



# FLANDERS TODAY

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# Lock up your data

Recent online privacy breaches should put data security at the top of Flanders' digital agenda

Linda A Thompson

From addresses and birthdays to relationships and credit card details, huge parts of all our lives are now stored online, and we trust agencies and corporations to keep them safe. But a series of recent data leaks should have us questioning just how safe the brave new digital world really is and how security can be improved.

Around mid-December, news reports surfaced that the personal information of hundreds of solar panel owners in Flanders had been briefly accessible to anyone with a login and password to the website of the Flemish energy regulator, VREG. Just before Christmas, an online data leak at the railway operator NMBS Europe exposed the names, addresses and birthdates of 700,000 international customers.

Two weeks later, the job-search website Jobat involuntarily dumped the salary details of 4,000 users online. These were just the latest in a string of data leaks that have raised tricky questions about consumer rights, privacy and accountability in a brave new digital world that is moving increasingly quickly. The data breaches have played an important role in alerting businesses, government agencies and consumers in Flanders to

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## FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

## Jef Brouwers



Psychology alumni at the University of Ghent have awarded this year's Psychologist of the Year prize to Jef Brouwers for his pioneering work on the coaching of athletes.

Brouwers is team psychologist for Mechelen football club and was the official psychologist of last year's team for the Olympic Games in London. He also coaches business managers in finding the success they, like sporting stars, dream of.

Launched four years ago, the Story Scientia/Academia Press prize, named after two academic book publishers, goes to someone who has contributed to creating a positive image of the discipline and the profession. The jury praised Brouwers for his "important contribution to professionalising coaching in business and sport," as well as his "passionate communicating style, which fosters understanding of psychology among the broader public."

His skills are also applied to football referees in Belgium and the Netherlands, who have consulted him on matters such as ensuring objectivity on the field, coping with pressure and dealing with their own power in making important calls.

According to the Dutch referees' magazine *Scheids*, Brouwers prepares by watching a ref's matches before making a report and then providing individual counselling. The basic principle: "Self-analysis is the key to helping referees become more resilient".

Of course, other top performers are lining up for his advice, and he brings a somewhat New Agey, wellness approach to his work. "I coach you in creating an effective combination of your private and professional life," he writes on the web page of the Ticka counselling consultancy. He's also national director for the human resources group Profiles International.

But it was as psychologist to the Olympic team that he first came to the public's attention last year, including when he had to offer his services to the selectors of the 4x400m relay, who had the unenviable task of choosing two runners out of a field of seven (the Borlée brothers were automatic selections). The process of forming a team in a sport – athletics – which is made up of loners was "10 times more bother than sitting on the bench at a football match," Brouwers admitted at the time. Brouwers' award ceremony will take place on 23 April, when he will give a lecture (in Dutch).

## News in brief

**Five people were killed** when a Polish tour bus carrying a group of Russian school students and staff ran off the E34 motorway at Ranst, Antwerp province, last weekend. The bus rolled 15 metres down an embankment. Fifteen more people were injured. Six of those injured, including three students, remained in hospital in the province as *Flanders Today* went to press. Some survivors – 25 children and four adults – were sent home to Volgograd, while other children were able to talk to their parents via a video link.

The **median wealth of Belgian families**, at €206,200, is more than four times greater than the median for Germany, according to a study by the European Central Bank. The reason is that the figure includes owned property, which is far more prevalent in Belgium than in Germany, which has a higher proportion of renters. The Belgian median is almost twice as high as the figure for the entire eurozone.

Flemish novelist **Tom Lanoye has been nominated** for the Jean Monnet Prize for European literature, which rewards a European author published or translated into French, for his 1991 novel *Kartonnen dozen* (Cardboard Boxes). Other nominees for the prize include British author Julian Barnes and the Lebanese-French author Amin Maalouf. The winner will be announced in October.

Rail authority NMBS last year **took in €5.18 million in fines**, almost double the total for the year before, thanks to their cooperation with bailiffs. "Before, people just laughed at us," said spokesperson Bart Crols. "But now they almost all pay their fines quietly. They seem to be afraid of a possible summons."

The owner of Le Bleu bar in Ghent's student district has been sentenced to 18 months in prison and fined €60,000 for **repeated breaches of the rules on noise levels**. The court fined the man's company another €60,000. Inspectors have repeatedly measured noise levels of up to 94 decibels; the legal limit is 90. Because of the way the decibel scale is calculated, an increase of 4dB is heard as more than twice as loud. The owner plans to appeal the sentence.

An information **campaign extolling the virtues of sugar** by the Flemish professional association of food scientists and dieticians VBVD was paid for by Coca-Cola, the magazine *Eos* revealed. According to VBVD chair Dirk Lemaitre, the campaign simply pointed out that sugar can form part of a normal diet. "Is it really necessary to draw attention to sugar when you know that 50% of adults are overweight and there are 200,000 obese children?" commented Patrick Mullie, a food scientist at the Free University of Brussels (VUB).

Animal park Planckendael in Mechelen welcomed **two-year-old female rhinoceros** Karamat last week. She comes from Whipsnade Zoo in England. Karamat, whose name means "endowed with special powers" in Nepalese, was a breech birth and not expected to live to adulthood. Keepers at Planckendael said she was still too young to breed but would join the park's international programme in about two years.

Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten has given regional radio stations 30 days to bid for one of **eight unused frequencies** serving the areas of Arendonk,

Essen, Kalmthout, Lille (Antwerp province), Bilzen (Limburg), Glabbeek, Overijse (Flemish Brabant) and Roeselare (West Flanders). Seven of the frequencies were withdrawn in 2007, and the eighth has never been attributed. The licences awarded will last until a new attribution round for all radio in 2016.

The metal workers of socialist trade union ABVV will not take part in the **day of action planned for Thursday, 25 April**, it announced. The exact form of the protests planned is not yet known, but some disruption to services is expected as members of the union draw attention to a package of measures on jobs, economic stimulus, taxation and the status of workers. The other main union, Christian ACV, will not take part in the actions.

On 4 May, residents of Antwerp will try to **break the world record number of forward rolls**, as part of the city's role as European Capital of Sport 2013. The world record stands at 8,341. The action is also part of TV channel Ketnet's Checklist campaign, a list of things every child should do before the age of 12. Setting a world record came in at number 14.

► [www.dna.be/sporting](http://www.dna.be/sporting)

Use-It, the **Flemish organisation for youth tourists**, will have €123,000 less subsidy next year after a change in the rules left the organisation ineligible for grants from the youth budget. Use-It still receives €200,000 from Toerisme Vlaanderen and the art cities, but will have to look for new backers to keep their information desk on the Steenkoolkaai in Brussels open, said a spokesperson.

## FLANDERS TODAY

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## OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

## In space, everyone can hear you tweet

The picture you see here is of the city of Antwerp. It was tweeted last week by Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield from the International Space Station (ISS), with the message: "Antwerp, Belgium with the Scheldt river like lightning sparking up the city".

Commander Hadfield is a space veteran, with two space shuttle missions under his belt, and is now the commander of the ISS – the first time his country has been at the helm of the station.

But it's as an inveterate snapper that he's attracted the attention of the online world. On the same day as he posted the photo of Antwerp by Night, he also sent back to earth photos of Helsinki and Tallinn; the mouth of the Mediterranean; the "pillowy farms ... tidily etched in snow" of Eastern Europe; Palma de Mallorca; Rotterdam by Night (not nearly as sparkly as Antwerp, frankly); and the heel and toe of the



boot of Italy.

There's plenty of opportunity: the ISS orbits the Earth 15.7 times a day (about every 90 minutes), from a distance of about 400 kilometres. But of course the Earth is spinning at the same time, so every time Cmdr Hadfield passes over, he's passing over by a different path in relation to the ground.

He's been up there for 120 days

and has posted no fewer than 4,468 images to Twitter, an average of more than 36 a day. He has more than 500,000 followers, and you can join them by following @Cmdr\_Hadfield. There's also a Tumblr page, which collects the photos all in one place (though it doesn't update 36 times a day).

► [www.colchrishadfield.tumblr.com](http://www.colchrishadfield.tumblr.com)



# Lock up your data

## Leadership needed to regulate and safeguard personal information online

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the importance of keeping personal information safe online. In a recent blog post, Ulrich Seldeslachts, CEO of the non-profit IT security industry association LSEC, which is supported by the Flemish Agency for Innovation by Science and Technology (IWT), pronounced 2013 “the year of the major data breaches and the data protection regulation”. Data leaks are being recognised as a global, socio-economic problem, says Christian Van Heurck from the Federal Cyber Emergency Team, the government agency that helps companies and organisations improve their internet and network security. “Much, if not all, of our personal data that would before have been stored in hard copy is now being saved electronically somewhere,” he says. “And people are beginning to realise that if those data fall into the wrong hands, that can have consequences for companies’ reputations, for government administrations and for consumers.”

The agency received 3,866 reports about security incidents last year, a 48% increase from 2011. “We are seeing a growing awareness; that is very obvious,” says Van Heurck. It’s not clear whether that is because the agency has gained visibility, because cybercrime is growing or because companies are increasingly lax with sensitive data.

### Tip of the iceberg

In February, an answer to a parliamentary question revealed that Flemish government agencies experienced seven data leaks in the past three years. It’s much more difficult to gauge how widespread data breaches are at privately held companies and businesses. But experts think we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg and that many companies are skimping on basic protection of online customer information.

“Companies have no legal obligation to tell us about data breaches,” says Eva Wiertz, communications officer at the federal Privacy Commission. “So they just don’t.”

Seldeslachts understands that IT security management can seem a complex and daunting task but claims that’s no excuse for companies to just not deal with it. By way of illustration, he often asks people if they sometimes leave their front door open or hand strangers their house keys. “People typically say: ‘No, no, we don’t.’ So then I ask them: ‘So why do you do that on a computer system where you store some of your most valuable assets, namely data?’”

Companies that fail to safeguard personal information risk doing harm to more than just their own reputation. The European Commission has pointed out that by damaging online consumer confidence, frequent data breaches risk slowing down online developments in general.

“Personal data is the currency of today’s digital market,” EU justice



“Personal data is the currency of today’s digital market”: EU justice commissioner Viviane Reding

commissioner Viviane Reding said when presenting a proposal to overhaul European data regulations last year. “And like any currency, it needs stability and trust. Only if consumers can trust that their data is well protected will they continue to entrust businesses and authorities with it, buy online and accept new services.”

