

Strength in numbers

Flanders joins forces with federal and regional governments to address competition concerns

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Life on Mars

A Flemish scientist is leading a crew on a simulation of a mission to Mars



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No more lost potential

What Flanders is doing to get more women to the top of academia

Linda A Thompson

Recent headline-grabbing rector elections and new initiatives by Flemish lawmakers to get more women to the top at universities have begun to push the gender gap in research into the mainstream. At the same time, they have brought to light just how serious the gender gap in Flanders is.

A couple of years ago, Hannelore De Grande stumbled into research. Not long after she graduated, an opportunity opened to work in Ghent University's sociology faculty. Still not sure what she really wanted to do, she took the leap. The 27-year-old is now a junior researcher pursuing her doctoral degree at the Free University of Brussels (VUB). As much as she has enjoyed doing research over the past few years, she still can't see an academic career for herself. She's

seen what has happened with too many of her postdoctoral colleagues who finished their PhDs but couldn't secure teaching positions – forever on the hunt for project funding, never certain they'll be able to stay on. "I can't see myself sticking

"The rector elections have really drawn attention to this issue"

around much longer," she says. "I have no ambition to stay at the university." That makes De Grande one of many young female researchers in Flanders who check out before they realise their full potential. Though women outnumber men at bachelor, graduate and PhD

level, they fall off the career ladder at the more senior levels – and more so in Flanders than almost anywhere else in the EU. "We have an ever-increasing number of women succeeding in higher education, and yet we do not see that reflected when you move into the management regions of science and the top and well-paid functions in science," says Alison Woodward of the VUB's RHEA Centre for Gender and Diversity in Flanders. "Something is happening along the way, and there's an enormous loss."

Recent numbers show that women make up just 11% of high-ranking academic positions at Flemish universities. That contributes to Belgium being the second-worst performing country of the 27 EU member states. If Flanders hopes to be become a competitive knowledge-based economy, nothing less than an all-hands-on-deck approach will do. Simply put,

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FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

Marc Van Montagu



© Courtesy Ugent

For the first time ever, the World Food Prize has this year been awarded to a Fleming: the plant scientist Marc Van Montagu, former director of the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology's Department of Plant Systems Biology at the University of Ghent. The prize is often referred to as the Nobel Prize of agriculture. But, while it is prestigious, it's also hotly contested.

Marc Van Montagu was born in 1933 in Ghent and studied molecular biology at a time that allowed him to be present for the most breath-taking advances in the science. The main aspect of his work concerns genetic manipulation, and he was a pioneer in the field in the 1970s. Together with his colleague Jeff Schell he discovered the mechanism by which the micro-organism *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* causes tumours in plants.

That knowledge opened the door to altering plants' genetics, creating the first transgenic plant, a tobacco plant, in 1983. Since then, the process has been used to create genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to improve their resistance to saline-heavy conditions, drought, cold and pests.

The process of genetically modifying plants is, of course,

highly controversial, with opponents pointing to the lack of information on the long-term effects, as well as the potential for GMOs to have a direct effect on other plants in the environment. Professor Van Montagu helped set up two spin-off companies: Plant Genetic Systems in 1982, now owned by Bayer CropScience, and CropDesign in 1998, now owned by BASF.

"The World Food Prize honours achievements that are extremely important for society, and I am therefore much honoured to be able to receive this award," he said after the announcement in Washington DC by US Secretary of State John Kerry. "It emphasises the importance of GMO technology as a contributing factor to sustainable food production. I am well aware that there is still a long way to go before this technology is fully established to produce the orphan crops and varieties essential to food security of smallholder farmers in less developed countries. I hope that this recognition will pave the way for Europe to embrace the benefits of this technology."

Van Montagu shares the \$250,000 (€191,000) prize with two other laureates: Robert Fraley, chief technology officer for Monsanto; and Mary-Dell Chilton, founder of Syngenta Biotechnology.

FLANDERS TODAY

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News in brief

The Beurs, the iconic building on Anspachlaan that once housed Brussels' stock exchange, will become the **Belgian Beer Temple** by 2018, the federation of Belgian brewers has announced. The Beer Temple, a museum in the vein of Amsterdam's Heineken Experience, will be managed jointly by the federation and the city of Brussels, which hope to attract 400,000 visitors a year.

investigation. The archive of the University of Leuven for the period 1425-1797 has been accepted for inclusion in **Unesco's Memory of the World Register**. Leuven was one of the two most important universities north of the Alps during the 16th century, and the archive offers an insight, Unesco said, into the workings of a modern university of the period.

The **Zwin nature reserve** in Knokke on the border of Flanders and Zeeland will close to the public this weekend until 18 August to allow for an upkeep of the natural areas as well as the building of a new visitor centre.

Flemish professor Marleen Temmerman, the director of reproductive health at the World Health Organisation, has been awarded the **Prize for Free-Thinking Humanism** by the Antwerp-based Humanist and Free-Thinking Association for her "years of effort on a worldwide scale for the rights, health and emancipation of women, characterised by her driven yet humble personal style".

Temmerman was head of gynaecology at the University of Ghent and founded the International Centre for Reproductive Health, with facilities in Ghent, Kenya and Mozambique.

American **nanny Aubrey Alta Anderson** has been convicted in absentia by a court in Bruges of deliberately breaking the wrists of twin babies in her care in Knokke-Heist. The now 32-year-old fled to the US soon after she was suspected in 2011. She was recently sentenced to five years suspended for a similar offence in the US. The Bruges prosecutor said he would request her extradition to serve her sentence here.

The **National Botanic Garden in Meise**, just outside of Brussels, will come into Flemish government hands next January, after a committee of the Flemish parliament last week officially approved an agreement with the French-speaking community. The gardens, with a collection of more than 18,000 specimens, were originally in federal hands, and the handover to Flanders was agreed in 2001. Difficulties over finance and staff arrangements held up the actual transfer. French-speakers employed when the institution was federal will remain in their jobs and have their affairs handled by a representative of the French-speaking community. The cost of the transfer is estimated at €6.5 million.

Rail authority NMBS has switched to its summer timetable, which runs until 1 September and sees many extra trains travelling to the coast. The NMBS has also brought back the Summer Pass, which offers a one-way trip between any two Belgian stations for a maximum of €7.50.

In De Wulf, the Dranouter restaurant of rising culinary star Kobe Desramaults, has been awarded **fifth place in a list of the top 100 restaurants** in Europe compiled by the website Opinionated About Dining on the basis of 110,000 reviews.

