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# The big picture

Flemish photographer Wim Tellier is back with another monumental installation, this time on the Scheldt

Georgio Valentino

Wim Tellier's latest project – a floating exhibition on the Scheldt river in Antwerp – is the culmination of three years of worldwide travels, innovative photography techniques and some staggering logistics

Despite his 30-odd years, Wim Tellier remains a child at heart. He has the long hair, wide eyes, casual mien and, above all, the restless energy of adolescence. This impression is reinforced when I ask him about his favourite non-artistic pastime: go-kart racing. "The track demands

your full attention," he explains between onomatopoeic "vroom"s and high-octane hand gestures. "It's all so fast and so loud. You don't have time to think about anything else." This is, after all, a man who has a lot on his mind. The Flemish photographer has taken a precious lunch hour off to chat in a cafe in Bornem. He should be neck-deep in the final preparations for *We Drift*, an ambitious project which has consumed the past three years of his life and is set for its big reveal on 2 June.

Originally conceived as a massive, floating exhibition of giant photos anchored in the harbour, the project has evolved into

a tide-swept procession of 1,000 rafts, each bearing a huge photographic collage. "All big art exhibitions are static," Tellier says. "I realised I wanted to make one that was dynamic, one that moved with the rhythm of nature." So the working title *Bay of Plenty* gave way to *We Drift*, and it was decided that the tidal river on which we drift would be the mighty Scheldt.

### 50 countries, one river

The logistics of such an exhibition, which is one day only on 2 June, are staggering. To close off a stretch of river for even a brief period requires the permission of 19 local and



## FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

## Eric Van Rompuy



Last week the Flemish Parliament honoured six of its longest-serving members, foremost among them Eric Van Rompuy, who has now served 30 years in the institution. No-one would ever think of describing Van Rompuy as a “damp rag” or a “low-grade bank clerk”. Those were the notoriously uncouth words used by British MEP Nigel Farage to describe his brother Herman, the president of the European Council. Herman may have risen to greater heights in politics – including a short period as prime minister – but Eric has the monopoly on sheer presence. Eric is a bull of a man with the build of a street-fighter, and the tenacity to match. While his brother has the ascetic look of a philosopher, Eric is an enforcer.

So it is that he has fought for the Flemish cause and for the interests of the people of his area, around Zaventem and the municipalities surrounding Brussels, for the last 30 years in the Flemish parliament. “I’ve always had the character of a fighter,” he admitted to VTM news. “A bit of a rebel.”

“He’s different from me,” added brother Herman, who was present for the ceremony. “But I think that

he has been true to his charter, and that has earned everyone’s respect.” Eric Van Rompuy, 63, was born in Ukkel and studied economics and philosophy, before completing a doctorate in economics at KULeuven. He then went to work for the Kredietbank (now KBC) while serving as youth president of the CVP party, now CD&V. Aside from his distinguished brother, the family also included sister Christine, who is active within the left-wing PVDA.

Eric’s career moved between the council in Zaventem, where he still sits, the national parliament, the European Parliament and the Flemish parliament. He was the first Flemish minister of agriculture, media and enterprise but was severely disappointed when, in 2004, party colleague and new minister-president Yves Leterme declined to appoint him as a minister.

Van Rompuy is married to Viviane Geuffens, whom he met in the corridors of the federal parliament, and the couple has a daughter, Heidi, who last week assured the VRT that she had no plans to continue the Van Rompuy dynasty’s involvement in politics.

## News in brief

The **quality of bathing water** is improving in Flanders, according to the Flemish environment agency (VMM), based on new figures from the European Commission. Flanders has 86 bathing places, including all of those at the coast. Sixty-two scored “excellent” and 23 “good” with one scoring “sufficient quality”.

US ambassador to Belgium Howard Gutman and Senate chair Sabine de Bethune last weekend took part in a ceremony in Waregem, West Flanders, to mark **Memorial Day at the Flanders Field American Cemetery**. Meanwhile in New York, Kris Dierckx, representative of the Flemish government in the US, joined Belgian consul-general Marc Calcoen in a Memorial Day ceremony at Clinton War Memorial to First World War dead in De Witt Clinton Park.

Much meat being sold in supermarkets is **infected by antibiotic-resistant bacteria**, and the government is not doing enough to combat the problem, according to Herman Goossens, a professor of microbiology at the University of Antwerp and an internationally recognised expert on antibiotics. Large quantities of beef, veal and chicken are contaminated with the EBSL-forming bacteria, which he described as “one of the most serious threats to public health” and “a severely underestimated danger”. One reason for the increase in the bacteria is the over-use of antibiotics on farm animals, he said.

A group of about 20 engineering students of the Groep T technical college in Leuven are putting the finishing touches to their **electric racing car**, which they will take to the Formula Student races in the UK, Czech Republic and Austria. The car contains parts supplied by 70 different companies. It is driven by 360 batteries providing 85kW of

power. The first race takes place from 3 to 7 July.

All of Belgium’s airports will have to **pay more for the services of Belgocontrol**, which supervises the nation’s airspace, federal transport minister Melchior Wathelet said. Last week, Belgocontrol alerted the government to a €13 million deficit for 2012 and warned that it could be unable to fund its services by 2014. The airport most seriously affected is likely to be Charleroi in Wallonia, which pays proportionally less than Brussels Airport – a fact long lamented in Zaventem and elsewhere in Flanders, where the difference is considered a distortion of fair competition.

The federal government approved a preliminary proposal to build two **energy islands in the North Sea** off the coasts of Zeebrugge and Blankenberge. The artificial islands would store and distribute energy from wind turbines and should be in operation by 2016. The project would be entirely funded by the private sector, North Sea minister Johan Vande Lanotte said. The plan still has to be agreed by the government of Flanders and the fishing industry.

Oude Geuze, produced by the Oud Beersel brewery in Flemish Brabant, won the **Champion International Beer prize** at the Australian International Beer Awards in Melbourne last week. The beer also won gold in both Lambic and Belgian/French Style Ale. Nearly 1,500 beers took part in the competition, from 277 breweries in 35 countries.

The Brussels-Capital Region is seeking the agreement of the government of Flanders to construct a **new national stadium** on the land currently occupied by Parking C of the Heizel complex, which is owned by the city of Brussels but stands

within the city limits of Grimbergen in Flemish Brabant. A new stadium is essential to Brussels’ bid to host the 2020 European Championships. The existing Koning Boudewijn stadium will be demolished to make way for housing.

Belgium will hold **federal, regional and European elections** together on 25 May 2014, after the European Parliament agreed last week to move up EU elections from the original June date.

Bogaletch Gebre, a prominent Ethiopian campaigner against female genital mutilation, was in Brussels last week to receive the **International King Baudouin Prize** for Development in Africa. Gebre has been working in her native land since returning from the US in 1997, and her campaign has resulted in the numbers of mutilations falling from almost 100% to less than 3%. The €150,000 prize money will go towards continuing her work.

The number of people **travelling daily from Brussels to work in Flanders** has risen to almost 50,000, according to Brussels labour minister Céline Fremault – up from just over 45,000 in 2011. The increase is largely the result of a co-operation between employment authorities in the two regions and a shortage of qualified workers in Flanders.

Police zones in Flanders have been alerted to organised **criminals taking paper and cardboard** left out by residents for collection. Last week the waste management authority for Limburg said its collection of paper had gone down this year for the first time in two decades. Waste paper brings in €90 a tonne, making it a lucrative business for collectors, but unauthorised pick-up of municipal rubbish is illegal.

## FLANDERS TODAY

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## OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

## The rain it raineth on the just

It won’t come as a surprise to you to learn that 24 May was the coldest 24 May on record, with a temperature of only 8.7°C. Not coincidentally, the previous day, 23 May, had been declared the coldest 23 May on record.

What’s going on with the weather? people ask each other endlessly. Last week, the Royal Meteorological Institute celebrated its 100th anniversary, which VRT weatherman Frank Deboosere marked by falling off his bike, fracturing his elbow and presenting the forecast in a plaster cast. Was it an omen of things to come?

The weather in Belgium has indeed gone a little bonkers. Even for Belgium.

• The KMI, with a sense of comedy uncommon in governmental institutions, marked its centenary with the issue of a new stamp



sensitive to temperature; an image of a tree changes to show one of the four seasons. Whether the transformation actually works is anyone’s guess, since the temperature has not yet risen high enough to tell.

• Rain caused long delays on the E19, where the tailback on the Brussels-bound side extended all the way to Wilrijk. On the E40, meanwhile, traffic jams extended from Wetteren to Groot-Bijgaarden.

• The construction industry is suffering from the extended period of bad weather holding up progress on building sites, and trucks were found to be ignoring the ban on overtaking in the rain. The agricultural sector, however, said the rain was welcome after the dry month of April.

• Perhaps strangest of all, the bells of St Peter’s in Leuven set to ringing all by themselves at 6.00 one morning last week, leading local residents to think they were being invaded by the Spanish, the Austrians, the French or the Germans – again. But no, all that was wrong was a short circuit in the electrical system controlling the bells, caused by rainwater and a leaky roof.

Or perhaps it was a warning after all – only time will tell.

► [www.meteo.be](http://www.meteo.be)



# The big picture

## Waterborne art installation involves massive tableaux of a thousand rafts

► continued from page 1

regional authorities. Tellier and his crew have to construct, warehouse and launch their own rafts. The manufacture of the massive photographic tableaux depends on a production chain that involves several specialised providers in Flanders and the Netherlands.

The bold concept runs the risk of eclipsing the photographs themselves, which are artistic and technical marvels in their own right. Each unique 16 square-metre collage is comprised of two elements: a portrait and a landscape patchwork. The portraits were shot in über-high resolution in an Antwerp studio after a casting call brought a thousand subjects of all ages, shapes and colours (pictured on cover).

The landscapes required a bit of travel. Tellier and his two-person crew spent three years trotting the globe to shoot the requisite landscapes. All told, a full 50 countries on six continents are represented. It was, Tellier says, an adventure. Conditions were far from ideal on the ground. The gang scouted locations off the beaten path and slept rough in tents.

Nor was the shooting itself a walk in the park. Tellier rigged his camera to a kite – yes, a kite – which he would fly over the site. “The problem,” he says, “is that there’s no way to tell how the place looks from the air until you put the kite up. A landscape that looks boring from the ground might be beautiful from some altitude.”

### Wounded planet

Then there were the vagaries of the weather. Most photographers just need good light; Tellier also required wind enough to launch his kite-borne camera. In Cambodia, where his luck bottomed out, it took four days to snap a single viable photo.

Such an unusual, overhead perspective can easily be mistaken by the eye for an abstract design. Tellier soon realised he needed a visual anchor, so, like *Where’s Waldo*, each composition integrates a giant red sticking plaster. The project’s hallmark is at once a unifying metaphor for a wounded planet and, at 7 x 7 metres, an optical yardstick with which the viewer can register the scale of a given landscape.

Tellier is reluctant to disclose what he considers his most successful shoot, but he does single out the



Wim Tellier has spent three years preparing the one-day only installation *We Drift* (top); *We Wish* found a giant blow-up of Tellier’s son, just days old, gracing squares across Europe and on the beach at Ostend; After premiering in Antarctica, *Protect 7-7* was on show for the crowds in Antwerp



by the ferocity of nature and the inadequacy of human plans. “You have a nice beach house. Your future is planned in detail. You feel secure,” he says. “But life is unpredictable.”