A study last year by the federal economy ministry revealed that 41% of all Belgians worried about disclosing personal data online. It’s not yet clear how the latest leaks have affected those levels of concern.

### A watchful eye

Back in 2008, IT experts from academic institutions and professional organisations warned that the state of IT security in Belgium was worse than in some Eastern European countries. Things

“Businesses don’t recognise technology as being primary to every single aspect of every single business”

have improved since then, says Guy Kindermans, a veteran reporter at the trade publication *Datanews*. “A lot of companies have really adapted to modern times and have done their homework,” he says.

Still, experts say that Belgium lacks a comprehensive national – or regional – approach to IT security. According to Seldeslachts, businesses and corporations will never self-regulate. “If you want to make sure that companies take IT security more seriously, then you have to have somebody or something leading the way.”

The Federal Cyber Emergency Team would be the most logical partner to take up that task. But, says

co-ordinator Van Heurck, constant finger-wagging and policing make no sense as an awareness-raising strategy. He doesn’t want companies to hold back from reporting cyber security incidents because they fear sanctions. “Trust, I think, is important,” he says. “Our role is to help and to prevent. So sometimes we don’t report incidents because it’s more important for us to make sure that information and understanding of such-and-such an incident can be shared with other companies.”

Xavier Damman is the Belgian CEO and co-founder of Storify, a social media storytelling platform that *Time* rated one the 50 best websites of 2011. Having lived and worked in San Francisco since 2009, he says that businesses in Flanders still need to wake up to the significance of technology. “They don’t recognise technology as being so primary,

really, to every single aspect of every single business nowadays,” he says. “That’s really the problem.”

So how did these leaks happen? Experts say that it wasn’t a lack of expertise or knowhow. Flemish engineers have long worked at major corporations like Microsoft and HP, and a number of cutting-edge IT solutions in the fields of encryption and authentication technology have come out of Flanders in recent years. Nor were these leaks the result of hacking attempts. Instead, they sprang from human errors that weren’t caught in time because of an outdated management approach to IT.

According to Kindermans,



“If you want companies to take IT security seriously, then you have to have somebody leading the way”: Ulrich Seldeslachts of the Leuven-based IT security industry association LSEC

companies ought to take a step back and determine what standards, procedures and risk assessment strategies they can introduce to safeguard their own and their customers’ data. Because data leaks can have such far-reaching consequences for a company, IT security should get commensurate attention from management, shareholders and board members. “That awareness is completely lacking in most companies,” he says. All too often, CEOs still brush aside IT security as a problem for IT staff. Or they shell out on expensive software licences and antivirus software and think they’re set, while the truth is that there are no quick-fix solutions. “Security isn’t about software; it’s about people,” says Kindermans. “People make mistakes; people carry out procedures, and so on and so forth. And a security expert can’t go looking over every single employee’s shoulder.”

### Lack of time and money

The leaks have also drawn attention to the legal dimension of online data breaches. Last Christmas, Frederic Jacobs was one of 700,000 customers whose data were exposed in the NMBS leak. A 20-year-old Brussels-born student at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology and a part-time software engineer, Jacobs did what most tech whiz-kids would do. He built a website. On [snbc.fredericjacobs.com](http://snbc.fredericjacobs.com),

customers could verify if their own data had been compromised with a simple search query. What Jacobs didn’t realise was that, in spite of his noble intentions, he was effectively breaking the law. “It’s crazy,” he says. “The internet laws were made before I was born, which makes no sense to me.”

Belgium’s privacy law puts the burden on individuals and companies to ensure appropriate protection of personal data against misuse and theft. In the past five years, the Privacy Commission has launched a handful of inquiries into major data breaches. That’s a reflection not of the severity of the problem but of a scant budget.

“We have the legal ability to be more proactive, to go to court for inspection, to see if this or that controller complies with the rules,” says Wiertz. “But we don’t have the time or the staff or the resources to do so.”

It also appears that both companies and government agencies are waiting for pending European legislation, which is almost certain to affect the existing Belgian privacy act. Among the most notable proposed changes is the data breach notification act, which will require companies and organisations to notify affected individuals of data leaks within 24 hours.



# Action sought on jihad fighters

## Muslim youth from Flanders and Brussels are feeling the pressure to go and fight in Syria

Alan Hope

Two parents from Flanders are in Syria, hoping they can find and convince their sons, who have gone to fight on the side of rebels, to come home. Meanwhile, politicians have come up with a remarkable selection of proposals for what to do about the problem of growing numbers of youths being recruited to travel to foreign war zones to take part in jihad.

Last week, Dimitri Bontinck from Antwerp was in Syria looking for his 16-year-old son, Jehoen, while another father from Vilvoorde was reported to have departed on the same mission. As *Flanders Today* went to press, neither had made contact with his son.

Though there have been several reports from around Flanders and Brussels, no-one knows for sure how many young men have gone to take part in the Syrian rebellion, often convinced by radical Islamist groups that it is their duty. There have been numerous press reports from Syria that the rebels don't actually welcome foreign volunteers, who can be more of a hindrance than a help.



Syrian rebels on the ground reject the idea of volunteer fighters from abroad

The mayors of Antwerp, Mechelen and Vilvoorde, where the growth of radical Islamist youths is particularly acute, held a summit to consider a response to the problem. Any action would only be taken prior to departure or following return: The foreign ministry has made it clear it is unable to intervene on the ground in

Syria unless the volunteers request it. Many parents lay the blame on groups like Sharia4Belgium; its leader Fouad Belkacem made headlines at the end of last year after being jailed for hate speech. According to Mimoun Aquichouch, chairman of the Masgir Annasr mosque in Vilvoorde, the 20 or so youths who have left the city

to fight in Syria were known to be problem cases, and the community failed to act in time. "They were looking for some sense in their lives, some direction," he said. "But they found it in Sharia4Belgium, not with us."

Politicians have suggested a wide variety of measures that might be taken to prevent or respond to the growth of militant groups.

- **Bart De Wever, mayor of Antwerp:** Use the system of municipal administrative fines to discourage the growth of radical groups
- **Hans Bonte, mayor of Vilvoorde:** Confiscate the passports of members of radical groups
- **Joëlle Milquet, federal minister of the interior:** Forbid Belgian citizens by law from going to Syria to fight
- **Serge Muyters, Antwerp police chief:** Pay special attention to young men who suddenly decide to grow a long beard
- **Nordine Taouil, Antwerp imam:** Lock up would-be recruits in detention centres

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Vilvoorde City

"Oh Vilvoorde City, more specifically in the Far West." In 1975, singer Kris De Bruyne described the Flemish Brabant town as if it was located in the Far West. Actually, Far West is a district in Vilvoorde, but the lyrics were also a reference to the town's working man's image. These days, Vilvoorde again seems a bit of a rough spot, as home of many of the *mujahideen* who have left Flanders to fight in Syria.

Until 1997, Vilvoorde was synonymous with Renault. When the French car producer closed its assembly plant there, thousands were left unemployed. It is also the home town of Jean-Luc Dehaene, the prime minister of legendary posture. These days, Vilvoorde is mainly a centre for the media industry, as the home of the commercial broadcasters VTM, Vier and Vijf. The hipsters employed by these companies, however, are far removed from the real challenges facing Vilvoorde these days.

The city has a population of about 40,000, but it has all the characteristics of a larger city. This is increasingly the case, as immigrant families from Brussels, Schaarbeek, Anderlecht and Sint-Jans-Molenbeek move in. This makes Vilvoorde the fastest-growing city in Flanders: its population increased by nearly 12% in just six years. It is also the "youngest", with over half of the population minors, while many of its inhabitants do not speak Dutch.

All of this doesn't just worry the new mayor, socialist Hans Bonte, it also angers him. He blames the Flemish government for not recognising Vilvoorde as a "centre city", a centre for work, care, education, culture and recreation, with special needs because of a diverse population. With many children growing up in vulnerable families, schooling problems and a lack of infrastructure, Bonte believes that Vilvoorde is entitled to the extra funds that come with the recognition as a "centre city" – more so than, say, Turnhout. "The Flemish government understands nothing of *de Rand*", Bonte said recently, referring to the Flemish municipalities that circle Brussels.

The growing radicalisation of some of its Muslim youth is another challenge, as 20 youngsters, believed to have been recruited by the extremist group Sharia4Belgium, have left to fight in Syria. Bonte's advice so far has been to take away possible recruits' identity cards, making it impossible for them to leave the Schengen zone. It only demonstrates how powerless a mayor can be against the forces at work around him.

## Bullying huge problem, says Unicef

Belgium scores a low 21st in a ranking of 28 countries for fighting and bullying at school, a UN report revealed last week. The study by the UN children's agency Unicef looked at 28 countries of the OECD and ranked them best to worst for children's well-being on a variety of criteria. Belgium was worse for bullying than all but six countries, including Portugal, Estonia and Lithuania. For fighting it did slightly better, ahead of seven countries, including Slovenia, Romania and Spain.

The so-called Innocenti Report Card measures children's well-being on issues including health, housing, safety, education and socio-economic circumstances. Belgium's overall ranking was ninth, with excellent results for education, from pre-school places to higher education opportunities.

According to the chair of the Flemish anti-bullying network



Kies kleur tegen pesten (Take Sides Against Bullying), the report is not a revelation. "Research has previously shown that bullying is a major problem in this country," said spokesperson Gie Deboutte. "Other countries have been more successful in getting a handle on the problem." Governments

in Finland, the Netherlands and Ireland "invest in a structural approach, which is what we are lacking. That is a shame because we know that bullying figures correlate with the high youth suicide figures in this country."

► [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

## Ghent mayor calls for ban on begging

Ghent mayor Daniel Termont has called on the federal government to take action and introduce laws against begging. Ghent city council has passed a law to outlaw certain types of begging, but it is difficult to enforce, he said.

"Organised gangs use the weak and vulnerable to make money," Termont explained. "But it is impossible to catch them. They brief the beggars to say they have no papers and no address if they're caught." This allows those asking for money, he explained, to escape the fines his council has enacted.

Begging is not illegal in Belgium, according to federal law, which makes it impossible for police to make an arrest. Termont called on interior minister Joëlle Milquet to take action. "As long as begging is legal, the problem will not go away," he said.

