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takes its
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Brussels for beginners

The Flemish Community Commission offers tours of Brussels' neighbourhoods to convince more Flemings to move to the capital

Daan Bauwens

It was a disturbing bit of reality that emerged from a report last year by US traffic information platform Inrix: After Milan, Brussels and Antwerp have the worst traffic congestion in the western world. To try to ease the burden of commuting, the Flemish Community Commission is hosting tours of Brussels' residential areas for commuters who live in Flanders – hoping to convince them to live where they work.

Brussels and Flanders hold quite a lot of records, but there is one they would rather do without: traffic jams. Because of their lack of spatial planning, their small size and tonnes of commuters and foreigners just passing through, the regions are at the top of the European charts when it comes to losing precious time in traffic.

A month ago, the OECD declared that Belgium's unusually long commuting times – both by car and train – result in increased environmental costs, low labour mobility and lost business productivity. Overall, the costs amounts to €3.85 billion annually or 1 to 2% of the nation's GDP.

With the number of commuters rising steadily – today more than 240,000 commute daily by train or car from Flanders to Brussels – the problem seems set to get worse.

There is one interesting solution, though. What if more Flemings chose to come and live in the capital?

To promote this idea, the Flemish Community Commission has been hosting *woontours*, or "living tours", for more than 15 years. On six tours spread over 18 Sundays throughout the year, buses drive through Brussels' 19 communes. On the tour bus, Flemings – and expats who live in Flanders – can dream away about what their life would be like if they came to live in Brussels.

Brussels inside out

"We want to broaden people's view of Brussels," says Els Scholiers, who organises the tours. "At the beginning of the project, our goal was to convince people to come and live here because living in Brussels sounded like an adventure to most Flemings. That has changed over the years. Now most people who join the tours have already decided to move into the city. And some of them already live in Brussels. With these tours, they can discover new places they have never seen before."

We are on bus tour number two, the most picturesque on the list. It leaves Central Station at 9.30 and makes its way through Elsene, Etterbeek, Oudergem, Sint-Pieters-Woluwe, Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe and Watermael-Bosvoorde, sometimes driving into some of the lush residential neighbourhoods inside the Sonian Forest.

"Do remember this is the most expensive and luxurious part

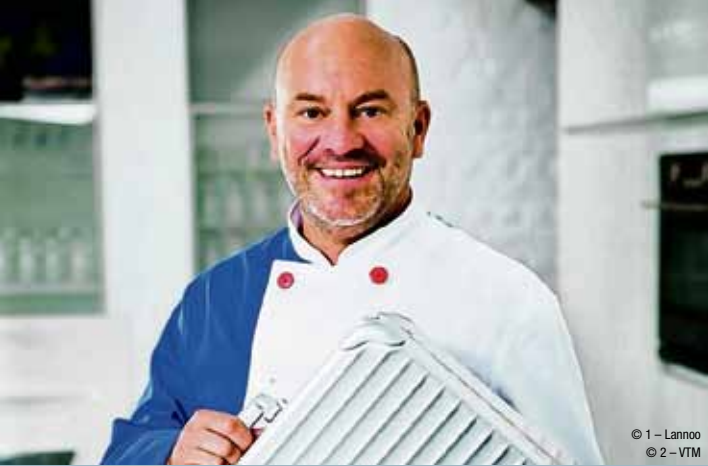


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FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

Piet Huysentruyt



© 1 – Lannoo
© 2 – VTM

As top chef Peter Goossens announced he was parting with Njam!, the digital food channel he helped launch, to concentrate on his three-Michelin-star restaurant Hof van Cleve, another of Flanders’ gastronomic superstars was going in the opposite direction. Last week, on the day when the salivating press were on their way to check out his new restaurant in France, TV chef Piet Huysentruyt announced he was leaving VTM and moving to VIER. Huysentruyt, 50, was born in Kortrijk and studied at the Ter Duinen hotel school in Koksijde. Alumni of the school include not only Goossens but the three-star Flemish chef Geert Van Hecke of De Karmeliet in Bruges and TV celeb chef Jeroen Meus. Huysentruyt’s first restaurant was in Wortegem-Petegem just over the border in East Flanders, where he eventually earned a Michelin star. He presented 1,000 episodes of the cookery show *Lekker Thuis*, followed by *De perfecte keuken* and *SOS Piet*, in which he would drop in on an ordinary person (usually a housewife) to help them out with a tricky culinary problem. His TV success as a man of the people – despite his culinary reputation, his TV recipes end to

be simple, even slightly dull, and delivered in a thick West-Flanders accent – helped him become the best-selling author in Flanders with a series of cookbooks, until the younger and more trendy Jeroen Meus toppled him from the throne. The restaurant in Les Vans in France, Le lutin gourmand, was opened in 2003 and closed again in 2006 after it became, he complained, a place of pilgrimage for holidaying Flemings. He’s now opened it again under another name – Likoké – under the day-to-day supervision from next year of a new Flemish chef, the 26-year-old Thijs Clinckemaillie. Meanwhile Huysentruyt has quit VTM – where former Lady Chef Sofie Dumont was poached from VIER’s predecessor VT4 to become the rising star – to move to VIER, with a new formula thought to be based on the best-seller by Dr. Kris Verburgh *De voedselzandloper* (The Food Hourglass; see Flanders Today, 5 September 2012). “After two decades of a wonderful marriage, we’re parting as good friends,” said VTM in a statement. “Piet has made it known he’s ready to take on a new challenge, and the station is happy to give him that opportunity.”

News in brief

Flemish interior minister Geert Bourgeois last week **withdrew subsidies from two mosques** – in Borgerhout, Antwerp province, and in Waregem, West Flanders – suspected of radical Islamist preaching. The De Koepel in Borgerhout also risks being the first mosque in Flanders ever to have its licence withdrawn. Only 28 of the more than 200 mosques in Flanders are officially recognised and eligible for subsidy, on condition they do not preach hate or violence.

The port of Zeebrugge last week welcomed the **largest cruise ship ever to dock at a Flemish port**. The Independence of the Seas is 339 metres long and 15 storeys high, with room for 5,700 passengers and crew. The facilities include an ice-rink, casino, 10 bars and a climbing wall.

A **family of four beavers** has set up house on an island between two branches of the Dijle near the Grote Begijnhof in Leuven, becoming an attraction for locals and tourists alike. Landschap vzw organises tours for visitors. In April, shoppers in the city’s Mechelsestraat were surprised to discover a beaver in a shop doorway.

Brussels is the first Belgian city to call for **tenders for electric taxis**. Fifty will be purchased by next spring, according to mobility minister Brigitte Grouwels. The capital also plans to run only hybrid buses by 2015; all trams and metros already run on green power.

Howard Gutman, the departing US ambassador to Belgium, has strenuously **denied allegations that he visited prostitutes** in Warendepark near his home in Brussels. The allegation was reported in the press after a former

State Department official said an investigation into the matter had been suppressed. Gutman issued a statement in which he said he was “angered and saddened by the baseless allegations ... and to watch the four years I have proudly served in Belgium smeared is devastating. At no point have I ever engaged in any improper activity.”

The organisation representing booksellers in Flanders has called for the introduction of a **minimum price for books** to protect the future of independent bookstores. In recent weeks, five independent bookshops have closed their doors, in part because of competition from other retail outlets that are able to offer best-sellers at cut prices.

Telenet has announced a new method for cable subscribers to **watch digital TV without the need of a digibox**. The CI+ card can be inserted into most modern televisions to allow access to digital TV channels. However, unlike the decoder, the CI+ card does not allow programmes to be ordered on demand, recorded or paused. The CI+ module will be on sale for €69 from 24 June.

The Antwerp World Diamond Center has denied rumours that the actual haul in the Brussels Airport diamond robbery last February could be **10 times higher than the official figure of €37 million**. According to reports based on information from the Moroccan security services, the final tally could be as high as €300 million but was minimised by the diamond sector for commercial reasons. “The only official figure is €37 million,” AWDC spokeswoman Caroline De Wolf said.

Only **3.7% of the unemployed in**

Brussels is Dutch-speaking – about 4,000 from a jobless total of 104,000, according to figures from the region’s employment ministry, based on the language chosen when registering as unemployed. Native Dutch speakers are estimated to be between 5 and 7% of the Brussels population.

Flemish golf enthusiast Alexander Hautekiet and Kasper De Wulf are attempting to **break the world record for golf** by playing nine courses in as many countries in the space of 24 hours. The tour begins at 2.30 on 24 June in Tarvisio, Italy, and moves through seven other countries before ending in West Flanders sometime after midnight. The record attempt, in aid of the hospital charity Ziekenhuisclowns, can be followed live in the Damme Golf & Country Club.

The Dutch Language Union is working on a **new edition of the Woordenlijst Nederlandse Taal**, popularly known as the Groene Boekje (Green Book). The book is an overview of the official spelling of Dutch words. The new addition will add some words and include more words used in Suriname and the Caribbean. The book is expected to be published in 2015. The last edition appeared in 2005.

Ikea will **stop selling meat from castrated pigs** in shops and restaurants in Belgium starting this August, following talks with animal rights organisation Gaia. The announcement is the latest success for Gaia in a campaign against the castration of piglets without anaesthetic, following similar agreements from Delhaize, Carrefour, Makro and Renmans. Ikea will also stop dealing with suppliers that practice the amputation of tails or provide insufficient space for the animals.

FLANDERS TODAY

Flanders Today, a free weekly English-language newspaper, is an initiative of the Flemish Region and is financially supported by the Flemish authorities.



The logo and the name Flanders Today belong to the Flemish Region (Benelux Beeldmerk nr 815.088). The editorial team of Flanders Today has full editorial autonomy regarding the content of the newspaper and is responsible for all content, as stipulated in the agreement between Corelio Publishing and the Flemish authorities.

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Last respects

A funeral is a place, you might think, to show respect, consideration and deference to the deceased and to their loved ones. Except when it comes to collectors of In Memoriam cards, who are annoying funeral directors up and down Flanders. In Memoriam cards, or *bidprentjes*, are a tradition in the Catholic church. The family of the deceased typically has cards printed with an image and text, and they are handed out to those attending the funeral and sent to friends and relatives who may not be able to be present. The cards have long attracted the attention, however, of collectors, regardless of who is being commemorated. The West Flemish parish priest Leopold Slosse (1842-1920) famously built up a collection of around one million, including cards and



death announcements. His interest was principally genealogical, as the cards often form a reliable record of a family’s history. His collection was bought by the city of Kortrijk in 1920 and is now kept in the city archive. Others are simply collectors, and, according to a report last week in *De Standaard*, fans of the cards are turning up at the funerals of strangers and often using tactics such as carrying two jackets so as

to join the queue for cards twice, or even rummaging through the hearse to take away leftovers, which can later be traded with other collectors. “Time and again, we come across a dozen or so card-hunters everywhere we organise funerals,” funeral director Gilbert Pues told the paper, describing them as “a plague”. The funerals of famous people, the victims of disasters or those who’ve made the headlines for one reason or another are the favourites of the collectors, he explained. Enthusiasts also study death notices and write to grieving relatives asking for a card to be sent by post. “Our job is to see the funeral goes as peacefully as possible,” undertaker Thierry Lelubre said. “Challenging their behaviour or putting them out of the church would not be appropriate.”