Vulnerability and unpredictability are recurring themes in Tellier’s work. His own life as a successful artist was anything but planned. A native of rural Flanders, he grew up with a passion for travel and nature but no particular interest in photography. He preferred

dipping his toe in the Antwerp gallery scene, Tellier decided the best way to make a name for himself in the Flemish metropolis was to think big. His first major work set the tone. *We Wish* was a 600 square-metre photographic installation starring Tellier’s

newborn son Yenno. After premiering on Antwerp’s Grote Markt in 2006, it was shown in several major European cities and finally on the iconic Santa Monica Pier in California. Then it was carved up and sold in limited-edition pieces.

His next project, in 2009, took the concept a step further. *Protect 7-7* featured not one but six enormous portrait blow-ups, each representing a continent and its people. As if that wasn’t impressive enough, the installation was exhibited in sub-zero temperatures outside Belgium’s Antarctic outpost, the Princess Elisabeth Station. (It was here, incidentally, that Tellier came up with the kite method that would serve him so well in the making of *We Drift*.)

### Three years of work

These high-profile works have established Tellier as one of the rising stars of Antwerp’s art scene, and naturally everyone wants to know how he plans to top his previous act. So keen is the public curiosity that a camera crew from TV station Canvas has been following Tellier since he began work on *We Drift*. The resulting documentary, also titled *We Drift*, tells the story of the project from conception to realisation, with a whole lot of blood, sweat and tears in between.

It’s a long story, spanning three years, and one that hasn’t truly reached its climax until Tellier and his crew launch the exhibition on the river on 2 June. The documentary will be shown in two parts, on 18 and 25 June.

Although Tellier built his reputation on the massive scale of his installations (and, at a reported 1,000,000 square metres, *We Drift* is his biggest yet), the artist insists that the most important aspect of this latest work is not its size. “Yes, it’s large,” he says, “but what is truly unique about *We Drift* is its presentation on the Scheldt. It’s the first major exhibition driven entirely by the forces of nature.”

*The We Drift installation will set sail from Sint-Annastrand on the morning of 2 June and should proceed inland with the tide before being towed back to the starting point. Plans could be affected by weather, so visitors are advised to check Wim Tellier’s website for details on the morning*

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

“It’s the first major exhibition driven entirely by the forces of nature”

American coastal region devastated by Hurricane Sandy last autumn as the most poignant stop. He was first of all surprised to be granted permission to shoot anything in the aftermath of the superstorm. On the ground, he was overwhelmed

climbing and, as a teenager, worked as a guide in the Himalayas. It was during this stint that he met his future wife and his future father-in-law, who happened to be a teacher of photography. After learning the trade and

## DATE NIGHT

The sky is the limit for Antwerp artist Wim Tellier, especially if his ambitious *We Drift* project comes off without a hitch. The photographer is grateful for his success but acknowledges how difficult it is to balance such demanding work and a fulfilling home life. Tellier has to travel a great deal but is a husband and father of two (baby Yenno, star of his first installation, is now six and has a little brother, Rio).

To maintain a sense of normalcy when his work puts him in a distant wilderness, Tellier kept a nightly date with his wife and kids. “I had a satellite phone at all times,” he explains, “and wherever I went, whatever I was doing, I phoned home every day at 19.00 sharp.”

The experience has changed everything, it seems,

even Tellier’s idea of rest and relaxation. “When you’re away from home so much, you learn not to waste any time when you’re back,” he says. “There are no lazy afternoons. We’re always doing something fun together.”

Tellier should be able to enjoy some quality time with the family this summer. Then it’s back to work. After the big debut on the Scheldt, he’s hoping to show *We Drift* on London’s Thames and then perhaps, if the art gods answer his prayers, on the Hudson in New York.

But that’s not all: Tellier is already planning his next project. Although he declined to go into details, he did mention that the follow-up to *We Drift* would continue his exploration of the forces of nature. It’ll probably be really big, too.



# One million euro for nature reserves

## Agricultural sector complains that Natuurpunt is Flanders' largest landowner

Alan Hope

Nature minister Joke Schauvliege last week announced a budget of €1.1 million spread over two years for the purchase of land to be set aside as nature reserve. The money is enough at current prices to buy 2,700 hectares, bringing the total surface of recognised nature areas in Flanders to 17,800 hectares.

"I am glad we are able to support nature organisations and individuals in their work in implementing Flanders' biodiversity policy and the accessibility of nature reserves," said Schauvliege. "Thanks to the efforts of numerous volunteers, this management can be socially inclusive and cost-efficient."

Nature conservancy organisation Natuurpunt welcomed the measure. "These extra resources are very welcome for us and for our land management colleagues," said director-general Chris Steenwegen. "This will allow us to better support our volunteers in their management



The Flemish planning ministry has approved an expansion of the coastal Zwin nature reserve

work and to make our nature areas more attractive to visitors." Natuurpunt is the largest private landowner in Flanders, with about 20,000 hectares under its supervision, compared to only 12,000 a decade ago. The organisation's holdings are roughly equivalent to the surface

area of the entire Brussels metro area, but not all of them are yet officially recognised by the government, which means they receive no support. "That of course is an untenable situation," he said.

According to the General Union of Farmers, that situation is not good

for the agricultural sector. Chairman Hendrik Vandamme called on the government to stop buying up agricultural land for nature reserves. The government, he said, is granting subsidies to Natuurpunt of up to 90% of the land price, while farmers are being robbed of arable land.

Schauvliege, meanwhile, praised the contribution of farmers in helping protect natural areas, such as by putting animals onto reserve land that benefits from grazing or by maintaining the grass in areas rich in bird life.

Last week the planning ministry also announced a plan for the extension of the nature reserve around the Zwin estuary at the coast (*pictured*), on the border with the Netherlands. The reserve, an important bird sanctuary, will be extended by 120 hectares, largely by returning the Willem-Leopold polder to the sea. Farmers whose land will be affected have vowed to fight the plan.

## Honorary doctorates for Clijsters, Bensouda

The Free University of Brussels (VUB) has awarded honorary doctorates to "five exceptional women": professor Cecilia Jarlskog of Lund University in Sweden, a theoretical physicist working on elementary particles; professor Londa Schiebinger of Stanford University in the US, a science historian specialised in the relationship between science and gender; professor Carol Gilligan of NYU, a psychologist of gender

differences; Fatou Bensouda, prosecutor at the International Criminal Court in The Hague (*pictured*); and Kim Clijsters, women's tennis champion and four-time Grand Slam winner.

In Hasselt, seven honorary doctorates were awarded this week, to Jean-Jacques Cassiman, a genetics expert at the university of Leuven; to architect Luc Deleu, best known for his work with



container accommodation; to Henry Chesbrough, inventor of

the concept of open innovation; to physiotherapist Lieven Masschalk, who works with top athletes; to professor Michael Braungart, economist and one of the developers of the cradle to cradle principle; to Professor Heinz Klug, a jurist who helped create a new constitution for his native South Africa; and to professor Sir Richard Friend of Cambridge University, a pioneer in the field of polymer semi-conductors.

## Enquiry into Brussels police shooting

The Brussels prosecutor's office is investigating the fatal shooting of a man by police in the Marollen quarter of the city last weekend. The incident took place in the busy area around the Kapellekerk on Saturday afternoon.

Witnesses said the man had attempted to rob a passer-by while brandishing a 30cm knife. Police on the scene ordered him to surrender, and when he approached police, they fired a warning shot. When he continued to approach, a police officer fired, hitting the

man in the chest. He died later in hospital of his injuries. The identity of the man has not been revealed.

The police union Sybol later called for the introduction of the bodycam for police patrols – a miniature camera worn by officers which records audio and video of any incident to allow investigators a clear view of what happened from the officer's point of view. Another police union, the liberal VSOA, opposes the measure.

## No final answers in Swiss bus crash investigation

Parents of the 22 children who died in last year's bus crash in Switzerland were said last week to be "disappointed" by the latest report from the prosecutor for the Valais canton where the accident took place.

The accident happened in March 2012 when pupils from primary schools in Lommel and Heverlee were returning from a ski holiday. Two drivers and four members of school staff were also killed when one of the buses crashed against the side of a tunnel. According to the Swiss authorities, the cause of the crash has not – and

probably never will be – determined. The prosecutor stressed that two hypotheses could be ruled out: that the driver suffered a heart attack or that he was effected by an anti-depressant he was taking. The remaining hypotheses – that he crashed the bus intentionally or that his attention was somehow diverted – remain unconfirmed. The prosecutor's office has proposed that the investigation be closed. In Belgium, other parties – namely the relatives of the dead – have the right to request additional enquiries.

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Benneke

N-VA remains Flanders' most popular party, a recent poll shows. With 32% of respondents calling N-VA their party of choice, it in fact towers over the rest. The Christian-democrat CD&V came in second with just 17%.

All eyes are still set on Bart De Wever's party, it seems, and these days, his successor as party president is talked about openly. When De Wever became mayor of Antwerp, he promised that he would combine this with the party presidency for another year. That would mean next January, but the appointment of a new president has been pushed to the 2014 election, or even after that.

"Should we win, I can hand confidently hand over power," said De Wever. "In all other cases, we do not want the new presidency to fail before it has even begun. I will take up the responsibility."

The timing may be unclear, but the name of De Wever's successor is hardly a secret. Every observer thinks it will be Ben Weyts, the party's current vice president, who – for practical reasons – already occupies De Wever's presidential office.

Like De Wever, Weyts was there when N-VA was founded. He was the spokesperson for Geert Bourgeois when he was the president of the Volksunie, the party from which N-VA originates, as well as when Bourgeois was the first president of N-VA. At the time, Weyts was known to political reporters as *Benneke* – the diminutive refers to his stature as well as his youthful enthusiasm.

Weyts was around at all the decisive times for his party. The first cartel between N-VA and CD&V was even scripted at his mothers' kitchen table in Dworp. As the party grew, so did Weyts' power. He went on to become Bourgeois' head of cabinet in the Flemish government and later an MP himself. He's had a hand in a number of appointments, such as the new governor of East Flanders, Jan Briers.

A resident of *de rand* – the Flemish periphery of Brussels – Weyts is particularly sensitive to language and institutional issues, his party's core business. This radicalism gained him another nickname, this time with French speakers: Ben Laden. It makes him popular inside his party, as well as outside, as adversaries hope the electorate will shy away from his alleged sectarianism.

But Weyts' popularity is still far removed from De Wever's. Last week's poll ranked him last amongst the polled politicians. De Wever sees no obstacle: "That is where I started out, too."