Ghent's local rules prohibits blocking the pavement, using animals, standing in the roadway at crossroads and using any aggressive behaviour. Thirty-nine fines were handed out in 2011. Last year, that went up to 121. Ghent's local law faces another hurdle: It has been brought to the Council of State by the Human Rights League, which is asking for it to be struck down as illegal.

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

€130,000

spent over the last four years by the Brussels public transport authority MIVB to repair damage by vandals to artworks in the metro

€3.8 million

in Belgian francs turned in to the National Bank in 2012. At the end of the year, the equivalent of €158 million was still in circulation

€3.8 million

seized by police and customs agents at Brussels Airport in the past six months, a record amount. One man was found with a suitcase containing €1,272,000

8%

increase in house prices in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen in the Dutch province of Zeeland, as a result of the number of Flemings moving across the border to live there

40,000

square metres of office space leased by the European Parliament in De Meeûs Square, in what is sure to be the largest property transaction in the capital this year



# Human nature

## Projects across Flanders aim to control flooding while creating new habitat for wildlife

Toon Lambrechts

“Developing nature” is something of a contradiction: Common sense says that “nature” signifies the absence of any human intervention. But in a densely populated area such as Flanders, this concept of nature is losing its meaning. Most nature reserves are tightly managed, and sometimes the choice is made to develop new ones. The results are indeed often remarkable.

Last week, a major construction project began in Kruibeke, East Flanders. The intention, however, is not to construct new roads or buildings, but new nature: reed fields, small islands and spawning grounds for fish.

The works are part of the Flemish government’s Sigma plan, which aims to create space for new bodies of water along the river Scheldt and its tributaries. The plan will not only aid nature, it will protect against flooding.

Kruibeke is not the only place in Flanders where nature is being actively developed. Since the 1990s, many projects to restore natural landscapes have been carried out, sometimes in unexpected places. One is the Maas River Valley, a river restoration project, which we covered in last week’s issue. Another is in the industrial area of the port of Antwerp, where wetlands have been created as a habitat for grassland birds.

Doing nothing seems the most obvious option if you want to create new nature: Just wait and see what happens. But in practice, it requires a skilful approach. If the aim is to give a certain type of nature the chance to develop, choices have to be made.

A lot depends on factors such as the condition of the soil and the water, for example. Similar areas elsewhere are taken into consideration, too, as is data about the plants and animals already present in the surrounding area.

### Home and abroad

“Throughout the years, we have developed a consistent body of knowledge on new nature,” says Geert De Blust, a biologist working at the Institute for Nature and Forest Research (Inbo), which supplies the scientific basis for Flanders’ nature and conservation policy. “What happens here in Flanders is based both on our own research and experiences from abroad. For example, while planning the recent project with the river Maas, we had a close look at experiences in France with the river Allier.”

But Flanders is not France, and the pressure on the available land is particularly high here. Nature development requires space, and that space is becoming



The Sigma projects on the Scheldt in Kruibeke (above) and on the Vlassen marsh in Dendermonde (top) will both protect against flooding and create a unique nature area

increasingly limited.

“For example, to develop a forest, you need at least 50 hectares. That’s the only way to get a full-fledged forest ecosystem,” explains De Blust. “Other habitats such as species-rich grasslands can be created in smaller areas, provided that there is not too much interference from outside. Drainage and fertilising are quite often a problem. In addition, you

need a lot of patience: A forest doesn’t grow overnight.”

On the contrary. De Blust: “It requires at least 150 years.” In the past, Flanders hasn’t made nature development in spatial planning a priority, and the future use of the available space is now a pressing issue. Nature development is a difficult political and economic issue. Everyone would like to live in a green environment, but that

requires space, which is becoming increasingly scarce.

“New nature requires land, and that is often agricultural land,” says Noah Janssen of conservation organisation Natuurpunt. “But it is also true that quite a few

and resources.”

Janssen is less convinced. “We see sometimes that nature development projects are claimed as compensation when originally this wasn’t the purpose of the project. It is important to keep in mind that nature, especially some ecosystems like old-growth forests or peat moors, is simply irreplaceable.”

### Natural healing

But how natural is new nature? That question is irrelevant, according to De Blust. “In Flanders, there is no single piece of land that is not influenced by man. Creating new nature can be done by natural means, but a site almost always has to be prepared before nature can take its course. Still, some external influence can never be completely eliminated.”

And of course, there are degrees of human interference in the management of new nature. Large herbivores such as sheep and cattle are sometimes used to secure variation in the ecosystem, so that the ecosystem as a whole comes as close as possible to its natural state. Mowing prevents certain species becoming dominant, and this is often necessary to maintain

“It is important to keep in mind that some ecosystems, like old-growth forests or peat moors, are simply irreplaceable”

soils are not suitable for modern agriculture. Creek valleys, for example, are too wet for farming, which relies on heavy machinery. The conversion of agricultural land to nature always leads to debate, and we try to reach a consensus. But that doesn’t always work.”

### Compensation

Nature development often occurs as compensation for nature lost elsewhere. That is an EU obligation, explains Janssen. “We would all like to see Brazilian rainforest conserved. But in Brazil, they also think that the European lynx is a beautiful animal. That’s why Europe has to take responsibility for its own nature. In practice, this means Flanders is obliged to preserve a certain number of natural habitats. So if these ecosystems are affected, compensation is required.”

That sounds good in theory, but with the possibility to create new nature, isn’t there the risk that policymakers will be less careful with existing nature? De Blust doesn’t think so. “Nature development does not guarantee that the specific type of nature we would like to see will effectively evolve. Compensation is really a last option that takes a lot of time

maximum biodiversity.

Many habitats are in fact not a genuine natural ecosystem but historical remnants. In Flanders, for example, heathlands came into existence due to certain farming methods. To conserve such valuable areas, management methods that replace these ancient farming methods are necessary.

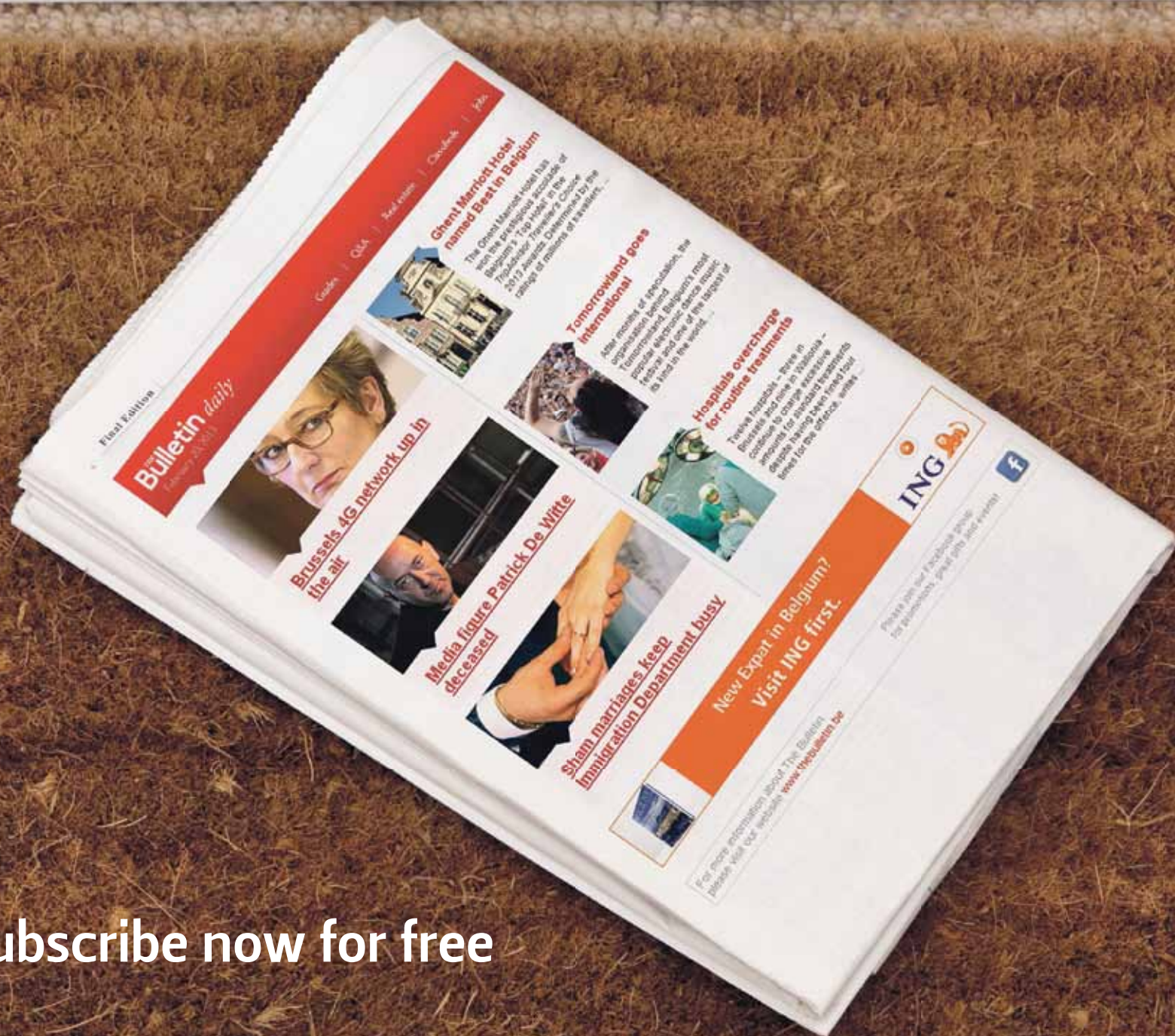
Within Europe, the concept of “new wilderness” is gaining ground. These are areas without any human interaction, such as the Oostvaardersplassen in the Netherlands. In this vast area created during the land claim on the Zuiderzee inlet in the North Sea, a complete ecosystem has been developed and is doing without any human intervention whatsoever.

“That wouldn’t happen in Flanders,” according to De Blust. “There is simply no space and no public support. Just look at the fuss about foxes and wild boars and the anxiety caused by the possible return of the wolf. Nature cannot be neatly divided into isolated areas and will always cause border conflicts. Flanders is just too densely populated for true wilderness.”



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# Lights out for Alfacam

## The launch of its own TV stations proves fatal to the media services group

Alan Hope

Alfacam, the TV and media services company that featured on every list of world-class Flemish businesses is on the brink of being broken up or declared bankrupt, after negotiations to find a new owner broke down last week. Alfacam was founded by Gabriel Fehervari, the child of Hungarian refugees, in 1985. It provided technical services such as cameras and outside-broadcast studios to TV producers. The company quickly established a strong reputation and won important contracts at home – beginning with the Night of the Proms – and abroad, picking up the contract in 2005 to provide services for the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008.

