

Strength in numbers

Flanders' four ports enter a co-operation agreement to improve competition and increase traffic

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Sinister seas

One Flemish company is working to clean up old munitions dumped in the world's oceans

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Flemish brews in US

Duvel Moortgat's Ommegang, brewed in New York, is a big hit in a country thirsty for better beer

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One giant leap

Antwerp University's Brainleap project is helping decipher secret communications of the mind

Andy Furniere

The organ that enables us to think is also the most difficult to understand: the brain. The project Brainleap, co-ordinated by the University of Antwerp, is using a new method to gain insight into the mind-boggling processes that take place in the minds of living things. This visionary research could lead to innovations that will improve the lives of the blind, deaf and paralysed.

The Brainleap project is an initiative of professor Michele Giugliano, who leads the Laboratory of Theoretical Neurobiology and Neuroengineering at the University of Antwerp (UA). Giugliano also co-ordinates the activity of participating researchers from the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Israel. Together, they want to find out how brain cells – also known as nerve cells or neurons – interact to determine the behaviour of animals and humans.

"We know that different groups of nerve cells communicate via electric impulses," says Giugliano, "but we cannot yet understand the messages they are conveying to each other." Making sense of this dialogue is the crucial first step towards the ultimate goal of influencing these signals and thus the brain's activity, helping repair the defects that cause brain disorders and diseases.

The international and multidisciplinary Brainleap team received funding of €2.5 million from the European Commission via the Future and Emerging Technologies programme. A total of 20 researchers will work on the project for three years; nine are scientists at Antwerp.

To eavesdrop on the activity of neurons in the brain, the researchers will use a new technique developed at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. They will employ microscopic gold electrodes – a thousandth of a millimetre wide – near the brain cells, and these will function as antennas to intercept the signals without harming the neurons. Currently, scientists have to stab

cells with glass pipettes to insert the electrode, causing the cell to die off after about an hour and a half.

"The new electrodes are coated with protein molecules that nerve cells perceive as a sort of food," explains Giugliano. "The neurons are encouraged to embrace the electrodes, but they don't have the power to break the antenna. Compare it to fishing techniques: Instead of throwing a harpoon, we are now using a hook with bait on it."

Test tube experiments on cells of marine snails showed that the "smarter" electrodes could register the signals for days without damaging the neurons. The Brainleap researchers aim to record the simultaneous interaction of up to 100 nerve cells, while it is currently only possible to examine the activity of a few.

The first challenge for Brainleap is to refine this method and apply it to more complex living creatures. Scientists from the universities of Antwerp and Amsterdam will carry out experiments on rodents, stimulating their senses while

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

Peter de Caluwe



Peter de Caluwe, general manager of De Munt opera in Brussels, has been named this year's Manager of the Year by the Flemish Association for Management and Policy (VVBB). The association awards the annual title to the Dutch-speaking head of a public sector entity. De Caluwe's nomination is only the second time in the award's 15-year history that it has gone to someone from the cultural sector. The jury praised De Caluwe's strong leadership and consistent approach as well as his efforts, in difficult financial circumstances, to keep motivating his colleagues, while taking active steps to engage in public debate. That happened most recently when De Caluwe announced the 2013-2014 programme for De Munt, which this year marks its 50th anniversary as purely an opera house. Theatre is a forum for discussion, he pointed out, but should also be an incitement to rebellion. A shot across the government's bow, perhaps, in the continuing battle over subsidies? With a mandate that still has six years left to run, De Caluwe has no need to fear a fight. He was born in Dendermonde, East Flanders, in 1963 and studied

literature and theatre history in Ghent, Brussels and Antwerp. In 1986, while still a student, he was invited by Gérard Mortier, then director of De Munt, to work as a dramaturge. He also dealt with the press, public relations and the opera's educational programmes. Three years later, he moved to the Dutch Opera in Amsterdam as communications director, then casting director and finally director of artistic administration. He was appointed general manager of De Munt in 2005, succeeding French-speaking organist and composer Bernard Foccroulle, and began his first term in 2007. That was due to expire this year, but the government of Yves Leterme decided to renew his contract for a further six years in 2010. De Caluwe, who coincidentally also turns 50 this year, is no stranger to awards: De Munt won the Opera House of the Year from the German magazine *Opernwelt* in 2011; the same year, Klara radio and Muziekcentrum Vlaanderen voted him Music Personality of the Year. He was also, in 2007, the first person to receive a master's degree *honoris causa* from the Sint-Lucas arts institute in Brussels.

News in brief

Federal pensions minister Alexander De Croo has amassed a panel of 12 experts to come up with concrete proposals for **reform of the federal pensions system** in response to the ageing population. One in four Belgians will be retired by 2020. At present, every retired person is backed up by 2.5 people in active employment; by 2020 that ratio will be reduced to one to 1.5. Among the members of the commission are professor Bea Cantillon of the Centre for Social Policy at the University of Antwerp, and politician-turned-academic Frank Vandenbroucke.

The Antwerp tribunal of commerce has made a declaration of **bankruptcy in the case of Alfacam**, the Flemish TV services company, after banks cut off the company's credit and a search for a new owner failed. Some planned broadcast projects, including talent show *The Voice van Vlaanderen*, will go ahead. Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters said the losses incurred by the government could be limited to about €8 million instead of the maximum €16.4 million guaranteed by the government's risk-capital fund Gigarant.

The **children of divorced parents** have only half as much chance of obtaining a higher education qualification as youngsters whose parents stay together, according to a study by researchers at the University of Antwerp as part of the Divorce in Flanders programme. Between 20 and 25% of all secondary school students in Flanders have divorced parents. Previous research showed that divorce had a negative effect on educational results: more have to repeat a year, and fewer leave school with a diploma. The latest study shows that the effects continue into higher education, with implications for future career and earning prospects.

DNA tests on foodstuffs in Belgium

revealed **no traces of horse flesh** in 106 prepared meals labelled as containing beef, the European food safety agency said. Across Europe, positive results accounted for less than 5% of 4,144 samples tested.

Former federal police chief **Fernand Koekelberg** has been officially named as a suspect in a case of fraud in the granting of public works contracts, the Brussels prosecutor's office announced. Koekelberg, who was initially dismissed over suspicions of mismanagement, is currently also under investigation in Namur on allegations of rape brought by a former girlfriend.

British retailer **Marks & Spencer**, famous for its underwear and food products, will return to Brussels in 2015 after an absence of 10 years. The new store will be on the Guldenvlieslaan in Elsene. The company last year began serving expats in Belgium with an online service.

On 5 May, **US ambassador to Belgium Howard Gutman** will fulfil his pledge to visit every one of Belgium's 589 municipalities before his term ends this summer. The ambassador's last port of call will be Voeren, an enclave of Limburg province located between the Netherlands and Wallonia. Gutman arrived in Brussels in 2009 and will mark his term with a party for 600 guests: the 589 mayors, 10 provincial governors and prime minister Elio Di Rupo.

Nearly one in 10 children in Flanders is **born into poverty**, according to the latest Poverty Barometer produced by the government of Flanders. In the last decade, the figure has gone up from 6%. The government's 2020 Pact calls for the figure to fall to a maximum of 4% by 2020, said poverty minister Ingrid Lieten. "There is more need

than ever for concrete action," she said. "It is high time successful local projects were turned into structural policy."

Motorists who respect the posted speed limits in Brussels could find themselves being pulled over and **rewarded with a Win for Life** scratch card, under a new safety campaign launched last week by Brussels mobility minister Bruno De Lille and the Belgian Institute for Road Safety. "If everyone were to drive more slowly in Brussels, we could avoid 50 to 60 dead and seriously injured a year," De Lille said.

Human remains found during dredging work in the port of Ghent last week could belong to a woman who disappeared in 1997, police said. The pelvic bones were found when a car wreck was fished out of the water. The search for further evidence continues.

The **orientation signposts on Flemish beaches** are losing their corporate sponsorship this year, 23 years after the posts were introduced. Sponsors, including KBC and Base, have cancelled their support for the system, by which 140 tall poles with illustrations attached help orient and guide lost children back to their parents. The entrepreneur who invented the system, as well as the bracelets with an emergency number given to children to wear, now hopes to raise funds from coastal municipalities.

The federal parliament's business committee approved a law making it **illegal for members of the public to sell tickets** for concerts or other events at a profit. The law takes aim at the organised black market but would also apply to individuals. The rule allows only administrative costs to be added to the face value price of any ticket.

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Boar 1, humans 0

At one end of the country, residents are plagued with aggressive seagulls. At the other end, it's a quite different and rather more imposing pest that's bothering the populace. The wild boar has been human prey for centuries, since Odysseus was wounded in the leg during a hunt, up through French king Philippe IV, who fell off his horse, to the fatal goring of King Robert Baratheon (though he of course is fictional). The wild boar of Flanders, however, are proving to be an even more formidable enemy. Last winter hunts were organised to cull the growing numbers of boar, which destroy crops. In Zedelgem, West Flanders, hunters organised a month-long hunt and killed precisely zero boar. In Postel, Antwerp province, 140 beaters and 60 hunters spotted 60 boar on one afternoon in February, and finished the day with a total of one kill. So what's the answer? The idea of wolves, believe it or not, was banded about the Flemish parliament. But that's not going to work, according to environment minister Joke Schauvliege, speaking in answer to a question from socialist Chokri Mahassine. Wolves are gradually making their way towards Flanders, but the region doesn't have enough wilderness to support the kind of wolf population required to keep wild boar growth under control, she said.



Don't boar me with your silly ideas

In any case, she added, wolves are not all that keen on wild boar. According to studies in the German-Polish border region, wolves prefer roe deer, followed by red deer. Boar make up only 15% of their diet. People, too, have little to fear from wolves, Schauvliege said, which are fearful and prefer to keep well clear of humans.

One giant leap

A supercomputer in Antwerp is translating brain signals into graphics

► continued from page 1

registering the reaction of the nerve cells. La Sapienza University of Rome has experience working with primates, which will be the subjects of Brainleap's final tests. In these experiments, primates will perform more complex cognitive tasks, involving, for example, memory games. The Hebrew University, meanwhile, is responsible for the optimisation of the microelectrodes, while nanotechnologists from the University of Tübingen in Germany will focus on the actual manufacturing of the new instruments.

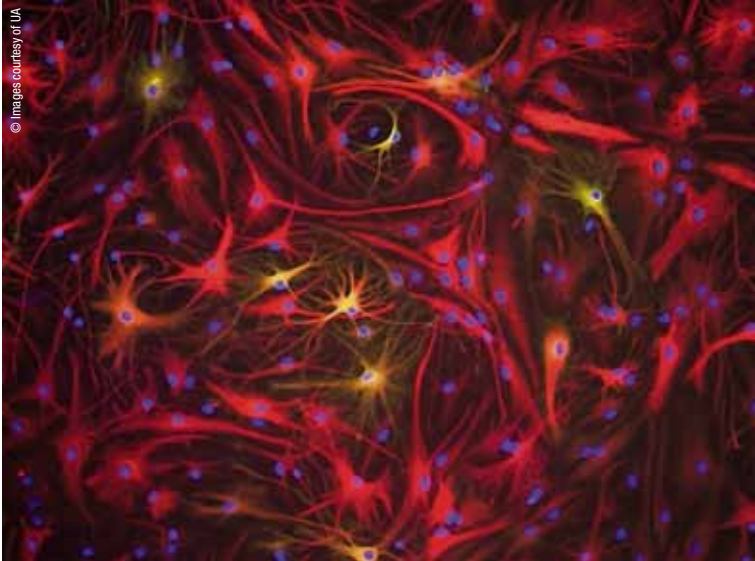
Breaking the code

Recording the electric impulses is one thing, but deciphering them is a whole other story. Giugliano shows me their supercomputer, occupying an entire small room in the lab. It has to translate the signals into graphics. Experts at Antwerp are designing the mathematical models needed to interpret these data into useful information about the communication taking place. Breaking this neural code is an extremely complicated undertaking, which presents the researchers with many questions.