Brussels for beginners

Tours show Flemings Brussels' oft-forgotten neighbourhoods

► continued from page 1

of Brussels. Paradoxically, it is also the capital's most populated area." The voice coming through the speakers is Stefan Van Camp's (according to bus tour aficionados the most knowledgeable guide). Van Camp belongs to Bruksel binnenstebuiten (Brussels Inside Out), the non-profit Flemish guide association accompanying the six different tours.

Flemings in the city

It is impossible to talk to travel companions on the bus. The guide keeps flooding us with information, not just about work and life in Brussels, but also about the history of every street corner, the details of the lives of famous writers and artists who lived in these neighbourhoods. For example: One of Etterbeek's most flourishing shopping streets was killed off by estate agent speculation after the start of the construction of the European institutions. The only reason there is a forest in the centre of Brussels is because it was the hunting ground for the Dukes of Brabant in medieval times. Léon de Béthune, the personification of evil in the legendary 1992 Flemish movie *Daens*, has a statue in front of the stunning St Boniface church and so couldn't have been that bad. The stories bring the streets and districts to life. Next on the tour is the first visit with a local. Werner Van Mieghem

is a Fleming who has been living in Brussels for almost 20 years, and he welcomes the crowd in his peaceful garden in the centre of Oudergem. "There is nothing unsafe about living in Brussels," he says in answer to one of the visitors' questions. "I have only been burgled once, and that's because we used to leave the front door open." From the quietness of Werner's house, it is only five minutes to the nearest metro station, which takes him to the centre of the capital in 15 minutes. "Living in Brussels is just wonderful – interesting and exciting," he concludes. "My wife and I have never regretted moving here." Next stop is the dream house of the van Waeg family in Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe, a protected old white villa with stables

People know each other and talk to each other on the street." His older brother Steven continues: "The Woluwe river runs a few hundred metres from here. It's a green and quiet place, ideal for relaxing and wandering. Nature is on our doorstep, but in 20 minutes we're in the centre."

"Now or never"

The further we go, the more this tour becomes a jaw-dropping experience. *Vogelzang* (Birdsong) is a collection of beautiful English-style cottages overlooking the Sonian Forest in the middle of Oudergem. White streets in Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe turn out to have been the playground of experimental modernist architects. The town square's Sunday market is filled to the brim with antiques. On the majestic Tervurenlaan we



Average residents talk about their experience living in Brussels during the *woontours*

ASLK, the area now offers hundreds of cottage-style houses with a view of more greenery. Myriad pedestrian paths connect the gardens behind the houses, designed to reinforce the feeling of community. This is not just tourism, though. Van Camp points out where people can connect with other Flemings in community centres, the price range of the houses, the local political situation and any development projects planned in the near future. During lunch in the Flemish community centre in Watermael-Bosvoorde we finally have a chance to connect with other travellers. Most of them have already decided to move to Brussels. "It's now or never for us," says Hanne Desmet,

27, from Leuven, who is on her third *woontour*. "We want children as soon as possible, and we want to raise them in Brussels. Once we've found a nice place in a nice area close to a good school, we'll do it." Hanne's partner, Ahmed Khan, is a professor of architecture and urban studies at the Brussels Free University (ULB). "On each tour we discover new parts of the city we would never have found ourselves," he says. "At the same time, the guides are knowledgeable about the city; they know about its social geography, its history and future. That's exactly what we need to decide where to go and live."

► www.woneninbrussel.be



© photos: Bea Uhart

RECRUITING NURSES FOR BRUSSELS

Only 17% of nurses in Brussels' hospitals speak Dutch, while more than one-third of patients come from outside Brussels, mostly from the bordering Dutch-speaking communities. The need for Dutch-speaking nurses, preferably living in Brussels, remains high. One day last month, three of Brussels' Flemish organisations – Muntpunt, Br(ik and the Huis voor Gezondheid (House for Health) – organised the event Job-Hopping in Brussels. A day-long tour showed 150 nursing students from four Flemish schools in Brussels what life and work would look like if they chose to stay in or move to the



capital after graduation. The tour took the new nurses out "to explore job opportunities in Brussels," explains Eva Drees from Muntpunt, the capital's Flemish library and information centre. "They visited several hospitals and talked to the nurses about working conditions and benefits. At the same time, we focused on the discovery of Brussels as a city to live in, using a game." In the evening the students were treated to a "retirement party", where they could use the tokens they'd won in the game to buy drinks. "We wanted them to feel what

makes Brussels so different from other cities in Belgium," says Drees. "It offers so much diversity; it is multicultural; it is the capital. As a nurse, you will have to deal with people from so many different backgrounds here. Dutch-speaking nurses can choose from a wide variety of interesting and challenging opportunities." In a press release, Pascal Smet, Flemish minister of Brussels, youth and education, said: "It is not enough to tell young people how exciting and fascinating it is to work in Brussels. They must experience it themselves."

Red Star Line campaign in New York

The soon-to-open Antwerp museum beckons to American tourists

Alan Hope

Antwerp's Red Star Line Museum, due to open in September, aims to become a top attraction for American tourists, according to the festive launch of a campaign in New York last week.

In the sumptuous surroundings of The Glasshouses, an event hall in the arty Chelsea neighbourhood of Manhattan, aldermen Philip Heylen and Koen Kennis of the city of Antwerp and Peter De Wilde of Toerisme Vlaanderen joined the museum's ambassador, the Belgian-American fashion icon Diane von Furstenberg, to mark the start of a promotion aimed specifically at the American market.

Between 1873 and 1934, the Red Star Line cruiser carried more than two million Europeans from the port of Antwerp to the United States. Some



Peter De Wilde of Toerisme Vlaanderen was in New York to introduce the Red Star Line campaign

will still be alive but most will have left descendants, now numbering in the millions. The city of Antwerp and

tourist authorities hope they might be encouraged to make the return trip to explore their roots.

The advertising campaign, which begins on 1 July, consists of posters in the New York subway and on taxis and buses, featuring the faces of both well-known and lesser-known Red Star Line passengers. Perhaps the most famous was Albert Einstein, who sailed regularly between Antwerp and the United States.

Antwerp hopes the Red Star Line will increase the number of Americans visiting the city by 10%. In 2011, US visitors spent 625,000 nights in Flanders, 56,000 of them in Antwerp. However, 60% of all US visitors are here on business: the Red Star Line campaign hopes to increase the number coming for recreational tourism.

► www.redstarline.be

Inspectors to move into Brussels schools

Flemish education minister Pascal Smet will send inspectors into Dutch-speaking schools in Brussels after a gathering of teachers declared that many schools were failing to achieve their educational targets.

The accusation came from the "teachers' parliament" organised in May by the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels. Some 40 teachers from primary and secondary schools met in the Brussels parliament with politicians to discuss problems they face.

Among the most serious of those is the chronic shortage of teachers, partially because Brussels does not have enough Dutch-speaking teachers to meet the city's needs. Many Flemish teachers do not want to stay in the capital or to move there after qualifying.

Language difficulties are also a problem for students, with many children from immigrant families being sent to Dutch-speaking schools to learn the language but never speaking the language with family or friends outside of the classroom.

Inspectors will visit all Dutch-speaking primary and secondary schools in the Brussels-Capital Region during the next academic year for the first time since 2007, Smet said. "I understand statements and the

concerns of the Brussels teachers, but I want to analyse the problem more thoroughly before coming to any final decisions," he said.

In related news, travel agent Neckermann has stopped a summer promotion that involved arranging fake medical certificates for parents who want to take their children out of school before the end of the year to go on holiday.

Last week, Smet criticised the company for the stunt, which caters to parents who want to get a jump-start on their holiday to avoid crowds. Smet told the Flemish parliament his department would continue its efforts to combat the practice, by encouraging schools to provide worthwhile activities in the final days of term and by educating parents on the need to respect the rules.



Campaign for disabled launched

People with a disability need to be treated like everyone else, but their handicap should not be ignored, according to Flemish equal opportunities minister Pascal Smet, launching a new awareness campaign against discrimination last week. "The disability or handicap should not be denied, but it also shouldn't be the only thing we notice," he said. "People with a disability are so much more than that."

The campaign, Smet said, comes in response to a growing demand for equal rights for the disabled. "The image we have of people with a disability remains a persistent stereotype," he said. "That's what we intend to fight with this new campaign."

The campaign includes a number of video messages on subjects like relationships, the workplace and public space.

Belgium ranks fourth in health-care services

Belgium has come in fourth in a ranking of 15 developed nations for access to health care and patient experience. The poll was carried out by Reuters News among 12,000 patients from countries around the world, including Argentina, Australia, Canada, the US, Japan, Germany and Great Britain. South Korea came in first, followed by Argentina, Japan, Belgium and Australia. Belgium scored an A-, with a score of 271 points, compared to South

Korea's 635. Points were awarded on the basis of responses to questions about access to GPs, specialists, hospitals, tests and drugs, as well as changes in access compared to five years ago. They also were rated on their experience of visiting the doctor, being referred to a specialist and being treated. Patients in Belgium consistently rated services better now than they were five years ago, with more than 25% voting better, and only 10% voting worse.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

€100 million

a year spent on cycling infrastructure in Flanders, good for 1,750km of cycle paths during this legislature, the equivalent of the distance from Brussels to Porto

€1.257 billion

in National Lottery sales last year, an annual increase of 4% and an absolute record. The main Lotto was the preferred gamble, with €490 million

72,700

Belgians added last year to the blacklist of bad payment risks maintained by insurance companies. The list now contains a record 204,000 names

45,000

square metres of space made available inside the Brussels Justice Palace for conversion into shops, eateries and tourist activities, the equivalent of the Wijnegem shopping centre

10%

reduction in blood donations over the past year, according to the Flemish Red Cross. Part of the reason is the scrapping of a day off for Flemish and federal civil servants to allow them to give blood

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Marking the difference

For years, N-VA's rise – recent polls show 35% support among voters – has left other parties like deer caught in the headlights. They are absolutely transfixed by the nationalists' success. In preparation for the 2014 elections, though, most parties are changing strategies: Instead of trying to respond to N-VA, they are looking at themselves.

CD&V has suffered the most from the continuing success of N-VA, the party it resuscitated in 2004 by welcoming it into a cartel. N-VA has now taken up the number one position, traditionally held by CD&V. Moreover, it damaged CD&V indirectly through a vicious attack on the ACW, the workers' movement associated with it. This even led to the resignation of federal finance minister Steven Vanackere, previously pegged as a future prime minister.

CD&V has renewed confidence, however, especially since deciding on the (informal) leadership of Kris Peeters. Flanders' minister-president presents himself as a true statesman, very different from the N-VA "troublemakers". Most recently, he was able to push through an agreement on education reform, despite N-VA's protests. Moreover, CD&V is moving away from the shady language for which it was known, while still claiming middle ground on just about any issue.

Open VLD, too, has suffered, as N-VA had captured – or hijacked – its essence: economic liberalism and the defence of free enterprise. Many entrepreneurs feel that N-VA, rather than Open VLD, speaks for them, as it laments the federal "taxation government".