The company went public in 2007, raising €35 million, the shares seeing an immediate rise on the first day of trading from €15.75 to €18. Last week, just before trading in Alfacam



Alfacam at its height helped bring coverage from the Olympics to four billion people worldwide, including these Beijing locals

shares was suspended, those shares were worth 60 cents.

Fehervari's ambition to launch a TV station of his own failed, which has led to the current state of the company. Exqi, as well as a set of

digital channels, began badly in 2010 when only 20,000 people tuned in on opening night. Six months later, Exqi disappeared from the airwaves. Alfacam went in search of new money: Fehervari himself put in

€2 million, as did ING and the Flemish investment agency Gimv. Alfacam also received €20.5 million in loan guarantees from the Flemish government. In March of last year, the company's bank creditors demanded the company come forward with fresh investments, and talk started of a takeover.

In December, Alfacam started talks with the Indian conglomerate Hinduja Group. Last week, final talks failed. The commercial tribunal of Antwerp will decide what happens to the company: It could be broken up and sold off in parts or it could simply be declared bankrupt.

Fehervari is the main victim, with 40% of the company's now-worthless shares. The Flemish government stands to lose €16.4 million in guarantees. The loss, however, will have "no immediate impact" on the taxpayer, according to Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters.

## Organic agriculture growing

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters last week presented the government's annual report on organic farming, revealing that the sector is growing in the region, slowly but surely. The sector now consists of 299 businesses, including farmers, growers, processors and traders, and a total farming area of 4,939 hectares – representing 0.8% of the total farmed land in Flanders. The figure is an increase of 8% over 2011. The government paid out €3.68 million to organic farming in 2012, an increase of 19% over the year before, with the lion's share of the increase going towards support for research and

initiatives aimed at the "short-chain", which encourages the consumption of local and seasonal produce. About 38% of the financing goes straight to the farmer, with 24% going to market development and 25% to research facilities, practice centres and demonstration projects.

"The Strategic plan we signed in 2008 with Boerenbond, the ABS and Bioforum is now bearing fruit," said Peeters. "The second Plan was signed at the start of this year, with the food and retail industries. This promises to raise the Flemish organic sector to the next level."

## Money for public space projects

Flemish planning minister Philippe Muyters last week announced financing worth €2.75 million for a number of strategic planning projects across the region. The latest round of financing is the fourth, and the projects funded were selected by a panel of experts from submissions sent in last year. The four main projects are:

- The Oosterweel motorway link in Antwerp, the cause of much controversy, and even a city-wide referendum, in the past

- A "growing zone" under glass in the area of Roeselare, West Flanders, and another in East Flanders around Melsele and eastern Ghent
- A city forest on the southern edge of the city of Antwerp
- A project to re-establish links between the municipalities of Hoeilaart and Overijse and the nearby Zonien forest, which have become less well-defined in recent years as a result of encroaching urbanisation

► [www.ruimtevlaanderen.be](http://www.ruimtevlaanderen.be)

## Flemish fast growers put brakes on job losses

A small core of 475 fast-growing businesses is driving private-sector employment in Flanders, according to a study carried out by the Flemish chamber of commerce Voka and Antwerp University.

Flanders has 13,895 private companies, and the study identified

those with a minimum of 10 staff and growth potential of 20% spread over three years. They discovered that 475 of those that fit the bill had alone created more than 28,800 jobs in the years 2009-2011, when the economic crisis was at its height.

The study makes clear the massive role

played by fast-growing companies in reining in unemployment overall but issued a warning for the future. "There must emerge a constant flow of new fast-growing enterprises to keep the job-creation engine turning over," the paper says. "Encouragement of and support for businesses with growth

potential is crucial if this group of 500 or so companies is to grow in the future."

Nearly one-quarter of the list are knowledge companies, such as IT and media. Antwerp province is home to a majority of the 475 companies, with 154.

## Q&A

**Marc Bontemps is the spokesperson for New B, a Brussels-based co-operative of more than 36,000 members that intends to set up a new bank in Belgium**

**New B has been widely reported as a "new bank". But the bank is still to come, no?**

We're a co-operative with the intention of starting a new bank. We reversed the tradition of marketing laws, which say you first create a product and then try to find clients. We first found clients – in this case members – and with these members we are going to create a bank.

**What is the difference between a co-operative bank and any other bank?**

In a co-operative bank, everybody has a say: We have a system of one member/one vote. You can't say that that is the case in the whole of

the rest of the banking sector. Right now, we're limiting it to one share per person because we're not at the stage of collecting capital. We're at the stage of collecting a long list of citizens who would like to take part in this movement.

**You've already got more people than you were expecting. Why do you think the response has been so huge?**

I think there are fundamentally three reasons. First, we managed to get the backing of 61 organisations representing Belgian society: Dutch and French speaking, different colours of the rainbow and different social sectors, like NGOs and small

businesses. This is rather unique. I don't remember any organisation in the last 10 years that had such a broad backing. Such broad support increased our level of credibility. Secondly, people are fed up with all the negative information they get on the financial and banking sector, and here we come with a positive answer, instead of complaining. The third reason is something I've been experiencing since we started our road show, which is that people actually get emotional about this subject. We really touched something very deep in the mindset and the feelings of people. We knew there were questions and discontent [with the banking sector], but we

never realised it went quite so deep.

*New B holds free information evenings in Brussels and across Flanders*

► [www.newb.coop](http://www.newb.coop)



## THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

### Auto parts ► Melexis

Melexis, which specialises in semiconductors for the automotive industry, is to invest €9 million in a new production facility in Ypres. The group, which already has production facilities in the city as well as in Tessenderlo, operates worldwide and last year made €247 million in sales.

### Currency ► National Bank

The National Bank has warned of an increase in counterfeit banknotes in circulation, particularly €50 notes, which escape detection by UV lamps. The Neutral Syndicate for the Self-Employed advised small retailers to be on the lookout for false currency in all denominations and not to pass them on if detected, which risks a prison sentence.

### Freight ► Port of Ghent

The Port of Ghent can look forward to an increase in trade with the German port of Duisburg and to more jobs as a result, according to the city's port alderman Mathias De Clercq, speaking after a visit from German representatives last week. Trade last year stood at around 300,000 tonnes.

### Hotels ► Meininger

German chain Meininger has opened a hotel in the Molenbeek commune of Brussels, on the site of the former Belle-Vue brewery. The 700-bed low-cost hotel is 100% passive in construction, while the rooms feature work by a number of young local artists.

### People ► Appointments

**Gilbert Van fraeyenhoven**, a managing partner at consultants Ernst & Young, has been appointed the new director-general of media company Woestijnvis.

**Erik van de Ven** is the new managing director of brewer Alken-Maes in Mechelen, taking over from Pascal Gilet, who moves to Heineken.

**Rudi Thomaes**, former director-general of the Belgian Enterprise Federation, takes over from Karel Vinck as chairman of the Antwerp Mobile Management Company in charge of mobility in and around the city.

### Service cheques ► Sodexo

Sodexo, which issues services cheques and meal vouchers, has warned holders that service cheques from 2012 costing €7.50 expire at the end of April and should be used, exchanged or returned for cash before then.





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# Biodiversity magnified

## High-tech radar and unmanned planes will investigate and map Flanders' nature as part of Lifewatch project

Senne Starckx

Contrary to what you might think, satellites can't see every detail on the ground. Services like Google Earth aren't very useful when it comes to recognising certain types of vegetation (types of trees and low cover, for example), nor can they snap every moving object in the air, like birds crossing Flemish territory as they migrate north.

But to protect and maintain – and maybe even restore – biodiversity in Flanders, these sources have to be monitored in detail, and in real time. In a nutshell: Flanders needs a huge magnifying glass that constantly monitors biodiversity, objectively and without too much human interference.

The Flemish Institute for Nature and Forest Research (Inbo) and the Flemish Institute of the Sea (Vliz), both agencies of the Flemish government, are putting the finishing touches to such a high-tech monitoring system. Over the next five years, several automatic and semi-automatic detection systems will be rolled out, each monitoring a different aspect of biodiversity.

The initiative is part of a pan-European project called Lifewatch, part of the European Strategic Forum for Research Infrastructures (Esfri). "It's the first time an Esfri grant has been allocated to a project with a multiple-country infrastructure," says Jurgen Tack, administrator-general of Inbo. "The history of Lifewatch goes back to 2002, when we urged the European Commission to develop a pan-European initiative to map and protect the biodiversity on the continent."

### Saving valuable time

At the core of Lifewatch is automatic and semi-automatic monitoring. "With this approach, we will have more control over everything," explains Tack. "Currently the ecological value of every parcel of land in Flanders is calculated by a team of 25 civil servants, who visit and check the parcels in person. Because it's so time-consuming, some valuations are already more than 12 years old."

Miniature and unmanned aircraft will make their work easier, by flying over Flemish territory and



This radar can automatically detect every bird within a distance of 10 kilometres and even recognise the species

make a reliable assessment of the biodiversity of a terrain." Another high-tech detection

"Investors in wind energy like to put their windmills in straight trajectories, preferably along canals, highways and railway lines," explains Tack. "But birds also use these landmarks to direct themselves south or north."

Currently these migration routes are – literally – spotted and tracked by volunteers, who are concerned that the construction of windmills on these routes will interfere with the birds' natural migration.

"That creates tensions with the constructors of windmills because open space in Flanders is scarce," continues Tack. "With the bird radar, we will be able to tell exactly where birds are flying so that we can protect them while optimising



Drones will fly over Flanders and map trees and vegetation, without disturbing the environment

opportunities for windmill construction."

The bird radar was developed by the Dutch company Robin Radar Systems as a tool to map migration precisely. "Thanks to these developments, we will be able to spot every bird within a distance of 10 kilometres," says Tack. "We will also be able to tell how high and how fast the birds fly."

But the most striking feature of the radar is its ability to recognise individual species, without any help from a bird watcher. "Our radar measures the frequency of the wing beats, which is unique for every species."

### Global reputation

During Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters' recent economic mission to Canada, a team from Inbo demonstrated the possibilities of the bird radar to their Canadian colleagues. It was a success: The Canadians are going to use Flemish know-how to help with the construction of 700 windmills near Vancouver. After its mission in Canada, the radar will return to Flanders.