"The mystery of brain structure is similar to that of the universe's composition," says Giugliano. "Every millimetre of the brain surface contains millions of neurons, and we have only just started to analyse the activity of a few of them simultaneously. The Human Genome Project, which maps our DNA structure, is a primary school assignment compared to examining the way our brain works. Similar tests on humans will only be possible in around 15 years, while it will take many more decades to fully understand how our brains function."

Bionic applications

However visionary the Brainleap project is, the scientists are already fully aware of the possible



Brainleap studies how neurons, or brain cells, connect to determine the behaviour of both animals and humans

applications their research could lead to in neuroprosthetics and bionic applications. Giugliano tells me about the interest of Second Sight, an American company that develops implantable prosthetics

and their wheelchair with just the power of their mind. "There are already technologies that enable paralysed patients to move, for example, a cursor on a computer, but scientists constantly have to

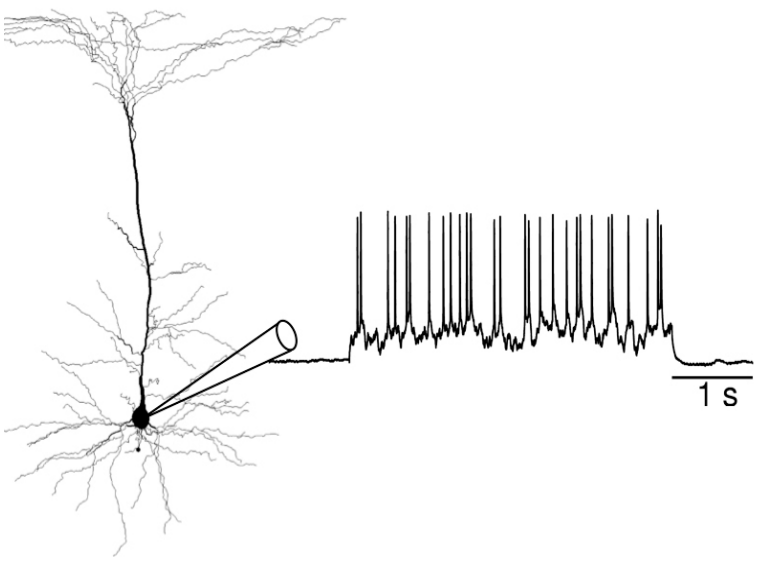
"The Human Genome Project is a primary school assignment compared to examining the way our brain works"

that enable those with a visual impairment to achieve greater independence. "These bionic eyes are still very primitive," he says. "It is difficult for people to make sense of the visual images that are transmitted into their brain by a camera. By applying the Brainleap technology, we could dramatically improve their sight." The working of cochlear implants for deaf people could similarly be fine-tuned.

For paralysed people, Giugliano envisions a day not too far in the future where they could type on a computer or control a robotic arm

adjust the high-tech applications to keep them working properly. By controlling the activity of responsible neurons precisely, we can revolutionise the reliability of this assisting technology." The international prosthesis producer Otto Bock is closely following the progress of the project.

The new method may also form a viable alternative for the deep, invasive brain stimulations that are now used to reduce the effects of neurological disorders such as Parkinson's disease. "Instead of disturbing thousands of neurons by implanting an electrode of around



A supercomputer translates brain signals into graphics, which UA researchers must then decipher



Michele Giugliano (centre) and his Dutch, German, Italian and Israeli collaborators

a millimetre, we could select the necessary neurons with our smarter and smaller electrodes. This would reduce the risks and the side effects considerably," Giugliano explains. The matter of interfering with our brain movements also raises the ethical question of the degree to which we are becoming bionic human beings. "We are definitely

moving in that direction, but I consider it a beneficial evolution because it helps us deal with numerous brain diseases and disorders," says Giugliano. "The augmentation of our brain function, a popular science fiction theme, is certainly not our priority."

► www.brainleap.eu

THE HUMAN BRAIN PROJECT IN FLANDERS

Flemish universities are also participating in the prestigious Human Brain Project, one of the EU's Future Emerging Technology Flagships. These are meant to form the scientific basis of future technological innovation and economic development in areas especially relevant to society.

For the next 10 years, the European Commission is allocating more than €1 billion to gather all existing knowledge on the human brain and to reconstruct its activity with models and simulations created by supercomputers.

The models have to lead to new insights on the working of the brain and on brain-related diseases, as well as advance breakthroughs on new computer and robotics technologies. One specific goal is the founding of a new platform for medical informatics, which will centralise valuable information from around



In the Human Brain Project, computer systems and robots will be created that use knowledge of the brain to enhance future computing technology

the world. This platform should result in more objective diagnoses of brain diseases and faster development of treatments. Computer systems and robots will be created that use detailed knowledge of the brain to take on the challenges of computing

technology in the future: energy efficiency, reliability and the difficulties related to programming very complex computer systems.

Cross-border intelligence

The Human Brain Project is co-ordinated by the Federal Polytechnic School of Lausanne in Switzerland. More than 80 European, North American and Japanese research institutions are collaborating, among them the universities of Ghent and Leuven.

In Ghent, professor Benjamin Schrauwen of the Electronics and Information Systems Department is leading a research project to understand the underlying learning mechanisms in the brain that form intelligence in humans and animals. The team will create theoretical models or algorithms that can later be applied in

robots and computers to establish intelligent behaviour or artificial intelligence.

Two research groups at KU Leuven, meanwhile, are participating with separate projects. Professor Thierry Voet of the Laboratory of Reproductive Genomics is organising a study on gene expression in the brain, while professor Cees van Leeuwen heads the Experimental Psychology team, which is performing a study on computational neuroscience.

The brain research of Neuro-Electronics Research Flanders (Nerf) labs could play an important role in future stages of the Human Brain Project. Nerf was established two years ago by nanotechnology research centre imec, the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and KU Leuven.

► www.humanbrainproject.eu

All is fair in war

Antwerp's long-running Sinksenfoor struggles to find a new spot

Alan Hope

Residents of Antwerp's Scheldekaaien – the streets overlooking the wharfs of the river – have picked up the baton from their neighbours in the southern docklands in protesting against the Sinksenfoor taking place in their neighbourhood.

The Sinksenfoor is Antwerp's annual fair held in the weeks following Pentecost. Last week a judge in the city issued a decision to ban the carnival from taking place in the southern docklands in response to a complaint brought by local residents concerning the noise caused by the 150 fairground attractions and crowds.

The Sinksenfoor traces its origins to the 13th century and an annual market held around Pentecost, and the judge said that, while the event



may be considered cultural heritage, the location of the event cannot. The Antwerp city authorities said they would appeal the decision, but

the chance of overturning it in time for the event to begin next month was unlikely.

Instead, the city worked out a

temporary solution: Move the Sinksenfoor to the Scheldekaaien. Not surprisingly, the residents of the chic apartment blocks on the waterfront soon protested against that decision.

One man, Edouard Buss, complained that he had lived for 18 years in the area where the fair was held and moved house to escape the nuisance – to an apartment on the Scheldekaaien. "Now, six years later, they're on my doorstep again," he told *De Standaard*. "If it's only for one year, it's no problem, but it is if the fair is going to stay here for 20 years. That's enough to drive you mad."

The Sinksenfoor is planned to run from 18 May to 23 June. Afterwards, the city will evaluate the position in the light of this year's experience.

Patrick Janssens to quit politics

Patrick Janssens, one of Flanders' leading socialists and mayor of Antwerp until the defeat of his coalition in last October's municipal elections, is quitting politics to study at the London School of Economics (LSE). Janssens will follow a doctorate in urban development, specifically, how the use of public space affects the quality of life for residents. Janssens already holds a post-graduate diploma in statistics from the LSE.

As a member of the Flemish parliament, Janssens attends the weekly plenary sessions, but does not sit on the city council of Antwerp. He has also largely refrained from public comment on the policies of his successor, N-VA leader Bart De Wever.

"Just after I became mayor, I attended a number of seminars at the LSE

which brought together mayors, city planners and sociologists to consider what actions you could take to make the city more liveable," he told Radio 1. "I kept up those contacts during my period as mayor."

Janssens came to power in Antwerp's City Hall in 2003. His departure from the political scene brings to an end a decade of progressive forces in Antwerp. His defeat in October sent a shockwave through left-leaning circles. According to Bruno Tobback, chair of the socialist SPA, Janssens' decision is "logical," while "at the same time, it is a loss for politics."

While pursuing his doctorate in London, Janssens will teach at the universities of Antwerp and Leuven, as well as seeing out his term as a member of the Flemish parliament until the elections in 2014.



Janssens during the Summer of Antwerp festival at the height of his popularity in 2006

No more free buses in Hasselt

Hasselt is bringing an end to its 16-year policy of offering free bus travel within the city because of rising costs. Since the summer of 1997, Hasselt has offered free buses within the city centre, as well as free buses to the outlying areas for residents of the city. The measure, introduced by then-mayor Steve Stevaert, made international news and was widely seen as the ideal solution to the problem of attracting people to use public transport.

When the system was introduced, it cost public transport authority De Lijn an estimated €967,000 a year in lost fares; last year that bill had grown to €3.5 million. The city, meanwhile, had a bill of €1.75 million last year. The contract between Hasselt and De Lijn expires on 1 May and will not be renewed. Those aged 19 and under and 65 and over will still ride for free; everyone else will have to pay 60 cents a trip.

Syria recruiters rounded up

Fouad Belkacem, the leader of the radical Islamist group Sharia4Belgium, is back in prison, following a co-ordinated police operation last week in which six people were arrested in 15 raids on homes in Brussels and Antwerp. Four, including Belkacem, were detained.

The four are accused of forming part of a network to convince local youth to travel to Syria to fight alongside rebels opposing the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Politicians have been struggling with how to react to the problem, as more and more youths from Flanders have travelled to Syria. The issue brought together the mayors of Antwerp, Vilvoorde and Mechelen – three of the cities most heavily involved – for a summit that produced a range

of possible measures.

The federal prosecutor's office is considering charges of being a terrorist organisation against Sharia4Belgium, which could bring a sentence of up to 20 years for Belkacem.

Meanwhile, Dimitri Bontinck, the Antwerp father of 16-year-old Jehoel, returned to Turkey from Syria after his attempt to track down his son in the bombed-out city of Aleppo was unsuccessful. Bernard Clerfayt, mayor of the Schaarbeek district of Brussels, has stopped food distribution to the homeless in Brussels North Station because, he claims, the organisers are also preaching radical views to young people there in an attempt to recruit them to go to Syria.