Health authorities will begin a project in October to **detect colon cancer more effectively**, especially in the risk group of people aged 56 to 74, said Flemish health minister Jo Vandeurzen. Colon cancer affects some 5,000 people in Flanders every year. Members of the risk group will receive an invitation for an examination every two years, as well as a free kit for taking a stool sample to help early detection.

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Kerb garden

Compared to many other major cities, Brussels can boast a fair amount of green space, with some outstanding examples of parks such as the Ter Kamerenbos in Elsene/Ukkel. And now, you won't just be limited to admiring the beauty of such a place during a stroll there in the dappled sunshine. You'll be allowed to eat it.

Brussels' environment minister Evelyne Huytebroeck has, with the help of Leefmilieu Brussel, launched the country's first "Edible Park".

Though "park" is perhaps overstating the case. What's involved is a plot of garden on the Kunstberg in Brussels, which has been planted with a range of different edibles, including wormwood, lovage, honey clover, wild marjoram, snow peas and lemon thyme. All are able to be consumed in one way or another. Wormwood is the principal ingredient in absinthe, but is also used to make a tea. Lovage is a fragrant herb used in many dishes. Honey clover is used to flavour beer, and so on.

To find out more about the plants, all you have to do is go along to the Edible Park on any Thursday between 27 June and 29 August from 17.00 to 21.00, when a chef will be on hand to demonstrate how each plant can be used, in combination with other ingredients.



© Leefmilieu Brussel

The goal is to inspire Brussels residents to grow food for themselves. "Fruit and vegetables grown in a garden, a park or even on a balcony are full of flavour, brighten up their surroundings and form a source of sustainable food," said Huytebroeck. "This summertime appointment ... will give the people of Brussels a chance to discover, taste and share a mass of gorgeous and delicious fruits and vegetables."

► www.leefmilieubrussel.be

No more lost potential

Universities have until January to formulate a policy to increase gender diversity

► continued from page 1

Flanders cannot afford to waste half of its potential research talent.

"That's the economic argument for gender equality," says Veerle Draulans, a professor in gender and diversity at the universities of Leuven and Tilburg. "An organisation should put to use every talent and ensure that the pool of talent from which to fish is as big as possible."

A couple of weeks ago, Flanders came very close to taking one giant step towards more gender equality. In the days preceding the rector elections in Ghent and Leuven, it looked like Flanders' two biggest universities would both put a woman at the helm. In the end, Anne De Paepe (*pictured on cover*) won the election at the University of Ghent, while Karen Maex lost with just 36 votes in Leuven.

A lucky coincidence

The gender gap dominated the rector elections in a way it hadn't ever before. In daily newspapers and on-campus debates, the candidates were grilled on their views about quotas, work-life balance and the under-representation of women in academia. One working group at the University of Leuven (KULeuven) even rated the candidates on their gender-friendliness and gave voting advice accordingly.

"The simultaneous elections were a lucky coincidence," says Draulans. "I think it's good they have really concretely drawn attention to this issue."

De Paepe's appointment was the direct result of a decree adopted last year that required male and female candidates to be put forward for all rector and vice-rector positions.

De Paepe, a physician and head of the university's centre for medical genetics, is the first female head of a Flemish university in 10 years and only the second in the history of Flemish universities.

Still, these appointments shouldn't lead lawmakers and university administrators to rest on their laurels. "Just because you have a woman at the head of your university doesn't mean you're a gender-friendly university," explains Elke Valgaeren, a former researcher at the University of Hasselt's SEIN group for Identity, Diversity and Inequality Research. "If you want to change the ratio, you have to appoint more women. This is a positive development, but it's not a guarantee for the many women dying to get more opportunities to move on up."

Twice as tough

In Flanders, the glass ceiling in science is firm and high. Though women outnumber men at the bachelor, graduate and PhD levels, they are sorely under-represented at the highest echelons. The Glass Ceiling Index literally puts a number on how difficult it is for women to reach the top ranks of research compared to their male colleagues. The European average stands at 1.8, meaning it's nearly twice as difficult for women. For Belgium, the number is 2.25. Of the 27 EU member countries, only Luxembourg, Lithuania and Cyprus do worse.

Even more work remains to be done when it comes to diversity at large. Marc Hooghe, professor in political sciences at KULeuven, says that diversity is still not an explicit policy goal at Flemish universities. That

concern for faculty to reflect the diversity of society at large, he says, "is completely absent here, which is kind of strange. Students often look for role models. And what they see here in Leuven is white men between 40 and 60."

With 22% of its faculty members women, the University of Hasselt has the smallest gender gap in Flemish

the tide, Ingrid Lieten must have thought.

Lieten, Flemish minister of innovation, together with the minister for equal opportunities and education, Pascal Smet, recently demanded that all six Flemish universities come up with an action plan to stop the waste of female talent. She wants those action plans,

attitude," he said.

According to Hooghe, these boards, made up mostly of men aged 50 and older, shun outsiders. "They always tend to select people like themselves, basically. The old-boys network says to half of the population: 'Well, we don't know you that well, so you don't really belong here.'

Open recruitment

It's hard to know if those boards are indeed the reason that Flanders lags behind most of the rest of Europe, but the gender gap in research is causing many to question how Flemish universities operate. And getting more women to the top inevitably means overhauling universities' traditional opaque approach to recruiting and hiring. Woodward contrasts the situation with Scandinavian countries where the recruiting process is more open – when was the job announced, who was on the jury, who were the other candidates. "In Belgium, no one knows about two-thirds of the jobs. How did that guy get it?"

That's why when candidates compete for a job, they need every bit of help they can get, particularly from their informal networks, she continues. "If not they're not in these networks, they don't get these two or three extra stepping stones into their CV."

That's where foreigners, people of different ethnicities and women typically draw the short straw, says Woodward: "people who do good work, but are not at the lunch table, who don't have a friend on the inside."

► www.tinyurl.com/rheacentre

"Just because you have a woman at the head of your university doesn't mean you're a gender-friendly university"

universities. Valgaeren says that the university's small size might be key to understanding why it outperforms other institutions. "When a couple of women join, that has a much bigger impact percentage-wise than at larger universities."

According to Valgaeren, the university's administration is concerned with gender and, crucially, its words lead to actions. "When a few people consider gender equality important and support it, that fans out across the university – because it is so much smaller, because the lines of decision-making are much shorter, and there are more informal meetings."