"There are a lot of applications for windmills in, for example, the harbour area," says Tack. "But, of course, the area is also very rich in bird life, and large areas are thus currently unavailable for windmills. Our radar will investigate how we can reduce these areas, without affecting bird habitat or migration routes."

The Lifewatch project will gather as much information as possible about biodiversity in Flanders. But that's not the final goal. Based on historical and future data, researchers will be able to make accurate prediction models about biodiversity in Flanders. These predictions can influence – just like daily weather reports do – many economic activities: transport, the planning of infrastructure, fishery, tourism, agriculture and more.

One particular prediction model being developed at Vliz is a "seabird radar" – similar to the rainfall radar that tells people when to take their umbrella. Despite what the name might suggest, this project has nothing to do with the bird radar above. Instead, researchers from Vliz will monitor the presence of plankton in the North Sea using sensors attached to several buoys along the Flemish coast. Based on that information, they will be able to predict when (and exactly where) you will find seabirds at the coast.

## THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Forty residents of the Gravenkasteel care home in Sint-Amands, Antwerp province, have started the **test phase of Fit-4-Life 65+**. High-tech company BioRICS from Leuven and the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (Vito) are motivating elderly people to move more. For three months, the seniors will carry a meter and a smartphone that registers their pulse and movement patterns. Researchers will analyse the data and send a weekly report to their physical therapists. The results, expected in September, should lead to solutions that reduce health-care costs and improve the self-reliance of the elderly.

Political scientist Didier Caluwaerts of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) **received the Frank Boas Scholarship** from the Fulbright Commission for Educational Exchange between the US and Belgium. Caluwaerts was one of the driving forces behind the popular democracy movement G1000. He will spend a year at Harvard University, investigating the role of civilian initiatives in democratic innovation.

Flemish minister Ingrid Lieten is calling on universities to create an action plan to **improve gender balance in academic staffing**. Figures show that one in five professors at Flemish universities is a woman. University rectors will have to present their strategy to the government at the beginning of next year. Lieten also wants to close the gender gap by giving priority to women in the Special Research Fund, which supports postdoctoral researchers.

Ghent University is the **first in Flanders to establish a campus abroad**. In Incheon, South Korea, just west of Seoul, students can earn an engineering diploma from UGent starting in March of next year. UGent was chosen because of its international reputation in the studies of biotechnology, environmental chemistry and food biology. About 250 students are expected in the first year, but the faculty could house up to 1,000 students in the future.

A PhD student at Ghent University, Ko Cattoor, has examined the **beneficial quality of hops** in beer as protection against cancer and infections, focusing on the absorption, distribution and metabolism characteristics of the flower. Experiments on rabbits showed that most hop acids are quickly and efficiently absorbed by the stomach and intestines and improved the health of the animals.

► [www.inbo.be](http://www.inbo.be)

"Our radar will investigate how we can maintain bird habitat while allowing the construction of windmills"

scanning the land. Tack: "These planes look like drones, except they are armed with a camera and a detection system that automatically recognises different types of vegetation, trees and individual plants. We believe these planes can

system that is part of Lifewatch is an automatic bird radar. The system will be used to map migration routes in Flanders – for example of ducks and geese flying overhead. This information is important ecologically and economically.



# History by the sea

**Visit the newly renovated museum in Ostend that once housed Napoleon and Belgium's royal family**

Alan Hope

Ostend has a rich history as a port, a strong British connection as the gateway to the European mainland and a strong royal connection dating back to the birth of the state. All three aspects – trade, tourism and monarchy – are brought together in the City Museum.

Just two streets inland from the seafront is the building that now houses Ostend's Stadsmuseum, or City Museum, which dates to the 18th century. In 1798, on his first visit to Ostend, Napoleon stayed there. He later established the city's chamber of commerce and industry, one of whose first members was Theodore Van Moorsel, who was by then the owner of an imposing house in Langestraat. The house was occupied variously by the French commandant of Ostend and by the English war commissioner, before it was bought shortly after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. The new owner, Edouard-Jean Serruys, moved in and made it his home. In 1834, in the newly created Kingdom of the Belgians, the house was put at the disposal of King Leopold and his queen consort, Louise-Marie. Serruys' widow drew up a rental lease (Serruys died that year) letting the house to the royals for 3,000 francs a year. The lease was later extended on the three-six-nine-year pattern familiar to any tenant in Belgium.

The house in Langestraat – joined with properties in Kapucijnenstraat and Louisastraat – became the summer residence of the royal family: king and queen, prince Leopold (later to become Leopold II), Prince Philippe (whose son became Albert I) and Princess Charlotte (who came to a tragic end in insanity as the widow of the Emperor Maximilian of Mexico). Charlotte died in Bouchout Castle in Meise in 1927, 60 years after Maximilian's execution by revolutionary forces.

## Final resting place

Belgium's first queen, Louise-Marie Thérèse Charlotte Isabelle, Princess of Orléans, was born in Palermo, Italy, daughter of the future King Louis-



Louise-Marie, Belgium's first queen, lived in the mansion that now houses Ostend's City Museum

Philippe of France. Her marriage to King Leopold took place just over a year after he had sworn allegiance to the constitution of the new state. Leopold had been married before, while living in Britain, to Princess Charlotte of Wales, daughter of the former Prince Regent, a marriage which would eventually have seen Leopold become Prince Consort. However, Charlotte died in childbirth in 1817. Despite several affairs, the new king remained unwed – a position

that was untenable now that the former military man was monarch. Unfortunately, Louise-Marie's life would be cut short by disease, probably tuberculosis, at the age of 38, when her youngest child was only 10 years old. As she wasted away, Leopold decided to follow medical advice and have her sent to the healthier sea air of Ostend. Soon too weak to move around on her own, her only remaining pleasure was to sit at the top of the house – hoisted up on a sort of chair-lift installed in the



Queen Louise-Marie breathed her last in Ostend, as depicted in the painting by Jozef Meganck

stairwell – and enjoy the 360-degree windows from which the ocean was then still visible.

Visitors to the museum can climb to the top, but the view is no longer the same: no sea waves, but plenty of construction site activity. Louise-Marie's tomb is in the church of St Peter and St Paul in Ostend (though she is actually buried in the royal church in Brussels beside Leopold). Her tomb was paid for by a public subscription raised a week after her death and features the dying queen looking up at an angel while a figure representing the grieving people of Ostend weeps at her feet. The museum allows access to the room where Louise-Marie breathed her last, as depicted in a painting in the museum by the 19th-century Flemish artist Jozef Meganck.

## Power of the sea

Ostend's City Museum is small, with a restricted collection that's rather a grab-bag of various aspects of the city: royalty, the fishing industry, tourism. There are maquettes of the Royal Civic Theatre built in 1905, and of the third Casino from 1899-1907. A silent video shows postcard scenes of the seafront and city sights through the ages.

There's another video in which an actress playing Louise-Marie speaks to us directly about her life (in perfect Dutch, even more unlikely than now).

The city's past as a fishing port is touched upon quite gaily with the display of a number of model ships, including maquettes for some which were designed but never built, as well as a ship built for transporting ice from Norway to the ice factory in Ostend. The ice was used in refrigeration; the ships on their return journeys would take back weighty articles like cobblestones to be sold in Norway.

The sea is of course a constant presence, not least in the walls of paintings of every style and every period – so long as it's maritime. One thing that's missing, though, is a sense of what the sea meant to the people who relied on it for their living, over and above its meaning as a type of landscape. However, work is under way on the renovation of the outbuilding at the rear of the museum, which will house the complete and more extensive maritime collection, planned for 2014.

► [www.oostende.be/stadsmuseum](http://www.oostende.be/stadsmuseum)

## A HISTORY ON PAPER

In an annex to the main building of Ostend's City Museum, adjoining the inner courtyard, is a temporary exhibition on the work of the small local printer, which sounds like a very niche interest but reveals itself to be much more. For though we may no longer remember, in these days of emails and Facebook, there was a time not so long ago when the only way to get information out to the public was to print it on paper and hand it to them.

So the exhibition features advertising flyers, posters, handouts, newsletters, death notices: in short, every form of printed information

imaginable over and above what's known as "the media". And indeed, all facets of society are represented: sales, entertainment, family, government communications, menus and receipts, and even the sort of certificates and diplomas you can still see displayed in butcher's shops and restaurants to this day. Such everyday documentation is a goldmine to a historian, and the exhibition has been put together by the members of the local history association De Plate. All volunteers, they have operated some sort of local history museum since 1948 – previous attempts at the project

were made in the Albert school, in the curator's own home and in Fort Napoleon.

The association's collection led a nomadic existence until 2002, when they were able to move into the Langestraat house – though less of it was open to the public than is now the case. The museum was named City Museum in 2009 and came under the municipal culture department, although De Plate still caters for the day-to-day running. The latest version of the museum behind this long-running saga was opened in May last year after renovations costing €550,000 which

added a new high-tech aspect. There's now a massive aerial photo of



Interactive exhibitions allow you to explore the Ostend of centuries past

Ostend on the floor of the first room and giant touch-screens strewn with virtual documents. A bank of tiny video screens shows time-lapse films of how the city looks now, as a sort of echo of the scenes of city life painted in time gone by. Everything is well-labelled in four languages, and videos offer the choice of French or English subtitles.

The old museum was open for three months a year and pulled in 6,000 visitors on average. They now expect that number to climb to 15,000 a year.

► [www.deplate.be](http://www.deplate.be)



# At home in the rest of the world

## Ostend's Mu.Zee hosts an exhibition of 30 years in the life of Antwerp artist Philip Aguirre y Otegui

Lisa Bradshaw

Being a person who feels most comfortable with linear narratives, I felt a little lost in the Philip Aguirre y Otegui exhibition in Ostend's Mu.Zee museum. At least at first. But once you let go of wanting to see a story build from the 1980s to today, you realise how delightful each work is in its own right, regardless of when or why the Antwerp artist created it.