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Turkeys don't vote for Christmas

The main task of Belgium's Constitutional Court is to ensure that human rights are respected. Marc Bossuyt, the president of the court, once complained that people feel discriminated against too easily. Asked whether Belgium is still guilty of any grave discrimination, he mentioned one instance.

Nearly 20 years ago, the court ruled that the difference in treatment between blue and white collar workers, a relic of the industrial past, was indeed a major discrimination. Blue collar workers receive far less compensation when they are laid off. Also, they have different terms for sick leave, the employment trial period and the payment of holiday bonuses.

By June, two decades after the Constitutional Court's ruling, these differences need to be abolished.

In Belgium, problems like this are traditionally solved by talks between workers and employers. However, as the past 20 years have shown, this method has not worked when it comes to the creation of the so called "unity statute" for all workers. As the deadline draws near, animosity between unions and employers organisations mounts, too.

Two solutions are possible. The first is "raising" the blue collar workers' statute, so that it equals that of their white collar colleagues. Employers have warned that this could amount to economic disaster, with the export of thousands of jobs to countries with lower labour costs.

Another possible solution is "lowering" the white collar workers' statute. Unsurprisingly, the unions find this unacceptable. Most white collar workers are flat-out against this. In the words of labour law specialist Marc De Vos of Ghent University: "Turkeys don't vote for Christmas".

The final compromise will be some middle ground, but that is yet to be found, even with the help of the federal government, which unions and employers requested. The negotiations have been all but suspended, with unions and employers mostly talking through the media.

"Everyone knows that the compromise will be an ugly baby, so they are all trying to postpone the birth as long as possible," says professor De Vos. He believes that the compensation in case of job loss is outdated anyway. Leaving people inactive, even when giving them large sums of money, is not the way to move forward. Instead, the compensation should lead to new employment.

No-one is against that, but, then again, who will vote for it?

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

1,974

unemployed from Wallonia found jobs in Flanders last year, thanks to cooperation between the two regions' employment agencies, one-third more than 2011. Just over 2,000 came from Brussels to work in Flanders

16.5%

retained from the invoice the Flemish government owes the manufacturer of electronic voting machines until problems with the machines that cropped up in last October's elections are fixed

4

months that Flemish biologist Angelo Vermeulen will live in a volcanic landscape environment in Hawaii, part of an experiment to replicate conditions for researchers on Mars

€78.5 million

paid for the Blue Tower on Louizalaan in Brussels, with over 25,000 square metres of office space, by real estate group Befimmo to owners Morgan Stanley

6.3kg

carrots eaten per person every year in Flanders, narrowly unseating the previous winner, the tomato on 6.1kg. Onions take third place on 4.5kg

Emotional ties that bind

Ahead of the First World War centenary, New Zealand's ambassador talks about her country's links with Flanders

Alan Hope

Earlier this year, the new ambassador of New Zealand to Belgium presented her credentials to the king in time-honoured fashion, dressed in a Maori ceremonial cloak. Earlier this month, the ceremonial event was somewhat different: She stood at the finish line of the famous Tour of Flanders cycle race.

Paula Wilson's husband is, in her own words, a cycle nut. "He cycled the amateurs' course on Saturday, and on the Sunday, he had the opportunity to follow the peloton in one of the VIP cars," Wilson explains to me at the New Zealand embassy, a sprawling building that overlooks Brussels' Jubelpark.

"My husband is a cycling nut, and in the course of a conversation with minister Geert Bourgeois, the extent of his cycling nuttiness was revealed," she smiles. Bourgeois made arrangements, and the New Zealanders had their first taste of Flanders' top sport. "I took our five-year-old twin boys along to watch the riders come over the finish line, and we saw the start as well. It was a great experience."

Wilson arrived in Brussels last summer but only took up the post officially in January. New Zealand has two ambassadors to the country. "We have quite a lot to cover. My fellow ambassador, Vangelis Vitalis, looks after the EU, Nato and Sweden, and I take care of Belgium, Luxembourg, Bulgaria and Romania. That's quite a broad spectrum of countries – with the focus on Belgium, obviously, since I'm resident here."

Her first foreign posting was to Bonn at about the time the German capital was being returned to Berlin, in 1999-2000. She has also worked on European trade and policy issues at the foreign ministry in the NZ capital Wellington.

Gateway to Europe

"Belgium is a founding member of the EU and of Nato, so it's an important contact point for our relations with both those institutions," she says. "There's quite a bit going on as far as trade is concerned. Zeebrugge is a key port for us – a lot of New Zealand products are landed there – so often Belgium is our gateway into the EU. We have dialogue with the government on trade and a range of political and foreign policy issues, mostly to give us a good view of what the EU is thinking on those issues." New Zealand exports farm products like lamb, venison, cheese and butter to Belgium, as well as coarse wool for the carpet industry. It imports products like cars, paper, TV sets and, inevitably, diamonds. New Zealand had a small trade surplus with Belgium – NZ \$40 million, or about €25.8 million – in the year



Paula Wilson wears the ceremonial Korowai to present her credentials to the Belgian king

ending June 2010.

There's an even closer emotional tie between the two countries, however, and that will be marked on 25 April: Anzac Day, the main commemoration of the First World War particular to Australia and New Zealand. New Zealand lost more than 4,600 soldiers on Belgian soil during the war, many of them at the battle of Passchendaele, which saw a death toll of nearly 13,000 in a single day in 1917.

The Tyne Cot Commonwealth War Grave in Passchendaele, a district of Zonnebeke, West Flanders, has the largest number of Kiwi graves at 520, as well as a plaque to commemorate 1,176 of the fallen whose place of rest is not known. In February, the second unknown New Zealand soldier to be reburied in a year was given a place at the Messines Ridge cemetery in Mesen, West Flanders.

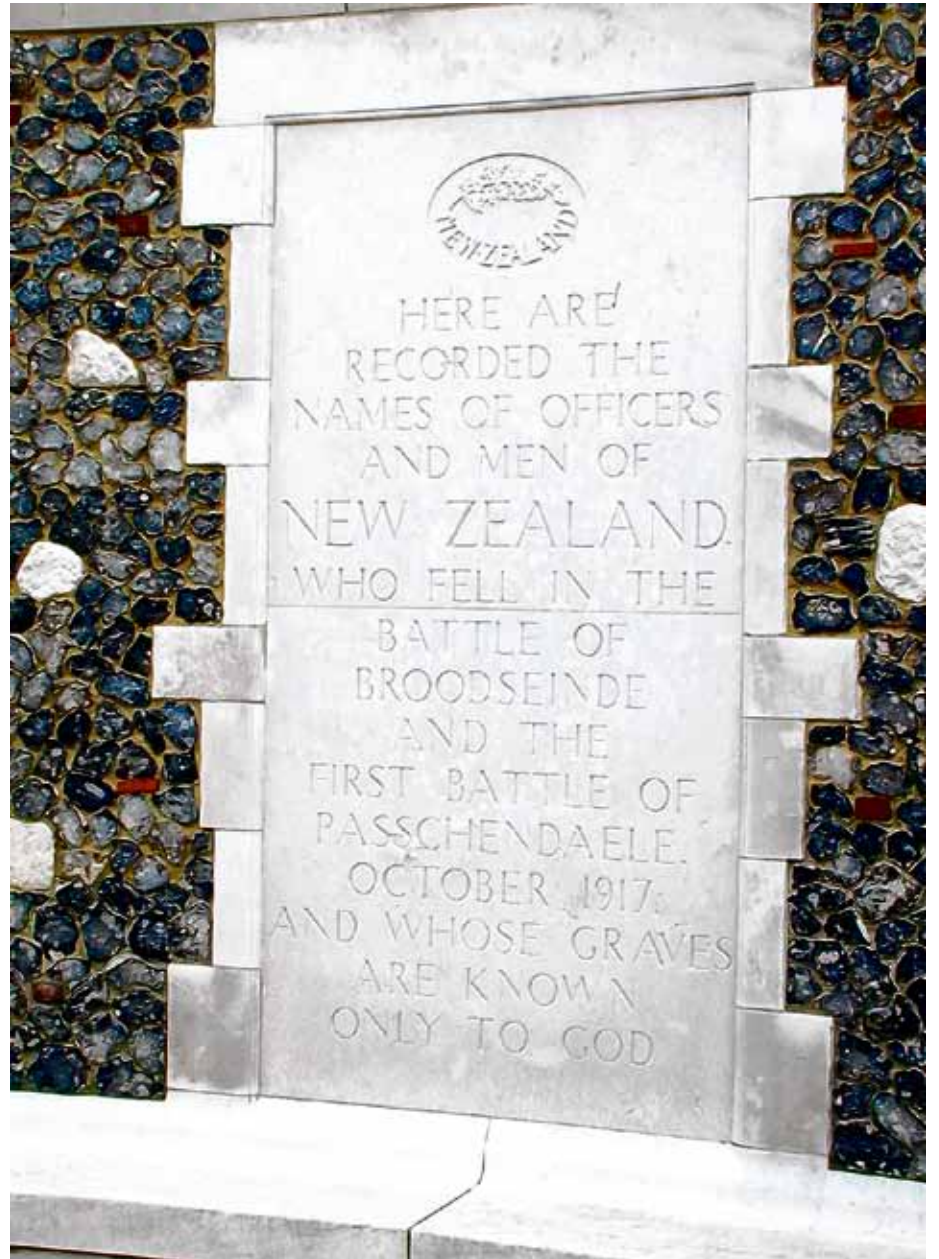
Great War commemorations

The commemorations of the centenary of the Great War are a massive event in Flanders, and New Zealand is also preparing. "The

federal government is co-ordinating the In Flanders Fields declaration – the statement the Belgian government wants to put out around the world for the centenary. We also talk to the Flemish government, and we have contact with Wallonia, because Comines-Warneton is proposing to twin with a New Zealand town."

Dealing with three governments doesn't seem to faze Wilson. "It just gives you more people to talk to," says. "But their competencies are clear; they each have parameters within which they work, so you always know what you're engaging in when you talk to them. We also talk to the individual communes because New Zealand has quite a close relationship with both Messines and Zonnebeke. So we talk at all three levels of government. In New Zealand, you would talk to the central government and the individual communities as well, so it's just the regional level that's additional."

Aside from official arrangements, Flanders is expecting a huge influx of tourists during the 2014-2018 commemoration period. Are many



Tyne Cot Commonwealth War Grave is the final resting place for some of the thousands of Kiwis who lost their lives during the First World War

Kiwis expected to visit? "New Zealanders tend to hit Europe as a whole, and they'll plan it several years in advance, which is why we're trying to get ourselves organised now. It could be that people are planning their 2014 or 2015 trips already. For us, the big commemorative year here would be 2017, the centenary of Passchendaele, and people will start thinking about that soon."