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

**5,400**

new jobs between now and 2030 in the port of Brussels, according to forecasts in the Masterplan just agreed with the Brussels-Capital Region

**52,076**

finances issued in 2012 aboard buses and trams of Flemish public transport authority De Lijn

**41,529**

students in Dutch-speaking schools in Brussels, a new record at all three levels, nearly 30% of them from families where Dutch is not the only language spoken

**58%**

of people in Flanders say that they exercise enough in a week, according to a survey by health insurer CM. About 83% of men claim to exercise more than 90 minutes a week, compared to 73% of women

**18kg**

meteorite put on display last week in the Museum for Natural Sciences in Brussels. Roughly the size of a basketball, it was discovered by a team of Belgian and Japanese researchers in Antarctica



# Smartville

## The Flemish love quizzing, and the residents of Aarschot are the reigning champions

Senne Starckx

The final episode of the popular TV quiz *De slimste gemeente* (The Smartest Town), recently broadcast on VIER, had a nail-biting climax. In the final round, the teams from Leuven and Aarschot – each composed of the town's mayor and a male and female inhabitant – competed against each other. The final and winning question was: Who wrote the play *The Seagull*? Karel Simons of Aarschot was quick and literate enough to give the right answer\*, bringing victory to Leuven's little brother (Aarschot lies 25 kilometres north of Leuven). For the next year, Aarschot can now decorate its town hall with a flag and add an honorary title to its road signs telling visitors they've just entered the smartest town in Flanders.

If bookmakers had been allowed to place bets, they would definitely have put their money on Leuven. As Flanders' only true college town, Leuven lives and breathes knowledge and wisdom. Besides, in Louis Tobback, Leuven's team had undoubtedly one of the smartest mayors of Flanders – certainly after Bart De Wever and his Antwerp team were eliminated in the first round. And in Tom Trogh, Leuven had the junior world quizzing champion (meaning under 30) in their ranks. For years, Trogh has been one of the best quizzers in the world.

### Quiz crazy

In any other region of the world, the Leuven team would have won as easy as pie. But not in Flanders, where the percentage of fanatical



From left: Ann Croes, mayor André Peeters and Karel Simons kick Leuven's butt on *De slimste gemeente*

quizzers among the population is undoubtedly the highest on the planet – with only England maybe being a true competitor for this nerdy statistic. That's why during that thrilling final, Trogh had to go up against Simons, the best quizzier in Aarschot (and surroundings). Simons outplayed Leuven completely by naming 19 of the 27 Red Devils who have recently played for the Belgian national football team – within 60 seconds. Of course, reeling off lists is one trademark by which you can recognise a fanatic quizzier. In a previous broadcast, Simons succeeded in naming every football club in the Belgian second division. After that outstanding performance, Simons said dryly that he doesn't even like football, before adding: "But you don't need to like

everything, you know."

That's the main difference between the occasional and the all-round quizzier. There are people who know all the major European rivers,

every winner of the European Song Contest, because they're fascinated by geography or by kitschy music. But real quizzers aren't. They make lists of all kinds of stuff, and learn

them by heart.

In Flanders, these "sports quizzers" have their own federation, which organises several championships – on the national and international level. In fact, on 1 June, more than 100 fanatics will gather in Beerzel (a stone's throw from Aarschot) to fill in a questionnaire covering all imaginable topics. The same event will take place at various locations in more than 25 countries. India, the US, Canada, Kuwait, Nigeria, Australia, Singapore ... all these countries have been infected by the quiz virus. And it's spreading.

In Beerzel, Trogh will compete once again in the junior championship, against other juniors (including your correspondent). Something tells me the revenge of the world champion from Leuven will be sweet.

\*Anton Chekhov

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

## BRAIN OF BELGIUM

Quizzers love to answer questions. So we put a few to Karel Simons, the "sphinx from Aarschot", as his friends sometimes call him.

### How did you end up on the Aarschot team?

**Karel Simons:** "A friend who organises a lot of local quizzes at the weekends asked me to participate. He put me with Ann Croes, who turned out to be very good in topics like movies and music – my major weaknesses. Together with our mayor, André Peeters, who won a TV quiz on geography in the late 1980s, we formed a highly complementary team."

### With which teams do you participate at local quizzes?

"On Fridays, I play with a team called Martine Van Camp, named after a nursing home we support for people with mental disorders. On Saturdays, I join Aleydis, a team from Leuven."

### Will you join the world quizzing championship, on 1 June in Beerzel?

"No, I never play individual quizzes – it reminds me of my old school exams. But Martine Van Camp once managed to win the European championship for teams."

# Smarter port security

## Computerised container-release system designed to cut crime in Antwerp's port area

Marcel Schoeters

MSC, the largest customer of the port of Antwerp, has introduced a new computerised container-release system as part of a larger policy to drive down crime in the port area. The company is willing to share the technology with other parties, says Marc Beerlandt, CEO of the company's Antwerp agency, MSC Belgium.

The initiative was welcomed by mayor Bart De Wever, who sees the new procedures as another step in the war against drug trafficking through the port. "Setting up raids to catch the dealers red-handed is not enough," he says. "We all know that this kind of traffic originates on the other side of the world."

Organised crime will go to great lengths to secure their logistic chain, explains Beerlandt. "Last year we discovered that there had been attempts to hack into the ICT system of our MSC Home Terminal, which is run by PSA Antwerp."

Beerlandt also admits that some MSC staff have been approached to leak the pin codes needed for the release of the containers. "Eventually this turned out to be one of the weaknesses within the old system. So far, not a single box has left our terminal illegally, but even then we must have a better registration method. We handle up to 3,000 lorries per day, after all."

### Neutral portal

The new release procedure is based on a secured website, managed by an independent partner specialising in data management and security. Every client who needs a container to be picked up is taken through a set of authentication and identification processes produced by the website. In the new system, the pin codes are entirely generated by the computer and no longer through human intervention. The second phase will introduce the "broken code" principle, in which only the first part



One of MSC's ships loaded with containers that will now be more secure when at the port of Antwerp

of the code will be generated by the computer. The second part will only be added after registration at the terminal.

When the log-in process has been carried out correctly, the client can produce a survey of all the containers that have been assigned to them at all times, including status messages. "These functionalities will turn this new release system into a

future-oriented tool for the day-to-day business of Belgian companies," says Beerlandt. Still, the new release system is only a first step in the port's crime-fighting strategy, he says.

### Paperless system

PSA Antwerp managing director Jan Van Mossevelde fully endorses the initiative taken by MSC Belgium. "We will give whatever support

necessary to roll out this system in the port," he says. "As the largest terminal operator in the port, we feel very strongly about safety, efficiency and transparency."

For PSA Antwerp, the new container-release system is part of a wider strategy of going fully electronic. "It is easier to trace the origins of electronic documents than to find out where the paper has originated from," Van Mossevelde says. "MSC Belgium and PSA Antwerp are committed to providing the port of Antwerp with an integrated environment, in which container pick-up will be as secure as a bank transaction."

For MSC, too, the new technology is part of an on-going process. "As for narcotics smuggling, we already had a dissuasion policy in place for our sea-going staff, using sniffer dogs," says Beerlandt. "What we are aiming at now is tightening up the way in which containers are released in the port."



THE WEEK  
IN BUSINESS**Dredging****► Jan De Nul**

The Antwerp-based dredging company has secured state-backed credit insurance for its Sabetta oil and gas terminal project on Russia's Ice Sea.

**Pigeons ► Bolt**

Bolt, the fastest pigeon in the world, who was born and raised in Vorselaar, Antwerp province, has been sold to a Chinese breeder for €310,000, the highest amount ever paid for a pigeon. Breeder Leo Heremans, who has developed an allergy to pigeons, sold all of his 530 pigeons for more than €4 million.

**Post ► TBC-Post**

The Zaventem-based TBC-Post has starting delivering standard mail in about 900 postal codes areas in competition with the national bpost. It is the first time that semi-public bpost has been faced with competition in its mail delivery. TBC-Post expects to expand its services to the whole of Belgium within five years.

**Rail ► NMBS**

The national rail authority NMBS has announced an action plan to tackle the theft of copper cables, which cost them €8 million last year in stolen property and delays to 1,000 trains. Cables will be buried in underground conduits to make them harder to reach, and the copper replaced with aluminium. Police will increase efforts to catch thieves, while the government pledged that courts will hand out tougher sentences. Last year incidents were up 80% to 1,300.

**Retail ► Decathlon**

The French-owned sports and outdoors apparel and equipment chain opened a store in Ghent last week. The company plans to expand its activities with additional stores in Turnhout and Evere next year and seeks up to 30 outlets within five years, including in Aalst, Sint-Niklaas, Hasselt, Ostend and Mechelen.

**Shipping ► Exmar**

The Antwerp-based shipping and tanker operator has appointed outgoing US Ambassador to Belgium Howard Gutman to its board. The company seeks to capitalise on Gutman's US contacts to develop its oil and gas activities.

**Technology****► Argus Lab**

The Antwerp-based mobile applications developer has attracted start-up venture capital from Samsung president Young Sohn.

# Government split over Unizo's mini-jobs proposal

## The proposed scheme would provide part-time jobs to low-skilled workers

Alan Hope

Government parties are debating a proposal made by employers' organisation Unizo and supported by the Flemish liberals, to introduce a system of low-paid "mini-jobs" to improve employment options for low skilled-workers in Belgium.

A mini-job is a part-time job paying up to €450 a month. The salary is tax free but offers few to no social security benefits. While unemployment has remained at about 7.5% since 2007 – even as the EU average rose – the number of employed aged 20-64 is only 67%.

The government has set a target of 73% by 2020. That would require the creation of 60,000 net jobs every year until then, and there seems little likelihood of that target being reached without significant efforts to lower salary costs, which currently represent a 10%-25% handicap for Belgian businesses.

The idea of the mini-job is taken

© Open VLD



from a German model that has long been opposed by socialists and unions. The liberals were careful to stress that their vision is not exactly the same as the German case.

"I find the term mini-jobs not the perfect choice, because of the pejorative connotations

surrounding it," said Open VLD president Gwendolyn Rutten (pictured). "But aside from that, we are in favour of the introduction of a system of easy-access, flexible and affordable labour ... to bring people more easily to the labour market."

The liberals' coalition partners,

the socialists, maintain their opposition. According to federal minister of the economy, Johan Vande Lanotte, €450 is not enough to live on – although the plan would include a top-up of government benefits. While five million people in Germany are currently employed in mini-jobs, he told the VRT, the German rate of poverty is twice as high as in Flanders.

The socialist trade union ABVV described the mini-job as "social dumping" and said it was a ploy "to distract attention away from more serious challenges, such as a recovery financed by fair taxation and with sustainable and quality jobs."

The other main party, CD&V, declined to come down on either side. "I'm not saying yes and I'm not saying no," said deputy prime minister Pieter De Crem. "These things still have to be discussed."

## Bpost goes to stock market

National postal service bpost has announced the details of its coming stock market launch. The enterprise will continue to be majority-owned by the state, at 50% of the shares plus one. The remaining shares are currently owned by the British private equity house CVC Capital Partners, and 20-30% is expected to be put up for sale.

"The listing of bpost is the culmination of more than 10 years of renewal and hard work," said bpost CEO Johnny Thijs. "Once we are listed we will continue to strive towards excellence in all that we do, for the benefit of our clients, our staff and our shareholders."

The sale is expected to raise between €500 and €750 million, which is small compared to the €3.6 billion raised at the (partial) privatisation of Belgacom in 2004, but places bpost in the top 10 of IPOs in Belgium.