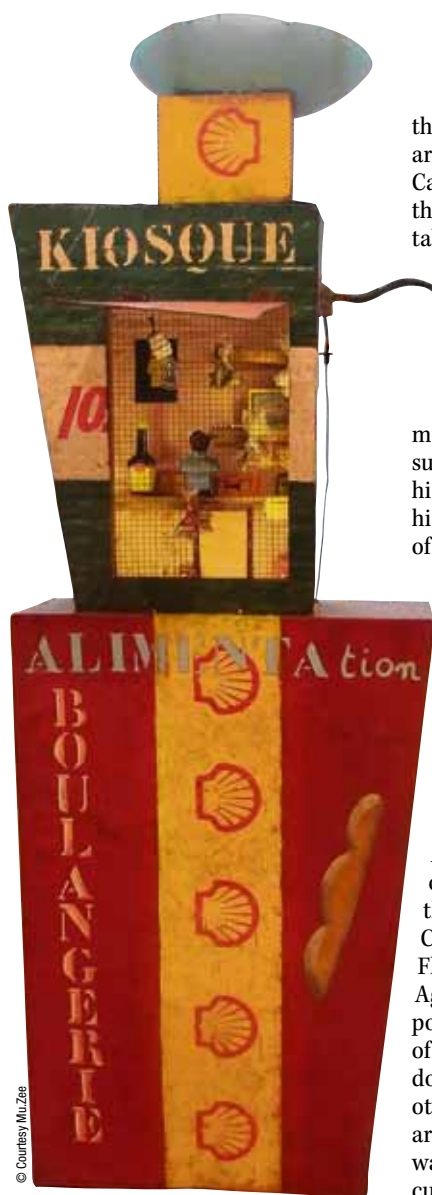
That was the goal of Aguirre, who curated the show himself. "We decided not to make it a historical, retrospective kind of show because I thought I was too young for that," the 52-year-old tells me from his home in the Borgerhout district of Antwerp. "Instead of chronological or thematic, it's more like a poetic landscape. Every visitor can make their own story from it."

That concept translates extremely well in the connecting spaces in which the exhibition, which lasts until 20 May and features 30 years of Aguirre's work, is staged. "My work is such that everybody can get something from it," he says. "There is a story, or multiple stories, behind each piece – anecdotal or historical or political – but in the end, it's the work itself that has to speak to the visitor. I still believe in visual art as a language. This is my own language, and you don't have to read a book to understand it."

### Beauty in the everyday

Aguirre's work is heavily influenced by both utilitarian tools and the demands of everyday physical labour. The smaller-scale sculptures are sometimes simple forms – pots, cylinders or rectangular shapes – but often are more recognisable, like chimneys or water pumps. Some of the most intriguing are those that look like some kind of tool, but you're not exactly sure for what it might be used.

"A painter works with colour, a sculptor works with forms," says Aguirre. "I find a lot of inspiration in utilitarian forms. They often have the perfect form – because of course



A shop in the shape of a woman: "Kiosque"

"I do," answers Aguirre. Seeing the beauty in the industrial shapes and translating that to us is part of that personal language he's talking about. In the Mu.Zee, though, I can see that the small sculptures that contain figures are the ones that cause visitors to linger. They more readily allow, as Aguirre hopes, viewers to create their own stories about the pieces, in which they can see themselves. "Woman" is beautiful in its simplicity: A female forms stands atop a bulbous mound, much larger than she. She seems at once alone in the world and powerfully

the very public arrivals zone to a VIP area on a higher level), while "Water Carrier" is part of the collection of the University of Antwerp. The wax tabletop-sized "Man with Megaphone" is based on the life-size bronze sculpture next to city hall in Kaprijke, East Flanders.

The first is based on a photograph he saw in a newspaper of refugees on the move. Carrying what they need to survive, one man bears a mattress on his back, signifying his priority. With his bed always at hand, he has a sort of makeshift home. "Water Carrier", meanwhile, has a man carrying several glass bottles over his shoulder with a rope. Aside from the tender stance of the man, the bottles seem to cascade down his back like a waterfall and glint in the sun streaming in the large windows of the Mu.Zee.

### The gathering place

Aguirre was born in Schoten, just outside of Antwerp. His father fled the Basque region during the Spanish Civil War as a child and wound up in Flanders. It would be easy to assign Aguirre's keen interest in the working poor and the displaced as a remnant of his roots, but it has much more to do with his eyewitness experiences in other countries. "For me, travel and art are harmonious. It's a very natural way of working," he explains. "I'm just curious about how people live and work."

Aguirre doesn't find it useful for the viewer to know the stories behind the works, but he'll tell nosy reporters if pressed. The simply named "Kiosque" is one of my favourite pieces in the exhibition. Made from metal, it's a replica of the small shops you find all over Africa.

In "Kiosque", several small goods – bags of flour, razors, small light bulbs, cigarettes – are offered for sale behind mesh fencing. "In Africa, there are a lot of little kiosk shops where you go to buy small items – one cigarette, enough soap for one wash of clothes, Nescafé for a single cup," he explains. "At first I thought that they are poor, so they only buy what they have enough money for. And that's part of it, but it's mostly about the social aspect of going to the shop. They want to go every day – or 10 times a day. These shops are beautiful because you have all these little objects, all those forms!"

Built in 1998, "Kiosque" is partially made from a Shell oil barrel, in reference to the oil company's scandalous activities in Nigeria at the time. "Then the form of the kiosk is an African woman, with a bowl on her head, and wearing the colours that you often see there. So it's the conglomeration of a lot of ideas."

### Architecture as sculpture

Aguirre is now finishing up his biggest – literally – project ever. He has created an amphitheatre and lavoir in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Douala, the largest city in Cameroon.



"Man with Mattress" is one of Aguirre's best-known works



Attached to a wall on one side, Philip Aguirre y Otegui's "Exodus" shows the vulnerability of refugeeism

The well in the ground already existed, and hundreds of residents use it every day to wash their clothes. With the help of local engineers, who fitted pipes and filters, Aguirre has created an infrastructure for the lavoir, as well as a gathering place for meetings and performances. Programming has already started – for the first time, performance groups are coming to this part of the city. "It's like a sculpture," says Aguirre, "but a very large one." The entire project is funded by Belgians. "I asked some well-placed friends how we could build it, and they contacted all their connections.

Within a month, we had the funding, all from Belgian companies and private donors – it was incredible."

This year is the 25th anniversary of Aguirre's first-ever solo show. So I ask the obvious question: How has his work changed over 25 years? "It's maybe less emotionally naive that it was in the beginning," he answers. "But what has stayed the same is that I really love to do it. I hope that people can see that when they see the object, that it's made with love. And I use the word 'love'; it's not too strong a word."



# BOZAR FESTIVAL!

# DEVALISES



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# If I could turn back time

## Heritage Day in Flanders and Brussels invites visitors to stand still and look back

Alan Hope

If the heritage industry is about one thing, it's about time: bringing the past to the attention of the future, stopping and – if possible – reversing the ravages of time. The theme of this Sunday's annual Erfgoeddag (Heritage Day) is Stop de tijd!

Brussels and Flanders have teamed up for this year's Erfgoeddag, or Heritage Day, so they are both on the same day. The slogan of this 13th edition is Stop de tijd!, or Stop Time!, which is "more than ever an invitation," according to Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege.

"It's an invitation to step outside the daily race against time, stand still and enjoy the work of the many thousands of heritage workers, both volunteers and professionals, who fight that fight against time day after day," she says. "With their work, they try to prevent as best they can the results of the passage of time. Their efforts and your interest together form the guarantee that what is important and meaningful for us, our cultural heritage, can be passed on to the generations who come after us."

The massive programme for Heritage Day can be downloaded by province online; we have a few suggestions of our own for how to spend the day, depending on where you live.

### Antwerp province

The **clock museum in Geel** is the ideal place to reflect on the passage of time. The collection of watchmaker Victor Wuyts includes more than 600 examples, some simple and some ornate, all of them in working order.

Antwerp's Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) sent 15 volunteers out into the city to find **traces of Moroccan heritage**. They left no stone unturned: From trade to religion to the arts, travel and education, the team had constructed an entire history by the time the assignment was completed. Objects and information they collected are on show at the museum, and they'll be on hand to answer questions and provide more information to visitors.

► [www.mas.be](http://www.mas.be)

### Brussels

The dead may be thought to have stepped outside the flow of time, but of course bereavement is an ongoing matter for those left behind. That's the subject of the exhibition **Home of the Living at the Jewish Museum** in Brussels, which continues after Heritage Day. It covers life and death, mourning and remembrance and a belief in the hereafter, and includes artistic, religious and philosophical expressions, some of which have never been shown before.

► [www.mjb-jmb.org](http://www.mjb-jmb.org)



© Photos: Philippe Debrue / F&N

Part of the point of heritage actions is to arrest the damage caused by time, and that's the main job of the **Royal Institute for Art Heritage**. On Heritage Day, it offers a glimpse behind the scenes of Belgium's heritage management in the institute's many restoration workshops, where experts bring cutting-edge technology and old-fashioned passion together to fight the advance of time.

► [www.kikirpa.be](http://www.kikirpa.be)

### East Flanders

Ghent's Museum of Industrial Archaeology and Textiles (MIAT) contains many artefacts that are highly sensitive to the natural conditions that museums fear the most: dampness, mould, infestations. The museum is offering a demonstration and a guided tour to show how their expert **conservators tackle the constant threat** of some natural phenomena that could spell the end for part of their collection. Reservation required for the guided



tour at [publiekswerrking.miat@gent.be](mailto:publiekswerrking.miat@gent.be).

The ravages of time are also there to read on the faces of each of us, and the combat against wrinkles and other signs of age has been a human concern down the ages. The exhibition **Timeless Beauty** (pictured, below left) in Merelbeke takes a look at some of the techniques, potions, apparatuses and other forms of sorcery the average person would try in the past to fight the inevitable advance of the clock. Especially for children: a crazy haircut competition in the salon of Kip Van Troye in Huis Hebbelynck.

► [www.merelbeke.be](http://www.merelbeke.be)

### Flemish Brabant

The Huis Ter Dijle group in Huldenberg hosts a tour of the workshops of **family carpentry business Leonaer**, which has been around for a century, but where time stopped 20 years ago. Even in those days, it would have been considered historical: no modern machinery, just simple hand tools barely changed down the centuries.

► [www.huisterdijle.be](http://www.huisterdijle.be)

### Limburg

Time is of the utmost importance to us every day, when it comes to getting from home to work and back again. An exhibition in the **mine depot in Waterschei** illustrates how important decent and reliable transport was to the success of the region's mines: If, as was the case in the beginning, miners spent hours getting to work, it would be harder to attract workers in the numbers required. So efficient transport was essential. You'll also find out about the underground transport system.