But Open VLD, too, has shaken off N-VA's grip. Its recent move to reject the idea of "confederalism" is just one step in this process. In recent weeks, party president Gwendolyn Rutten has also spoken out in favour of "mini jobs", against the "witch hunt" on fiscal fraud and against a large civil service – thus claiming back the party's core business.

Socialist SPA also has a bone to pick with N-VA, its ideological opposite. Of all traditional parties, it has been in government the longest, resulting in a reputation of uninspired policy makers. Moreover, its fear of being associated with the French-speaking socialists of prime minister Elio Di Rupo (PS) has left them with an unclear profile. However, at a recent congress, SPA renewed its party's core beliefs, opting once again for clear left-wing solutions. Applauding from the front row was Paul Magnette, party president of ... the PS.

CD&V, Open VLD and SPA have all put some effort into standing out from N-VA. The results of those efforts we will see in 2014.

Setting the trend

Trendhuis creates new online networks and keeps social responsibility in vogue

Andy Furniere

At the Trendhuis in Mechelen, the residents are not content with just revealing the trends that shape our society. The co-operative Xenarjo sets up online platforms to improve the lives of target groups, while non-profit Time4Society involves companies and government departments in activities to help vulnerable people and nature. Time4Society is extending its reach abroad, through partnerships in the Netherlands and Hungary and through its own projects around the world.

Trendwatcher Nathalie Bekx founded Trendhuis in 1996 after a career in the media, including a stint at the head of the popular women's magazine *Flair*. With her team at Bexpertise, she annually questions around 4,000 Belgians from all ages and social backgrounds face to face on topics such as work and consuming. The results are used by the media department of Bekx&x, which specialises in designing magazines, websites and newsletters for specific target groups.

Work Barometer

Publisher Trendbookx, another department of the Trendhuis, releases books that makes the conclusions of surveys accessible to a broad public. One of its flagship projects is the Work Barometer, an annual trend study conducted with 1,000 Flemish citizens for the European Social Fund.

The last Work Barometer showed three important trends: "Almost everyone feels that people should work for at least 40 years but consider themselves an exception to the rule," says Bekx. The team also found that jobs were becoming

more important to people than social relationships and that stress was more linked to a way of life than the type of job. "People in their 20s need to combine hobbies with their work, then the work-family balance causes problems, and over-50s mainly worry about their capability to keep up."

On these issues, Bekx organises lectures and workshops for the business world and government departments. She also helps companies develop new products, tuned to the demands of the consumers of tomorrow.

Life scenarios

The Trendhuis houses the co-operative organisation Xenarjo, a name that refers to the scenarios we all write for our lives. Xenarjo creates social networks where people can exchange thoughts and experiences



Trendhuis founder Nathalie Bekx

concerning specific subjects.

On 123feelfree.be, people have an online room to discuss the best ways of living healthily through wholesome food and fun exercise. Users can already share recipes or sport tips, but the Xenarjo team will launch a revolutionary mobile application next year. In a supermarket, you'll be able to scan the barcode of the food you plan to buy, and the app will show you what energy level the product offers.

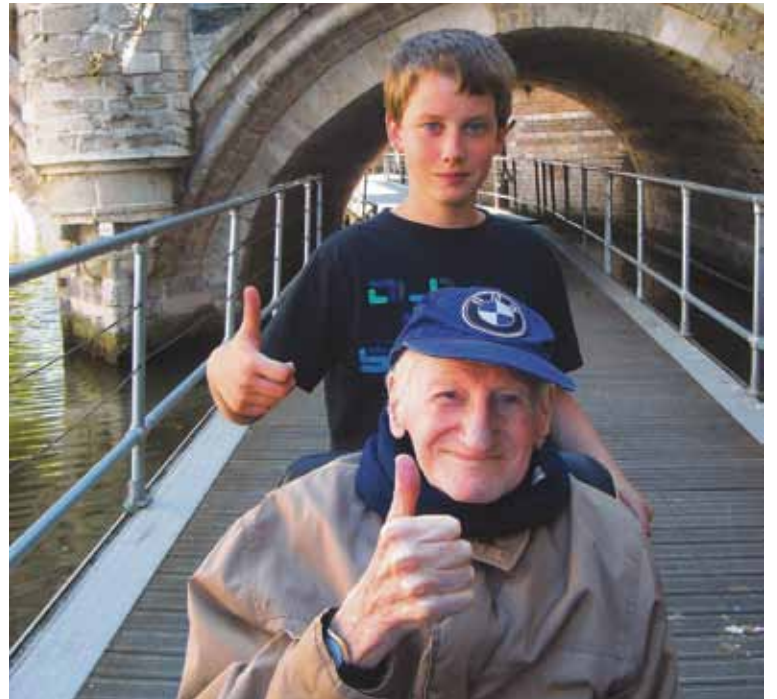
On the website of go51.be, people over 50 can talk about interests such as travelling. The Xenarjo team is now preparing a third platform that will unite the growing group of people who care for family members or friends requiring help at home. "They are often socially isolated and need a network of people in the same situation," says Bekx.

Investing time

Non-profit organisation Time4Society responds to the trend of corporate social responsibility (CSR) by organising socially relevant projects for businesses. A team of employees invest a certain period of time in a socially or ecologically valuable initiative.

"It's a trend that fewer and fewer people now do volunteer work at fixed and regular moments, for example once a week, which causes problems for social and environmental organisations," explains Benjamin Demarcin, account manager of Time4Society. In five years, the non-profit has provided 62,000 hours of time to its partners.

Employees of clients such as GlaxoSmithKline Biologicals, KBC, Microsoft, Deloitte and government



Time4Society organises volunteer activities that benefit those who are socially isolated

departments have helped primarily residents of retirement homes, asylum seekers and persons with a disability. The bank KBC, for example, helped people in poverty deal with financial issues.

But the activities are not always related to the client's expertise. Employees of Rabobank organised a week full of circus activities for adults with Down's syndrome. "The activities are also advantageous to the companies and government departments," says Demarcin. "The relationships between employees can be strengthened but also individual skills such as leadership capacities can be developed. It also creates a positive public image."

Time4Society is in full expansion. It

wants to offer consultancy services in the future, by giving advice and workshops on corporate social responsibility instead of only serving as a matchmaker. It is also helping partners in Hungary and the Netherlands set up a similar organisation and wants to establish projects worldwide for its clients.

"For example, projects at schools or hospitals in India or an economic visit to a company with which a multinational enterprise works," says Demarcin. "This way, managers of multinationals form a personal bond with their employees and with the population of countries where they are active."

► www.trendhuis.be

Vlerick empire expands

The Flemish business management school opens new campus in Brussels

Alan Hope

Vlerick, located in Ghent and Leuven, has a new city to add to its list. The management school opened a campus in Brussels last week and will welcome its first students in September.

The new campus is in the Manhattan Centre, the skyscraper that overlooks Rogierplein in central Brussels. It takes up an entire floor of one of the two towers housing the Sheraton and Thon hotels, as well as a new round capsule jutting out from the roof, plus office space on another floor. In all, it amounts to 4,800 square metres of facility – about as big as the school's Leuven branch.

The decision to expand, says dean Philippe Haspeslagh, was "a step in the school's development it was impossible to skip". Vlerick is, he

said is "world-famous in Flanders," but a school in Brussels will make it easier to attract students from around the world. "Everybody knows Brussels."

The campus joins a large educational community in the area, including St Jan's teaching hospital, the Vlekho economic college and the Brussels university college HUB. "Recently, we sat down with what will be called the Meyboom-Marais Group, a consortium of schools and health-care institutions that have 14,000 students on an area of one square kilometre around the campus," said Vlerick director-general Patrick De Greve. "This educational hub is developing the talents of the future, and we would like to bring our expertise into it. As in Ghent and Leuven, we want



The neon colours of Vlerick's new Brussels campus were chosen to represent vitality

to create an open house, partnering with the Brussels community."

The interior is designed to be as polyvalent as possible, with

a huge central meeting space, a roof terrace, four linked auditoria, classrooms, meeting rooms and breakout rooms. Away from the

central area, all done out in wood and concrete and furnished in brightly coloured foam furniture (representative of vitality – one of Vlerick's new brand characteristics), there are offices, work spaces for staff and research areas.

The school will offer degree programmes and executive training and will not take courses or students away from its existing schools in Ghent and Leuven. Starting in September, it will offer 16 programmes, with 14 more to come in 2014. As elsewhere, the school will also offer customised training for individual enterprises and has already organised a mini-MBA course off-site for KBC bank.

► www.vlerick.com

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS**Chocolate****► Daskalides**

German chocolate group Halloren Schokoladenfabriek has acquired 50% of Ghent-based pralines producer Daskalides. The move will allow Daskalides to further develop its sales in North America and Asia.

Energy ► Dart

The Australian Dart Energy group has won drilling and exploration rights to seek methane gas in the former coal rich Kempen area of Flanders, in partnership with the local Mijnen company.

Energy ► E.On

The German energy group is to build a €700 million biomass-fired power station in the port of Antwerp area in partnership with the local port authority and the Solvay chemical products group. The new unit, with a capacity of up to 300 megawatts, will meet the energy requirements of 800,000 households in the area from 2018.

Frozen food**► PinguinLutosa**

The world-leading frozen vegetables group PinguinLutosa, based in Westrozebeke, West Flanders, has been renamed Greenyard Foods following the recent sale of its Lutosa frozen fries and potatoes activities to Canada's McCain.

Holdings ► GBL

Group Brussels Lambert, the holding company of financier Albert Frère, is investing €2 billion for a 15% stake in the world-leading Swiss Société Generale de Sécurité, specialised in inspection, analysis and certification.

Property ► Belair

The Belair project, jointly owned by Brussels-based property group Immobel and the Dutch Breevast group, has been sold to the German Hannover Leasing and Asian interests for up to €315 million. The project includes the redevelopment of 80,000 square metres of office space in the former Belgian state administrative centre in downtown Brussels.

Supermarkets**► Colruyt**

The Flemish discount supermarket has cancelled 34 contracts with Asian suppliers of non-food products for not meeting the company's social charter audits.

Textiles ► Sioen

The textiles and coated garments producer, based in Ardooie, West Flanders, is to acquire the Dutch Van Ochten Bedrijfskleding group.

More delays for Oosterweel

European Commission could send Antwerp works back to square one

Alan Hope

The government of Flanders looks set to face its biggest upset yet in the ill-fated dossier of the Oosterweel link in Antwerp, a project that would complete the Antwerp Ring and ease traffic congestion in and around the city.

Last week financial daily *De Tijd* reported that the European Commission was at the point of deciding against the government's decision to go ahead with a contract awarded to the consortium Noriant for the construction of the roads and tunnels involved in the Oosterweel project. That report remained unconfirmed by official sources as *Flanders Today* went to press, but was unofficially confirmed at the weekend by EU trade commissioner Karel De Gucht, a Fleming, speaking on VRT television.

The Noriant contract was awarded for the original Oosterweel project,



The Oosterweel link in its original form, with the contested viaduct

which involved roads, tunnels and a bridge. Following public protest, the original plan was put to a referendum and rejected

by Antwerp voters. A new plan was formulated, which left out the bridge; but Noriant kept the contract.