Home away from home

New Zealand is as far as you can go before you start to come back, I point out, rather needlessly. I wonder if being that far from home imposes a special burden compared to the rest of us expats. "It's hard being so far away from friends and family," Wilson admits. "But, although Europeans always say to us, 'Oh New Zealand is so far away', we're used to it in a way. But we're very like-minded with Europe, so it doesn't feel that unusual. You don't feel foreign here; it feels familiar. Familiar but different." As for her children, spending these formative years in Brussels doesn't make them any less Kiwi. "They're

only five – to them, as long as their mum and dad and Legos came along, they were going to be happy. We love New Zealand and we love the New Zealand way of life, and we'll always live there on and off doing this job, but we hope they'll be Kiwis with a global perspective." As she talks about identity, I see a way to fit in a question about the remarkable cloak she wore to present her credentials to King Albert. "It's a Maori cloak called a Korowai, and it's worn by people who have *mana* – prestige or an important position," she explains. "It's worn on ceremonial occasions. We have one Korowai that we keep at our High Commission in London, and whenever our ambassadors in Europe are presenting credentials we send the Korowai out to them so they can wear it for the occasion. New Zealand is a multicultural society, and it's nice to be able to project that element, especially on such an important occasion. I'm not sure if people always recognise its significance, but to us it's a strong reminder of home."

► www.ww100.govt.nz

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS

Autos ▶ Touring

The automobile association opened its first glass servicing centre in Zaventem last week for the repair and replacement of damaged glass and windshields. The group plans to open a further 10 this year in competition with market leader Carglass, an affiliate of the D'Ieteren car distribution company.

Awards
▶ FRX Polymers

Flanders' first Foreign Investment Trophy has been awarded to FRX Polymers, a subsidiary of the US flame retarding plastics producer. Pharmaceutical group Johnson and Johnson received a Lifetime Achievement Award. Both businesses are located in Antwerp province. The awards were handed out by Flanders Investment and Trade (FIT).

Banks ▶ KBC

Flanders' largest financial institution has invested a further €125 million in its Irish affiliate. The bank expects to open additional branches in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway.

Chemicals ▶ Solvay

The Brussels-based chemicals and plastics group plans to build production units in the alkoxylation and specialty surfactant fields in Germany and Singapore. The plants, to open in 2014 and 2015 respectively, will help the company meet demand from the detergents and cosmetics industries.

Construction ▶ Besix

After three straight years of decreased sales, the Brussels-based construction group posted a record year in 2012, with a turnover of €2.13 billion. The figure is close to a 25% increase over 2011. It was also reported last week that Besix has acquired a 15% stake in Australia's Watpac company. Besix has an office in Perth.

Dredging ▶ Deme

The GeoSea affiliate of Antwerp-based dredging company Deme has won two contracts to build the foundations for 77 and 35 offshore windmills in Germany and the UK, respectively. In addition, Deme has pitched for the maintenance and dredging of the access routes to 11 ports in Brazil.

Fast food
▶ McDonald's

The US-based fast food group is investing €60 million over the next three years to renovate its existing Belgian outlets and build several more. The company, which operates 65 outlets in the country, employs some 2,900 people and expects to hire an additional 500 over the period.

Flemish ports to co-operate

New Flanders Port Area agreement will work to increase the market share

Alan Hope

The four ports of Flanders – Antwerp, Ghent, Ostend and Zeebrugge – will co-operate more closely in the future to improve their competitive position internationally. Last week representatives of the ports, together with the Flemish Harbour Association and public works minister Hilde Crevits, signed a co-operation agreement.

The document consists of 30 main points spread across six fields of activity. Goal number one is to increase the shipping traffic to Flanders. One way to do that will be to create added-value projects in the hinterland. Antwerp and Zeebrugge will work together to attract a greater share of the growing traffic from Asia to Northern Europe; Zeebrugge and Ostend will work to promote cruise traffic; and all four ports will



combine their efforts to promote and market Flanders abroad, for example at trade fairs and on international missions. Minister Crevits will undertake an international mission

later this year to promote the new Flanders Port Area.

The ultimate goal is nothing short of turning Flanders into a logistical portal to the rest of Europe.

"Everyone has committed to raising Flanders to the top of Europe by 2020," said Crevits. "Targeted co-operation is important not only for the four ports, but also for the welfare of all of Flanders." The third edition of Flemish Port Day, she announced, will be held on 22 September.

"As the second-largest port in Europe, Antwerp is happy to join with the other Flemish ports to lay the foundations which will put Flanders on the top in Europe in 2020," commented Antwerp port authority president Eddy Bruyninckx. "But let's not forget that we can only achieve results if we pay attention to our customers. The point of co-operation is to increase the returns of all the ports involved."

▶ www.flandersportarea.be

Give patients more information,
study recommends

Patients are unable to make informed choices about costs at the time of their admission to hospital and often make bad decisions as a result, according to a study commissioned by the Christian Mutuality (CM) and published last week to coincide with Patients' Rights Day.

The conditions of a stay in hospital are laid out in the admission agreement that patients sign. A majority of patients – 68% – sign the agreement on the day of admission, which the study points out is not the ideal time for making such decisions. "That brings a certain level of stress with it," said Marc Justaert, chairman of CM. "The situation at reception is also far from ideal: queues, pressure, people talking in the background." While 83% of those asked said they were satisfied with the information they had been given on admission, 40% were later unable to explain the financial implications of their choices. For example, a single room in an average hospital costs four



times as much as a shared room. The study also shows that 88% of doctors do not discuss the financial aspects of hospital admission. And some admission agreements are not fully in line with the law. The study makes a number of recommendations, the main one being: Make sure patients are properly informed of their options and the attendant consequences. The report also calls for a greater role for physicians – for most patients, the main point of contact before admission – in providing proper information; for each patient to be given a detailed estimate of probable costs; and for all agreements to be brought into line with the law.

Language rules breach EU law,
court rules

The government of Flanders will review its laws on employment contracts, after a ruling from the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg last week found that the requirement to have all contracts drawn up in Dutch was in breach of EU law.

The court was referring to the Flemish language law of 1973, which dates from before the creation of the internal market and states that all employment contracts of businesses based in Flanders have to be written in Dutch. The case concerns a Dutch national who was employed by the logistics firm PSA in the port of Antwerp. The man was laid off but claimed his employment contract was void because it had been drafted in English. The employment tribunal in Antwerp, which heard the case, asked the Luxembourg court to rule on the legality of the provision that would have nullified the contract. The court ruled that the language law was a breach of the principle of free movement of workers, as it would tend to discourage foreign workers from coming to Flanders and discourage businesses from employing them. "Europe has a problem with the way in which the decree from the 1970s is drawn up," said a spokesperson for Flemish labour minister Philippe Muyters. "We will have to look and see how it can be adjusted."

Eén and VTM collaborate on new
television series

TV channel Eén, owned by public broadcaster VRT, and commercial channel VTM are making Flemish broadcasting history by collaborating on a new series featuring Koen Wauters and Tom Waes. The programme, as yet unnamed, will be broadcast simultaneously on both channels in 2014. Competitor channel VIER said the co-operation between the public channel and the commercial market leader "raised pertinent questions" about the "exclusive co-operation between the public broadcaster and the commercial market leader." According to VTM, Wauters and Waes came up with the idea themselves.

Meanwhile Bart Tommelein, media specialist for opposition party Open VLD, said the co-operation between the two channels was in breach of the long-standing principle that the VRT had a specific mission as a public broadcaster, different from that of a commercial station. Neither VIER nor any other commercial station had been approached to work with VRT, he said. "That arouses the suspicion that the new competitor for the VRT and VMa [owners of VTM] is being cleverly sidelined." Exclusive co-operation with only one partner, he said, was "not really desirable for the balance of the broadcasting landscape".

Measures to help renters
and tenants

A new website to help landlords and tenants calculate a market rent for any property in Flanders registered 170,000 visitors on its first day of operation last week. The website, huurschatter.be, was launched by Flemish housing minister Freya Van den Bossche as part of her new Rental Plan. At one point, demand was so high, it crashed the server for a short time.

The Rental Plan is a collection of measures aimed at both landlords and tenants and includes subsidies to encourage owners to insulate their properties, incentives for landlords to work through a social rental agency and a rent guarantee fund to come into operation next year.

The website asks a series of questions about the property for rent and provides an estimate of a fair rent based on a range of criteria. The figure proffered is only indicative, but the intention is to give landlord and tenant a basis for

discussion. The simulator does not cover the 19 districts of Brussels. "The Flemish housing market is characterised by a large number of non-professional landlords," Van den Bossche pointed out. "They do not always know what price to ask." For too long, she said, the private rental market was "a blind spot" in Flanders' housing policy – although most people rent at some point in their lives, and one in five families lives in privately rented accommodation.



Ticking timebombs

Flemish minesweepers are clearing the world's oceans of ancient dumped ammo

Senne Starckx

The largest piles of ammunition aren't lying inside heavily guarded military bunkers but at the bottom of the sea, in countless dumping sites around the world. A large part of these dumped arms are chemical weapons, posing a serious threat to the marine environment. The Flemish company Adede is a world pioneer in tackling this largely neglected issue.

On a sandbank in the North Sea, just a few kilometres off the coast of Knokke-Heist, lies one of the biggest undersea ammunition dumps in the world. This century-old site – that bears, for mysterious reasons, the name Paardenmarkt (Horse Market) – contains more than 35,000 tons of ammunition, largely German explosives from the Yser battlefield of the First World War. A lot of the dumped grenades, stored in wooden boxes, still contain poison gas, but no one knows exactly how many of them are chemically charged.

After the Second World War, the site was used to get rid of tons of ammunition and other weaponry. The dumping continued until 1972, when an international ban came into effect.

Falling apart

Most people don't have any idea about the existence of these several hundred dumping sites around the world. That has to change because the metal shells of the dumped weaponry are starting to fall apart, possibly releasing toxic substances into the marine environment, or exploding unexpectedly. Governments around the world have never shown much interest in cleaning up the waste from their wartime past. But that is starting to change – albeit slowly, and not in every country. The main reason is not sudden concern about the



An unexploded munition, pulled from the seabed. The public is generally unaware of how much ammunition has been dumped in the world's oceans

environment but the steady increase of offshore activities in many coastal areas around the globe: windmill parks, drilling platforms for gas and oil, tidal energy plants, undersea pipelines.

Of course, the companies investing in offshore projects don't want to build on a minefield. And avoiding risky areas can be costly – sometimes more than financing the clean-up of a dump site. The builders of the undersea Nord Stream pipeline, which brings gas from Russia to Germany, had to make several diversions on the seabed of the Baltic Sea, one of the world's larger ammunition graveyards.

Companies with offshore activities are increasingly hiring specialised firms that deal with the risks of undersea ammunition clean-up. Adede, a private company from Ghent, is a pioneer in this field. Its core business is the detection, identification and clearance of

bombs and other explosive weaponry on land and sea.

Adede has only 25 employees, but it's active in many countries; currently it's working in Germany, France and Vietnam. "It's our job to assist and advise local governments and companies in adapting their activities to the presence of ammunition dumps, or cleaning them up entirely," says Adede CEO Bart Van der Speeten.

The company combines experienced personnel such as geologists and demining experts with high-tech equipment. "We have two kinds of what we call submarines," says Van der Speeten. "The autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV) is programmed to work completely automatically, without any remote control. Thanks to the attached survey technology on board, such as a metal detector, the AUV can scan large areas of the seabed. It also carries intelligent sensors, which

allow it to follow the bottom contour without bumping into rocks or getting stuck in a sandbank."

Local demining expertise – on land as well as at sea – is known worldwide and goes back decades. Van der Speeten was trained as a diver and undersea deminer by the Belgian army in the 1980s. During the Gulf War (1990-91), he was the first diver in the world since the Second World War to work at a "live" minefield. "This was a dense field of deep sea mines laid by the Iraqis off the coast of Kuwait. My job was to cut the cables and to attach explosives to the mines so we could let them explode under controlled circumstances."