► [www.mijndepot.be](http://www.mijndepot.be)

Yet another local history association, the Heidebloemke group from Genk, is organising a guided walk around what's left of the **artists' village** in the city, which was started 100 years ago this year. Reserve via email at [cultuur@genk.be](mailto:cultuur@genk.be).

### West Flanders

The **Bruges Art Route** is a guided walk through the city highlighting a number of living or recent local artists – heritage in the making, you might say. Among them are Flori Van Acker, André De Meulemeester, Gilbert Swimberghe and Koen Scherpereel. There are three routes, and a map can be downloaded from the website for

you to construct your own walk at any time.

► [www.bruges-art-route.com](http://www.bruges-art-route.com)

The village of Dudzele, nestled in the polders, was the subject of **photos taken by Louis-Frans Monbaliu** in 1900 (pictured below), which will be on show at the Museum De Groene Tente, together with some of his original cameras.

*Heritage Day events are free but some require a reservation. De Lijn (Flanders), MIVB (Brussels) and NMBS (national rail) all have special tickets available on the day.*



## 21 APRIL

Across Brussels and Flanders

► [www.erfgoeddag.be](http://www.erfgoeddag.be)



A matter of perspective

Knokke-Heist Photo Festival

Bjorn Gabriels

Like photography itself, the annual Knokke-Heist Photo Festival continues to tinker with its format, while keeping its nucleus intact. Last year, the 80-odd selected photos could be found along a tour in and around Knokke. That scattered group exhibition replaced the long-time tradition of sending visitors to a series of distinct but interlinked exhibitions across the coastal cities. This time around, there's no need to hop on a bike or hike around the Knokke hinterland: All photos await your gaze at the Scharpoord Cultural Centre.

While only a year ago the free-for-all festival wanted to bring contemporary photography to the masses by taking it to the streets, suburbs and crowded public spaces, the current edition aims for that same goal by staying indoors and launching a new international prize for photography: the biannual PixSea Awards. A matter of perspective, no doubt. The festival hands out two prizes.

The Oeuvre Award has been given to Italian photographer Guido Guidi, who displays a keen eye for contemporary landscapes. In Knokke, he presents a selection from his latest book, *A New Map of Italy*. Guidi, now 71, steers clear of the picture-perfect idylls of his native country, preferring to depict spaces of everyday life. His photos are modest in size, too, and avoid folkloristic stereotypes in favour of what he calls "simple, actual reality". His work is in tune with the current crisis in Italy, while presenting a refreshing take on the widespread tradition of backyard scenes.

Grab bag of styles

The international jury also nominated seven photographers for the PixSea Emerging Artist Award. The nominees are testament to the variety in contemporary photography. Twenty-something French photojournalist Benjamin Girette dislikes being labelled an "artist": He rather wants to inform and agitate. Instead of



framing the photos he took during the Tunisian revolution (*pictured*) as works of art, he just tacks them to the wall as witnesses to an often-gruesome reality. All the other photographers use the exhibition setting to display imaginative interactions with the world around them or create installations on site, which range from playful gimmick to artistic-historical research. Dutch photographer Anouk Kruithof encourages visitors to take

a mirror and look at the photos she has attached to the ceiling. Clare Strand of the UK explores the history of the uses of photography, using found photographs in her interactive installations and photomontages. In dark shadows and brown planes, German artist Andrea Geyer explores the relationship between photos, archive documents and historical objects that refer to the 1919 Spartacus revolution in Germany. Compatriot Annette Kelm, on the

other hand, has by far the most colourful works in this Emerging Artist section. French photographer Noémie Goudal offers monumental pictures, often with *trompe-l'oeil* effects, whereas the work of Olivier Cornil, the only Belgian photographer in the selection, is much more intimate. His project *Vladivostok* undertakes a personal and poetic journey, named after a place Cornil doesn't show. By tradition, the Knokke-Heist Photo Festival also welcomes *Photo View*, a selection by the Centre for Visual Expression, an image medley from local photography clubs, and (from 9 May) the touring World Press Photo exhibition. In this year's winning photo, by Swedish photographer Paul Hansen, a group of grieving men carry two dead children through a narrow street in Gaza. You'll also see the portrait series *People of Mercy* by Flemish photographer Stephan Vanfleteren, who won the World Press Photo's category "Staged Portraits Stories".

Until 9 June | Scharpoord Cultural Centre, Meerlaan 32, Knokke-Heist | [www.fotofestival.be](http://www.fotofestival.be)

VISUAL ARTS

Neo Rauch

*The Obsession of the Demiurge* is contemporary German painter Neo Rauch's first solo exhibition in Belgium. Known for his massive canvases that feature bizarre scenes, Rauch is like a postmodern Hieronymus Bosch, painting largely recognisable figures (soldiers, workers, citizens) but in ultra-surreal combinations. One canvas, for example, reveals a woman lighting a fire underneath a pair of grappling, giant beetles (*pictured*). "You don't have to understand them," Rauch assures his audience, "just to feel that this creation, to the greatest possible extent, is at peace with itself." The Leipzig-born artist's eccentricities are partially explained by his upbringing in pre-reunification East Germany; his craft is marked by the insularity of the GDR, despite having become, after unification, a fixture on the international arts scene. **Georgio Valentino**



Until 19 May | Bozar, Brussels | [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

**Optimundus:** Works by Brussels artist duo Jos de Gruyter and Harald Thys based on a theme of alternative realities, including installations, drawing, sculpture, performance and photography  
**Until MAY 12 at M HKA, Leuvenstraat 32**  
[www.muhka.be](http://www.muhka.be)

Leuven

**Saskia Olde Wolbers:** Three recent video installations by the London-based Dutch artist that hinge on the relationship between the otherworldly and the familiar  
**Until MAY 26 at M Museum, Vanderkelenstraat 28**  
[www.mleuven.be](http://www.mleuven.be)

Tongeren

**Tractor Steven:** Photographs of agricultural machinery in action around Tongeren by Steven Cuyx  
**Until MAY 26 at de Velinx, Dijk 111**  
[www.develinx.be/tractor-steven](http://www.develinx.be/tractor-steven)

FOOD & DRINK

Geuze Tour

Belgian beer is, of course, world famous but not all beers are created equal. The bubbly geuze, for example, is not nearly as well respected as the rich Trappist brews. To give the regional beer a boost, the High Council for Artisanal Lambic Beers (Horal) organises an annual Geuze Tour through the Pajottenland and the Zenne valley. Beer-lovers will visit eight producers, where master brewers will show you how the beer is made and let you sample their wares. Admission is free and reservation is not required, unless you want to ride on the Horal bus that shuttles between breweries (in which case, book as soon as possible). There's even a special-edition brew created just for the occasion. The Old Geuze Mega Blend 2013 is the delicious fruit of a collaboration between the tour's partner breweries and is bottled in collectible, numbered units. **GV**



21 April, 10.00 | Across Flanders | [www.horal.be](http://www.horal.be)

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Brussels

**What's cooking:** Launch party for the new book *What's cooking in Belgium: Recipes and Stories From a Food-Loving Nation* by Brussels-based British authors Neil Evans and Anna Jenkinson  
**APR 24 18.30 at Le Meridien, Carrefour de l'Europe**

Oudenaarde

**Brown Beer Month:** Oudenaarde in the Flemish Ardennes is celebrating its famed *Oud Bruin* (Old Brown) style beer with brewery visits, walking tours, overnight arrangements, beer-infused lunches and more  
**Until APR 30 in and around Oudenaarde**  
[www.tinyurl.com/brown-beer-month](http://www.tinyurl.com/brown-beer-month)

Sint-Truiden

**Fruit tour bus:** Daily three-hour bus tour along Limburg's blossoming fruit orchards and producers, with a knowledgeable guide and a gift basket to take home  
**Daily until APR 30, leaving at 14.00 from Oud Stadhuis, Grote Markt**  
[www.toerismelimburg.be](http://www.toerismelimburg.be)



## CONCERT

### Kraakpand

Four completely different bands hang out for an evening of musical exploration. Billed as a kind of artistic *kraakpand* (squat), the show puts the musicians in close proximity to the audience, which may be the last time you can get intimate with some of these rising stars. Flemish pop-rock band Douglas Firs are blasting off on a rocket of publicity surrounding their debut album *Shimmer & Glow*. The group is led by Gertjan Van Hellemont (*pictured*), better known as the guitarist of another Flemish buzz band, the Bony King of Nowhere. Singer Ellen Schoenaerts is another up-and-comer on the bill. Peter Van Huffel's latest project Gorilla Mask brings a fair measure of gonzo, free-jazz madness to the evening. The Berlin-based Canadian saxophonist will be on a lightning, weekend tour that also includes performances in Brussels and Antwerp. Finally, the capital's BLNDMAN saxophone quartet are also squatting Kraakpand with their minimalist brand of contemporary music. **GV**



© Dries Segers

20 April, 20.15 | Handelsbeurs, Ghent

► [www.handelsbeurs.be](http://www.handelsbeurs.be)

## MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

### Antwerp

**Sleepers' Reign:** One of the most promising young bands to come out of Humo's Rock Rally Finale 2012 bring a dreamy mix of soundscapes and mesmerising vocals

**APR 19 19.30 at Trix, Noordersingel 28-30**

► [www.trixonline.be](http://www.trixonline.be)

### Brussels

**Karl Hyde:** The Underworld frontman goes solo and intimate, with Norwegian artist Farao as special guest

**APR 20 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110**

► [www.abconcerts.be](http://www.abconcerts.be)

### Leuven

**Marble Sounds:** Flemish band bringing fragile, emotional pop rock

**APR 23 20.30 at Stuk, Naamsestraat 96**

► [www.stuk.be](http://www.stuk.be)

## FESTIVAL

### Brussels Short Film Festival

The Brussels Short Film Festival proves that size doesn't matter. The gifted short filmmaker can communicate in 10 precious minutes what might take another two hours. Yet, for all its focus on the small work of the film world, BSFF is a big deal. This 16th edition takes place on several screens across Brussels. At the heart of it are national and international competitions that feature dozens of short films from here, there and everywhere, including the animated *Junkyard*, the Netherlands' entry to this year's Oscars (*pictured*). Opening night celebrates Hollywood with a screening of Oscar-winning shorts. A few days later, the Night of the Shorts will keep you entertained into the wee morning hours. For a dose of young talent, check out the Next Generation student film competition at Elsene's Mercelis Theatre. And a brand-new mini-festival presents 40 works by students from around the world. **GV**



24 April to 4 May | Across Brussels | ► [www.bsff.be](http://www.bsff.be)

## MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

### Across Flanders

**Moov Film Festival:** Festival of world cinema with a focus on social issues

**APR 17-28 in Bruges, Turnhout and other cities across Flanders**

► [www.moov.be](http://www.moov.be)

### Alden-Biesen (Limburg)

**International Storytelling Festival:** Annual festival featuring storytelling by 35 professionals from every genre, including horror, travel, fables and fairy tales, biography, adventure and more

**Until APR 23 at Landcommanderij Alden-Biesen, Kasteelstraat 6**

► [www.alden-biesen.be/vertelfestival](http://www.alden-biesen.be/vertelfestival)

### Kortrijk

**Festival of Flanders:** Kortrijk kicks off the months-long, region-wide festival of classical, contemporary and world music

**Until MAY 5 across Kortrijk**

► [www.festivalkortrijk.be](http://www.festivalkortrijk.be)

## DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

### VE Day Party

3 May, from 19.00, Cocteau, Ghent

This 8 May marks 68 years since Belgium became free from the cruelties of the Second World War. Back then, street parties thrown all over the country indicated the war was truly over. If you want to get a glimpse of what it might have been like, join the Victory in Europe Party on 3 May at Cocteau in Ghent.