Stop the waste

The recent attention to the gender research gap comes at a critical moment. Over the next few years, an entire generation of baby-boomer professors is expected to retire and thousands of new professors will have to be recruited. It's time to turn

due in January, to coalesce into an inter-university charter for gender equality. Presenting her proposal, Lieten underlined that gender imbalance would never be a self-correcting phenomenon. "At this rate, we'll have to wait another 70 years for gender equality," she said. The range of responses to Lieten's plan – with some commentators suggesting women themselves were to blame, others arguing there aren't enough talented female candidates – irked Hooghe. In a powerful op-ed in *De Standaard*, he debunked those arguments. Citing the numbers of women in research in the rest of Europe where "women have exactly the same psychology as far as I know", he said: "It's such an easy lie. 'Oh, but women are not ambitious, and they don't want to'."

Instead, Hooghe put the blame on the boards that get the final say on who is promoted and who gets tenure: "What Belgian universities still have is this kind of closed-shop



From left: VUB researcher Hannelore De Grande, Alison Woodward of the VUB's RHEA Centre for Gender and Diversity in Flanders and former UHasselt researcher Elke Valgaeren

School closed after abuse allegations

Angry parents file complaints against a pre-school teacher in Antwerp

Alan Hope

Antwerp education authorities last week closed the Blokkendoos pre-school two weeks before the official end of term, as a result of rising anger among parents over allegations of sexual abuse made against a female teacher.

The row began last week when a number of parents approached the school administration with complaints of unusual behaviour by their children. Some had spoken of inappropriate behaviour and "intimate games" by the teacher, and some children behaved strangely in the showers. Two parents were reported to have filed a complaint with the Antwerp prosecutor's office. The complaints were studied by police and the pupil support agency CLB, and the school stressed that no objective evidence of any abuse



Parents are demanding the dismissal of a teacher at Blokkendoos pre-school

could be found. Authorities decided to go ahead and close down classes in the face of the rising anger of parents. Normal pre-school

lessons were suspended, although the premises will remain open for day-care of children who need it, supervised by staff from other

schools.

"We could do nothing else in the circumstances," said education department spokesman Frederik Picard. "The school team decided no longer to give lessons, in the interests of the children and other staff."

Parents continue to demand the resignation of the teacher, who has been suspended. The story has even found its way into the news in Morocco, from where many of the parents originate, and their protest has been joined by concerned parents from other parts of the city. "This is an exceptional situation that requires exceptional measures," said city education alderman Claude Marinower. "We hope that by 2 September the school will be able to function again as it always has."

Walking in Brussels more popular than driving

Walking in Brussels is now more popular than driving, with only one-third of residents taking the car when they have to go somewhere, according to a report by the Brussels-Capital Region's knowledge centre for mobility, published last week.

The last time such a survey was carried out was in 1999, when half of all journeys, regardless of length, were by car. Now that figure has come down to 32%. Over the same period, walking has increased from 32% to 37%. Cycling is also more popular than in the previous survey - 3.5% up from 1.2%.

Public transport saw the largest

increase, from 14.5% of journeys in 1999 to 25% now for trams, buses and metro combined. Train travel only went up from 0.2% to 0.9%, but the figures cited are only for travel within Brussels. For those entering and leaving the region, the train figures were much higher.

Car-sharing, a phenomenon that did not exist when the last study was carried out, now accounts for a substantial share of the city's car trips, the report says. Coincidentally, the Brussels car-sharing service Cambio is celebrating its 10th anniversary and now has 10,000 subscribers, with a target of 25,000 by the year 2020, mobility minister Brigitte Grouwels said.

NSA records stopped attack in Belgium

According to a report by CNN, the Prism project run by the United States National Security Agency (NSA) to gather data on telephone and internet communications in the US and Europe was successful in stopping a planned terrorist attack in Belgium.

The attack allegedly involved the Brussels-based Malika El Aroud, who first came to public notice when her husband took part in the assassination of anti-Taliban leader Ahmad Shah Massoud in Afghanistan on 9 September 2001, an event later seen by many as the catalyst for the attacks in New York two days later.

El Aroud was later found guilty

of organising terrorist networks and sentenced in Brussels in 2010. According to CNN, police in Brussels were tipped off in December 2008 to the existence of an Al Qaeda cell in Brussels as the result of an email intercepted by the Prism operation.

One of the members of the cell, Moez Garsallaoui, revealed that the group was about to carry out a suicide bombing.

No evidence of a bombing was found in a 2008 raid, and the pair were later convicted on lesser charges. Garsallaoui is thought to have been killed in a drone attack in Pakistan last year.

Bridge placed over Ghent's Ringvaart

Workers last week carried out a massive operation to place a 3,500 tonne bridge over the Ringvaart waterway in the northwest of Ghent. The section is a cable-stayed bridge with a pylon 40 metres high from which the bridge deck is suspended. Construction started about a year ago in a special works beside the waterway and the motorway.

Last Saturday, the entire section was inched onto a floating pontoon, which then carried the section into place. The new bridge will form part of the new link between Zwijnaarde and Merelbeke, as well as linking the two banks of the Ringvaart by the Ghelamco Arena, Ghent's new stadium.



THE WEEK IN FIGURES

2m 23cm

width of the narrowest house in Antwerp, in the Huikstraat. The house is up for sale for a price of €389,000. It was built to fill the narrow space in 2006

17.5 km/h

average speed reached by trams operated by De Lijn, far under the 25 km/h target speed set by the Flemish government. Only one in three buses ever reach that target speed

€90 million

handed over to help balance the federal budget by asylum and immigration minister Maggie De Block, who is able to spare the funds because of streamlining asylum procedures

1 in 8

number of times callers with Arabic names are refused appointments to see a rental property in Flanders, according to a study by UGent. If you also have an accent, the number jumps to 1 in 6

82%

of people in Flanders think that King Albert should officially recognise his illegitimate daughter, Delphine Boël, 45, is filing suit to have DNA samples taken from the king, Prince Filip and Princess Astrid

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Ethic revolution

The emotions stirred up in France by the introduction of same-sex marriage raises eyebrows in this country. In Belgium, two men or two women have been able to get married since 2003, while the right for same-sex couples to adopt was introduced in 2006. Marriage equality was part of the "ethic revolution" that swept the country in the years following 1999, under the "purple" governments of prime minister Guy Verhofstadt. For the first time in decades, the Christian-democrats were excluded from the federal government. The governing liberals ("blues") and socialists ("reds") took this opportunity to push through a number of laws on ethical issues about which Christian-democrats had always been apprehensive.

One of these was euthanasia, which, under strict conditions, became legal. Two aspects were deliberately left out: euthanasia for minors and for people with dementia. Both were too sensitive even for the coalition of liberals and socialists at the time, especially amongst the French speakers.