Clean-up crucial

After having served for years, Van der Speeten left the army and started his own business. Thanks to the boom of offshore activities around the world, his company is growing steadily. He is well aware of the threat of old undersea ammunition dumps and is vice-president for Europe of the International Dialogue on Underwater Munitions, a non-governmental organisation that aims to put the clean-up of dumping sites on the political agenda. "Similar to the international ban on ocean dumping, we want a treaty – preferably under the umbrella of the United Nations – that will force governments into action," he says. "Some critics say it's not possible to remove all the ammunition safely, or to clean up the underlying sediments entirely. For example, at the Paardenmarkt, off the Flemish coast, the ammunition is covered by a two-metre layer of sludge. It won't be an easy or cheap task, but it's definitely possible to clean up this little-known black spot."

► www.adede.com

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

More than 30 life sciences companies are representing the Flemish region during the **BIO International Convention**, the biggest biotechnology fair in the world, which takes place this week in Chicago. FlandersBio, the umbrella organisation for the sector, is working with the region's international investment agency, Flanders Investment & Trade, to organise debates and networking opportunities at the convention.

► www.convention.bio.org

At the University Hospital of Leuven, two men in need of a new kidney each received the organ of the other's wife. It is the first so-called **crossover kidney transplant** to take place in Belgium. Because the blood types of one couple didn't match, they "swapped" a kidney with another couple. It's very unusual to transplant a kidney from a living donor.

The Flemish Living Lab Electric Vehicles is hosting an **electric bike campaign** at three Flemish train stations. On 24 and 25 April, people can test an e-bike at Leuven, Ghent and Hasselt stations, where experts will provide information on electric vehicles and offer the chance to rent an e-bike for 25 hours for €5.

The Free University of Brussels (VUB) is **taking action against scientific fraud** through lessons on the rules of academic publications during the Master's degree programme. At Bachelor's and PhD level, students are already made aware of the dangers of data manipulation, and now Master's students will learn about specific cases of scientific fraud and the importance of correct citations. The plan is to establish a separate course, but it is uncertain when it will be introduced. At the end of last month, a VUB professor in pharmacology was fired because he manipulated research results.

Five professors are standing as **candidates to become the new rector at the University of Ghent** in October. Possible successors of current rector Paul Van Cauwenberge are professors Anne De Paepe, Freddy Mortier, Luc Taerwe, Guido Van Huylenbroeck and Lieva Van Langenhove. Apart from Van Langenhove, these professors are also candidates for the position of vice-rector, together with professors Herwig Bruneel and Derrick Gosselin. This year, particular attention was devoted to gender balance among candidates. The electoral college will hold a secret vote on 6 and 7 May. On 8 May, the board of directors will take the final decision. **Andy Furniere**

Q&A

Ko Cattoor just finished his PhD in organic chemistry at Ghent University, with an investigation into the medicinal power of hops, one of the main ingredients of beer

How did you end up in this research?

My mentor at the university, professor Denis De Keukeleire, was looking for someone with a chemical background to investigate the health effects of hops. De Keukeleire had received a research grant from the InBev-Baillet Latour Fund, sponsored by AB InBev, the brewer from Leuven. Every year the fund awards grants to this particular kind of medical research.

So, what's the secret of hops?

Hops consists of hundreds of interesting components and molecules. We classify them, roughly, into two groups: polyphenols and hop acids. The first group has a certain oestrogenic activity. The second, the acids,

have more diverse effects, like an anti-inflammatory and anti-carcinogenic. Furthermore, hop acids have good influence on the metabolism of fat. However, until now most clinical studies have been performed on rats and mice. Real evidence about healing effects in humans is still scarce.

And what did you find?

I measured very carefully the absorption, distribution, metabolism and elimination of hop acids in rabbits. I did several *in vitro* studies, as well as experiments on living animals. My conclusion: Hop acids are very well absorbed by the rabbits' metabolism. Furthermore, the particular acids that are common in beer are also very well digested and eliminated.



This means – for rabbits and possibly also for humans – that you'll have to drink several pints to reach a dose that is high enough to have a

healing effect. Many more studies in humans are needed to investigate this possible link between beer consumption and health.

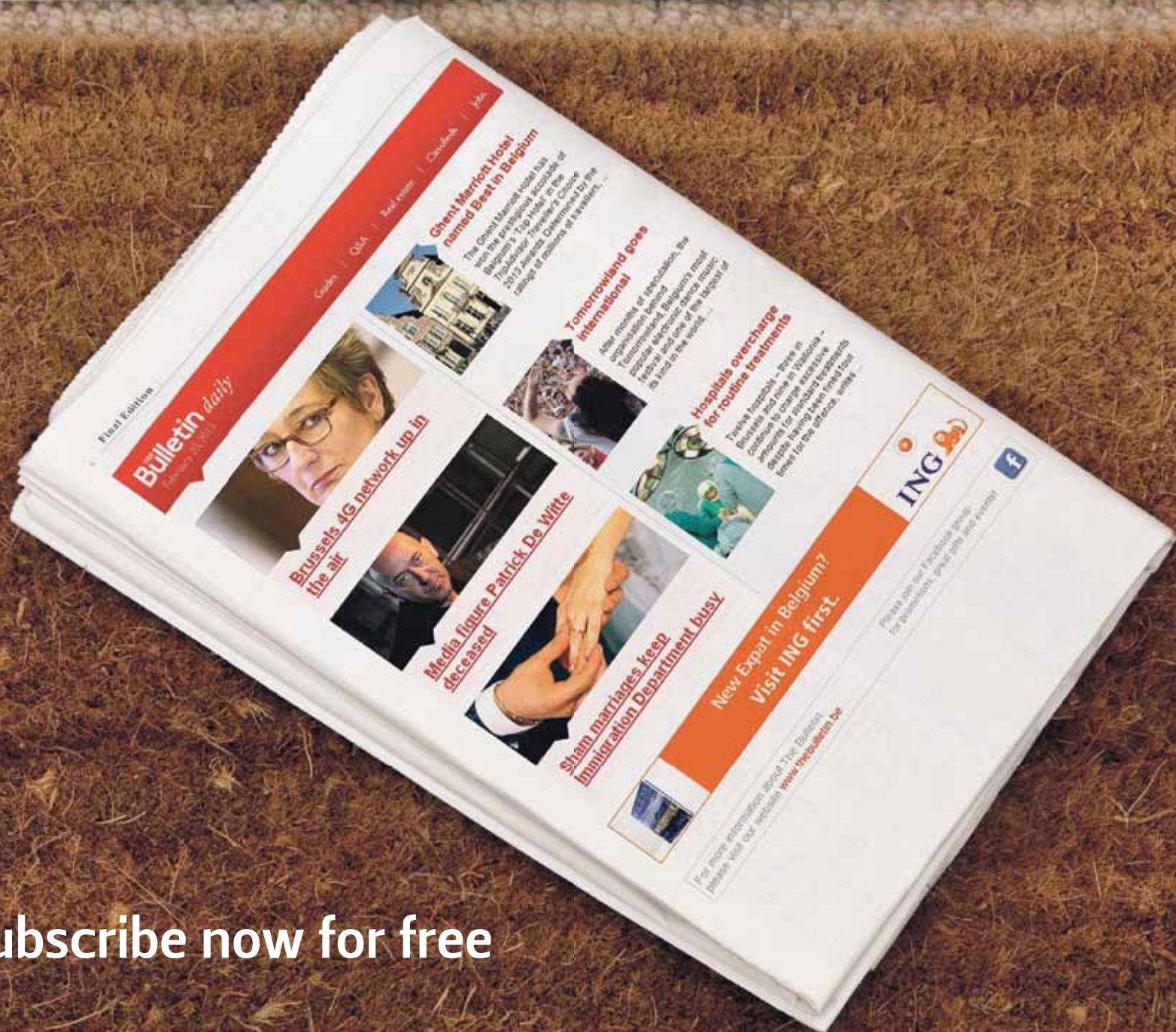
Hops is sold as a food supplement. For which ailments could it bring relief?

Historically, hops became known as a drug that promotes a good night's rest. We also know that the polyphenols bring some relief to women during menopause. The hop acids can be effective – if the extrapolation from rabbits to humans turns out to be right – against diseases like osteoporosis and several metabolic and inflammatory diseases. Not to mention that hops is one of the most effective antioxidants.

Interview by SS

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Americans thirsty for Flemish brews

As “Belgian style” beer takes off in the US, opportunities for export abound

Philip Ebels

Every year, the number of US producers of artisanal beer grows bigger, including those who specialise in “Belgian style ales”. The US also has a huge market for imported beer, but Flemish brewers have yet to take full advantage.

Walking past the long line of people waiting outside, wearing strings of pretzels around their necks and T-shirts saying “Shut up and drink your beer”, it wasn’t hard to guess what was going on inside the Lexington Avenue Armory in New York City one recent afternoon. It was the NYC Craft Beer Festival, and locals were gearing up for some serious tasting. Once inside, they were given a shot glass and free rein among 75 brewery stands, each offering two of their finest blends. The festival is a celebration of “America’s best craft breweries”, according to the organisers, and many of those breweries bear names such as Boulder Beer or Goose Island, pouring such all-American drafts as Mojo Risin’ and Big John. But somewhere in the middle of the room stood a foreign-sounding brewery serving foreign-sounding beer. “Ommegang”, it read in black, yellow and red letters, below an image of a lion. That jogged the memory of this journalist formerly based in Brussels.

Familiar sight

“It’s named after some festival in Brussels that started in the Middle Ages,” explained a girl behind the counter while pouring a drop of Hennepin, the brewery’s farmhouse speciality. She was spot on. Ommegang Brewery, based in Cooperstown, New York, is named after the annual procession of medieval folklore in the Flemish capital (*omnengang* is old Dutch and means a procession). This Ommegang brewery is owned by – wouldn’t you know it – brewing giant Duvel Moortgat, making it one of the few from Flanders to reap the benefits of a rapidly growing craft beer market in the US. “We are one of the only breweries in the US producing only Belgian-style ales,” says spokesperson Allison Capozza, “and we are the only New York brewery doing so.” Craft beer, according to the US Brewers’ Association, is beer made by a “small, independent and traditional” brewer. Strictly speaking, Ommegang doesn’t qualify – it’s owned by a bigger company, which itself is not a craft brewer. But figures suggest that the American beer lover doesn’t always make that distinction. From 2011 to 2012, the domestic US beer market grew by 1%. By contrast,



the market for craft beer grew by more than 15%. Similarly, says Capozza, Ommegang’s production has grown by 25% per year over the past four years. Its beers – bearing Flemish names such as Witte (White) and Rare Vos (Strange Fox) – have become a familiar sight in the many bars of the city that never sleeps. Part of a larger trend of local, organic, more artisan food consumption, people in the US and elsewhere are becoming increasingly interested in beer. Not the stuff they grew up drinking – Budweiser, Miller or even Stella Artois (considered a prime choice by many in the US) – but something different. Good beer. Beer with a capital B. Beer the way beer was supposed to be.