According to De Gucht, the substantial changes to the original plan mean that the contract needed to again be put out to tender, according to EU laws. If that were to happen, Noriant would have a case against the government for damages, amounting to as much as half a billion euros. The new tender procedure would also introduce yet more delay in a project already far behind schedule.

This week minister-president Kris Peeters said he would seek a last-minute chance to "clarify certain outstanding questions" in talks with the Commission, as well as request permission for Noriant to go ahead with works that remain from the original project.

Municipalities demand injection of funds

The municipalities of Flanders, gathered in the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG), has called on the Flemish and federal government to step forward with financial assistance for local councils and social aid agencies (OCMW) to help them out of growing difficulties. In an increasing number of municipalities – as many as one in three – urgent aid is needed to prevent "unthinkable consequences," according to VVSG chairman Luc Martens. The association last week passed a motion at a meeting in Mechelen with unanimous support of the members.

If something is not done, the VVSG's motion asserts, municipalities could be forced to cut staff by not replacing those who leave or retire; to reduce or cut some local services; to reduce investments that currently total €2 billion a year, affecting thousands of jobs in the private sector; to sell off patrimony; or to raise local taxes.

The motion contains a list of demands:

- A commitment by the government to maintain annual growth of 3.5% in the Municipal Fund for the current legislature 2013-2018
- An amendment to the system of sewer subsidies to provide municipalities with certainty regarding the level of subsidy they can expect over a number of years
- A promise by the government not to enter into engagements with unions representing local authority staff which will then have to be met by the municipalities
- A commitment by the federal government to take on the burden of retraining firefighting service personnel

New rules on death duties

Inheritance rights in Flanders are set to change in the near future under new decrees introduced in parliament last week and intended to take account of the varying composition of families in today's society.

The first decree aims to set foster and stepchildren on the same footing as biological offspring when it comes to gifts subject to inheritance tax – at present 3% for biological children but 7% for others.

A second decree would wipe out the inheritance tax imposed on financial gifts that return to the donor in case of the death of the recipient. At present, the gift returns to the donor, who then has to pay succession duties on their own gift. That will no longer happen.

The decrees are expected to be approved after the summer recess and come into force by the beginning of 2014.

Beer exports increase

Belgian brewers produced 18.75 million hectolitres of beer in 2012, of which 11.69 million hectolitres were exported – an increase on 2011 of 5.4%, according to the Belgian Brewers federation's annual report. Beer exports have grown by 70% since 2002. "This demonstrates the enormous growth potential of Belgian beer," said federation chairman Theo Vervloet.

About 60% of local beer production goes to export. France is the largest market, taking about one-third of all exports. Japan, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and the US are all growing markets.

A recent survey commissioned by the federation revealed that, while pils remains the most popular export, sales decreased

from 39.4% in 2012 to 27.3% this year. Its place is being taken by regional beers (up 6.7%), Trappist beers (up 3%) and abbey beers (up 1.5%).

The federation also announced it has filed a complaint with the European Commission against a new 160% duty introduced on beer in France, which, the federation says, discriminates against Belgium in breach of the free movement of goods. The price of Belgian beer would go up by about 20% as a result.

Duties on all beer, including French, were raised at the beginning of the year, while those on wine remained unchanged. France produces less beer than Belgium – 16 million hectolitres compared to 18.6 million in 2011.

Aid package for SMEs edges closer

Both the Flemish and the federal governments last week took steps to make it easier for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to obtain credit to allow them to invest their way out of recession.

The finance committee of the Flemish parliament approved a proposal by minister-president Kris Peeters (*pictured*) to extend the government's credit guarantee system, known as Gigarant, to allow it to fill in the gaps left by banks unwilling to lend money to SMEs. The proposal still has to pass a vote of the full parliament, where it can be



sure of broad support.

Later in the week, the federal council

of ministers agreed a new framework for lending to SMEs. That includes an obligation on banks to provide full information to lenders, including the terms best suited to their situation and a free draft agreement on request. The package also includes a limit on the penalty interest to be paid on early repayment of loans. The package was described by Christine Mattheuws of the NSZ, an organisation for the self-employed, as "a major step forward".

Peeters also announced that the government will funnel €100 million in extra financing to the Limburg

regional investment agency LRM via a simple loan. The government's commitment to LRM dates from shortly after the announcement of the closure of Ford Genk, but Peeters encountered political opposition when he said the financing would take the form of a capital increase via one of the two regional participation agencies.

Critics pointed out this would give the government extra weight in the LRM's decision-making, as well as divert dividends to the government. The terms of the loan have not yet been revealed.

A bridge to space

Flemish company QinetiQ sends satellites into orbit

Senne Starckx

Thirty years ago, a small SME from Kruibeke, East Flanders, started building scientific instruments for European space missions. Today, this company has three satellites swirling around the Earth. Focussing on the niche market of highly autonomous (read low-cost) microsatellites has paid off for the front-runner of the Flemish space industry.

The launch of the satellite Proba-V a month ago, and its successful positioning in low orbit, brings us back to Kruibeke. Here, on the left bank of the river Scheldt, lie the European headquarters of QinetiQ Space – the company that built Proba-V. For me, it's a reunion of sorts, because I was here five years ago, watching engineers add the finishing touches to Proba-2, the precursor of Proba-V that's been swirling around the Earth since 2009.

At the time, the company still carried the name Verhaert Space, after the founder, Paul Verhaert, who founded his own product development company back in 1969. Since 2005, the company's space division has been owned by the QinetiQ group. "QinetiQ is a British multinational active in the field of security and defence," explains Jo Bermyn, marketing director at QinetiQ Space. "But our entire company is still a Belgian company based in Kruibeke. In fact, another division of QinetiQ Space, based in Farnborough in the UK, falls directly under our supervision."

The absence of gravity

QinetiQ Space kick-started its space activities in 1983, when the company signed its first assignment with the European Space Agency (ESA). "Our task was to develop and build instruments for scientific research in the field of microgravity," says Bermyn. "Our instruments were used in several manned space stations, like Spacelab, Mir and today the International Space Station. So when we saw astronauts like Frank De Winne or Dirk Frimout performing tests in space, they were using our experimental setup." Today, microgravity is still a major field in space-related scientific research. With future space missions that aim to take humans to Mars in mind, one of the key obstacles of such a long journey remains the absence of gravity. Scientists still don't know exactly how much harm this causes to the human body – and how to avoid it. QinetiQ Space is still developing scientific instruments for space missions, but since the beginning of the 1990s, it has been converting itself from a supplier of subsystems into a provider of complete so-called "end-to-end space systems". It's an innovation strategy that was sparked by the ambition of the people at Kruibeke. Bermyn says: "Of course, with our limited capacity at that time – we



Proba-V, when it was still under construction in the cleanroom at QinetiQ Space in Kruibeke, East Flanders. The microsatellite is about the size of a washing machine, albeit a flying one

had only 30 employees in 1991 – there was little chance that we could do this entirely on our own. Luckily for us, the ESA decided at that time to start a new technology demonstration programme, focussing on the development of microsatellites. These are no bigger or heavier than a common washing machine and have a number of benefits: They're light-weight and low-cost, they have a much higher degree of autonomy and can be built within a short time. With the support of the Belgian Science Policy Office to the ESA's Technology Programme, we could win the contract to build the first microsatellite for the ESA." The company started building Proba-1 (Proba stands for Project for On-Board Autonomy) in 1998. Three years later, on 22 October, 2001, the local space industry experienced a historic day: The first through-and-through Belgian satellite was successfully put into orbit. "The Proba-1 satellite was, in the first place, a technology demonstration mission," explains Bermyn. "The aim was to demonstrate the possibility to perform a space mission without constant steering and supervision from the ground. That involves a huge saving in operational costs."

Besides the technology to make satellites more autonomous, Proba-1 had two earth-observation instruments on board. "The technology demonstration period lasted for only a few months, but today Proba-1 is still flying around and making pictures of our planet on a daily basis." Proba-1's success demanded a sequel. So, in 2009, Proba-2 was launched, with some demonstration technology on board. Bermyn says: "One of the new elements was the on-board computer, which is still

the most powerful in any European satellite." However, "powerful" is perhaps not the right word. Bermyn: "You might compare it to an Intel 80386 processor. Our laptops and smartphones are several times more powerful, but I'll bet they wouldn't survive in space for long. These on-board computers have to be super-reliable – we can't send somebody to space to repair them. They have to withstand extreme vibrations during launch and all sorts of electromagnetic radiation and extreme temperatures once in orbit. We say they must be 'space-qualified'."

The Earth-watcher

But even with this processor, Proba-2 is able to calculate entirely on its own what the best position is to take a picture – ordered from the ground. "The software calculates the best position, depending on the position of the sun. If there's damage, the computer puts the satellite automatically into survival mode, where it can analyse and recover itself."

Proba-2 also carries some observational instruments, to watch not the earth but the sun. "These instruments are used by the Belgian Royal Observatory in Brussels to deliver a daily space weather report to its customers. Companies who rely heavily on satellite communication want to know when solar wind and solar storms are coming."

And so we end up with Proba-V, which was launched on 7 May and is in orbit 820km above the ground. The V stands for "vegetation". Bermyn says: "Proba-V is what we call a gap-filler mission. The goal is to ensure continuation of the vegetation instruments on the old Spot satellites. These two giant satellites have, for almost 10 years now, daily monitored and mapped the world's vegetation, providing information on crop yields, droughts, desertification, deforestation... But the Spot satellite will retire at the end of this year. Until their successor, the Sentinel, arrives in 2015, Proba-V will take over the monitoring of the Earth's vegetation."

► proba-v.vgt.vito.be

TO PARIS AND BEYOND

From 17 to 23 June, Paris will once again become the world's capital of aviation and spaceflight. At the old airfield of Le Bourget, 2,100 exhibitors from 45 countries will gather at the 50th edition of the biennial Paris Airshow. Traditionally, this is the industry's major event; it's here that the big contracts between the builders of planes and the main airlines are signed. For Bermyn and his colleagues, Paris is the most important

networking event of the year: "It's important for small companies like us to be present, and to attract visitors' attention." QinetiQ Space has its own stand at the Belgian pavilion, with other parties like the Flemish Institute for Technical Research (Vito). "The Paris Airshow is still 80% aviation and only 20% space industry," Bermyn says. "But our share is growing, due to the introduction of private companies – like us – to the space industry market."

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

A medical research team at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) has discovered **why multiple sclerosis (MS) causes decreased blood supply to the brain**. The researchers found that MS patients have an excess of the substance endothelin-1 in their blood. This substance, produced in the neural pathways, makes blood vessels contract and thus diminishes the blood supply. Experiments on animals proved that this causes neural pathways to die. The researchers succeeded in correcting the decreased blood supply and hope that this will lead to new treatments.

It is profitable to create heat, electricity and other forms of **energy from manure or fruit and vegetable waste**. That is the conclusion of European research in which the University of Hasselt and the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (Vito) participated. Researchers collected waste from different places, including Lommel in Limburg province, and processed it at an Energy Conversion Park. The researchers hope the government will invest in projects to develop the method.