Now, a new purple axis has formed, with a joint proposal from (Flemish and French-speaking) liberals and socialists on euthanasia for minors. The proposal does not include an age limit but speaks of minors who are "able to assess" their own situation.

The proposal shocked Christian-democrats, who were not consulted. Coalition partners should not go behind each other's backs on such delicate issues, they say. The senators behind the proposal retort that it is open for amendment. They hope for "toleration", if not support, from the Christian-democrats, who are not needed to get a majority in parliament, as greens and/or the N-VA could also support it.

CD&V has already stated that it will never accept an "ability to assess" clause for minors, as this leaves too much room for interpretation.

To some people in Flanders, who have always looked up to the Dutch when it comes to the handling of such issues, the first ethic revolution in this country was long overdue. Others felt that the enthusiasm and unusual like-mindedness it created amongst the "purple" parties was vindictive, serving only to expose the Christian-democrats as conservatives.

This time the situation is different, with all three traditional political families making up the federal government. That calls for respect for each party's sensitivities. Still, few people want to go back to the situation before 1999, when all ethical issues seemed locked indeterminately.

Governments join forces for competition

Federal and regional politicians agree to co-operate in easing labour costs

Alan Hope

The federal and regional governments will present proposals to reduce wage and energy costs for business after agreeing to a "competitiveness pact" last week. The pact was drafted after prime minister Elio Di Rupo met with Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters and his counterparts from the Brussels Capital Region and Wallonia.

The pact is an agreement in principle: no concrete measures have yet been proposed. From the beginning of July, each of the partners, which includes the Flemish and French-speaking Community representatives, will designate its own experts to take part in working groups on the various issues the pact is intended to cover. Asked whether the experts would be working to a deadline, Di Rupo replied said that "timetables



Prime minister Elio Di Rupo (left) and Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters

are always dangerous. But as soon as possible."

Peeters, meanwhile, has long been

an advocate of action to reduce the burdens on business, which all sectors agree have a detrimental

effect on Belgium's competitive position. In relation to neighbouring countries, that is estimated at a 12.5% disadvantage on wage costs alone.

There are two main burdens: those imposed by the government in the form of taxation and other charges and those imposed from outside, principally energy costs. One is more open to government intervention than the other, though even that presents a minefield of potential political problems, including funding.

"We all have our budget problems," admitted Peeters. "We first need to see what is to be done, and then who pays for what."

"The important thing is that we work together," Di Rupo added. "Each entity has its job to do, but together we are stronger."

De Nul accepts award, criticises government

Jan Pieter De Nul, CEO of the dredging company Jan De Nul was awarded the Human Resources Manager of the Year prize last week, handed out annually by the Flemish magazine *Trends*. De Nul had some choice words prepared for his acceptance speech, as he said that it was too easy to get by in Belgium without working and that the governments have not enacted "a single structural measure that promises a future for the coming generation".

De Nul's company is a major world player in its sector, involved in operations from land reclamation in Dubai to dredging off the Horn of Africa and the Panama Canal to port construction in Iraq and polar Russia. The company has twice been voted best employer in the Randstad annual survey, but De Nul was surprised to find himself honoured as an HR manager. "In fact the title of my speech should have been 'What am I doing here?'" he

quipped. Instead, his title was "Mother, why do we have to work?" and consisted of staunch criticism against what he considers a culture of unemployment that sees only about half of the potential workforce of six million actually working. De Nul also hit out at what he sees as a lax immigration policy, which he blamed for handing over too many jobs to both legal and illegal immigrants.

Reactions to De Nul's widely reported speech were many and varied: Omega Pharma CEO Marc Coucke suggested that politicians in the next government negotiations ought to start each day by reading De Nul's words. Rudy De Leeuw, chairman of the trade union ABVV, described as "totally reprehensible" De Nul's desire "to push the blame for the crisis and for unemployment off onto politicians and the unemployed themselves."

Flanders Care calls for innovative health-care ideas

The government of Flanders has launched its fourth call for demonstration projects for the Flanders Care programme, which supports innovations that address the real needs of health-care providers. A total of €1 million in financing will be awarded to the most convincing projects. Previous projects supported by Flanders Care include:

- Remote monitoring of heart and lung patients to allow them to be cared for at home
- Flexible adhesive dressings to allow more comfortable movement
- A special lock to allow care workers to enter the homes of patients with limited mobility
- A body movement monitor and e-coaching for patients with chronic heart problems
- An internet gateway for young diabetes patients to transmit their blood sugar levels



• Tablet computers adapted to the needs of health-care providers "Our aim with this call is to set up environments in which products can be tested in a controlled manner for quality and effectiveness," commented Katrien Kimpe, coordinator of Flanders Care (pictured). "In that way, products can be suited to real needs for the benefit of both caregivers and patients, while increasing the chances of economic success."

Medec Benelux and H Essers are named Export Lions

Medical equipment manufacturer Medec Benelux and logistics services provider H Essers have been awarded this year's Leeuw van de Export, or Export Lion, by Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT), the Flemish government's international business promotion agency. The Export Lion has been awarded annually since 2002 to two companies, one with fewer than 50 employees and one with more, that have made the most impression on the judges by their export performance. Previous winners include video detection specialists Traficon, Cardon Pharmaceuticals and brewers Duvel Moortgat. Medec Benelux from Aalst manufactures anaesthetic equipment and exports to 91 countries worldwide. It also has

a sales division in the UK and a branch office in Costa Rica.

H Essers from Genk, meanwhile, provides logistics services in 11 countries through 32 branches, employs 3,390 people, nearly half of them in other countries, and has a fleet of 1,200 trucks and 2,300 trailers.

Other nominees this year for business with fewer than 50 employees were Huyghe brewery of East Flanders, Delirium Tremens brewers in Antwerp province and bakers Vermeiren Princips, also of Antwerp province. Nominees for 50 or more employees were airport services company ADB from Zaventem and drive manufacturers Punch Powertrain of Sint-Truiden, Limburg province.

► www.leeuwvandeexport.be

Alfacam bought for €25 million

Alfacam, the troubled broadcasting services group, based in Lint, Antwerp province, has been acquired by the French Euro Media (EMG) group for €25 million. Alfacam, started in 1985 by Gabriel Fehervari, owns the largest fleet of outside broadcast (OB) vans in the world and in recent years has been a major presence at global sporting events, like the World Cup

in South Africa and the Olympics in Beijing. The company began having financial difficulties after a failed launch of its own cable channel. The deal allows EMG to take over all Alfacam's equipment. The company's headquarters in Lint will be sold separately. EMG already has 74 OB vans and 92 studios spread across Europe, including Videohouse in Vilvoorde (pictured).