The launch is not only large, it is also a turning point for the Belgian stock exchange. The last fully-fledged IPO was pharmaceutical company Novartis in 2009, and since then several planned launches, among them Omega Pharma and Duvel Moortgat, have been cancelled because of the state of the stock market. Jean-Pascal Labille, the federal minister for government enterprises, said that "bpost is a modern, top-performance enterprise that ensures the delivery of



© Courtesy bpost

important services to all citizens and will continue to fulfil that social function in the future."

In related news, the post and telecoms regulator has issued the first postal licence to a private company since the liberalisation of the industry in 2011. TBC Post is based in Zaventem, and its 10-year licence will allow it to pick up, sort and deliver national and incoming international mail. Only outgoing international mail is excepted, as that lies under the authority of foreign regulators.

TBC Post will now be a direct competitor for bpost. Another private company, Vlaamse Post, based in Keerbergen, Flemish Brabant, is due to begin operations in 2014.

## Total invests a billion in Antwerp

French oil industry giant Total is investing €1 billion in its production facility within the port of Antwerp, the company announced, confirming rumours first heard a month ago.

The investment covers two major projects. The first is a new refinery for the production of low-sulphur domestic heating fuel and diesel, in response to a growing demand for products with lower environmental impact. That plant should come on stream in 2016.

One year later, Total plans the start of a new installation for the conversion of low-value refinery gas emissions into petrochemical raw materials. The move will replace naphtha, which can be both explosive and carcinogenic. The two new facilities will replace two old ones: a steam petrochemical cracker and the polyethylene production line, due to be closed down next year.

Total employs 1,700 in Antwerp, and the new investment is



not expected to change that figure. The plan does involve a retraining programme of €22 million, and last week the government of Flanders agreed to a grant of €1 million towards that. "Strengthening the Flemish chemicals sector is of fundamental importance to our economy," said minister-president Kris Peeters. "The chemicals sector contributes to our positive export trade balance, is responsible directly and indirectly for employment and represents about half of the research and development spending in Flanders."

## Greenpeace files complaint against dredging guarantee

Greenpeace is filing a complaint with the Council of State against the federal government's decision to give guarantees to Aalst-based dredging company Jan De Nul for its part in a controversial project in the Arctic Ocean.

One of the world's largest dredging companies, with activities all over the world, Jan De Nul was contracted

by the Russian government to dredge a shipping canal in the Gulf of Ob off the Kara Sea in the north of the country. Jan De Nul has obtained payment guarantees from the federal government under the Delcredere overseas export credit insurance system, meaning that if the Russian government should default, the company would be paid by the

Belgian government.

"The Belgian government is ignoring its own resolution on the protection of the North Pole area, voted in almost unanimously by the chamber in 2011," Greenpeace said. Four government ministers have veto power over the Delcredere guarantees but chose not to exercise it. Greenpeace is concerned about the project leading

to exploitation of oil and gas reserves in the area without regard to the environmental implications.

The government is setting "a dangerous precedent," said Greenpeace. "Delcredere has now flung open the door for other companies in the future to seek their fortune from the oil and gas under the polar ice."



# Tax amnesty nears deadline

Corporations and wealthy families rush to regularise before 1 July, when the fines increase

Daan Bauwens

On 15 May, the federal police searched more than 40 offices in Belgium and Luxembourg in a case related to accountant Jan Vanden Abeele of Waregem, West Flanders. The accountant is suspected of helping his clients, including some notable corporations run by wealthy Flemish families, to evade taxes via havens such as Luxembourg and Cyprus. The legal actions of the Kortrijk district attorney coincide with the federal government's tax amnesty, which for the first time gives corporate fraudsters the chance to bring regularise their money and bring it back to Belgium. "That is no coincidence," says Karel Anthonissen, head of the federal tax authority. "This is our way of

We want as many people as possible, as soon as possible, to come clean." The current amnesty system, which has been in place since 2004, will operate until 2 July. After that, fines will get higher. "And it is the last chance," says Anthonissen. "After 2013, there will be no more tax amnesty. People who keep on refusing to regularise will run the risk of criminal prosecution, they will be in newspapers, there will be scandals. With this new system, we offer everybody a discreet and fair solution." Taxpayers thought to have been involved in non-corporate fraud – for example, by placing their savings in a Luxembourg bank account – will pay the tax that was due, plus 15%. Those guilty of serious fraud will see their capital



© Jean-Marc Charles/Sygma/Corbis

Brussels, Ghent and Antwerp. Last year he published the book *Iedereen doet het* (Everybody Does It) about tax avoidance in Flanders. "Things have changed recently," he says. "Out of 10 people coming into our office, now eight of them file for regularisation. Until last year, that number used to be just two or three."

Ever since it started eight years ago, ethical questions surrounding tax amnesty have been debated in the Flemish press and parliament. Although Maus and Anthonissen find themselves on opposite sides in the debate, they agree that this settlement is the only possibility of getting the money back into the country.

"You have to be realistic," says Maus. "If you don't organise a period of regularisation and just implement a new fraud policy, 90 to 95% of the fraudsters from the past will get away with it, while a few will be made into a scandal. I'm not a big fan of that."

Anthonissen agrees: "The amount of fraud in this country is enormous. We can only solve this with a massive remorse campaign. The message afterwards should be: Now we live in another world, and the sales are over."

with €3 million of black money you can walk out 10 minutes later with €2 million of white money," he told *Flanders Today*. "It's an offer you cannot refuse. It's the sales."

The news that fines will get higher has caused tax evaders to rush to their lawyers. Over the first three months of this year, the federal government received four times as many dossiers for regularisation as in the same period last year. Last month, 667 people filed for regularisation. Since the start of this year, 1,715 dossiers have been filed, creating a revenue of €330

million.

"More than 90% of them are Flemings," Anthonissen says. "The anxiety to come clean in Flanders is much higher than in the south of the country." At the same time, Flanders will benefit from the new round of fiscal amnesty: Taxes and fines for the regularisation of succession rights will flow directly to the Flemish government.

## Everybody does it

Michel Maus is a fiscal attorney in Ghent and Bruges and a law professor at the universities of

"We want as many people as possible, as soon as possible, to come clean"

increasing the pressure on people with black money. The international press, thanks to recent reports such as those on offshore leaks, is on our side. We want to disturb these people's sleep and then offer them a settlement so they can rest again.

taxed at a rate of 35%, with income tax to be paid on all revenue, plus 20%.

Anthonissen has been quoted in the Flemish press comparing this last round of amnesty to a period of sales: "If you come into my office

# Boldly green

Consultancy Futureproofed creates a win-win situation for the business and natural worlds

Andy Furniere

As engineering students, Serge de Gheldere and Steven Van Praet shared the same motto: "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem." Today, as partners in the consultancy Futureproofed, they offer companies profitable solutions to the problems of climate change and environmental degradation. Among their clients are Flemish enterprises like Colruyt, multinationals like Nike and international institutions like the European Parliament.

As we are all becoming increasingly aware of our own ecological footprint, the business world is looking to the advice of specialised firms to help them acquire an

eco-friendly reputation. The experts from Futureproofed, however, help enterprises to see this green revolution as an opportunity instead of a necessary evil.

"Our sustainable strategies are not just to the benefit of the environment, but are profitable for the companies," says Van Praet, who became a partner in Futureproofed in 2007, eight years after De Gheldere founded the agency. "Through sustainable strategies, they save considerable energy costs and limit the risks of future shortages of energy and resources. We also open their eyes to new market possibilities and set them on the way to developing the products of tomorrow."

## Efficiency first

But Futureproofed, based in Leuven, is careful not to brand its advice as "green" or even "eco-friendly" because the terms can carry connotations of being expensive and/or impractical. Instead, they offer "bold solutions" that have a big impact in an efficient way.

The agency also advises clients to emphasise the economic advantages for consumers instead of applying a green label. That is why Nike, for example, does not promote the



Futureproofed founder Serge de Gheldere (right) at the Factor 10 CEO summit

fact that many of its shoes contain recycled materials.

Futureproofed focuses on measures in the areas of mobility, buildings, food and financing and points to the advantages of staff working at home and of financial incentives that encourage employees to use public transport or folding bikes.

Van Praet, however, realises that the company car remains an important form of alternative remuneration – and a status symbol. He hopes more companies follow the example of supermarket chain Colruyt, where employees the money employees save by limiting their petrol consumption

goes towards their next car. He also believes in affordable electric cars, like multinational Tesla is designing. In 2009, Futureproofed worked with professional services network Deloitte to reduce the European Parliament's carbon dioxide emissions. While the original goal was to reach a reduction of 30% by 2020, by last year greenhouse gas emissions had already been halved. Green building practices such as insulation are also crucial for the city of Leuven to become climate neutral by 2030.

Food measures may seem less obvious, but they have an

enormous impact. Futureproofed recommends concentrating on the supply of healthy vegetables and fruit and choosing meat products with a low carbon footprint, such as chicken. For the financing of all these transformations in the business world, the consultants give marketing advice but also work on getting the support of banks and governments.

## Factor X

To send out their message to enterprises and society in general, Futureproofed organises lectures and workshops. At the start of the year, the team set up the second edition of the Factor 10 CEO summit, where 25 Belgian CEOs and decision-makers exchanged contact details, learned new skills and received info on sustainable business thinking.

The target of the project is to increase the sustainability of our way of living by a factor of 10. "Politicians have a crucial role in reaching this aim," stresses Van Praet. As one concrete example, the consultant hopes that governments will stop encouraging the use of company cars.

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



Making sustainability profitable: Steven Van Praet



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# A tangled web

## Flemish co-creator of the world wide web reflects on 20 years of life-changing technology

Senne Starckx

It's impossible to imagine life without the internet these days. But on the 20th anniversary of his brainchild, Robert Cailliau, one of the founders of the web, is rather sceptical about how it has developed

Cern, the giant European laboratory for high-energy physics based near Geneva, has put a prehistoric website online again. Or to be more precise, parts of that website are online, because over the years a lot of the original content has been lost.

The site that Cern is trying to restore is the first web page in the history of the internet. The site, which appeared "online" within Cern's internal network on 30 April, 1993 and can be considered the birth certificate of the worldwide web, brought together research from different groups of scientists working at the physics lab. It was created at the beginning of the 1990s, by British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee and Flemish informatics engineer Robert Cailliau.

Contrary to popular use, the "web" and the "internet" are actually two different things. The internet links computers to other computers around the world and is a way of transporting content. The world wide web is software that lets you use that content, or contribute your own. The web runs on the HTTP protocol, which enables you to use browsers and hyperlinks. The internet is much older than the web and was developed by the US army in late 1960s, under the name Arpanet.