Hot tickets

It’s safe to say Flanders’ many artisanal beers would fit that description nicely. The region has a long and rich history of brewing that dates back to the early middle ages. Three of the world’s eight Trappist beers, made under extremely strict conditions by Trappist monks, are in Flanders. One is the Sint-Sixtus Abbey in Westvleteren, West Flanders. When last December it decided for one time only to make available for export to the US a limited amount of its Westvleteren 12 – regularly rated number one on the influential *ratebeer.com*’s annual list and



The success of Ommegang Brewery, flying the Belgian flag in New York state, is part of a growing trend for artisan food and drink

widely considered to be the best beer in the world – it was sold out within 24 hours. Since January of 2011, “the Belgian beer culture” has been part of Flanders’ Intangible Cultural Heritage, as decided by Unesco. “We owe our exceptional beer culture to ... our mild sea climate ... the quality of our water ... and the variety of our natural resources,” read a statement at the time from the Flemish culture ministry. “Small, artisan breweries of local beers are becoming ever more manifold and are a good export product to, among others, the US.” Trappist monasteries are non-profits, but the for-profit breweries in Flanders seem to be taking less than full advantage of the Americans’ unquenchable thirst. Over the past decade, beer exports from Belgium as a whole have doubled, according to the Belgian Brewers Association. In that same period, exports to the US have grown 20-fold, though they remain well below those to the Netherlands, for example, a country with a fraction of the population. The reasons are not immediately

clear, but some say breweries themselves are to blame. “It is incredible how some breweries deal with their exports,” says Peter Boeckeaert, a Fleming and chief brewer at New Belgium brewery in Fort Collins, Colorado, one of the biggest US producers of Belgian-style beers. He says that Flemish breweries lack a clear

export strategy. “There is enormous potential in the US, but they don’t take care of deliveries. They have no idea where their beers are going or how they are being marketed. They leave everything up to the importer. Export to the US has grown enormously, but if your only selling point is that you’re Belgian, you won’t make it.” In the meantime, beer makers in the US are taking care of themselves. The number of domestic breweries has grown massively, and continues to grow. Last year, almost 400 were added to an earlier total of about 2,000. “There’s a lot of money flowing into the industry, which in these times is exception,” says Boeckeaert. “Being a brewer today is paradise.” Unlike at wine tastings, people at beer tastings drink up. It was only mid-afternoon, but the hall had already begun to resemble one big happy hour. The people at Ommegang were pouring non-stop to keep up with demand, and continued to do so until the last pretzel.

► www.omnengang.com

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Members of the public, including children, are invited to vote for their favourite museums in Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia as part of this year’s **Museum Prize**. The museums with the most votes will win the annual contest’s Public Prize and Children’s Jury Prize, while a jury will choose the three grand prize winners. Grand prize winners each receive €10,000. The nominations for the grand prize will be announced on 13 May. The public can vote online until 31 May, and all winners will be announced in June.

► www.museumprijs.be

Flemish artist Arne Quinze has erected one of his large-scale wooden structures in front of the Museum of Contemporary and Modern Art in Nice, France, which has recently reopened after major renovations. Quinze is known for his works of interconnected wooden dowels that tower overhead, such as “The Sequence” on the Leuvensesteenweg next to the Flemish Parliament. The work in Nice will be in place until 27 October in order to “evoke a dialogue between the museum’s architecture, the city and the public,” according to the museum. Quinze’s monumental “Rock Strangers”, an altogether different kind of work, can be found this year on the seafront in Ostend.

► www.arnequinze.com

The non-profit Jonge Belgische Schilderkunst has changed the name of its prestigious annual prize from the Young Belgian Painters Award to the **Young Belgian Art Prize**, in order to better reflect that the prize is open to all disciplines within the visual arts. Four prizes a year are handed out: first and second place, plus a Bozar Award and the ING Award. This year a Public Prize is being introduced, and the public can vote online starting in June.

► www.youngbelgianartprize.com

Flemish director Nic Balthazar was awarded the **Someone to Watch Award** at the Cleveland International Film Festival earlier this month. The festival screened both Balthazar’s feature films, *Ben X* (2007) and last year’s *Tot altijd* (known in English as *The Time of My Life*). *Tot altijd* is the story of the first person in Belgium to use the federal euthanasia law. “We were curious how people in the American Midwest would react to a theme like euthanasia,” said Balthazar. “But it is magnificent how the film has been received here. Bringing the story abroad was one of our important objectives for the film.”

► www.totaltijd.be



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Images as ammunition

Antwerp's FotoMuseum shows Gaddafi archive and Arabic artists responding to dictatorship

Tom Peeters

Photography has the power to make and break regimes. That is at the heart of the striking exhibition *Power! Photos! Freedom!*, part Gaddafi archive, part activism via camera in the Arab world.

In the Arab world, the power of the image has often been misused as propaganda by dictators. With the help of a camera and the internet, local artists and activists are using the same images to their advantage, throwing them like a boomerang in the faces of the leaders they used to fear.

These artists make up the work in the second part of the exhibition *Power! Photos! Freedom!* at Antwerp's FotoMuseum. The first part displays the once-secret archives of the late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, found by Peter Bouckaert, the Flemish director of emergencies at Human Rights Watch.

To survivors of his regime, the glamorous pictures of Colonel Gaddafi – a handsome and charismatic man in his younger years – alongside other world leaders may feel like a slap in the face. For curator Susan Glen, showing these photos is necessary to reveal the brutal truth behind his dictatorship and is an integral part of the healing process of a people.

"Without understanding their past, the Libyans can't understand their future," she says. "The problem with the fall of these regimes is that the good things are destroyed with the bad. But if you cut something away, it doesn't mean it's gone. You just don't have any evidence of it anymore."

Found photos

It was Bouckaert's team, hunting for evidence to convict the regime on crimes against humanity, that discovered thousands of photographs in the abandoned Gaddafi headquarters. "Because there was too much to take with them," explains Glen, "they snapped photos of the scene," including of Gaddafi's photographs. This is why broken glass can sometimes be seen next to the original photographs.

Bouckaert is fully aware that the first reaction of a people confronted with the fall of a dictator is to destroy everything that reminds them of the regime. "He anticipated this," says Glen. "My job as a photo editor, receiving the raw material, was not to interpret these pictures but simply to add the basic information, so the Libyan people could start to reassemble their history."

Coming up with the right names, dates and locations turned out to be a massive job, and Glen started reading accounts written by diplomats. "For instance, the memoirs of the Egyptian ambassador in Libya, who was with Gaddafi every single day for six years, were

a great help. I also spoke to various Libyan expatriates living in London, some connected to the Gaddafi regime. Obviously, they didn't want to be identified."

For Libyans, it's extremely difficult to look at this exhibition, Glen admits. "There is always going to be something in it that will offend them, whether it's the allied period, the green book period... For instance, in the green book period Libyans were forced to paint their front doors green, as a sign of loyalty to their leader." Gaddafi had installed a regime of fear, even interrupting popular shows on state television to broadcast live executions, so it would be clear to everyone that opposing the regime was not an option. In an improvised Libyan living room within the exhibition space, there's a television screen, showing such a hanging, under, of course, a portrait of the leader. It gives the visitor cold shivers.

For Glen, this is the perfect illustration of how Gaddafi controlled the population through terror in their own homes. "He had control not only over people's lives but also over their minds. Not even children could escape. As a result, most Libyans really find the glamorous pictures from the early period – which I call the period of hope – distasteful. They can't even bear looking at them."

That's why it's far too early to show the pictures in Libya, but Glen is thinking of building a virtual exhibition, giving everybody worldwide access to the archive.

Fallen icons

The opening show of the archive in London contained more than 300 artefacts and pictures. The Antwerp display – the first in mainland Europe – is limited to 120 pictures because it's included in a larger exhibition focussing on the reactions of photographers and activists from the Arabic world.

In that section, artists openly criticise their leaders' personality cult. Take *Dancing for the Big Father*, the photo series by Syrian photographer Issa Touma: On every picture you see an image of one kind or another of Bashar al-Assad. The banality intrigues, putting the deformity and destruction of the iconic portraits by other artists into context.

Or take "Guillotine Imaginaire", a photomontage by Joachim Ben Yakoub, a Belgian with Tunisian roots. He mixes the image of the expelled Tunisian president Zine Abedine Ben Ali with photos found on the internet during the revolution, expressing at once hope and fear.

An anonymous graffiti artist on a wall in the streets of Cairo summarises the show best. Next to his image of a gun, he wrote in Arabic "their weapons"; next to his image of a camera, "our weapons".



One of the many images that make up Joachim Ben Yakoub's "Guillotine Imaginaire"



Colonel Gaddafi in Moscow with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in 1981

UNTIL 9 JUNE

FotoMuseum

Walsekaai 47, Antwerp

► www.fotomuseum.be

THE POETRY BEHIND THE RITUAL

Who are these people who dress up every year, when the season's right and a parade is coming up, as a bear, a goat or a devil, covered with animal skin, feathers, straw, or cow bells? French photographer Charles Fréger travelled the remote European countryside – from Scotland to Bulgaria – to look for these "savages" for his series *Wilder Mann*, also on view at the FotoMuseum until 9 June. Putting them in a rough, primitive-looking landscape, he brings ancient traditions back to life.

The ancient fertility rituals to which these masquerades refer have become a sort of folklore. You can read about them in tourism brochures. But once they did actually celebrate the birth of new life,

the cycle of the seasons.

The composition of Fréger's meticulously prepared pictures always follows the same rule: one of the wild men standing in the middle of the image surrounded by an uncultivated, wintery scene. "I wanted to show the masquerade without the ritual," says Fréger. "I thought it would fit best in a pure and natural environment of wide open, hibernal space. Also, winter reflects new life that's on the way. The search for the right spot took me at least two hours per photo."

This very consistent method, at the border of an ethnographical study and an artistic project, distances us from the spectacle and emphasises its poetry.





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Murder, mystery and mayhem

British author Helen Grant's stay in Flanders inspired her to write a thrilling new trilogy

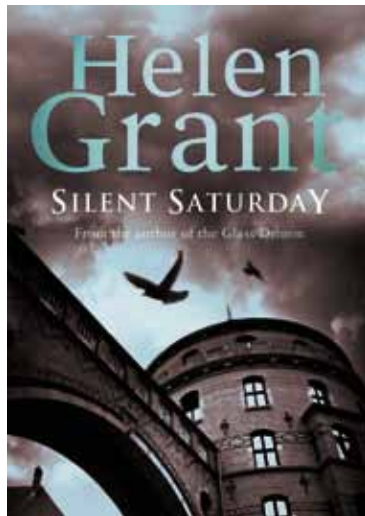
Rebecca Benoot

British author Helen Grant uses her environment – whether German, Flemish or Scottish – as inspiration for her thrillers and mysteries for young adults.

When Helen Grant lived in Bad Münstereifel for several years with her family, she fell in love with the local legends and folklore of the historic German spa town and used them to fuel her debut novel, *The Vanishing of Katharina Linden*.

Her next two equally ghoulish novels, *The Glass Demon* and *Wish me Dead*, were also inspired by her German surroundings.

Then she moved to Tervuren, just outside of Brussels in Flemish Brabant. "Over the three years that we lived in Flanders," she says, "I came to admire Flemish culture very much. I love the cities of Antwerp and Ghent, especially Ghent perhaps, since you can really feel the history of the city when you walk around the streets. I enjoyed Flemish films, and I have become a big fan of the band Clouseau; I saw



liked that Tervuren was fairly near Brussels because it gave me an opportunity to write something more urban, a bit grittier, than the stuff I had done before, which was set in a small town."