It is not yet known whether the sale will bring in enough to pay off Alfacam's creditors. The Flemish government is owed €16.4 million in guarantees it provided, and the company is reported to have been in debt to the banks for €20.5 million. At least 25 of the remaining 35 staff will be retained by EMG, according to reports.



THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Aircraft ▶ Asco

The Zaventem-based aircraft parts manufacturer has won a 40% share of the \$1 billion (€755 million) contract signed last week by Sonaca to produce wing parts for the new Brazilian Embraer regional aircraft. The deal ensures up to 10 years of work for Asco, a long-time supplier in the various Airbus programmes.

Aircraft ▶ Sabca

The manufacturer of aircraft and space launchers, based in Lummen, Limburg province, has signed a \$40 million (€30.5 million) contract with the French group Dassault Aviation to supply tailwings for the next generation of Falcon jets.

Banking ▶ KBC

Flanders' largest financial institution will return €1.8 billion in loans and penalties to the government of Flanders to pay back part of the amount it borrowed in the midst of the 2009 financial crisis. The move lowers the national debt-to-GDP ratio in line with EU demands.

Electronics ▶ Media Markt

The electronics and appliance retailer, part of the German Saturn group, will open up to 10 additional stores across Belgium over the next three years, including in Mechelen and Turnhout. The company already has 22 outlets in the country.

Leather goods ▶ Delvaux

The Brussels-based luxury leather bags manufacturer, owned by Hong Kong's Fung Brands, plans to open stores in Paris, London, Tokyo and Seoul over the next two years.

Retail ▶ Petrossian

The French caviar and seafood retailer has opened its first local outlet in the Brussels district of Ukkel. The company operates 12 stores worldwide.

Stocks ▶ bpost

Shares for national post operator bpost launched last week at €14.50, near the top of the expected range. The IPO was over-subscribed due to demand from institutional and private investors and values the company at €2.9 billion.

Travel ▶ Planetveo

The Flemish government's investment agency is investing €15 million in the French online tailor-made travel specialist Planetveo with the Iris Capital investment fund.

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Bulletin daily
Final Edition
Tuesday 10 Oct 2017

Ghent Marriott Hotel named Best in Belgium
The Ghent Marriott Hotel has been the previous year's accolade of Belgium's 'Top Hotel' in the 2017 awards. Travellers in the category of 'medium' (over 100 rooms) will be impressed by the hotel's facilities and services.

Tomorrowland goes international
After a massive expansion, the Tomorrowland festival, the world's largest electronic music festival and one of the biggest of its kind in the world, ...

Hospitals overcharge for routine treatments
Tervuren Hospital - more in Brussels and more in Ghent - has been criticised for charging exorbitant fees for standard treatments. For the entire series, ...

Sham marriages keep Immigration Department busy

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Brussels 4G network up in the air

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Magic numbers

The International Year of Statistics outlines the countless applications of the science in our lives

Andy Furniere

With statistics, you can prove anything, or so they say. To counter this and other prejudices against this scientific field, statistical organisations proclaimed 2013 the International Year of Statistics. Technological evolutions, however, also pose challenges to statisticians, and to society in general. To improve the statistical knowledge of Flemish researchers, the regional government has established a training network that connects all universities in Flanders. There is a good chance that thinking of statistics brings to mind complex graphs and incomprehensible mathematical formulas, rather than Google, new medicines and weather prediction. The lack of understanding about the influence of this science is partly caused by the introvert nature of specialists, says professor Geert Molenberghs, who heads the Interuniversity Institute for Biostatistics and Statistical Bioinformatics (I-BioStat). I-BioStat unites the Centre for Statistics at the University of Hasselt and the Leuven Biostatistics and Statistical Bioinformatics Centre.

"Many statisticians work hard and very precisely, but can't communicate their results to a broad public," says Molenberghs. The education system is also to blame for the image problem, he believes: "Students are too soon burdened with heavy theoretical material. Youngsters should first learn how statistics can help to solve concrete problems."

For the International Year of Statistics, global associations launched statistics2013.org. The site lists some of the innumerable applications of statistics in our daily lives and gives an overview of related activities at participating institutions in 123 countries. I-BioStat organised a debate and lecture at the beginning of the year as well as a symposium at UHasselt in November. At the end of December, there will be a large event at the University of Leuven.

Public health

I-BioStat's researchers often act as independent experts during clinical tests for new medicines developed by pharmaceutical companies. "We help enterprises with the practical issues concerning the methodology," explains Molenberghs. "But we also take on the role of watchdog, monitoring the possible side effects and guaranteeing that no fraud takes place." Another focus of I-BioStat is on epidemiology: studying the patterns, causes and



Professor Marie Davidian, an international leader in the world of statistics, kicks off Statistics2013 in January with a lecture at Hasselt University

effects of conditions in populations – one of the cornerstones of our public health policy.

Recently, the I-BioStat team has contributed to a new eye medicine by ThromboGenics, based in Leuven, and a treatment of Tibotec – part of Janssen Pharmaceutica in Beerse – against HIV, the virus that causes Aids. Statisticians from UHasselt also collaborated with researchers from Ghent, the US and South Africa to develop a new mathematical model to map the spread of HIV and assess the impact of prevention measures via simulations.

For their simulations, researchers use the Flemish Supercomputer Centre, established five years ago by the government of Flanders. According to Molenberghs, the supercomputers' massive calculation capacities brought about the "big data era". The innovations in processing and analysing enormous amounts of information can even make it difficult for statisticians to keep up with the increasing complexity of data sets.

This big data evolution also gives rise to privacy concerns in society, and it has emerged that

US agencies have been gathering millions of phone records and monitoring internet data. Search engine Google then uses the progress in technology to make information more accessible for everyone, but also for advertising purposes, such as recommending products on the basis of your personal profile.

Text mining

There are, however, numerous applications of statistics that have a less ambiguous impact on our lives. Weather predictions, for example, are based on the analysis of data by statisticians, who can also help to improve agricultural techniques and sustainable strategies such as recycling. Both physical therapists and psychiatrists are helped by medical data to determine the best programme for patients, while statisticians also provide biologists with the tools to map biodiversity and find out which species are threatened with extinction. Even literary historians, who you wouldn't suspect of having mathematical interests, use statistical methods to trace the identity of authors. Text mining – the statistical analysis of text patterns – famously helped to identify the authors of the Federalist Papers, a series of articles and essays that were influential in promoting the ratification of the United States Constitution.