► www.ecp-biomass.eu

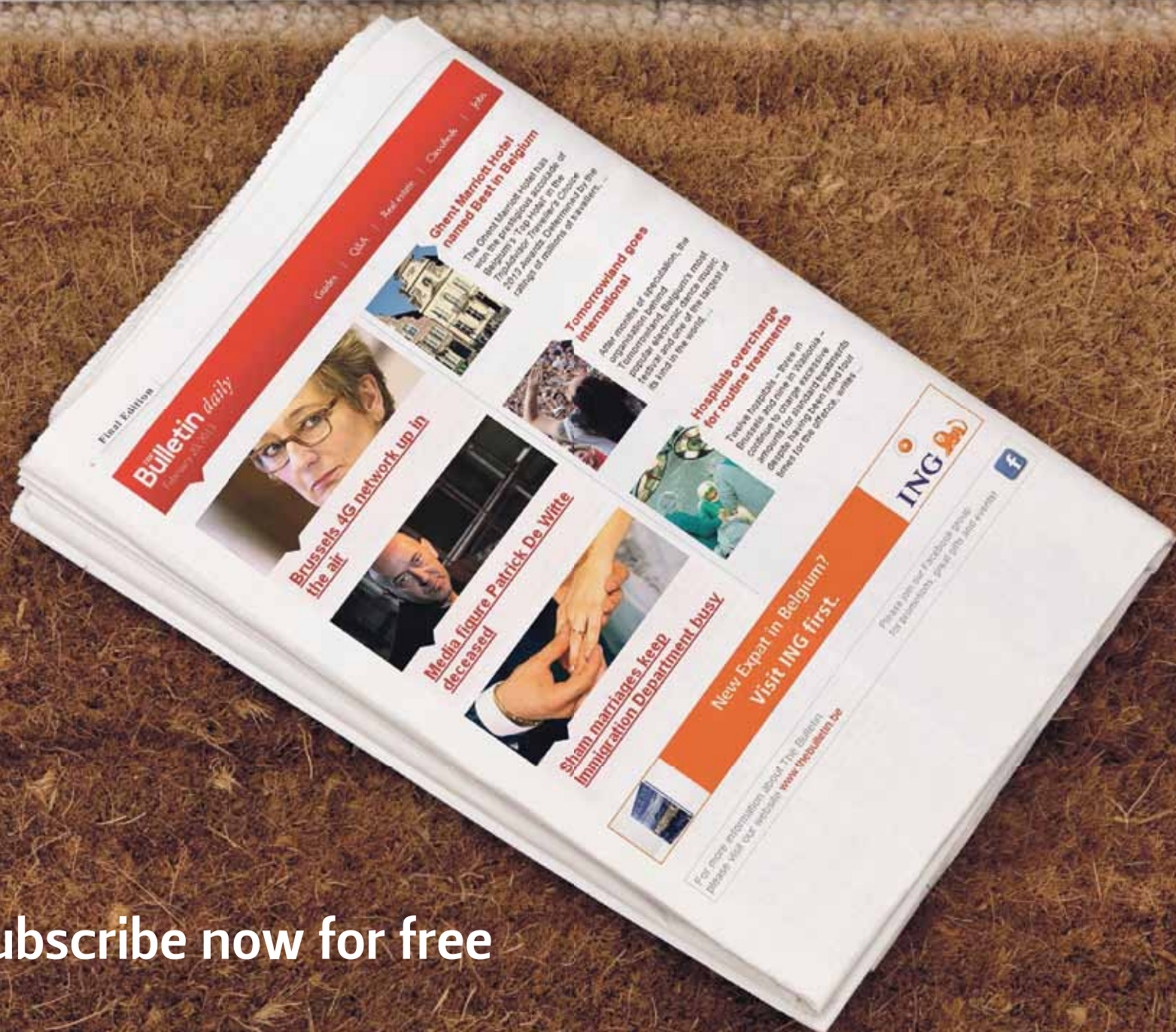
The University of Leuven inaugurated the Sofhea Chair, dedicated to research into the **long-term effects of stem cell transplantation** on patients' physical and psychological quality of life. Sofhea is a non-profit organisation that provides support to patients with a life-threatening blood disease. It also supports research into these diseases and Leuven's Cord Blood Bank.

A survey at the AP University College in Antwerp shows that half of the students (48%) are convinced they score **higher on exams thanks to Facebook**. Virtually all students (99%) use the social networking site to exchange information about lectures, tests and subject material. During exam periods, 85% of students visit the site every day.

Flemish universities are concerned about the increasing number of **agencies that help students with their theses**. Dozens of Flemish agencies assist students with adjusting the structure, analysing sources and interpreting statistical data. Their hourly wages fluctuate between about €28 and €60. Many universities feel this clashes with the purpose of a Master's thesis, as students should prove they can independently write a scientific work. The Free University of Brussels (VUB) calls it fraudulent and is taking measures against it.

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Here comes de zomer

Annual cultural festival takes over Antwerp for two long, breezy months

Angela Chambers

The annual Zomer van Antwerpen, or Summer of Antwerp, provides plenty of outdoor activities to – hopefully – help you forget this year’s long wait for warm weather.

In July and August, Zomer van Antwerpen (ZVA) offers free or inexpensive fun, including theatre, cinema, circus and music, all across the city.

“There are always different programmes each year, and even after living in Antwerp for a long time, I often discover something I didn’t know existed during the festival,” says Bieke Vandenbosch, one of the hundreds of volunteers who keep the two-month festival running like a well-oiled machine. Organisers want to bring residents and visitors out of the city centre or their neighbourhood’s comfort zone to more unexpected locations. The sites range from Wilrijk in the south to Berendrecht-Zandvliet-Lillo in the north.

“We have a lot of places in the city that are beautiful but aren’t regularly visited, so we want to take our audience on an adventure,” says ZVA spokesperson Liesbeth Van Houdt.

Beach life

Arguably the most popular summer pastime in Antwerp is finding a sunny spot near the Scheldt to relax and crack open a beer. The Zomerbar, on the Ledeganckkaai in the city’s ever-expanding Zuid district, allows visitors to sit on the beach or lounge in a hammock underneath a canopy of trees. Seasonal dishes, cocktails and drinks are available at the restaurants and bar.

In case it’s cold or raining – would it dare? – a fire pit and tents help keep everyone warm and dry. An outdoor library provides reading for all ages. As if that wasn’t enough, Zomerbar throws in a circus: two are performed in nearby tents. *Klaxon*, by the group Akoreacro, combines music and acrobatic performances. After a great reception during the 2011 ZVA, festival organisers want to bring the circus back to Antwerp this year with a completely different show.

The second circus, *Secret*, is a one-man show starring Johann Le Guillerm. He climbs atop a wooden structure that moves with each step and uses other objects to equally amaze the audience.

Cinema Urbana

A well-attended ZVA activity is the free movie screenings. Thanks to its popularity, Cinema Urbana has expanded this year from one to two months.

In July, combine swimming and a movie in the city’s Badboot, the hugely successful swimming pool that floats on the surface of the Scheldt. Watch a film on the deck for free or pay €4 for an inflatable mattress in the pool. Badboot



Relax with a cocktail under the huts of the Zomerbar (not to be confused with the Zomerfabriek)



Wind as a theme and a prop in *L'après-midi d'un foehn*

movies have a water-related theme, so be ready for *Life of Pi*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* and, naturally, *Jaws*.

August is the month to see films at Hangar 19A on the Scheldekaai. You can sit in the sand or bring a chair, which will be judged in a contest for “the most original chair”. When referring to movies at the Hangar, many talk about the free soup offered at intermission. Screenings in August include *Desperado*, *Mamma Mia!*, *True Grit* and much more, with 36 films in total making

up both the Badboot and Hangar sessions.

Movies in a hangar are cool, but even more unique are the locations for performances and exhibitions. Clutter is being pushed aside in a vacant brewery, abandoned warehouses, a junkyard and other normally hidden sites.

Flemish and international companies provide entertainment for all ages; several performances have no dialogue, which works well for those who don’t know much Dutch.

This includes *Upstream*, a “dance project where women explore their deepest emotions: anger, love, passion, shame and embarrassment,” according to the ZVA programme notes. Other non-speaking shows are by the group Compagnie Non Nova, which will use wind as a theme and a prop in both *L'après-midi d'un foehn* and *Vortex*.

The Flemish company ’t Arsenaal presents *Hannibal*, an ambitious show about the commander who led an army of 70,000 men and 40

elephants from Carthage over the Alps to Italy in the third century BC. Diverse musicians and actors combine this history with modern technology.

The interactive exhibition *Miracoco*, meanwhile, comes from the UK-based Architects of Air led by artistic director Alan Parkinson. The display features large, inflatable “luminariums”, defined as a “sculpture people enter to be moved to a sense of wonder at the beauty of light and colour”.

The sculptures are made from PVC, which allows a mixture of reflective and direct light to seep through. The silver plastic is opaque, and the coloured sections are translucent, giving the visitor multiple perspectives in this study of light.

World music

International bands are the focus of the festival’s music programmes. La Banda en Flor features Chilean women performing cumbia and salsa, which should get the audience to dust off their dancing shoes.

Seckou Keita, who was born in Senegal, travelled with his music on three continents before ending up in England. His music has African roots, but he uses influences from various parts of the world.

The Bombay Royale is described as “Bollywood meets Tarantino and disco funk”. Hailing from Melbourne, Australia, the humorous and theatrical group perform Indian cinema music while also featuring James Bond-like songs.

While most of the bands are from around the globe, the Antwerp-based Crema Kawa are also part of the festival. The ska and reggae group was number one in the Spanish radio charts last year.

Summer tradition

The Zomerfabriek, or Summer Factory, is the place to go after any performance or to just hang out any night of the week. The old gasworks in Zurenborg is transformed into a summer club with DJs, movies and more.

If you don’t live in the city – or are perhaps too inebriated to find your way home – the Nulsterrenpension (No-Star Hotel) at Zomerfabriek is there for you, for just €18 a night. Kids are welcome and get in at a discount. It comes with an organic breakfast and a retro feel thanks to the use of discarded furniture.

Since it was created when Antwerp was European Capital of Culture in 1993, ZVA has grown into an independent arts organisation with support from the City of Antwerp and the Flemish Community.

ZVA events requiring a ticket are already available by phone on 078.054.050. Online sales begin on 24 June. Popular productions sell out early

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Meditating on the masters

Artist Fabienne Verdier spent four years responding to works from the Groeninge Museum

Ian Mundell

Contemporary artists no longer busy themselves with the highly detailed figurative style of the Renaissance, but Fabienne Verdier communicates their emotions through monumental brushstrokes.

Most of us spend just a minute or two looking at each painting in a museum. Something famous or particularly fascinating might get five or 10 minutes, but rarely more. French artist Fabienne Verdier likes to take longer.

Invited to work with the collection of old Flemish masters at the Groeninge Museum in Bruges, she spent four years contemplating six of its paintings. The results of her research and artistic exploration can now be seen in Bruges and Brussels. Verdier's work is informed by both Western and Eastern traditions. After art school in Toulouse, she spent 10 years in China studying the traditional art of calligraphy and its philosophical roots. Returning to Europe, she developed a style combining this calligraphy with Western abstract art.