The title of her new book, *Silent Saturday*, the first in the Forbidden Spaces trilogy, came straight out of Dutch class. "Our teacher told us about Stille Zaterdag, when the church bells fall silent. Kids are told



heroine, Veerle, and her friend Kris decide to climb the tower of the local church and see whether the bells are there or not. The two children are disappointed to find that the bells are still there but take advantage of the opportunity to peer down at the village below. From this secret vantage point, they see something truly horrific happen.

The rest of the action takes place 10 years later when Veerle is a teenager, but the terrible events of that silent Saturday come back to haunt her.

Accurate portrait

For a temporary resident, Grant has created a surprisingly accurate portrait of the area, using real-life

settings such as the number 44 tram, De Lijn buses and the Zonien Forest, not to mention the incorporation of the language divide in Belgium. In the book, Veerle's mother is from Namur in Wallonia, and her father is from Ghent.

"I've seen the Flemish-Walloon divide from both sides because I spent a lot of time in Wallonia in my younger days," she explains. "Tervuren is Dutch-speaking, but if we made the 18-kilometre trip to Waterloo, we were in Wallonia, speaking French. So you do feel as though you have really crossed a border. My own personal experience was not that there was a lot of antagonism between the sides – more that there was a strong pride in Flemish culture in the area

where we lived."

In *Silent Saturday*, Grant also offers a look inside the lives of some Tervuren expats who reside in opulent villas – which the characters break into when the occupants are away. A realistic opportunity considering that most expats go away for two or three weeks during the summer holidays.

Well-paced

Silent Saturday is a well-paced gothic thriller with an eerie atmosphere and characters that are as interesting and intricate as the plot. Like many of Grant's protagonists, Veerle is an adolescent because she likes the possibilities that are still open to them.

"If Veerle were older, she might think twice about the things she does with Kris. If she were 25 and had a job, she might not want to risk doing something illegal and being caught, perhaps losing her job as a result. I love the fact that she has a rebellious streak that life hasn't worn away yet."

Most of Grant's work has been written in the first person; *Silent Saturday* is in the third. "First-person writing can be great because it really allows you inside the head of the narrator. On the other hand, it means that you know that the narrator is going to survive to the end of the book, because they are telling the story! *Silent Saturday* moves away from that, so you can't really be sure that Veerle is going to get to the end of the book, or indeed the trilogy, unscathed."

The second book in the trilogy, *The Demons of Ghent*, will be published next year.

► www.helengrantbooks.blogspot.be

"If I were a Flemish kid, I would want to get into the church tower and see if the bells had really flown off to Rome"

them in concert three times!"

Like in Germany, the Flemish countryside inspired her. Grant (pictured) now calls Scotland home, but she has just published the first in a trilogy that takes place in Flanders. "When we moved to Flanders, I was ready to take a new direction," she continues. "I

that the bells have flown away to Rome to collect Easter eggs from the Pope. I was fascinated by this story. I immediately thought that if I were a little Flemish kid, I would want to get into the bell tower of the church and see if this was true."

This anecdote became the starting-point for the book in which the

FRESH FICTION

Geschiedenis van een berg (The History of a Mountain)

Peter Verhelst • Prometheus

There are few Flemish authors who are able to write with such visual flair as Peter Verhelst. With more than 20 literature prizes to his name for works such as *Tongkat* (Tongue Cat) and *De allerlaatste caracara ter wereld* (The Last Caracara in the World), he is one of Flanders' foremost postmodern novelists. His new book is set in Dreamland, a parallel universe where gorillas, giraffes, bison and even fish are all part of society. Through the

eyes of these creatures, we get an exceptional perspective of society. However, when they are ready to be perceived as human, a battle between nature and nurture commences.

Het gewemel (The Impetuosity)

Louis van Dievel • Vrijdag

After winning the Hercule Poirot Prize last year with his novel *Hof van assisen* (Court of Assizes), Flemish journalist Louis van Dievel is back with his most intimate novel to date. *Het gewemel* is a multi-layered date with destiny in which four unrelated characters collide in Mechelen's train station.

Paralyzed by options and fate, they can only move forward and wait.

Wij en ik (We and I)

Saskia de Coster • Prometheus

Hailed as the European answer to Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*, *Wij en ik* is a novel about a dysfunctional upper class family dealing with tragedy, truth and all-consuming ambition. Renaissance woman Saskia de Coster is one of Flanders' freshest female voices, and her latest novel is filled with intriguing characters and offers a funny, clever and deeply profound look at the contemporary nucleus that has made the tradition of keeping up appearances into an art form.



Miranda van Frituur Miranda

Erik Vlamincx • Wereldbibliotheek

Born and raised in a travelling carnival, Miranda left her husband and son years earlier to open up her own *frietkot*. Getting ready for the funeral of a former fellow carnies, she begins to contemplate her life. Should she go? What will they think of her? And how long before certain secrets start to resurface? Infused with Erik Vlamincx's love for carnivals, this novella is what we would expect from the Flemish novelist: authentic characters, a sumptuous setting and near perfect prose.

Tearing the roof off

The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion

Mark Andrews

The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion are bringing their full tilt, maximum rock'n'roll show to Antwerp next weekend. This is the fifth time the band will have played here in less than a year. Three festivals, the AB and now Trix. Prepare for the roof to be duly torn off the sucka. Their connection to Flanders goes way back, says Spencer, on the phone from New York. "When we first started touring Europe, one of the first shows we played was in Ghent at Democrazy. Maybe like a baby chick from its mama, Belgium has been imprinted on our brains."

The band's long-time European tour manager is Xavier Benoit, who runs Firemountain out of Ghent, and their recent video for "Black Mold" was shot in Belgium by Toon Aerts, a Sint-Lukas alumnus in Brussels. Selah Sue received two bottles of Champagne from Spencer last summer for



swapping her slot with him at the Les Déferlantes d'Argelès festival in France because the Blues Explosion were stuck in traffic en route from

Bordeaux.

Spencer certainly seems to like playing here. "The show we did at the AB was a special night. We played

with Toon's band, The Sha-La-Lec's. It's such a beautiful venue, a good sounding room, and there are a couple of comic book stores around the corner."

He also has fond memories of the Sjock Festival in Gierle, Antwerp province, which he refers to as "the show in the woods".

The upcoming show is a big one for Spencer because "we're playing with Tav Falco. He was an early influence for me. His band, the Panther Burns, were playing American roots music, but it took me a long time to get all the connections in what they were doing."

The Blues Explosion, like Falco, are very much in a long line (or "at the end of a lonely street," quips Spencer) of flamboyant, passionate and slightly eccentric takes on rock'n'roll. The line runs through The Cramps, The Stooges, The Monks and all the way

back to Little Richard.

It's this vision of rock'n'roll as weird, thrilling and beautiful that gets Spencer out on the road. Despite the thought of touring engendering "a good healthy slice of panic, a bunch of fear and maybe some dread," the Blues Explosion tour a lot because "if it's a perfect gig, it will change people's lives. I've been to shows that have changed my life in unusual and special ways."

There's something evangelical about Spencer when he talks about the music he loves: Charlie Feathers, Rufus Thomas, Link Wray. Even more so when he explains his discipline, devotion to the cause and commitment to hard work: "I'm from New England ... Puritans, you know." Jon Spencer: The Protestant Work Ethic in rubberised denim trousers. "The Blues Explosion is all wrong. It's a mistake. But somehow it works."

Until 27 May | Trix Noordersingel 28, Antwerp | www.trixonline.be

VISUAL ARTS

Jan De Vliegheer

Bruges artist Jan De Vliegheer's first solo exhibition is a breath of fresh air in the sometimes unfathomable landscape of contemporary art. With a growing reputation at home and abroad, the painter and teacher has come to the attention of Cuban-American art connoisseur Roberto Polo, who compares him to Bradley Walker Tomlin and Cy Twombly and who is staging this show in Brussels. *Collections* is four series totalling 44 recent oil paintings on canvas – predominantly large-scale representations of ancient statues, collections of glass and porcelain and rarefied and rich interiors such as palaces.

De Vliegheer, an alumnus of Sint-Lucas art school in Ghent, works from digital images and deconstructs the objects, resulting in abstract and expressive images that include running drips of paint. Colourful, luminous and seemingly Impressionist, De Vliegheer's work pushes the boundaries of figurative painting. Sarah Crew



Until 2 June | Roberto Polo Gallery, Brussels | www.robertopologallery.com

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Het Schaakspel (The Chess Set): A monumental installation from 1967 by Flemish artist Vic Gentils, featuring 32 pieces representing a turning point in the sculptor's oeuvre

Until SEP 1 at Middelheimmuseum, Middelheimlaan 61

www.middelheimmuseum.be

Ghent

Architects and Silver: 20th-century creations in silver designed by a handful of renowned architects, usually commissioned by passionate patrons and collectors

Until JUN 9 at Design Museum, Jan Breydelstraat 5

www.designmuseumgent.be

Turnhout

Kunnen speelkaarten vliegen? (Can Playing Cards Fly?): All your most pressing questions about playing cards are addressed, from their origins to the rules of the game

Until OCT 31 at Museum van de Speelkaart, Druivenstraat 18

www.speelkaartenmuseum.be

CONCERT

Nina Simone: No Fear!

In celebration of what would have been Nina Simone's 80th birthday this year, Antwerp's Toneelhuis and Flemish pop-rock group Dez Mona are putting on a monster of a tribute concert. The single night will see over a dozen Flemish bands and artists pay homage to the late American torch singer, among them the Van Jets, Stijn Meuris, Stefanie Callebaut & Benjamin Desmet, Rudy Trouvé & Elko Blijweert, Blackie & the Oohoos, Mo & Grazz and Melanie De Biasio. The programme shows that Simone (pictured) remains as influential as ever, despite her death a decade ago. One reason, besides sheer vocal talent, is her prodigious curiosity. Refusing to be pigeon-holed as a simple jazz or soul singer, she crossed generic frontiers and interpreted songs written by Bob Dylan, the Beatles, Jacques Brel and even the Bee Gees. Giorgio Valentino



30 April, 20.00 | Bourla, Antwerp | www.toneelhuis.be

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Rosanne Cash: The great Johnny Cash's oldest daughter performs country-rock with her guitarist-producer husband John Leventhal. Sri Lankan-American folk-rock musician Bhi Bhiman opens

APR 26 20.30 at De Roma, Turnhoutsebaan 286

www.deroma.be

Ghent

Villagers: Mellow krautrock, electronica and psychedelic pop by the Irish indie folk band fronted by Conor O'Brien. Flemish singer-songwriter Marco Z opens

APR 28 19.00 at Handelsbeurs, Kouter 29

www.handelsbeurs.be

Opwijk (Flemish Brabant)

Daan: Flemish musician and living legend Daan Stuyven presents his newest album *Le Franc Belge*