To boost the statistical skills of researchers in Flanders, the Flemish government this year established the Flanders Training Network for Methodology and Statistics (Flames), which unites all Flemish universities. Its website connects doctoral students and scientists with the various courses on offer across Flanders and makes course materials available: slides and videos, along with ready-to-use software programmes and case studies.

Flames will also expand the statistical training currently offered by Flemish universities and bring existing training to new audiences. In practice, this means that the network will develop training modules for complex and advanced statistical methods taught by experts, a series of seminars on qualitative methods, organise an annual summer school and deliver specialised workshops on demand.

► www.statistics2013.org

► www.flames-statistics.eu

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Leuven-based nanotechnology research centre imec and the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (Vito) have signed an agreement to co-operate on the development of **hyper-spectral camera systems for earth observation** from space. Vito contributed to the technology of the Proba-V – a small earth observation satellite for global vegetation monitoring, while imec recently developed chip-based hyper-spectral filter technology, which generates new applications because of its compactness and light weight.

Flemish biologist **Marc Van Montagu** has received the **World Food Prize 2013** for pioneering work on genetic modification of crops, with two American scientists. The jury awarded them this annual "Nobel Prize for food and agriculture" because they contributed to an increase in the quantity and availability of food. Van Montagu is the first Belgian laureate.

Researchers at the University of Hasselt have found a method to **diagnose rheumatoid arthritis at an early stage**, giving patients about 50% more chance of limiting the symptoms. Rheumatoid arthritis leads to the deterioration of joints and causes serious physical impairments. Around 1% of the global population suffers from the condition. Through their discovery of new biomarkers – natural substances that indicate the condition – the Hasselt researchers can help treat bone and cartilage damage before the joints are affected.

About 900 candidates for sciences studies at Flemish universities **registered for the first "calibration test**", which measures their knowledge and skills. The universities of Leuven, Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels offer this non-obligatory and non-binding test to students as an opportunity to assess the difficulty of the study. KU Leuven started last year with a pilot project, which attracted 228 students, but it's the first time several universities have provided the test. The first one is on 1 July, and students can register in August for a second test in September.

► www.ijkingsstoets.be

The Flemish Trust Centre for Child Abuse advises **introducing sexual education in pre-school**, instead of waiting until the end of primary school. The centre has in recent years received an average of one report a month of sexually transgressive behaviour among toddlers. Child psychiatrists recommend sex education on specific topics, such as toilet visits and physical contact.

► www.kindermishandeling.be

Q&A

Annelies Van Mol, founder of the Music Lab Inclusive at Wijngem, has been named Teacher of the Year by education magazine *Klasse*

What kind of chemistry takes place at the Music Lab?

We teach people with disorders to play music through programmes adapted to their capacities. These people cannot follow standard courses at music academies because they often lack the ability to read and write fluently and can't handle the pressure of tests and exams. We teach students the music theory through practising with different instruments and working with visual tools. Instead of music notes on paper, we use wooden boards as staves and plastic shapes as notes to teach music notation.

Can you describe a typical lesson?

We begin with playing African and Western rhythms on the djembe.

The eight students in a class have to communicate with each other through improvisations on their instrument. We then progress to forming melodies, mostly on the xylophone. To get to know different styles of music, students listen to many kinds of musical fragments. We also teach them to keep time by moving, walking and dancing, for example. The atmosphere is always a lot livelier than at standard courses. Apart from one hour a week in the group, students can also receive individual lessons of half an hour on one specific instrument.

Do you consider the lessons as therapy sessions?

No, all four of the teachers are musicians, without a therapeutic background. The music lessons



should be a hobby that also provides social contact. But the self-confidence of students definitely increases; you can see

how shy people blossom when playing music. There was even a boy who spoke for the first time in his life during one of the lessons. He suddenly joined in when all his fellow students called out "yes" after an exercise.

How large is the demand for your music lessons?

After six years, we have about 50 students with disorders such as autism, Down's syndrome and ADHD. The Music Lab was originally only meant for children, but we now accept people of all ages. Hopefully, the Flemish education ministry will continue to support the expansion of our project.

► www.muzieklaboinclusief.weebly.com

It's said that we live in the festival capital of Europe, with more summer music events per capita than anywhere else. It's also nothing if not diverse, whether you want to hang out with the headbangers or with your kids. To plan your summer outings, look no further than this handy guide, which reflects the diversity of the Flemish festival landscape

SOT

Graspop

28-30 JUNE

DESEL, ANTWERP PROVINCE

The annual headbangers' ball in the heart of the Kempen. See critic's choice.

www.graspop.be

Couleur Café

28-30 JUNE

TOUR & TAXIS, BRUSSELS

Two of the three days of this popular festival of afro, soul, funk, reggae, salsa and dancehall are sold out, so hurry if you want to catch a ticket for Sunday, when you'll see CeeLo Green, Wax Tailor, Living Up Soundsystem, Die Antwoord and many, many more

www.couleurcafe.be

Genk on Stage

28-30 JUNE

STADSPLEIN 1, GENK

This charming, small city festival is totally free and builds its line-up around mainly Flemish headliners. If the names Trixie Whitley, Stijn Meuris, Daan, The Van Jets or Raymond van het Groenewoud don't ring a bell, you've either not been paying attention or just haven't lived here long enough.

www.genkonstage.be

Rock Werchter

4-7 JULY

WERCHTER, FLEMISH BRABANT

As usual, most of the tickets, including the coveted combi-ticket, for Flanders' biggest alt-rock and pop festival are sold out. But there are still one-day tickets available for the opening day, featuring awesome acts such as Green Day, The National and Sigur Rós.

www.rockwerchter.be

Gooikoorts

5-7 JULY

GOOK, FLEMISH BRABANT

If you're a fan of traditional folk, Gooikoorts is probably your number one festival. Every year about 5,000 share in the folk fever in the heart of Pajottenland. It's family-friendly as well, with lots of activities for the kids in a special children's area. This edition focuses on traditional percussion, with tambourines, drums and bodhrans taking the lead, played by bands like Trivelin, Chemin de Fer, Frigg and Sol I Serena.

www.gooikoorts.be

Gent Jazz Festival

12-20 JULY

BIJLOKE SITE, GHENT

This annual festival, which ends just in time for the massive Gentse Feesten to start, has been introducing jazz to a larger audience by mixing up traditional jazz artists with pop artists (mostly in the funk and soul department) who are more or less influenced by jazz. That's turned out to be a masterstroke, with a growing number of visitors every year. Also: Do not underestimate the lovely park setting. Jazz cats on stage this year include Diana Krall, Jamie Cullum and Avishai Cohen Quartet, while the pop category is covered by big names such as Bryan Ferry, Bobby Womack, José James and Elvis Costello & The Imposters.