Party organisers Casablanca promise "an atmosphere of girls dancing in flower dresses to the tunes of Glenn Miller and Vera Lynn, while the guys are smoking king size cigarettes". Dress up in your best '40s style, but keep it comfortable as you'll be swinging, waltzing and Lindy Hopping all night long. No worries if you can't dance, though, there are courses before the night starts; you'll be partying like it's 1945 in no time.

As you'll notice, the organiser has a keen eye for detail, from the entire setting to the old coins and notes with which you'll be paying for your drinks. Tickets cost €10.

► [www.ve-day.be](http://www.ve-day.be)

### Dr Sketchy's

22 April & 2 May, 20.00-23.00

The night before Casablanca's VE Day Party, the already-decorated Cocteau is also the place to be for Dr Sketchy's, a sketch night for those of all artistic levels. Based on a concept out of New York, the unique Dr Sketchy's themed sketch nights are hosted by the Neo Retro Agency, also responsible for the Radio Modern swing parties.

A master of ceremonies leads you through the evening, which is, trust us, not your average art class. Background music, cocktails and all sorts of side entertainments help bring your drawing creativity to the fore. For the

Liberation Edition, the burlesque model will be wearing her prettiest nylon stockings, as they were invented during the war and suit the VE Day spirit perfectly. The April Dr Sketchy's, meanwhile, Murder in the Mansion, takes place in the Happaert House in Antwerp. In your finest cocktail wear, you'll be a guest at a swanky 1960s English mansion, where, you might have guessed, you'll be required to help solve a dastardly crime. Tickets for a Dr Sketchy's night cost €10 at the door, but you need to sign up in advance.

► [www.neoretroagency.com](http://www.neoretroagency.com)



© 25th April



BITE

Robyn Boyle

Les Briggittines ★★★★★

If it were up to chef Dirk Myny, he'd sit down with each and every one of his guests. As chef-proprietor at Les Briggittines, a Brussels establishment for some 20 years, he knows how to make people feel at home with genuinely warm hospitality.

Myny (*pictured*), who grew up in Dilbeek, just outside of Brussels, learned to cook in his grandmother's kitchen. That explains the long list of classics filling the menu, from cow udder broth to his famed pig's trotters.

My dining companion and I opt for five courses, each paired with a different beer. What we get is entirely up to the chef. We eagerly await the first course by nibbling on fresh, crusty bread smeared with butter, all the while admiring the magnificent Art Nouveau dining room.

First up is a terrine of pork ears and whelks, served with a *gribiche* sauce. The bits of meat and other ingredients, including crunchy carrot and celery, are held in place by the pork's gelatinous stock. It has a distinct seafood flavour thanks to the whelks, or sea snails.

The *gribiche*, made with boiled eggs and mustard, is the perfect tangy accompaniment for the terrine. This rustic starter is paired with a glass of Rulles Estivale, a pale ale brewed in Wallonia. It pours hazy golden and has a nice hoppy aroma and trace of citrus fruit, which makes it a good match for the fatty terrine.

The next course is steamed cod. The ultra-moist cod sits atop a bed of braised *witloof*, leeks, carrots, parsley and barley and topped with a fluffy sabayon made from farm-fresh eggs and lambic beer. The combination of tart lambic with expertly seasoned grains and vegetables proves complementary to the subtle flavour of the fish. Naturally, to go with this meal Myny has chosen a glass of lambic from famed Brussels brewer Cantillon.



Next we are treated to the ultimate Brussels dish: *zenne pot*. Myny's version of this once number one dish of Flemish peasants is a divine combination of cabbage cooked in Cantillon Gueuze with *bloempanch* (blood sausage), dried sausage and whelks. The bottom layer of blood sausage is deliciously soft, sweet and slightly spiced, while the top

layer of gueuze-soaked cabbage, whelks, and dried sausage is salty and sour. The beer served is the same as that found in the dish. The dishes just keep getting better as the evening progresses, and the main course is no exception. I can think of few things more delicious than veal cheeks braised for four hours in Cantillon Kriek beer. The beer lends

its sweet cherry flavour to the pork, which is soft to falling apart. It comes with seasonal veg, including parsnip, whole young carrots, pearl onions, *witloof* and a skin-on potato. A clump of sour cream on top is just beginning to melt and run down onto the meat. A glass of the reddish-pink Cantillon Kriek is the spot-on pairing.

But the topper of the evening was still to come. A scoop of dark chocolate sorbet might normally be average, but the way in which Myny pairs it has us both blown away. The flavours inside the glass of XX Bitter from Brewery De Ranke mirror the sharp, bitter qualities of the dark chocolate in the sorbet. Pairing beers with food in this way immensely enhances both the beer and the dish.

Instead of letting us order the usual coffee after our meal, Myny has another suggestion *in petto* and pops open a bottle of Smoked Porter from Stone Brewing Company in California. This rich, malty ale has all kinds of complex flavours, including roasted cocoa and coffee bean. It makes for the perfect finish to the perfect evening. And all for about €100 each.

► [www.lesbriggittines.com](http://www.lesbriggittines.com)

- 📍 Kapellemarkt 5, Brussels; 02.512.68.91
- 🕒 Mon-Thurs 12.00-14.30 & 19.00-22.30; Fri 12.00-14.30 & 19.00-23.00; Sat 19.00-23.00
- 💶 Mains: €18-€42
- 📖 True Brussels experience complete with Art Nouveau décor, exquisitely prepared local dishes and expert beer pairings

TALKING SPORTS

Leo Cendrowicz

A fatal Fed Cup fall?

When Kim Clijsters and Justin Henin were in their pomp a decade ago, Belgium could almost claim that it had become synonymous with women's tennis. But those titans have retired, and their successors have struggled to match their achievements. And now, six months after Clijsters quit the game, Belgium is facing the ignominy of tumbling into the third tier of tennis's premier team competition, the Fed Cup. What has gone wrong? Perhaps it was too much to expect that the Flemish stars tipped to follow in their footsteps would have the same impact. While Yanina Wickmayer and Kirsten Flipkens have impressed in recent years, neither have been close to winning any of the majors, and Flipkens' Quebec Bell Challenge win in September is the only WTA title they have between them.

Still, their more modest status shouldn't have prevented them from joining together to pull Belgium through the Fed Cup. Yet that is what is happening. This weekend in Koksijde, Belgium face Poland in a World Group II playoff, and defeat will knock them into what is effectively the Fed Cup's third division.

Part of the problem is commitment. Wickmayer has pulled out of the tournament claiming Koksijde's hard court surface could aggravate her back injury, and Flipkens, the country's top player and ranked 22nd in the world, waited until last week before confirming she would take part. But they both played in Belgium's defeat to Switzerland in February, the third consecutive loss for the team after losing last year to Serbia and Japan.

In 2001, Clijsters and Henin led Belgium to their sole Fed Cup triumph. They reached the final in 2006, and the last time Clijsters played in the Fed Cup was also the last time Belgium won, beating



Yanina Wickmayer serves to Switzerland's Stefanie Voegelé during their Fed Cup World Group II first-round match in Switzerland last February

the US 4-1 in February 2011. With Wickmayer out, Flipkens is joined by 181st-ranked Alison Van Uytvanck; An-Sophie Mestach, who is currently at 330 in the WTA rankings; and Ysaline Bonaventure, at 399. They will face a Polish side led by fourth-ranked Agnieszka Radwanska and her sister Urszula. Unless Flipkens and Co can defy their dreary Fed Cup form, Belgium is looking down the barrel of back-to-back relegations in a competition it once conquered.

The last word...

Waves of sympathy

"I'm glad I'm a man."  
Guinea pig reporter Jesse Van Regenmortel tried out an artificial birth-contractions machine at Ghent University Hospital

Standing ovation

"Marcella, last of the beguines, is no more. A bronze statue, just as she was: strong and humble. Kortrijk is in mourning."  
Kortrijk mayor Vincent Van Quickenborne tweets on the death of the last living resident of a *begijnhof* in Flanders

Firing range

"In this heavily populated and fragmented Flanders, hunting comes more and more in conflict with other users of public space."  
Jan Rodts of Vogelbescherming Vlaanderen, which has put together a broad coalition of groups in favour of a total ban on hunting

Car contradiction

"You can't very well complain about badly maintained roads, then complain there are too many road works."  
Public works minister Hilde Crevits on road disruptions over the next few weeks

NEXT WEEK  
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

How the brain works is a mighty big subject for one research project, so several European universities are pooling their resources to consider how neurons behave and communicate. How do they do it? They *listen* to them. We talk to the co-ordinator of the Brainleap project at the University of Antwerp

Science

New Zealand sent more than 100,000 soldiers to fight in the First World War and is a major partner in the upcoming centenary in Flanders. We talk to the country's ambassador, Paula Wilson, about their upcoming plans here

Living

Flemish beers aren't only popular in Flanders: The US is importing them in ever-greater numbers. But some Flemings have taken an even greater leap: started breweries in the US. We meet these Flemish-Americans and see what's brewing