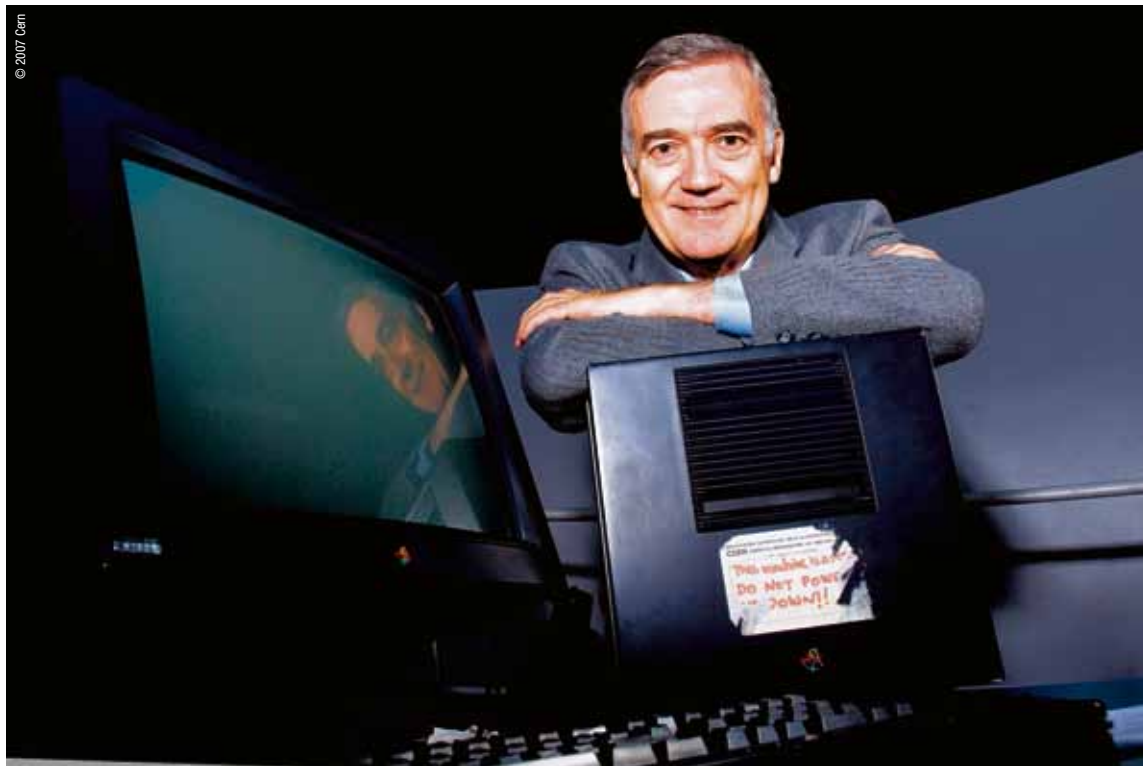
### Data loss

Due to the tremendous pace at which the web and the internet have evolved over the past 20 years, the first website has now become a real museum piece. But unlike traditional museum pieces, like paintings and sculptures, bits and bytes are extremely volatile. It's a daring exploit to bring together all the data that constituted that first webpage. "Putting the original website online again, with the same content as in 1993, is a very difficult task," says Cailliau, who was born and raised in Tongeren. "A lot of the data has been lost because at that time, people weren't aware of the historical meaning of our invention."

Now Cern has sent out a message for help to people outside the research community. "Maybe someone out there still has parts of the original data on his home computer," says Cailliau, who is retired now but still lives near Cern, just across the border in France.

**The worldwide web has evolved to a highly interactive and user-friendly digital environment. Are you a fan of the web 2.0?**

**Robert Cailliau:** "Actually, I'm not. The trend now is that information is spread less by means of text and more by visuals, like pictures and videos.



Limburger Robert Cailliau is the co-creator of the world wide web

I find that a regrettable evolution because videos consume much more time. An online article that is properly structured makes it possible for me to quickly scan it – after which I can decide whether I want to read the entire article. That's not possible with video: You can't work out if it's worth viewing it entirely. And a video that lasts 10 minutes can often be summarised in a few lines, which takes only one minute to read. Furthermore, you can't search inside videos with search engines. These are real shortcomings."

### Do you use social media?

"A pure waste of time! I don't like to be on websites in which the biggest goal is to keep you there – taking away your browsing freedom entirely. I never visit Facebook, and I never twitter (*laughs*). You might call me a bit old-fashioned."

"But much more worrying is the fact that more and more websites oblige you to have and maintain a social media account. Recently, I wanted to post a message on the website of a TV station. I failed, because there was no other way than to post this message to the Facebook wall of the

"Social media is a pure waste of time! I'm not fond of smartphones, either"

TV station. This is a strategy to either keep us silent or to make us take part in the madness of the online crowd."

**But hasn't the web made our electronic devices more user-friendly?**

"I must say that I'm not fond of mobile phones, or smartphones either. Today you have access to thousands of apps, but only a few of these are really useful. Besides that, it annoys me that smartphones hide the way



The first web server: The machine used by Robert Cailliau and Tim Berners-Lee in 1990 to develop and run the first server, multi-media browser and web editor

they function. They *look* very nice, but who knows that the GPS receiver inside your smartphone doesn't rely on a mobile network or wi-fi – but on signals from satellites? Companies like Apple are real masters at hiding this functioning. And this is making us dumber. The only thing that the producers of smartphones want is that we do data roaming all the time. This is one of the most lucrative services in the telecom sector."

**Would you compare the invention of the web with the invention of printing, or even with the discovery of fire?**

"When you realise how information and knowledge was gathered and stored before, say in the 1950s, then the internet and the web are at least part of a big revolution: the so-called information revolution. Before the age of the computer, every piece of information was stored in a physical form, for example in

books in a library. Finding the right information was a slow and often difficult process.

"The information revolution, by which I mean the transition from physically to digitally stored information, is comparable to the transition of hunting and fishing in prehistoric times to early farming. Before that transition, every day in human life was dominated by the search for food. From the beginning of agriculture, people got a grip on their future. Suddenly, people were able to make plans and to look further ahead than the next day. That caused a dramatic shift in the ... attitude towards their lives. I see the same happening now due to the information revolution. People get even more control of their lives and futures because they can now access all the information that's available. "However, the challenge for every one of us is to find the right information and to deal with the overflow of data the world wide web pours out onto us every single day."

*The world's first website, which is in the midst of restoration, can be found at [www.tinyurl.com/cailliau](http://www.tinyurl.com/cailliau)*

## THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Neuroscientist Patrik Verstreken of the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) demonstrated for the first time that badly functioning mitochondria, which generate energy in cells, **can lead to mental disabilities**. Scientists knew that faulty energy production in brain cells could cause Parkinson's disease, but this research shows a clear link with other brain disorders. A better understanding of the mechanisms used by the cell to maintain optimum energy levels could lead to medical applications to prevent or to treat these diseases.

On 31 May, **World No Tobacco Day**, 63 Belgian hospitals will offer smokers free tests to measure the consequences of their nicotine addiction and explain the best ways to quit smoking. Figures from participating hospitals prove that people who take these tests and receive advice are 30% more likely to succeed in quitting.

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

Prince Filip and Princess Mathilde have **inaugurated an expanded Technopolis**, the hands-on science and technology museum in Mechelen. In the new Xplora zone, youngsters can discover whether they might become an inventor or animator, while the Inspirience zone stimulates children to try out their DJ skills or generate energy by dancing. The Flemish government contributed half of the total investment of €7 million.

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

The academic studies for medical specialties at the universities of Leuven, Ghent and Antwerp **do not meet the minimum quality requirements**, according to the definitive report just published by a commission of international experts. The experts determined that the balance between working, studying and personal life for students was often disrupted by working 60- to 80-hour weeks, without adequate guidance. The universities have three years to improve before the next examination.

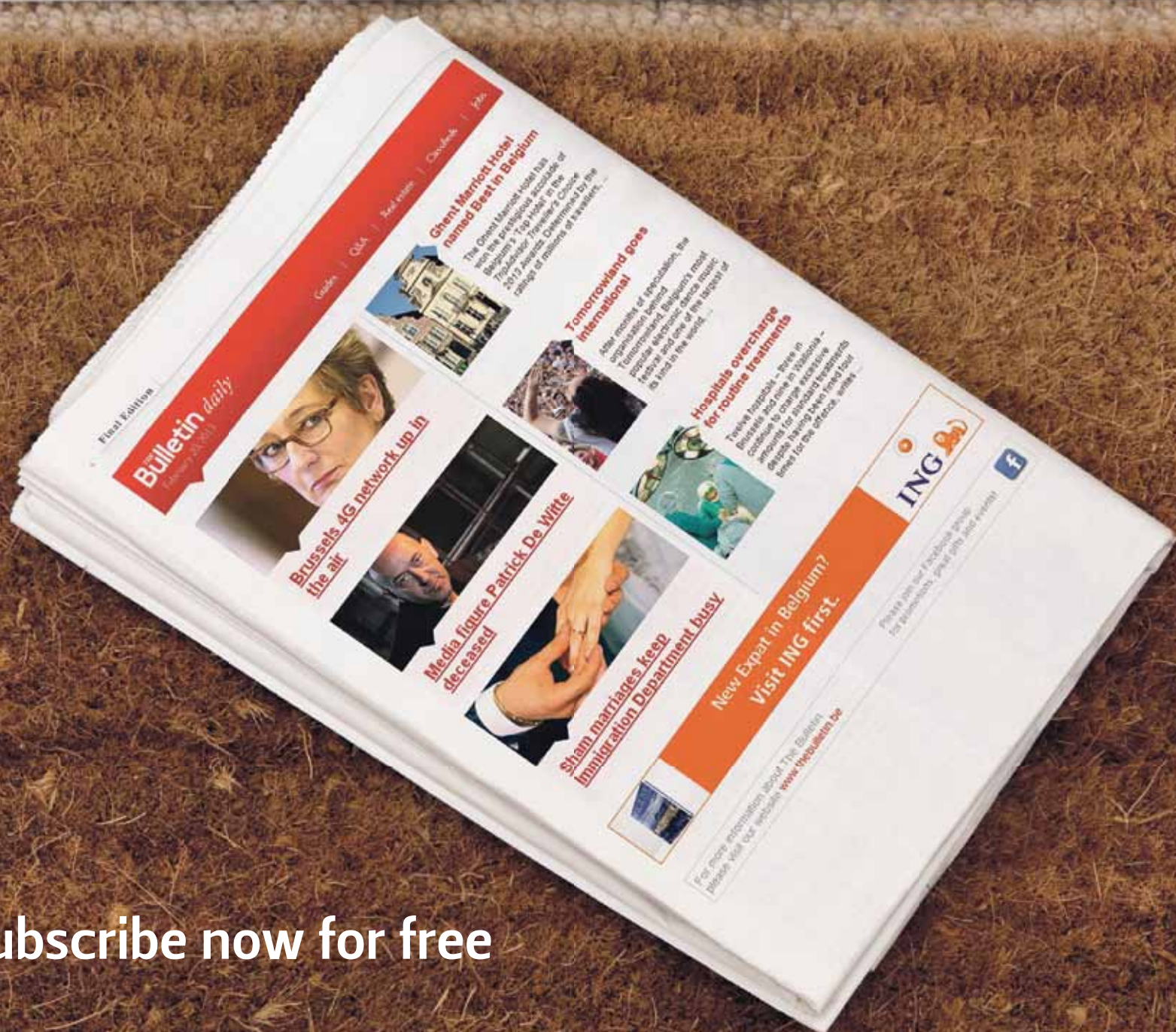
Figures from Flemish education minister Pascal Smet show that there is a serious **shortage of student accomodation** in Leuven and Brussels, while Antwerp and Ghent have a modest surplus. In Brussels, the growing population of expats are competing with students for affordable, short term rentals, while in Leuven, the supply of student rooms and studios is not keeping up with the growing number of students. Erasmus students, who come to Flanders for one semester have trouble finding a room in every city.