www.gentjazz.be

Cactus Festival

12-14 JULY

MINNEWATER PARK, BRUGES

Even without the music, it's hard not to fall in love with Bruges' Minnewater Park, the green lung of the medieval city and the location of the eclectic Cactus Festival. The organisation has always preferred atmosphere to size, so it keeps the festival inten-

CRITIC'S CHOICE

Graspop

Considered a bit of a kick-off to Flanders' festival season (a week before Rock Werchter), this metal meeting has high standards to live up to. Looking at the line-up, it seems they have all the sub-genres covered. Headliners are hard-rock fossils Twisted Sister, best known for their 1984 hit "We're Not Gonna Take It" – a live experience that will no doubt catapult you back into a time of spandex and leather. Cemented in the hard-rock hegemony are, of course, the Brits of Iron Maiden, and guess what? They're top of the bill as well. There's also room for the briefly popular genre of rap-metal (Slipknot, Korn, Papa Roach, P.O.D., Coal Chamber), metal-core (Bullet For My Valentine, Unearth, Caliban, Heaven Shall Burn), thrash metal (Testament, Kreator, Prong) and sludge metal, in the form of the young Flemish rascals that call themselves Steak Number Eight. The Dessel area had better be prepared for the visit of controversial Norwegian black-metal band Mayhem, though, as the self-proclaimed Satanists have been associated with some disturbing violence and the burning of churches back in the 1990s. Only one member of its founding line-up, however, remains: the charmingly named bassist Necrobutcher. While the number of festivals specialising in metal and hard rock is shrinking throughout the globe, it feels like Graspop won't ever bow down. (see listing for details)



tionally small with all acts performing on one stage. Some of the main acts this year are Thurston Moore & Chelsea Light Moving (Sonic Youth split up, remember?), Pinback, dEUS, Beach House and the unique British MC Ghostpoet.

www.cactusfestival.be

Rock Herk

12-13 JULY

PARK OLMENHOF, HERK-DE-STAD, LIMBURG

UK band Maximo Park is the biggest name on the bill of this year's Rock Herk, Flanders' oldest alternative music fest (rocking since 1983). Other names include SX, Suuns, Isbells and the heartbreakingly hard post-metal Kortrijk outfit Amenra.

www.rockherk.be

Vijverfestival

13 JULY

DILBEEK, FLEMISH BRABANT

It's the 10th anniversary of this small and cosy one-day festival that takes pride in being eco- as well as family-friendly. Spread over two stages, mostly Belgian acts like A Brand, Absynthe Minded and Airplane provide the tunes.

www.vijverfestival.be

TW Classic

13 JULY

WERCHTER, FLEMISH BRABANT

This is a throwback to what Rock Werchter used to be, back before all the people going to it now were even born: one stage, one day and classic rock. The headliner this year is Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band, who promise to play for more than two hours. Before that, you'll find Santana, Blondie, Ben Harper and more. A festival

for grown-ups.

www.twclassic.be

Brosella Folk Festival

13-14 JULY

GREEN THEATRE, BRUSSELS

The same location as Bruksellive (see Critic's Choice), but dedicated to folk (on Saturday) and jazz (on Sunday). The whole family can enjoy a picnic in the park, as activities for kids are included. If you like New Orleans jazz, check out Jon Batiste and the Stay Human Band on Sunday.

www.brosella.be

10 Days Off

18-28 JULY

VOORUIT, GHENT

Ten Days Off has always offered the most interesting and experimental line-up in electronic music, and this year is no exception. Clubbers and electronic geeks alike are all headed in the same direction during the Gentse Feesten: the beautiful and historical venue Vooruit. There are still a few big names to be announced. See Critic's Choice.

www.tendaysoff.be

Blues Peer

19-21 JULY

PEER, LIMBURG

This all-blues festival celebrated its first edition back in 1985 and has since been making quite a name for itself. This year, House MD gets the blues, with actor-turned-musician (or is it the other way round?) Hugh Laurie presenting his second album, *Didn't it Rain*. Other names on the bill are Status Quo, the Robert Cray Band and the Fabulous Thunderbirds.

www.brbf.be

CRITIC'S CHOICE

Jon Hopkins @ Ten D

Ten Days Off always manages to showcase the diversity in contemporary electronic music, and if one artist this year emphasises this particular strength of the festival, it must be Jon Hopkins. Earlier this month the London-born producer released his fourth solo album, *Immunity*, a truly hypnotic and visceral listen, earning much critical acclaim. Hopkins' music can't be pinned down – "ambient techno" might be the closest definition – and it might not be appealing to the more dance floor-minded crowd, but this only contributes to the festival's eclecticism.

Before releasing *Immunity*, Hopkins was a jack-of-all-trades musician: As a composer he worked on a score for British sci-fi film *Monsters*, as a producer he remixed tracks by David Lynch, Purity Ring and Four Tet, and as a keyboardist he played on a few Brian Eno albums (undoubtedly one of his biggest influences). To top that off, he has released three previous albums that each have their own cinematic story to tell. If the more experimental, introspective side of electronic music is your bag, his live set will make for an intoxicating experience. (see listing for details)

CRITIC'S CHOICE

Bruksellive

This relatively young festival takes place at a park that has the Atomium towering above it. Of Brussels' youth clubs and has the scintillating on four stages, it's known for its excellent selection of a breakthrough. The biggest name on the project centred on Erik De Jong. Even if you do discover. Other recommendations: New York's his unique brand of experimental lo-fi, per discovering. Other recommendations: New York's his unique brand of experimental lo-fi, per beats, Glasgow-based producer Koreless is the

© Bruksellive 2012



Gentse Feesten

20-29 JULY

ACROSS GHENT

The largest combination music and street theatre festival in the world, the Gentse Feesten draws more than one million visitors to the centre of Ghent each July for the 10-day outdoor bash that never sleeps (quite literally). Every square is a stage, and the biggest are the Polé Polé Latin stage across the canal, the Trepunt stage of world music at Sint-Jacobs square and the appropriately named Boomtown, with mostly local rock bands in the Kouter. This year, street theatre festival MiraMiro wants babies (starting from nine months old) to be included in their audience, as they have prepared a unique music show for them. It will focus on the world of insects, so they say.

www.gentsefeesten.be



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Out of this world

A Sint-Niklaas scientist is among the multinational crew of a simulated mission to Mars

Alan Hope

Take six extremely clever people and leave on a hostile planet for four months. It sounds like a recipe for disaster, a sort of *Big Brother* meets *Lord of the Flies*. But it's a very serious research project, and the crew commander is Sint-Niklaas artist-scientist Angelo Vermeulen. *Flanders Today* caught up with him via interplanetary email.