APR 26 20.00 at Nijdrop, Kloosterstraat 9

www.nijdrop.be

PERFORMANCE

De waarheidscommissie

Exactly 100 years ago, Ghent grabbed the world's attention by hosting its own spectacular World's Fair. Unfortunately, the trauma of the First World War has completely effaced the memory of the event, including its recreated Senegalese and Filipino villages. Although not unique to this fair, these were effectively "human zoos", and in Ghent, one of the animals died in his cage. Igorot tribesman Timichieg had a pedestrian tunnel at Ghent's train station named in his honour in 2010, but even a full century on, the subject remains controversial. The socialist palace Vooruit first opened its doors during the very same fair. As the famed performance venue marks its centennial, it faces 1913 in all its moral ambiguity with the co-production *De waarheidscommissie*, or *The Truth Commission*. The truth team, led by KASK's Chokri Ben Chikha and Zouzou Ben Chikha, has spent the past years studying the events and is finally ready to present its case in Ghent's 19th-century courthouse. **GV**



Until 27 April, 20.00 | Courthouse, Ghent

► www.vooruit.be

MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Mogelijkheden (Possibilities): Ellen Schoenaerts and Steve Aernouts perform their version of *Constellations*, the recent London theatre hit by writer Nick Payne (in Dutch)

APR 29-30 20.30 at Monty, Montignystraat 3

► www.monty.be

Brussels

Eind goed al goed (All's Well That Ends Well): The third part of the Thomas Bernhard trilogy by Flemish theatre group STAN (in Dutch)

Until APR 30 20.30 at Kaaistudio's, OL-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81

► www.stan.be

Leuven

Sorry voor alles (Sorry for Everything): The world is topsy-turvy, with 50-plussers getting tatoos and workers yelling at their bosses, in this production by Wagehuys for ages 12 and up

APR 26 20.00 at 30cc, Rijschoolstraat 4

► www.30cc.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Silver Market

May Day may be the worker's holiday but it is also celebrated by the well-heeled. For the ninth year running, Deurne's Silver Museum Sterckshof hosts an all-day, open-air Silver Market in its lovely French garden. Dealers will be offering antique and contemporary pieces, and there will, of course, be jewellery aplenty. Aspiring silversmiths (and curious amateurs) can attend workshops. Silver-cleaning demonstrations take place throughout the day. Pierre Dôme from Liège's prestigious-sounding École d'armurerie Léon Mignon will personally demonstrate the fine art of engraving hunting rifles. Visitors can also take guided tours through the library, silver repository and museum store. Then there's the Win a Silver Jewel competition, at the end of which one lucky winner is personally presented a silver ring by jeweller Helena Schepens. For the kids, there's a dazzling (and educational) family activity: the ABCs of silver. **GV**



1 May, 10.00 | Silver Museum Sterckshof, Antwerp | ► www.zilvermuseum.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Days of Macedonian Culture: Celebration of all things Macedonia, featuring live music, film screenings and an exhibition on traditional clothing

APR 25-26 at Espace Senghor, Etterbeek

(Exhibition until May 8 at Boudewijn Building, Boudewijnlaan 30)

► www.senghor.be

Groot-Bijgaarden

Floralia Brussels: The run date has been extended for this spring flower exhibition in a 14-hectare castle park and greenhouses. More than one million bulbs in bloom, including 400 types of tulips

Until MAY 12 at Castle of Groot-Bijgaarden, Is Van Beverenstraat 5

► www.floralia-brussels.be

Leuven

Zythos Beer Festival: The biggest beer festival in the Benelux, featuring some 100 brewers and more than 500 beers and local products

APR 27-28 at Brabantthal, Brabantlaan 1

► www.zbf.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Nicholas Hirst

On the Rocks

Grauwerkersstraat 5, Bruges

On the Rocks, a late-night bar on a cobbled backstreet of Bruges, reminds me of a 1970s Tokyo bar – not that I have ever been to Japan, or was even alive in the 1970s. Still, Tokyo because, at its narrowest, the bar is less than one metre wide and probably never wider than two metres, reminiscent of the Japanese capital's shoebox spaces. About five metres deep, with the one window blacked out, you could be on the 40th floor of a skyscraper whose rent per square metre is enormously expensive – the Roppongi Hills Mori tower, say. Despite opening in 2003, On the Rocks bathes in a distinct '70s flavour, with its groovy bar stools, orange walls plastered with record sleeves and many, many mirrors. Indeed, exiting such a place only to find yourself on Grauwerkersstraat in a medieval Flemish city can be quite disconcerting.

On the Rocks is certainly one of Bruges's prime late-night drinking dens, open only from 20.00 until the wee hours. Owner Tony (*pictured*) constitutes a large presence in such a remarkably small bar. A portly, ponytail-sporting Fleming, he's known to hide a great operatic voice and for his enormous empathy – always ready to set the world right in the dead of the night.

Over the years, the bar has generated an adoring fan base, and the same local *Bruggeling* faces reappear time and time again. Their peace is occasionally interrupted

by marauding students from the local EU training institute, the College of Europe, whose largest residence lies just across the Ezelbrug (Donkey Bridge). They're drawn by the bar's karaoke kit and the chance to hear Tony belt out one of his favourite anthems. At the back, a minute dance floor, decked out in flashing lights and dusty disco balls, caters for those not singing. Drinks at On the Rocks are well-priced for the centre of town, and plentiful. Some snacks and light meals are available, too. The bar is open from 20.00 till late and is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays



© Johan Fredborn Larsson

BITE

Robyn Boyle

De Commanderie ★★★★★

Go forth to the source of a burbling river, and there you will find Sint-Peter's Castle, its towers mighty and its ponds alive with fish. What sounds like a fairy tale is actually the setting of one of my more memorable dining experiences in Limburg.

The dramatic 17th-century castle in the Voeren region – a green, rolling area that's part of Flanders but sandwiched between the Netherlands and Wallonia – is worth a visit all on its own. It's located at the source of the river Voer, from which spring 4,000 litres of water per minute, filling the castle's ponds with a steady flow of fresh, cold water. This creates the ideal habitat for trout, and the castle ponds are teeming with the fish in all sizes, as well as a few hefty sturgeon. These grounds have been used as a large-scale trout fishery since 1885, and make a great place for a day trip.

My partner and I each pay €2 to tour the fishery, starting with the nursery where hundreds of tiny fish start out life in stone troughs. As they grow (one centimetre a month!), the trout are moved from pond to pond, which are all connected to the streaming source. After two years, they are ready for consumption.

A charming little eatery on site looks like an old fisherman's shack. Being the only ones in there on this cold Sunday afternoon gives us the feeling of having a personal chef. Raphael happily explains the two different preparations on the menu, and we order one of each. We hear plenty of sizzling from the kitchen, followed by the presentation of our dishes no more than 10 minutes later.

My partner's *truite au bleu* is sprinkled with vinegar and then poached gently in bouillon, a process that turns the



trout's skin a stunning blue colour. It's a whole fish on the plate, but surprisingly easy to eat, as the meat is so soft it slides right off the bones.

My trout has a crispy, golden brown skin from being cooked in loads of butter (from nearby Aubel). Both fish have plenty of tender pink meat that's obviously very fresh, but also juicy and full of flavour. They come with perfectly simple accompaniments in the form of pan-fried potatoes, light crunchy salad and a wedge of lemon.

We skip the traditional white wine with this dish in favour of a glass of apple juice and a bottle of Rick's Abbessé, a beer made from sweet, local black cherries.

The total would have come to a mere €31, but then we bought a bag full of local cheese, *stroop* (fruit syrup) and smoked trout on the way out.

► www.voerstreek.be

- 📍 Commanderieshof, Sint-Pieters-Voeren; 04.381.14.30
- 🕒 Daily, 10.00-18.00
- € Mains: €12-€14
- 📖 Castle fishery and a great place to taste trout, a local delicacy from the rural Voeren region

TALKING DUTCH

Philip Ebels

Babel boy

And I thought I knew a lot of languages. But seven kind of fades in comparison to 20, the number of languages Timothy Doner, a 17-year-old New Yorker and something of an internet sensation, has taught himself over the past four years.

In a 15-minute video that has been watched more than a million times, Doner talks about – and in – such languages as Pashtu, Turkish, Hebrew and German, to name a few, jumping from one to the other with remarkably little effort.

"Ik kan een beetje Nederlands spreken," he says after talking about Indonesian food in Indonesian. *"Maar mijn accent is niet zo goed want ik ben een beginner."* I can speak a little Dutch, but my accent is not so good because I'm a beginner.

"Ik wil Nederlands leren want Nederlands en Engels zijn zusterspraken," he adds, before introducing himself in Xhosa (spoken in parts of South Africa). I want to learn Dutch because Dutch and English are sister languages. Doner started learning languages when he was studying Hebrew for his bar mitzvah, he told the *New York Daily News* in a recent interview. He developed a keen interest in the Middle East and soon started learning Arabic, too. "From Arabic, I went on to more or



less everything else," he is quoted as having said. "That was the key in the beginning." Is the kid a genius? He obviously has more than a knack for languages. And is, therefore, worth listening to when he shares his thoughts on the art of language learning. Start young, he says. "Between the ages of nine and 12, your ability to comfortably and fluidly pick up a foreign language diminishes with regard to phonology, syntactic processing or whatever it may be."

While that piece of advice may come too late for you, here's another: Make it fun. "If you love jazz or R&B, listen to that kind of music in the target language. Anything you can do to make

it relevant and interesting in your own life is definitely a positive step forward."

At some point in his hit video, he says (in German): "I don't try to learn new words from a book, but rather listen to conversations and watch movies." And near the end of the interview, the wonderboy offers one final thought: It gets easier every time. "You start to get more familiar with different grammatical systems, different ways of idiomatically speaking, different pronunciation systems," he says. "And of course, also, they bleed into each other. I think a lot of it has to do with getting through that brick wall of learning your first language."

► talkingdutch@hotmail.com

The last word...

Host with the most

"Make a list of overnight stay possibilities in the area. If the weather is good, guests can camp in the garden."

Tips on throwing the perfect alcohol-safe party, according to Flanders' road safety institute

In the running

"He'll beat me next year. In the Ten Miles, you understand, not in the elections."

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters came in ahead of arch-rival Bart De Wever in last weekend's running event in Antwerp

Cycle cross

"If a cycle path isn't part of a safe cycle route, it's money down the drain. What's the point of five perfect kilometres of path if you then have to cross over a deadly dangerous junction?"

Roel De Cleen of the cyclists' union Fietzersbond attacked the government's policy on cycle paths

Smart consumption

"There's been a change of mentality in that people don't necessarily want to own products, but only to use them. Look at online music services."

Geert Gisquière, founder of the Cambio car-share system

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

"Sustainable" is a buzz word people like to bandy about, but some residents and institutions are taking it very seriously. Ghent University, for instance, has embarked on a long-term strategy to make all of its operations sustainable, meaning as energy efficient as humanly possible. Along with that, they are considering how to invest more time and effort into socially relevant research

News

Wastewater treatment in both Brussels and Flanders is an ongoing struggle to reach and maintain acceptable norms. There are areas in Flanders that fall short of EU obligations in secondary treatment facilities, and Brussels is under EU Court of Justice proceedings for the second time. We look at the problem and what administrators are doing to fix it

Living

Have you heard of "suspended coffee"? A simple act of charity that is sweeping across the planet, the concept is simple: When you buy a coffee in a coffee house, you pay for an extra. Then someone who can't afford a coffee can come in later and claim it. A coffee shop in Antwerp is leading the way in Flanders, while in Brussels we found "suspended frieten"