Some of her work is small and delicate, but she also produces monumental paintings, executed with a giant brush suspended from the roof of her studio. This allows her to continue to work in the vertical, as with a hand-held brush, but on a much larger scale.

Wealth of choice

Her work with the Flemish Primitives in the Groeninge Museum began on the spot, spending time with the paintings themselves. Then she invited master photo-engraver Daniel Regard to visit the museum. "I asked him to make a print – the exact size as the original masterpiece – of the paintings that spoke to me and moved me the most."

These were Jan van Eyck's "Portrait of Margareta van Eyck" and "Madonna with Canon Joris van der Paele", Hans Memling's "Moreel Triptych" and Hugo van der Goes' "The Dormition". Then there were two anonymous paintings: "Saint Luke Drawing the Madonna", based on an original by Rogier Van der Weyden that is now in Boston, and "Mater Dolorosa and Man of Sorrows".

Verdier took these high-quality prints, which preserve the intensity of colour and the details of the originals, back to her studio. Here she continued to contemplate the paintings but also researched their history, reading about their symbolism, the artists' lives and also making connections with other works of art and lines of thought, before and since.

Beyond the visible

The results of this research can be seen in Verdier's studio notebooks, which are part of an exhibition at the Erasmus House in Brussels. These



Fabienne Verdier with a part of her response to "Saint Luke Drawing the Madonna" and the original (below)



contain sketches, photographs, copies and cuttings, linked together by a network of quotes and notes (mostly in French) from her reading. But as well as recording the research process, the notebooks also represent a cleansing of the system, since the research did not give her exactly what she was looking for.

"As a painter, and as a human being, I wanted to know about the almost metaphysical shock that we can receive when we stand in front of these paintings," she says. "What is happening that allows us to be entranced and transported to such a degree? How, on these small wooden panels, did these geniuses of the 15th century succeed in communicating to us such a volume of thought, posing fundamental questions about our humanity, the cosmos, light ... about a thousand important things."

Part of the challenge she set herself was to get past the perfection of the Flemish masters' figurative technique. "They have made reality sacred to such a degree that it takes time and a lot of work in order to try to pick up what is beyond the visible. And I've spent all these years trying to be receptive to this mystery." While she left the intellectual research behind, it still informed her artistic exploration of themes from the paintings. "It shaped me, it nourished me, it made me grow internally," she explains. "Then, when I take up my brush and I work

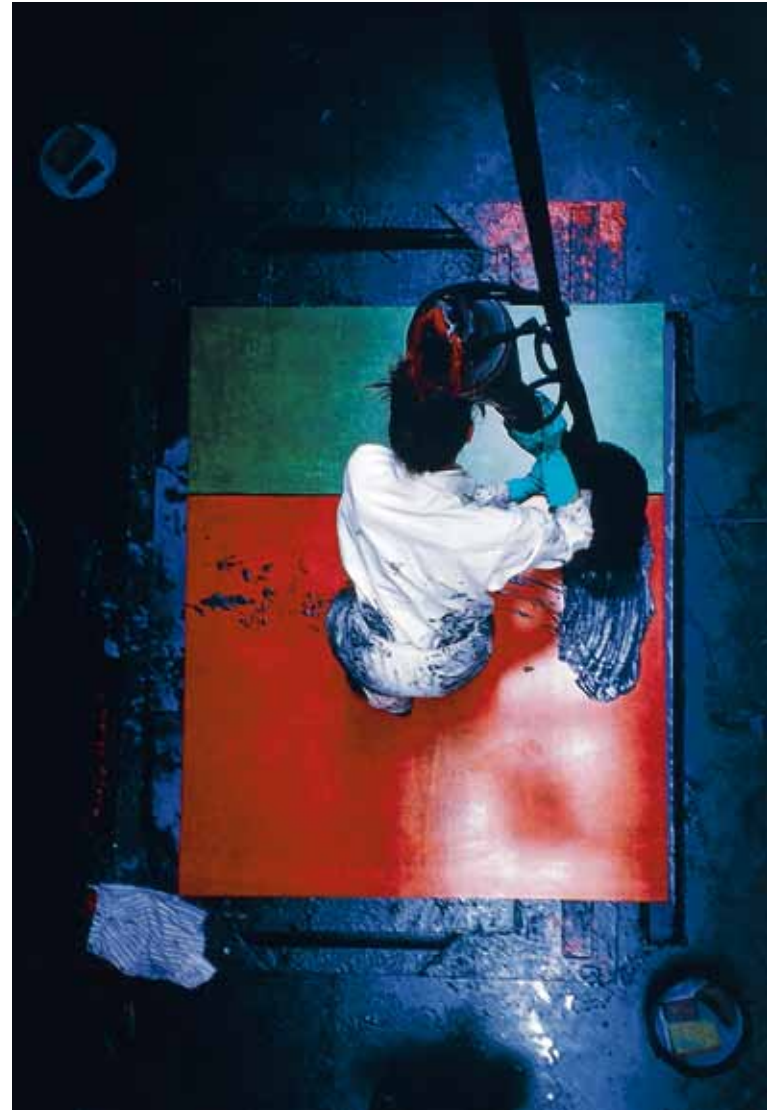
spontaneously, it comes to a kind of maturity."

The result is not the lyrical abstraction based on gestures that you find in 20th-century Western art, but an abstraction that seeks a harmony of form, the essence of things. For example, the posture of Canon Van der Paele is distilled into the single brushstroke of "Man at Prayer", while the crimped edges of Margareta van Eyck's headdress becomes a meandering white line on a red background, a "labyrinthine thought" that also suggests the folds on the surface of the brain.

Valleys of space

Verdier also works with presence and absence, interpreting St Christopher crossing the water in the "Moreel Triptych" by the shape of his cloak, a swirl of red on a blue background. Then there are the valleys that open up when she considers how two figures stand relative to one another. "When I paint a tree, and that vital force that gives life to matter, in the branches of a tree I see mountains," she says. "When there are presences in the world, between you and this chair, for example, if I draw what is happening, once again a large valley opens up into space. I find the same structures everywhere."

Verdier also works with more geometric shapes, exploring Van Eyck's Madonna as a figure channelling the energy between heaven and earth in the "Sedes



Verdier uses a giant brush suspended from the ceiling to create massive, wild brushstrokes

Sapientiae" series, or picking up the circles scattered throughout the same painting – in the window behind the throne, on the knight's armour, in the Canon's glasses – to produce the monumental "Polyphonie-Ascèse" installed between the beams of the Sint-Jans Hospital in Bruges.

Stroke of energy

Perhaps the most intriguing series is based on "Saint Luke Drawing the Madonna". Verdier's eye was attracted to a pair of figures in the background of the painting, gazing out at a river landscape. "One can feel something of the infinite there," she says. But was there another way to achieve the same effect without the strictly figurative approach of the 15th century?

"Suddenly I saw St Luke's belt as this single brush stroke with which I've worked since the beginning," she says, recalling her study of calligraphy. "And I said to myself: Maybe I no longer have to paint

a landscape to meditate on the landscape. If I can draw people into a single brushstroke, perhaps it will be possible to travel within it and have that perception of the infinite in the landscape in nothing more than a stroke of energy, of matter."

The result is a series of massive black brushstrokes on red panels, the speed of the stroke evident in the texture of the paint and the way traces of red are revealed where the brush filaments move and separate. Gaze into each stroke, and see where you end up.

You can find a selection of Verdier's work with the Flemish masters at both the Erasmus House and the Patrick Derom Gallery in Brussels, but a visit to the Groeninge Museum allows you to see the 15th-century originals as well as her larger paintings. Ancient and modern are in adjacent rooms, however, a deliberate choice that encourages visitors to make a short journey back and forth, holding an image in their minds.

UNTIL 25 AUGUST

Tribute to the Flemish Masters

Groeninge Museum & Sint-Jans Hospital, Bruges

► www.museabrugge.be

“

I love the fact that BSB has given me the opportunity to take part in a range of activities outside the academic programme, such as debating at the Model United Nations, speaking in the national finals of the Telenet BBC Public Speaking Awards and playing in the school orchestra.”

Sam (School President, BSB)

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Great expectations

Playing all three Werchter festivals, Flemish band Balthazar are on tour non-stop this summer

Christophe Verbiest

With their second album *Rats*, Balthazar fully redeemed the promises they made with their debut, *Applause*. The Flemish fivesome play intricately construed songs that sound groovy and melancholic, often at the same time. This summer, they're touring extensively through Europe.

“This country is so small that it's useless to divide it into more parts.”

No, Maarten Devoldere, one of the founders of Balthazar, is not commenting on politics. I just wanted to know how to pinpoint them geographically, but it was a bit of a long story. The band formed in Kortrijk, became successful after moving to Ghent, and Devoldere has been living in Brussels for a few years now. His four bandmates, however, are still in (and around) Ghent.

In Belgium, let alone Flanders, “it's so weird to talk about city scenes,” says Devoldere. “I live half an hour from the other guys. If we were living in New York, it probably would take



Maarten Devoldere (second from right) and Balthazar are touring their tails off this summer

them until 2010 before releasing their debut, *Applause*. They needed some time to find their path.

“Before *Applause*, we experimented with lots of different musical genres: folk, electro, rock, singer-songwriter, you name it,” explains Devoldere. “We did a lot of thinking

done before. They've already played Werchter Boutique; on 4 July you can catch them at Rock Werchter, and on 13 July they're opening TW Classic.

“I don't know how we did that,” smiles Devoldere. “I think it's just a coincidence. Muse themselves invited us to play at Werchter Boutique.” Apparently the headlining band's drummer Dominic Howard is a fan of Balthazar's. “Besides that, I think our booking agent did a hell of a job.”

Still, it says something about Balthazar that they fit at the three festivals: TW Classic, for instance, is aimed at an older audience than Rock Werchter.

“I have discovered that our parents' generation likes our music, too,” says Devoldere. “I think our presence at the three festivals is also a signal that the difference between the festivals in general is fading.

Only Tomorrowland is going to be difficult for us,” Devoldere grins, referring to the awesomely popular electronic music fest in Boom.

They'll play three more Belgian festivals (Cactus, Les Ardentes and Lokerse Feesten), but they also have 20 dates abroad in their agenda. France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands and even two famous British festivals (Reading and Leeds) are all welcoming Balthazar. It shouldn't come as a surprise, though: *Rats* has been released in some 20 European countries, keeping them constantly on the road.

Touring spirit

“In some of those countries, like France and the Netherlands, we play in concert halls similar to the ones here in Belgium. In other countries – the UK, for instance, where the album has just come out – we're still playing in very small venues: Outside London, an audience of 100 is already a very good result.”

On the question of how viable those adventures abroad are, Devoldere answers honestly: “In a lot of those countries, touring is an investment that we don't always earn back. But it's a choice we've made wholeheartedly. We could do it the easy way: Focus on Belgium, France and the Netherlands, and cash in on some money. But that's not our spirit. We want to explore new territories and invest the money we earn in those three countries in touring the rest of Europe.”

► www.balthazarband.be

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Ghent cocktail bar Jigger's made the list of the **best 50 cocktail bars in Europe** at the recent Cocktails Spirits conference in Paris, an annual event that tracks new trends in the cocktail industry. The Jigger's team did a presentation introducing their bar and its reservation only concept and made two of their speciality cocktails.