Andy Furniere



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# Comic relief

## Brussels comic museum celebrates the much-loved work of Willy Vandersteen

Alan Hope

To mark the centenary of the birth of Willy Vandersteen, one of Flanders' most popular – and certainly most prolific – comic-strip author, the Belgian Comic Strip Center is running an exhibition on the man's life, career and extensive influence.

“Willy Vandersteen is certainly one of the most important strip artists from Flanders or Belgium, and there are various reasons for that,” explains Willem Degraeve of the Belgian Comic Strip Center. “His output is *gigantic*: He created a large number of series and told an enormous number of stories. That's pretty unique for one cartoonist.” Willebrord Jan Frans Maria Vandersteen, always known as Willy, was born in 1913 in the Seefhoek area of Antwerp, then as now a vibrant, popular quarter. His father was an ornament-maker and sculptor and may have inspired Vandersteen's artistic talents; from an early age, Vandersteen the younger was making up stories to entertain his friends and chalking cycle race paths on the pavement in the street where he lived. According to legend, Vandersteen's fantasy often overtook his studies, and one teacher warned him he would never be able to make a living by drawing and making up stories. Fortunately, that didn't stop him from taking evening classes in drawing at the Arts Academy in Antwerp or from entering his father's trade and later moving into the window-dressing business. His first publication, in fact, was a strip called *Kitty Inno*, about a sales assistant in the store where he was employed, published in the staff magazine.

### Famous faces

Real-world publication followed in 1941 when the newspaper *De Dag* was looking for home-grown strips for its children's supplement to replace the American imports banned by the Nazi occupier. Vandersteen came up first with *Tor de holbewoner* (Tor the Caveman), then the cat Pudifar – heavily influenced by US cartoonist George Herriman's banned *Krazy Kat*. Vandersteen became a full-time artist, commuting between home in Antwerp and work in Brussels. And the characters and stories kept coming at a prodigious rate: Piwo the little wooden horse, his first full-length album; Simbat the chubby pirate; Floche and Flache, two wacky resistance fighters; trapper Bill Bing; Peggy the Scotch terrier. Finally, in 1945, came a story of espionage in Cocoslavia starring brother-and-sister adventurers Rikki and Louise. Never heard of them? For various reasons, including that he was rather too similar in appearance to Kuifje (Tintin), Rikki disappeared in the following adventure, and we meet



The Belgian Comic Strip Center looks back at the career of Willy Vandersteen, born 100 years ago



Suske en Wiske is one of Vandersteen's best-known strips around the world

a young orphan called François, nicknamed Suske. At the end of the tale, he returns with Louise, nicknamed Wiske (who appears also to be an orphan, though it's never made explicit), to live with her Aunt Sidonia.

### Suske en Wiske

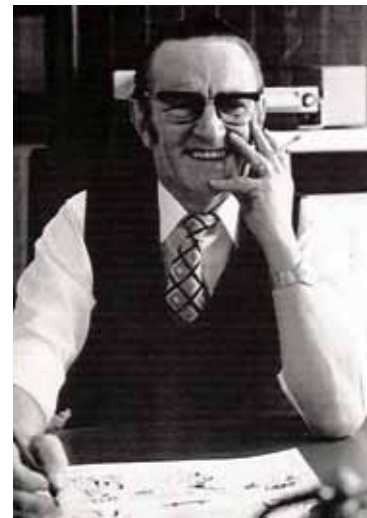
*Suske en Wiske*, which still publishes daily in *De Standaard*, was without a doubt Vandersteen's most successful strip. Vandersteen handed over the art and writing completely to his collaborators in 1974, and there have been more than 300 adventures published in albums, usually following their publication in the newspaper. Complete sales figures for *Suske en Wiske* are impossible to come by, though we do know that a new release sells about 3.5 million a year worldwide, adding up to a total of more than 200 million sold since 1945.

As a result, it's hard to find anyone in Flanders who didn't grow up with *Suske and Wiske* and pass the dog-eared, red-coloured albums on to their children. As well as the albums, the heroes have appeared in a puppet series on TV, animated films, their own weekly magazine for children, a musical, a live-action movie (with Peter Van Den Begin as Aunt Sidonia), a game for Nintendo and, most recently, a 3D animation.

### Team of artists

*Suske en Wiske* albums have been translated into myriad languages (including Esperanto and Latin) and even dialects like Frisian and Limburgish. The characters' names change, too, which you'll see in an installation of covers at the exhibition: Anu ja Antti in Finnish, Bob et Bobette in French, Baga & Basang in Tibet; Spike and Suzy in the UK – but Willy & Wanda in the US – and so on around the world.

But while Sus and Wis are the largest single success, the influence of Vandersteen, who died in 1990, reaches much farther. He created 25 series, for a total of more than 1,000 albums. “*Suske & Wiske* is certainly the number one,” confirms Degraeve. “Then perhaps *De Rode Ridder*, although *Bessy* is also a very well-known series, incredibly popular in Germany, and *Robert en Bertrand* is also very well known.” Vandersteen's contemporary Marc Sleen, creator of *Nero*, likes to boast how he wrote and drew every single album of *Nero* single-



Willy Vandersteen created *Suske en Wiske*, *De Rode Ridder* and many other beloved strips

handedly. Vandersteen could never have achieved his formidable output alone and hired a number of artists and writers, opening Studio Vandersteen in the 1950s.

### New series

The exhibition is a clear and comprehensive look at Vandersteen's career, with all information in Dutch, English and French. Most importantly, while it places *Suske en Wiske* in its correct place, it doesn't ignore the many other characters and series Vandersteen created. That's essential to understanding his particular genius: Most great strip creators found a successful recipe and stuck to it, none more than the exalted Hergé, creator of *Kuifje*. Vandersteen worked for Hergé at one point and learned from him how to clean up his drawing style, but, in the end, Vandersteen's creativity far outstrips Hergé's, while his productivity outstrips everyone's. And there's still new life in the old idea. Last month the first rumours started to circulate of a new *Suske en Wiske* album, *Amoras*, which would take the pair back to that first time they ever met. Only they would no longer be children, and the world they inhabit would be darker and more dangerous.

The new album, it was reported, was to be the first in a series of six, to be released over the coming months, with the full backing of Vandersteen's daughter Leen, who manages his estate. *Amoras* has yet to appear, but the ending of that part of the story has already been revealed in the Flemish press (which appear not to have heard of spoilers). As we are convinced that many readers of *Flanders Today* will want to read the new series, we'll decline taking any surprises away from you.

UNTIL 1 SEPTEMBER

Belgian Comic Strip Center

Zandstraat 20, Brussels

► [www.comicscenter.net](http://www.comicscenter.net)



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# THE Bulletin

Education Guide

## THE GUIDE TO SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES IN BELGIUM

# Education Guide

THE BULLETIN'S GUIDE TO SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES IN BELGIUM



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# One-stop rock'n'roll centre

## No computers allowed in the new Primitive Sounds analogue recording studio

Tom Peeters

Ever wanted to record on the same equipment as, say, the rock'n'roll icons of the famous Sun Studios in Memphis? Or maybe you want to try the first synthesizer, made in the early 1950s; or the legendary Vox organ used by The Animals, The Monkees and The Beatles; or the amp that inspired Neil Young's distorted guitar sound? Then Primitive Sounds Studio, which opened its doors last month, could well be your new favourite place.

In these digital times, the laid-back spot in the fields of Merchtem, just outside Brussels, is a welcome relief for nostalgic souls and music lovers. There are no computers in this renovated farmhouse. Everything is recorded like in the old days, focussing on a real, live and – indeed – primitive sound. Two garage/punk rockers drove all over Europe to find the analogue gear in which everyone else had lost interest.

### Back to the future

"Built from scrap, made to last!" they scream on their Facebook page. Herman Verbelen, a veteran of Flanders' garage rock scene, still organises concerts under the name Living Dead Punks and made some money developing computer software. With his life savings, he established a non-profit structure to build his rock'n'roll dream.

Verbelen hired his good friend Ronny Wynants, a member of the garage rock combo The Way-Outs and a technical jack-of-all-trades. Wynants can also assist bands



as a sound engineer during their recording sessions.

"I don't think this would have been possible 10 years ago," asserts Verbelen. "There was really an anti-analogue sentiment. Everybody threw away their old gear. But now vintage is trendy."

And word is getting out. Sex Pistols

studios without any atmosphere."

In order to attract more visitors, Verbelen en Wynants are also providing more than just a recording studio. They will soon open a rock'n'roll snack bar with burgers and Mexican food. Musicians can already enjoy the bed and breakfast facilities. "The possibilities are

to become *the* Belgian rock'n'roll centre."

### Keeping it reel

But the real treasures are to be found upstairs. Last year, while the studio was still being built in a former hay loft, the legendary American punk rock artist Sonny Vincent dropped by, preparing music for his new super group Spite, which includes Rat Scabies from The Damned, Steve Mackay from The Stooges and the aforementioned Matlock. He declared that the studio helped him capture the raw "in yer face" sound he hungered for.

In the control room, you find an authentic Ampex 351 reel-to-reel tape recorder, just like in the Sun Studios. "This specimen once belonged to an American embassy," explains Verbelen. "Instead of music they recorded phone calls with it – possibly the reason why it's still in perfect conditions."

The mixing console, meanwhile, they picked up with their trailer in Italy. Every piece had to be an original, which made the whole project quite an investment. "Though musicians who have an emotional bond with their gear sometimes would rather give it to us than sell it to anonymous wholesale dealers. They know that in our studio it will get a great second life in the hands of real musicians."

*Feel free to contact Primitive Sounds should you have old gear you'd like to donate or sell*

► [www.primitive-sounds.com](http://www.primitive-sounds.com)

## Sex Pistols bassist Glen Matlock called it "100 times nicer than all those big boring studios" he sees

bassist Glen Matlock is one visitor who has come by to check out the studio, saying that it was "100 times nicer than all those big boring

endless," says Verbelen. "A tattoo shop, a rock'n'roll hairdresser, a record store, a radio station ... we have the space for it. We want

# Record resurrection

## Starman rereleases Freckleface and other gems of Flemish rock history

Tom Peeters

Not a lot of people are aware that the heralded Flemish rock veteran Arno made his recording debut in a band called Freckleface. How could they be? Back in 1972, the album came out on a small, independent label, and the band dissolved soon afterwards. Only 300 copies of the five-track vinyl were sold, and it never got a rerelease.

Until now. Enter Antwerp music fan Felix Huybrechts and his new one-man business Starman Records: Together they are diving for pearls in the vast ocean of Belgian rock music. "I used to be one of those people," he admits, "thinking Arno played in only two bands before he launched his solo career: Tjens Couter and TC Matic. But then by coincidence, I heard a Freckleface song and fell in love with it. I was astonished by the sheer quality and authenticity of their blues, rock and folk mix."

The love affair got physical: Last



week another 500 vinyls hit the market, limited and numbered and with the original sleeve design. On the front is a colourful, Ensor-style painting by the late Ostend artist Elias, and at the back a charming picture of the band in a cafe taken by long-time friend and photographer Danny Willems.