► www.jiggers.be

Ghent-based Irish filmmaker Declan Lynch is **accepting scripts to be part of the *Follow* film project**. Ten short scripts will be selected to be fused together for one feature-length film, starring the same pair of characters in different parts of the city. The film will screen at the International Film Festival in Ghent this October before being released online. Both emerging and established writers are invited to submit scripts, which can be written in either Dutch or English, and the deadline is 29 July.

► www.tinyurl.com/followgent

The author of the best-selling book *The 500 Hidden Secrets of Brussels* has now published *The 500 Hidden Secrets of Antwerp* (Luster, €14.95), detailing little-known places and facts about the port city. Brussels-based Scottish writer Derek Blyth, who was formerly the editor-in-chief of *Flanders Today*, gears the book towards locals as much as tourists.

► www.lusterweb.com

Screen Flanders is allocating **nearly €5 million to 20 international film productions** that will be shot partially or fully in Flanders. The investment is expected to return about €20 million to the region in audio-visual work. Most of the projects are in co-operation with France or the Netherlands, including *Asterix: The Mansion of the Gods*, *De behandelings* (The Treatment) by Flemish director Hans Herbots and *De dwaaltuin* (The Rambling Garden) by Flemish director Douglas Boswell. Screen Flanders is an initiative of economy minister Kris Peeters, with the goal of bringing more co-productions to the region.

► www.screenflanders.be

Top chefs from around the world will cook for a 70 lucky few in Ghent during the Gelinaz! event on 30 June. Locals Jason Blanckaert, Kobe Desramauts and Olly Ceulenaere will be joined by 20 more chefs, including Basque chef Eneko Atxa of two-Michelin star restaurant Azurmendi in Larrabetzu, Spain and Agata Felluga of Paris' Le Chateaubriand, number 18 on The World's 50 Best Restaurants list. Entrance is gained only by bidding on a seat through eBay.

► www.gelinaz.com

“The place you live influences your identity, and the latter resonates in your music”

me more time to get to them, but still we would be seen as a New York band.”

Devoldere had no musical reason to move to Brussels but says that “the place you live influences your identity, and the latter resonates in your music.” If so, that'll only be heard on the third album, since he and Jinte Deprez penned the songs for *Rats*, which was released last autumn, while still living in Ghent. He and Deprez – they both play guitar and sing – formed Balthazar in 2004, with Patricia Vanneste (violin, keyboards, vocals). But with its current line-up – with bass player Simon Casier and drummer Christophe Claeys – the band has only been together since 2007. It took

when making *Applause*, probably fuelled by uncertainty. But on *Rats* we worked more intuitively. I think it rendered the album a bit more adventurous and mature.”

There's a perception that Devoldere and Deprez are leading the band, but we shouldn't exaggerate this, the former points out. “It's correct when it comes to songwriting, but only to that. We're a band of five people, and all of us participate in how our music sounds. Live, we generally get better reviews than for our recordings, and that's thanks to everyone.” Three festivals are being held this summer at Werchter, Flanders' holy ground of music festivals, and Balthazar are playing at all three of them. It's a feat no one has ever

Balthazar live:

4 JULY

Rock Werchter

Festivalpark, Haachtsesteenweg, Werchter

► www.rockwerchter.be

13 JULY

TW Classic

Festivalpark, Haachtsesteenweg, Werchter

► www.twclassic.be

MUSIC REVIEWS

Celestial Wolves

Wood for Wood • Dunk!

Celestial Wolves, a quintet from Sint-Lievens-Houtem (near Ghent), have only been around for two years but have still released a very convincing and mature-sounding debut album. *Wood for Wood* is made up of eight tunes, each between five and nine minutes, of instrumental post-rock. Three interwoven electric guitars, supported by a

flexible, at times even jazzy, rhythm section, build an intriguing wall of sound. Still openings mostly end in an explosion of sounds, but,



through subtle variations, the band avoid repeating themselves. A promising first album by these – you saw this one coming, right? – young wolves.

► www.celestial-wolves.be

Dan Lacksman

Electric Dreams • 77 Recordings

Dan Lacksman became a cult hero as one-third of the Brussels synth group Telex, famous for their surreal pop songs and

the dance hit “Moscow Diskow”. But Lacksman is even more appreciated as a stellar producer and sound engineer. *Electric Dreams* is his first solo outing in ages. Listening to it, you're beamed up to the end of the 1970s: This is *très* Telex. But if you like Telex, you shouldn't care about that: The musical feel is kept intact, and the lyrics are just as crazy. The album is funny and breezy, light-hearted and relaxing.

He made *Electric Dreams* with his daughter, Alice. His succession is ensured, but for the moment, Lacksman senior is still holding the reins.



A caravan hen house and Javanese dolls

Plazey festival

Andy Furniere

The start of summer in Flanders doesn't necessarily mean a sunbathing season has begun, but it does guarantee the kick-off of months crowded with open-air festivals. In Brussels, the free city festival Plazey offers a month full of concerts, movie screenings, workshops and family activities.

For the 21st year, the Elisabeth park at Koekelberg basilica is the scene of the Plazey festival. But it's the first time that it will last for an entire month, instead of just two weekends. While the activity used to be centred on a stage, a festival park is now set up around a temporary café. The festival is open from Wednesday to Friday and on Sundays.

On Wednesdays, kids can try out sports, like tai chi and wrestling, or express their creativity during workshops on making, for example, Javanese dolls or Asian kites. Film

enthusiasts are expected on Thursday evenings for open-air screenings. On the programme this week is the animated *The Triplets of Belleville*. Next Thursday, the festival screens a documentary about the Brussels Boxing Academy, preceded by a boxing demonstration in a ring at the park. Throughout the festival, you can visit the small movie shack, to watch short amateur films about the Koekelberg basilica.

Fridays provide a diverse line-up of musicians. On the concert stage this week is Les Fils de Teuhpu, a French band that will put you in a good mood with their mix of ska, jazz, punk rock and gypsy music. Remarkable performers are the hip-hop and beat-box artists of Les Jeunes du Quartier, a project of Belgian rapper Pitcho with Brussels youngsters. Before treating your ears, you can also enjoy a meal prepared by volunteers.



Sunday is family day. After a brunch, visitors can make seed bombs, listen to fairy tales, create personalised T-shirts or have a haircut. On the last Sunday, the festival ends with a bang

that consists of animation, workshops and a lot of music. The brass band Café Marché will play the retro Roger Variety Show, La Femme Belge bring back the 1930s with their acoustic

swing music and the six *Brusselaars* of Opmoc introduce Skunk – their own genre that mixes funk, reggae, hip hop, punk, blues and ska. For the Brussels Underground project, Belgian violinist Nicolas Hauzeur brought together Roma gypsies that usually play in the Brussels metros.

The Plazey festival also promotes an eco-friendly lifestyle, with workshops in a temporary vegetable garden. The caravan in this garden functions as a henhouse; during the day, the chickens walk around the grass, where visitors can hunt for eggs. The Plazey café and wooden furniture is created with recycled materials in cooperation with Brussels artists.

High up on the agenda is the theme of cycling in the city. Visitors can participate in debates on cycling, add bicycle parts to a totem and get their bike fixed during the Repair Cafés every Friday.

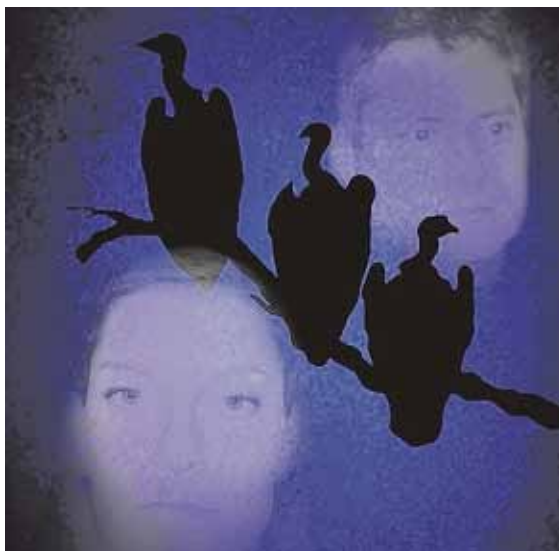
Until 7 July | Elisabeth park, Koekelberg basilica, Brussels | www.plazey.be

PERFORMANCE

Antigone

When last we met him, Oedipus had discovered that he killed his father and married his mother. Then the doomed king gouged out both eyes and staggered into the sunset, leaving his equally doomed children to step into the spotlight. This last instalment of Sophocles' Theban trilogy follows daughter Antigone, who defies the new king by burying her recently deceased outlaw brother. The classic drama is given a modern spin by Brussels-based amateur theatre company ETCetera and director Sophie Thompson. As classical Greek has gone out of fashion lately, Thompson's Antigone is performed in English. Early birds will be pleased to note the matinee on the afternoon of 29 June.

Georgio Valentino



25-29 June, 20.00 | Theatre Varia, Brussels

www.varia.be

MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

Ghent

Straat: Inspired by old photographs and the Vooruit building's 100th anniversary, theatre groups Nevski Prospekt and KIP recreate all that the building has "seen" or "experienced" over the course of the last century

JUN 22-23 (last tickets) at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23

www.vooruit.be

What the Body Does Not Remember: Ultima Vez performs this "brutal confrontation between dance and music" by choreographer Wim Vandekeybus, a revival of his iconic work from 1997

JUN 20-23 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23

www.vooruit.be

VISUAL ARTS

Vlaanderen in Aalst

It's fair to say that Filip Claus knows Aalst inside-out. The veteran photo-journalist spent a full year photographing the East Flemish town. Aalst's public museum 't Gasthuys commissioned Claus in 2011 to explore every nook and cranny and then show the world what he found. The result is an exhibition at the intersection of fine art and documentary, a complex portrait of a modern Flemish city. Like a proper anthropologist, Claus trekked from town centre to the outer boroughs, looking at all aspects of community life: tradition, arts, religion, education and sport. Nothing is off-limits for this hard-nosed reporter (who nevertheless has a soft spot for his hometown). The end result is at times poignant and at times humorous, but it's always genuine. **GV**



Until 22 September | 't Gasthuys, Aalst | www.aalst.be/museum

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Bruges

Was het nu '60 of '70?: Selection of contemporary art from the 1960s and '70s, including many portrayals of current events from the period, bright colours, pop art, power, politics, environmental concerns and newfound freedom of body and mind

Until SEP 15 at Arentshuis, Dijver 16

www.museabrugge.be

Hasselt

Moda - Made in Italy: The extraordinary but complex history of Italian fashion, starting with the post Second World War period, when the Florentine businessman Giovanni Battista Giorgini decided to organise shows to promote Italian fashion

Until FEB 9 2014 at Modemuseum Hasselt, Gasthuisstraat 11

www.modemuseumhasselt.be

Leuven

Open M: I Could Have Lived Here: Multi-media works by 27 artists with a link to Flemish Brabant