In the liner notes, you can read the legend of the lost album and find out what happened to the musicians. "That's basically how a reissue should be," claims Huybrechts. "You

really have to tell the new generation the story, cause they mostly don't have a clue. This was one of my main goals when I started the label last year."

Another, he continues, "was to really dig deep and find the gems we have forgotten. I always knew there was more to early Belgian rock heritage than The Pebbles and Ferre Grignard."

### From the vaults

After thorough research, Huybrechts came up with the first *Belgian Vaults* album, a compilation of 16 forgotten songs from the 1960s. He has also released *Shoot Me Baby!*, a compilation of tracks from the Brussels-based psychedelic blues rock band The Shakes, with the 17-year old guitar prodigy Dany Lademacher, who eventually would become the sidekick of Dutch rock star Herman Brood.

This week sees the release of *Best of*

*Belgian Garagemania* and, at the end of the year, Huybrechts even wants to release his first original recording. "People told me I was crazy to launch a record label in these crisis years," he says. But with a background in music journalism and games marketing, he holds to a clear philosophy. "You basically need two things: good music and a strong story."

Starman Records also sells CDs because not doing so, says Huybrechts, "would be far too dangerous. Young people often don't even have a record player," nor do they want to pay €20 or €25 for vinyl ahead of a lower-priced CD. "But they do like all the anecdotes about the past, and they embrace the vintage trend."

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

## WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

**British actress Patricia Routledge**, best known for her unforgettable role as Hyacinth Bucket in the TV series *Keeping Up Appearances*, will return to Flanders in November and December with her one-woman show *Admission: One Shilling*. The 84-year-old actress performed the show to a sell-out audience in Aalst last year and will do three shows this year, in Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp. Ticket are available now for the Ghent and Antwerp shows and from 7 June for Bruges.

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

The Royal Belgian Film Archive has released the three CD set and accompanying booklet *Art & Cinema: The Belgian Art Documentary*. In the 1950s and '60s, prominent filmmakers such as André Cauvin, Henri Storck and Charles Dekeukeleire made short and mid-length documentaries about European artists, from the Flemish primitives to their own contemporaries. Films follow the lives and work particularly of those who were influenced by or who had an influence on members of the CoBrA movement, including Picasso, Paul Delvaux and the writer Herman Teirlinck. Cinematek is also programming art documentaries until the end of June.

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

The **Ghent Jazz Festival**, which takes place from 12-20 July, has announced its programme, which includes Bryan Ferry, John Zorn, Diana Krall, Elvis Costello and Jamie Cullum. Tickets to the festival are on sale now online or at selected Fnac stores.

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

Award-winning Bollywood director **Rajkumar Hirani** will shoot his next film in Bruges. It's the first time that a Bollywood film is being directed in Flanders. The romance focuses on a young woman studying in Bruges, and shooting takes place next month. Hirani's 2009 film *3 Idiots* was one of the most lucrative Indian films ever made. "It's good news when you consider that millions of people will see this film," said Bruges mayor Renaat Landuyt. "This promotion is an enormous gift."

Flemish "shock-o-latier" Dominique Persoone, owner of The Chocolate Line shops in Bruges and Antwerp, is taking part in the world's **first-ever CO2-free chocolate transport**. The Grenada Chocolate Company, a cocoa grower and chocolate producer on the island country off the coast of Venezuela, will transport the chocolate by sailboat to Amsterdam, from where it will travel by bicycle to Persoone's shops in Flanders. The entire trip will take about four months.

► [www.chocoladeboot.nl](http://www.chocoladeboot.nl)



*Listening to the stories of art*

# ArtConnoisseurs

Georgio Valentino

Everyone knows that Brussels' upscale Zavel district is the place to go for art and antiques. The neighbourhood is all labyrinthine shops brimming with furniture and curios from yesteryear and independent galleries specialised in contemporary, "ethnic" and even erotic art. The Zavel also hosts an open-air antiques market every weekend. If that's not enough for you, there's a perfect storm of art on the horizon. To wit, three major events are taking place in tandem in and around the Zavel. The Brussels Ancient Art Fair (BAAF), now in its 11th edition, is a known quantity in the capital. Indeed, it is the main event for dealers and collectors of antiquarian artefacts. BAAF's baby sister fair, meanwhile, is making its debut this year. Asian Art in Brussels (AAB) specialises in pieces from

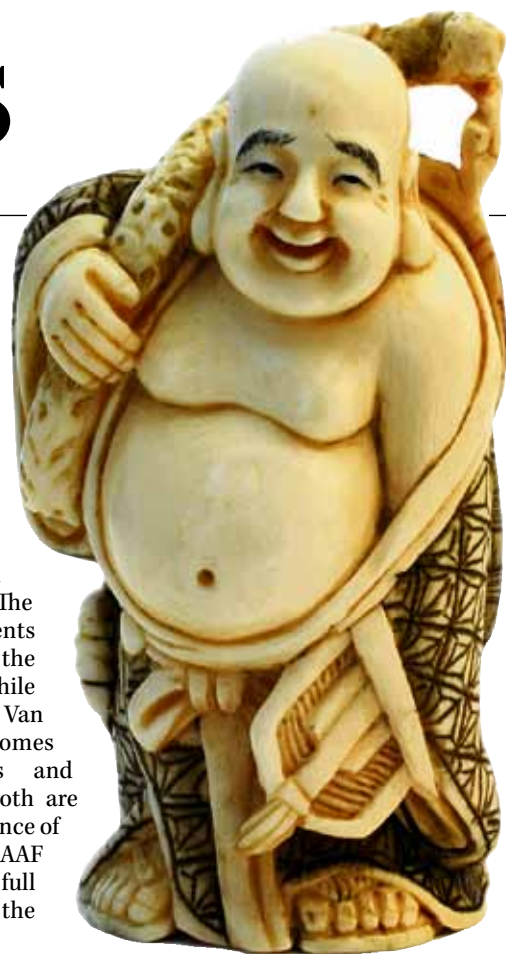
Japan, China, India and Southeast-Asia.

Finally, for those of us who just like to watch, the lecture series ArtConnoisseurs is being held on the periphery. It features 25 conferences led by experts in several fields, who have come from Belgium and beyond to share their knowledge and spark dialogue. Guests come from diverse professional backgrounds; there are museum curators, private collectors and dealers as well as archaeologists, scientists and historians. By bringing together this motley crew, ArtConnoisseurs and its partners at BAAF and AAB hope to bridge the chasm between culture and science, beauty and knowledge. The art world is not as insular as it seems. Yes, you'll learn about craftwork, symbolism and history, but you'll also discover how archaeology, law and social

media affect the art market. Guido Creemers, chief curator of Tongeren's Gallo-Roman Museum, reports on the recent discovery of Imperial Roman treasures under Belgian soil. French academics Cyril Thiaudière and Corinne Besson show off rare and valuable jewellery from the Roman Middle East. It's interesting stuff, for sure, but nothing entirely unexpected.

But then we're transported from the museum to the laboratory and the library. Swiss physicist Irka Hajdas introduces the science of radio-carbon dating, a technique that has long been crucial to the antiquities trade and yet remains poorly understood – if understood at all – outside the scientific community. French Egyptologist Vincent Euverte shows how the internet can be the antiquarian's best friend or worst enemy. Belgian lawyer Alexandre

Pintiaux surveys national art law to identify incentives and obstacles to preservation. These are just a handful of ArtConnoisseurs' offerings, which are shared between two locations. The Musical Instruments Museum hosts the Asian art series, while the nearby Club Van Lotharingen welcomes the archaeologists and other academics. Both are within walking distance of the Zavel, where BAAF and AAB will be in full swing throughout the weekend.



6-8 June

Musical Instruments Museum & Club Van Lotharingen, Brussels

► [www.artconnoisseurs.eu](http://www.artconnoisseurs.eu)

## FESTIVAL

### Matongé-Europe Festival

Brussels is a kaleidoscope of cultures, but sometimes it takes a bit of encouragement to get folks to venture beyond their familiar neighbourhood circles. The Eurocrats of the European Quarter and the African immigrants of the Matongé, for example, are close neighbours who hardly interact. This festival is a cross-district shindig designed to bring these two square kilometres of



Brussels closer together. Of course, you don't have to be a resident of either neighbourhood to partake in the festivities, which kick off with a parade through the two areas, dubbed "Frites Sauce Manioc". Over the following days there are open-air concerts, a freestyle mini football tournament, a fusion edition of Bal Moderne, loads of authentic African street food and a walking tour of both neighbourhoods. **Georgio Valentino**

5-9 June

Matongé and European Quarter, Brussels

► [www.festival-matongeeurope.be](http://www.festival-matongeeurope.be)

## MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

### Leuven

**Reuze Leuven:** First edition of the folklore festival featuring giants that reflects the city's medieval history

**JUN 1 at Grote Markt**

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

### Olen (Antwerp province)

**20ste weekend der Belgische bieren (20th Weekend of Belgian Beers):** Festival featuring more than 100 beers, including special cask ales, craft brews and old ales

**JUN 1-2 at De Vrede, Lichtaartseweg 131**

► [www.tinyurl.com/olen-beer-fest](http://www.tinyurl.com/olen-beer-fest)

## FILM

### Millenium Int'l Documentary Film Festival

The popularity of the recent Opendoek festival of films focused on social issues proves that audiences have a real interest in seeing movies from Africa, the Middle East and South America that might not get a cinema release in Belgium. That festival takes place across Flanders, so the annual Millenium International Documentary Film Festival is conveniently located in Brussels. The goal of the festival is to open up minds and dialogue on themes related to the Millennium Development Goals,



eight global issues that all 193 members of the United Nations pledged to significantly improve by 2015, including extreme hunger, universal primary education and environmental sustainability.