Until AUG 25 at Museum M, Vanderkelenstraat 28

www.mleuven.be

FOOD & DRINK

Fish and Folklore Festival

Mariekerke is a quintessential Flemish fishing village of yesteryear. Stretched out idly on the banks of the Scheldt, the place is a refuge from the hurly-burly of urban Antwerp, just downriver. Every year the townsfolk celebrate tradition with this outdoor festival dedicated to Mariekerke's historical lifeblood: fish. The main event is at noon on Saturday, when the fishermen's parade sets off from the market square. As the procession of floats wends its way through town, costumed performers (including the ubiquitous Flemish giants) act out scenes from local history and mythology. There's also a fresh seafood market on the waterfront and a flea market in Droogveldstraat. Artisanal crafts and regional food and drink can be found on virtually every street corner. Free admission means you'll have that much more ready cash for *waterzooi* and beer. **GV**



22 & 23 June | Across Mariekerke | www.folklore.mariekerke.eu

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Brussels

RestoDays Star Edition: A Michelin-star/Gault Millau edition of the popular annual event that sees set menus in top restaurants at discounted prices

JUN 21-29 across Brussels

► www.restodays.be

Ghent

Flemish Food Fest: Ghent's top chefs Kobe Desramauts, Jason Blanckaert and Olly Ceulenaere present this festival of Flemish food, featuring a farmer's market and barbecue where 20 young chefs prepare dishes with local products

JUN 30 10.00-22.00 at DOK Gent, Koopvaardijlaan

► www.flemishfoodfest.be

Midzomerontbijt (Midsummer Breakfast): Breakfast on beautiful green abbey lawns, featuring fresh bread, organic cheese, jams made with fruit from the abbey garden, honey and drinks

JUN 22 9.00-11.00 at Sint-Pietersabdij, Sint-Pietersplein 9

► www.sintpietersabdijgent.be

CLASSICAL

Early Music Day

It's time for Flanders' annual festival of medieval melodies. The focus of this year's edition is 12th-century troubadour Hendrik van Veldeke. Born in the area that is now Limburg, Veldeke is considered one of the first Europeans; he travelled extensively and blended German, French and Dutch influences in his work. Young local musicians from Zefiro Torna, Ensemble Leones and Sequentia Ensemble perform Veldeke's compositions throughout the day, using the same instruments you would have seen 1,000 years ago.

But there's more to Early Music Day than music. As an added bonus, dance company Fabuleus and theatre troupe Froefroe present performances inspired by Veldeke and his contemporaries, and everything takes place on the beautiful grounds of the Alden Biesen castle. Get it while you can: This is the last edition of Early Music Day in its present format. After a successful 30-year run, the festival is due to re-invent itself in 2014. **GV**



30 June, from 10.00 | Landcommanderij Alden Biesen, Bilzen

► www.dagoudemuziek.be

MORE CLASSICAL THIS WEEK

Antwerp province

CMB Open Door Days: The Centre for Musical Instrument Making shows off its students' creations and hosts a barbecue and concerts by classical guitarists Oman Kaminsky and Koen Claeys, steel-string guitar by Snaarmaarwaar and classical compositions for violin, cello and clavier

JUN 21-23 at Kasteel d'Ursel, Hingene (concerts) & CMB, Guido Gezellelaan, Puurs

► www.cmbpuurs.be

Brussels

Odysseia Ensemble: This co-operative brings together horns, strings and voice for a unique and moving performance of songs by Schubert and Mozart

JUN 23 11.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23

► www.bozar.be

Leuven

Noémie Schellens: The Flemish classical soprano performs songs by Mozart, Verdi, Hahn and Dvorák from a romantic bridge in the park, accompanied by Armenian bassist Gevorg Grigoryan

JUN 21 21.30 at Dijlepark, Schapenstraat

► www.stadssopraan.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Chez Richard Minimenstraat 2, Brussels

There are several bars with a history in Brussels, but not many that carry their age as gracefully as Chez Richard. One of the oldest bars in the centre of the capital, it has withstood the test of time among the art galleries, antique stores and chocolatiers at the Grote Zavel. When you enter, the wooden interior and movie posters in the small room bring to mind the sort of beloved black-and-white classics like Laurel and Hardy.

The previous owner – called Richard – changed the name of the bar after it had existed for decades under the banner of Au Grand Pot. Yes, the owner now for almost 20 years, decided to retain the name

and the authenticity for which the bar is now well-known and loved. Chez Richard may look old-fashioned, but it's not a museum where time stands still. In the evenings, from Thursday to Saturday, you can order tapas at the stand on the terrace. On weekends, a DJ livens up the laid-back atmosphere. Yves tells me they also plan to organise concerts and theme parties in the near future.

After the summer, the tapas will be replaced by oysters, available from October until the end of April. All year long, the bar serves breakfast and traditional Brussels dishes like *stoemp* and *carbonnade*



at reasonable prices. Apart from beers and wines, you can also find refreshing cocktails on the menu. But like any proper bar, Chez Richard also offers a lot of stories through its customers. People from all social backgrounds are talking in different languages about their adventures in life – perhaps a little exaggerated. The openness of the place attracts many artists on a visit for an exhibition in the area. For more info, visit the Facebook page, which is kept very up to date. Or just drop by, like in the old days; it's open every day from morning to evening.

► www.tinyurl.com/ChezRichard

Andy Furniere

BITE

Robyn Boyle

Chicken Inn ★★★☆

How influential a photo can be. One Facebook post of mouth-watering homemade *koninginnehapje*, or *vol-au-vent*, and I'm on my way to Chicken Inn in Zottegem, about 30 kilometres south of Ghent. Specialising in all-chicken dishes and snacks, this new bistro has a unique focus – rotisserie chicken, to eat there or to take away. But that's not all. What used to be a dusty old café was transformed earlier this year into a pleasant eatery with an airy, modern dining room and roomy terrace. My partner and I have a seat and peruse the menu, although we've already got our minds set on one thing. The photo that inspired this impromptu visit to the Flemish Ardennes is of a true Belgian classic: thick chunks of tender chicken in a creamy mushroom sauce, served inside a hollow case of puff pastry. But they're out. You'd think I'd be annoyed, but in fact, I appreciate this in a restaurant, as it



shows that they make one big pot of the dish from scratch, at the risk of running out. In any case, it ends up being a blessing in disguise as it forces me to order something else, which is quite possibly even better. My chicken brochette is made up of several fat and juicy morsels of pure

chicken breast, lightly seasoned and slowly grilled rotisserie style. I've never had such succulent chicken in my life. It's smothered with my choice of sauce – made from chunks of fresh mushrooms and loads of cream. With all this richness come a pail of fresh-cut fries (a rarity in restaurants these

days), homemade mayo and a big bowl of crisp salad. Across the table, my partner is working on one-half of a chicken, also rotisserie-grilled to perfection. The skin is the best part, lightly crisped, salty and full of flavour. His also comes with a sauce, this time one that is sweet, spicy and creamy, with black peppercorns still intact. In-between bites and raving about the meat, he's wholly won over by fresh fries and mayo. We both wash our meals down with the local Oud

Zottegems brew. Despite the huge portions, we still find room for a *dame blanche*. Another Belgian classic, this dessert is a wonderfully simple combination of vanilla ice cream, warm, runny chocolate and fluffy whipped cream. After this and two coffees, we decide to roll on home. But not before paying the more than reasonable €48 bill and waving goodbye to Marc, the friendly owner.

► www.facebook.com/kiekekotteke

- 📍 Firmin De Meyerstraat 2, Zottegem (East Flanders); 0483.59.99.90
- 🕒 11.00-22.00, Thurs-Mon
- € Mains: €8-€16
- 📖 New bistro specialising in chicken any way you like it – on a spit, in the wok, fried, on a salad...

TALKING DUTCH

Derek Blyth

A sense of (mis)direction



My heart always sinks when I see the orange road sign with the word *omleiding* (or occasionally *omlegging*) on it. I know that I might as well abandon the journey there and then, because there is no hope of ever getting to the destination. I have lived in this country long enough to know that *omleiding*, which the dictionary defines as “deviation”, is a lot more than just a jog out of your way. It means you will be sent off your route, but never, or almost never, directed back again. You will be left to your own devices to puzzle out how to get back to the road down which you were happily driving. Even if there is a sign along the way, it will be placed so ambiguously that it could be interpreted as “left” or “straight ahead”. Whichever direction you choose will be the wrong one. You will either end up in an industrial estate or you will have to reverse out of a cabbage field. You might as well translate *omleiding* as “Give up now”.

It might not matter in other countries. I found a website called omleiding.net, which provides information on *alle omleidingen in Nederland* – all the detours in the Netherlands. Here is what it said: *Er zijn op dit moment vier omleidingen in Nederland*, there are currently four diversions in the Netherlands. Four! There are often four diversions in our street. There are many reasons for *omleidingen* in Flanders. Some are caused by roadworks which can last for years. But the diversion could equally be due to a procession of mediaeval penitents, or a cycle race, or a finch-singing competition that is traditionally held on the main road through a village. We are now entering the summer season, which is when most *omleidingen* are likely to happen. Every little town has its *kermis*, or fair, and so every little town has its *omleiding*, or reason to chew off your own hand. The worst that can happen is that

you follow the *omleiding* around one village's beer festival only to run into a different *omleiding* put in place to avoid the neighbouring village's goose-decapitating ceremony. The orange signs look the same everywhere, so you have no hope of ever returning to your original route. At this point, you might despair, but I advise against this because sometimes you discover the most interesting things when you are on a detour. So if you do spot something, I suggest you park the car and join in the fun. The word for that is not *omleiding*, but *verleiding*, temptation. You might have noticed a new name on Talking Dutch this week. We must bid adieu to Philip Ebels, who delivered a smart, insightful column for nearly two years. Derek Blyth, the original editor-in-chief of Flanders Today, is back in our pages to pen Talking Dutch from here on out. Welcome back, Derek.

The last word...

Heartbreaker

“I don't know what it's like to be dumped.” Flemish pop and soul singer Natalia, in a recent interview

Pulling a fast one

“That wasn't me. That was a look-alike.” Cyclist Johan Verhaegen, banned from competition 10 years ago for doping, took part in a race under another name and was outed by members of his own club. He now risks a €25,000 fine

The days that are no more

“There hasn't been much time to mourn, but sometimes the sorrow catches up with you. At night, for example.” Epiphany Vanderhaeghen, daughter of Flemish designer Kaat Tilley, ahead of a tribute to her mother, who died one year ago

Amen

“It took about 10 minutes; there was some prayer and some holy water sprinkled around. Nothing spectacular happened afterwards.” The Catholic Tanguy Veys of Vlaams Belang took part in an exorcism in the federal parliament to protect it from evil

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

We keep hearing about how few women there are in academia and the sciences. The numbers of female professors and researchers compared to male are low. We talk to some of Flanders' top educators to find out where this discrepancy comes from and what the region is doing about it

Science & Education

Flemish researcher Angelo Vermeulen is in Hawaii right now, but he's far from on holiday. In fact, he's involved in a project that simulates the environment on Mars. It was difficult to speak with him because of the seven-minute delay in telephone communications (such as would be the case from Mars), but we did manage to exchange some emails to find out what researchers hope to learn from the experiment

Summer

It's time once again for *Flanders Today's* Summer Festival Guide! We'll offer up an exhaustive list of music festivals happening in Brussels and Flanders and tell you which ones we *especially* recommend