Celebrating its fifth anniversary, the festival hosts workshops and debates as well as cinema. Good choices in the vast programme are *A World Not Ours*, an unexpectedly nostalgic look at a childhood spent in a Palestinian refugee camp (*pictured*), and *Bay of All Saints*, which follows six years in the life of a Brazilian shanty town on stilts after the spectacular failure of a slum-eradication grant. **Lisa Bradshaw**

31 May to 9 June

Across Brussels

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

## MORE FILM THIS WEEK

### Brussels

**OUT LOUD!:** Free film screenings, concerts and parties on the rooftop terrace of Beursschouwburg

**JUN 5-29 at Beursschouwburg, A Ortsstraat 20**

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

**Chinese Dreams:** Free screenings of a series of documentaries by young Chinese filmmakers (with English subtitles)

**JUN 3, 10 & 17 19.00 at Think Young, Luxemburgplein 6**

► [www.thinkyoung.eu/chinesedreams2013](http://www.thinkyoung.eu/chinesedreams2013)

### Hasselt

**Filmfestival Delicatessen:** Screening of six Flemish shorts

**MAY 29 20.15 at Zebracinema, Zuivelmarkt 33**

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



## TALK

GET TICKETS NOW

### TEDxGhent

If you're one of those who thinks that the TED (Technology Entertainment Design) talks are sometimes the only thing keeping the internet sane, make a note in your diary for 22 June, when the franchise comes to Ghent for a day of speakers in both Dutch and English, bringing, as the TED slogan has it, "ideas worth spreading". They include Lydia Kavina, an expert in the theremin (the only instrument you can play without touching it); migration expert Khalid Koser on people-smugglers; and psychiatrist and writer Iain McGilchrist (*pictured*) on the brain's effect on culture. Closer to home, the conference also features fashion designer Bruno Pieters on his campaign for fair prices; Godfried-Willem Raes, creator of the robot orchestra of the Logos Foundation; and professor and women's rights campaigner Marleen Temmerman, on the right to birth control. Tickets are still available, but they're going fast. **Alan Hope**



22 June, 10.00-18.00 | de Bijloke, Ghent

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

## TALKS THIS WEEK

### Bruges

**TEDxUHowest 2013 - Playing the World for Good:** Talks on a wide range of subjects, including work and play, education and media, health and the measured/quantified self and economy and ecology (in Dutch and English)

**JUN 1 9.30 at Bruges Halles, Markt 7**

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

### Brussels

**Daniel Mendelsohn - A Stage With a View:** The American author, essayist and critic talks to Flemish journalist Annelies Beck about desire – in life, literature and the opera (in English); with musical interludes by pianist Noémie Biro

**JUN 2 11.00 at De Munt, Muntplein 6**

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

### Ghent

**Pensées Noires:** Tribute to well- and lesser-known black writers, philosophers, activists and media figures who have contributed to emancipation in America, Europe and Africa. Speakers include Moroccan-born columnist Jamila Amadou, Ivorian actress Hanny Tchellay and Antwerpen Kids founder Isabelle Mbuyi (in Dutch)

**MAY 30 20.00 at De Centrale, Kraankindersstraat 2**

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

## VISUAL ARTS

### House of European History in Exile

"Alas, poor Europe! I knew him." Thomas Bellinck may or may not have thought of Hamlet when he conceived the *House of European History in Exile*, but the installation is just as bleak and burdened with angst. The Flemish theatre director (*pictured*) has converted a derelict building into a kind of historical museum of the early 21st century. Tomorrow's yesterday, which is possibly today's tomorrow, doesn't end well. The European Union, it seems, fell apart in 2018 and its constituent states resumed their old habits, namely nationalism and war. The *House* examines our brief period of (at least apparent) harmony and tries to answer the question: "What went wrong?"

The "museum" is presented in the context of Tok Toc Knock, an itinerant contemporary arts festival curated by KVS and hosted in each edition by a different Brussels neighbourhood. This third instalment of Tok Toc Knock unfolds across Brussels' European Quarter, hence the history lesson. **GV**



Until 14 June | Kloktorenstraat 22, Brussels | ► [www.toktocknock.com](http://www.toktocknock.com)

## MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

### Antwerp

**Junya Ishigami – How small? How vast? How architecture grows:** Works by the Japanese architect who is inspired by nature, resulting in buildings that appeal through their spatiality and environmental richness

**Until JUN 16 at deSingel, Desguinlei 5**

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

### Brussels

**Paper-Paper:** Collection of paper bindings realised by bookbinders working in Belgium, showing that paper is less fragile and humdrum than it appears

**Until JUN 9 at Bibliotheca Wittockiana, Bemelstraat 23**

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

### Turnhout

**Weg van Vlaanderen (Away from Flanders):** Depictions of contemporary Flemish landscapes, which depict the dramatic disappearance of nature in the region

**Until AUG 25 at de Warande Turnhout, Warandestraat 42**

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

## DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

### International speed dating

31 May, 20.30  
The Flat, Brussels

If you haven't found the right person to join you for a romantic picnic at the Elsene ponds or a walk along Flanders' blustery coast, you might find him or her this Friday. Brussels Speed Dating hosts get-togethers specifically for expats in Brussels, with casual speed dating sessions in English (or French) in a cool venue in the city.

The first one of the season is at The Flat, a bar/club where you can sip your drink in the living room, the bedroom, the dining room or even the bathroom.

The event starts at 20.30 and gathers men and women between 28 and 40 years old. (There's a session for 35- to 47-year-olds the week after, on 7 June). You need to register via the website to get in, which allows the organisers to make the evening run smoothly.

To kick off the night and loosen your lips, everybody gets a drink. Once the edge is taken off, it's time for a five-minute chat with every participant. Five minutes might seem short, but you'll notice soon enough if you've got something in common. If not, you'll be grateful time's up after 300 seconds.

The event was set up to bring expats together, as the organisers know they can be lonely in a big city without family or friends. You might not find your better half during the speed date, but you often wind up with nice new friends – of both sexes.

And what more do you need to dance the night away? The Flat has a great drinks menu featuring cocktail, bubbly and beers.

And if you can't make it on 31 May (or would like to give

it a second go), there's another speed dating session for the same age group 12 June at Loft. Participation costs €25.

► [www.brussels-speeddating.be](http://www.brussels-speeddating.be)





BITE

Robyn Boyle

Le Piranha ★★★☆

“We make our food like one should make love: slowly, but well,” the menu clearly states. All the online reviews warned me as well, but I am not deterred. A long, leisurely meal is exactly what my friend and I are after on this drizzly Friday evening. We enter the dimly lit and impossibly cosy restaurant at 21.30 and don’t get up to leave again until well after 1.00. Within that time, we get to know the owner and his son, and even have a chat with some of the older, yet considerably livelier, party next to us. Richard Pluta, owner and grill master, has been running Le Piranha for 37 years. I’m not sure whether it’s his French or Polish roots that give the place its exceedingly warm and convivial atmosphere, but we’re more than happy to be settled in our seats for a few hours. Richard’s smiley son Arnold takes our orders: two glasses of house red, a starter of grilled gambas to share, one mixed grill and one beef brochette. Our direct view of the open-fire grill, the jewel and centrepiece of the dining room, allows us to watch Richard in action. Before our gambas go on the grill, however, he takes the time to share a pint with the raucous table and a



short dance with the seasoned birthday girl. Fortunately there’s a basket of bread and a bowl of herb butter to tide us over. The gambas finally arrive and, while impressive in size, we are disappointed to see only four of them, or two each. Knowing each one costs more than €5, we take our time peeling and eating them, making sure to get every last bit. The seasoning is fantastic, and the meat sweet and smoky, albeit a little overdone. They come with a juicy garlic-topped grilled tomato. About an hour later (but who’s keeping track?) our mains arrive hot off the grill. My friend’s plate is a mix of grilled lamb, pork chop and steak. The lamb and steak are expertly cooked *saignant*, or still red inside, and simply seasoned with rock salt and black pepper. The real flavour is in the meat itself, obviously fresh and of the highest quality. The beef comes from Belgium, while the lamb is flown in fresh from New Zealand, Arnold tells us. At first I gasp at the size of my beef brochette, but in the end I finish every bit. The meat is so tender and has that unmistakable grilled flavour. It comes

with three baked potatoes stuffed with more of the delectable herb butter. We’re too busy stuffing ourselves to notice the side salad, but it doesn’t look particularly exciting anyway – just some plain lettuce with diced tomatoes. Finally, we skip dessert at this late hour in favour of coffee and cognac. The bill comes to about €37 each. Upon leaving with full bellies, we take with us an unshakable holiday feeling and a sincere hope that Arnold will want to follow in his father’s footsteps one day.

www.lepiranha.be

- Keizer Karelstraat 173, Ghent; 09.225.17.45
- Wed-Sun 19.00-3.00
- Mains: €13-€26
- Slow food at its best, with generous cuts of meat grilled by the owner before your eyes

TALKING SPORTS

Leo Cendrowicz

My, what a busy month

The end of May, with summer in sight and soaring spirits, is the busiest time of the year for most sports. First tennis, where, just as the WTA Ladies Open finishes in Brussels (congratulations Jie Zheng), the Paris Open begins in Roland Garros. Kortrijk’s veteran battler Xavier Malisse crashed out in the first round at the weekend, but there is still a chance that Kirsten Flipkens and Yanina Wickmayer can redeem themselves – and Flemish tennis – with good runs. The Giro d’Italia wrapped up this weekend, and the top Belgian in the three-week tour was Francis De Greef, from Rumst, who came in 21st. The Giro clashed with the five-day Tour of Belgium, won on Sunday by Germany’s Tony Martin for the second successive year. Philippe Gilbert, winner in 2011, came third overall, while Kristof Vandewalle was seventh

and Jurgen Roelandts eighth. None of these results bodes well for the Tour de France next month. And so to football, where Anderlecht just won their 32nd league title. But their triumph is less memorable than runner-up Zulte Waregem’s near catch-up falling just two points short. That should have been cause for celebration for the West Flanders minnows, but they have become embroiled in a bizarre scheme to move the club some 80 kilometres to Antwerp. With Beerschot relegated to the Second Division, alongside Royal Antwerp, some city bigwigs are apparently so desperate for Antwerp to have a top-flight club, they are willing to buy in another team. Or so that was the conclusion drawn from talks between Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever and Zulte CEO Patrick Decuyper. In the face of fan fury all round, both denied

the plans. Attention now moves to the international scene. The Red Devils are set to play the United States in a friendly game in Brussels next Friday for the World Cup 2014 qualifiers. Finally, mention must go to the more than 37,000 who took part in the 20km of Brussels last Sunday, including Crown Prince Philippe. It is phenomenal that a record number, despite the chilly, cloudy weather, pounded the streets of the capital. The first Belgian finish, in fifth, was Abdelhadi El Hachima of Schepdaal, while first place among women went to Catherine Lallemand of Brussels – for the fourth time in a row. Although Kenyans and Burundians thrashed the locals to take the top four spots, there is hope that just getting involved might spur some sporting prowess.



A record number took to the streets of Brussels last Sunday for the annual 20km

The last word...

Monsieur Piet

“In France I’m Mister Nobody. But not for long.” The hugely popular TV chef Piet Huysentruyt (SOS Piet) has opened a new restaurant in the south of France

Feathered fiends

“They drop their waste all over the place ... and it contains ammonia, which is bad for buildings and monuments. On top of that, they make a horrible screeching noise.” The aggressive jackdaw is chasing the humble pigeon out of our cities, says bird conservancy Vogelbescherming Vlaanderen

In the running

“He’s got a marathon in him. If you can do less than two hours in your 50s, then you’ve got the condition for it. He just has to find the time.” An unnamed member of the entourage of Prince Filip, who ran the Brussels 20km on Sunday

Foreign correspondents

“People will be invited into the camper to tell their stories. We’re not looking for tourist anecdotes but for interesting people and their stories.” The crew of the upcoming TV series *Manneken Pis* is looking for tourists on the streets of downtown Brussels

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Do you live in Flanders and work in Brussels? Join the club. Nearly 250,000 pour into the capital each morning to go to work, then pour out again in the evening – and we’ve got the traffic to prove it. Now the Flemish Community Commission is hosting a *woontour*, or living tour, to introduce Brussels’ neighbourhoods to those who might consider making the move to the big city

Science

Windmills are helping to improve the energy situation in Flanders, and now something just as innovative is being tested off the coast of Ostend: Wave Pioneer generates electricity using the swell of ocean waves. We talk to the co-operative FlanSea about this new direction in capturing and using energy

Living

If you haven’t used it yet, you’ve certainly heard about it. Launched as a simple couch-surfing option, AirBNB has become a full-fledged holiday rental website. With both professional and casual rentals, it’s hugely popular for its home-swapping and other inexpensive options. We talk to a few people opening up their home to holiday-makers in Flanders