Hi-Seas stands for Hawaii Space Exploration Analog and Simulation, and it's the name of a project that simulates a space station on Mars. But, as the name suggests, it's here on earth, in the deserts of Hawaii, where participants live as if on the Red Planet: If they go outside the "station", they have to wear a spacesuit.

The mission looks specifically at food strategies on a future mission to Mars. The amount of food required for such a journey is enormous, and the crew will be exploring two basic strategies: the pre-packaged, just-add-water variety that astronauts mostly eat now and foods that require more preparation – but are ultimately healthier. They are also experimenting with what vegetation can actually be grown on board the vessel.

Angelo Vermeulen is the sole European on the Nasa-funded mission. He's a scientist who specialises in ecology and environmental pollution, but he's also an artist who takes part in international exhibitions and teaches at the Sint-Lucas school of arts in Ghent. In 2009, Vermeulen launched the Space Ecologies Art and Design project, a platform for artistic research into space colonisation.

Vermeulen, 41, was selected as commander of the crew last year and underwent training at Cornell University in New York. Weekly contact with other members of the crew and the principal researchers continued until January, when the crew went off for a training mission at the Mars Desert Research Station in Utah. The Hi-Seas mission then started in April and will end in August.

The mission

Besides Vermeulen, there are five other crew members: material scientist Yajaira Sierra-Sastre from Puerto Rico, who also works in nanotechnology; astrophysicist and robotics expert Simon Engler from Canada; Russian-born Oleg Abramov, a geologist and expert in planetary science; science writer Kate Greene and geology professor Sian Proctor, both Americans.

The six are embroiled in "a food, mood and nasal study that investigates the relationship between food preparation time, repetition of foods, perception of food aromas, food acceptability and food intake in a confined and isolated setting similar to what an



Clockwise from above: Flemish scientist Angelo Vermeulen is heading up the Mars simulation in the Hawaiian desert; It's all about food: The Hi Seas crew will determine how astronauts can best feed themselves on journeys that take more than a year; Fast-growing foods could help spice up space meals; The team's space station in the Hawaii desert

astronaut would experience during a mission at a lunar or planetary outpost," explains Vermeulen. In his role as crew commander, he "maximises the space people need to be productive in their role. I take care of communication, both within the crew and with Mission Support. Crew-ground disconnect is a phenomenon that is typical for space exploration." This is where Vermeulen's diplomacy and tact come into play: "We've had our moments of miscommunication, and then I use all my diplomatic skills to make all viewpoints clear to everyone and find a compromise. Finally, I identify sources of potential conflict. There's no point in letting things fester. If something is not working well, it's better to handle it straight away."

Close quarters

Clearly, one of the problems Mars travellers will encounter is prolonged proximity to others. I wonder if there is a standard time when it all gets too much. "Broadly speaking, there are two reasons why things can become too much," says Vermeulen. "First, personal tensions. But these can be avoided by carefully selecting a crew. We've been selected according to our personality compatibility, and it shows. We're a very communicative and tight crew."

And of course, there's the workload and stress: "We have a lot on our plate here."

As well as the core research of the

mission, crew members have side projects of their own, including personal resilience, sleep and lighting conditions, team cohesion and robotics. Sierra-Sastre is doing research on antimicrobials – as it pertains to laundry. She writes on her blog: "We have been evaluating antimicrobial exercise T-shirts, bed linen, towels, socks and underwear to determine the length of time these items are used or worn by the crew before they are deemed unacceptable. Crew members' responses have varied."

It's too early for Vermeulen to make any hard conclusions from the mission so far, but he does have a few personal observations. "Most of the things I assumed would be difficult haven't been so far: the sheer physical isolation, the limited living space with five colleagues 24/7, reduced contact with friends and family, potential boredom ... I definitely long to see my friends and family again, and I think about hiking and swimming in the ocean. But it's not something I consider difficult."

Time management

In fact, what's ended up being most difficult, he says, is managing time. "Days and weeks seem to fly by at lightning speed! We all struggle with our schedules, which are filled with research activities, surveys, meetings, cooking and exercising. I don't think we ever finish a day where we've completed our personal



to-do lists."

That can be frustrating at times, he continues. "We're all pretty ambitious people, and we want to churn out results and papers. We truly want to move human space exploration forward and we want this mission to be as effective as possible."

The mission is all about food, which suggests that vices like ice cream and chocolate would be in short supply. Are there guilty pleasures? Vermeulen: "Yes – mayonnaise, Nutella, crackers. These supplies dwindle like snow under the sun."

Although he's living like one, Vermeulen is not actually an astronaut. He would like to go into space for real but feels that perhaps

this is one ambition that he won't be able to realise. "Of course, I would love to go to Mars. But if you look at the recent selection of Nasa astronauts, I might not have the right qualifications. A lot of them are test pilots and have an army/marine background. The European Space Agency has stopped recruiting astronauts, so the only option is commercial spaceflight. But for Mars One alone there's already over 80,000 applications. I'm realistic; the chances are slim that I'll make it. But fortunately, there's so much more to do in the world of space exploration. I have enough ideas for the next few years."

► www.hi-seas.org

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The art of war

A powerful exhibition in Ypres illustrates the tragedies of conflict

Denzil Walton

With the last survivors of the Great War of 1914-1918 having passed away, it's no longer possible to tap into their memories to remind ourselves of those tragic, earth-shattering years. Of course, we have their diaries, photographs and flickering black-and-white movies. But we also have another vast – and continually expanding – collection of items to provide evidence of those devastating years and their aftermath: Trench Art.

The original definition of Trench Art was confined to objects made in various materials by soldiers, prisoners of war and civilians between 1914 and 1939. Recently it has been expanded to include any decorative item that is directly linked to any armed conflict or its consequences, in any period. And as armed conflicts are so common, Trench Art is a correspondingly huge field. Every day, somewhere in the world, Trench Art is bought and sold in flea markets, car-boot sales, militaria fairs and online.

Trench Art can be grouped into three general categories. The most obvious

crude metal items, such as rings, crosses and pendants, from bullets and shells. Even today in the fields of Flanders, rusty cigarette lighters, matchbox covers, tobacco boxes and letter openers made from bullets and scrap metal are unearthed by farmers' ploughs. Many objects are personalised, engraved with a man's name, rank and regiment, much to the enthusiasm of local historians.

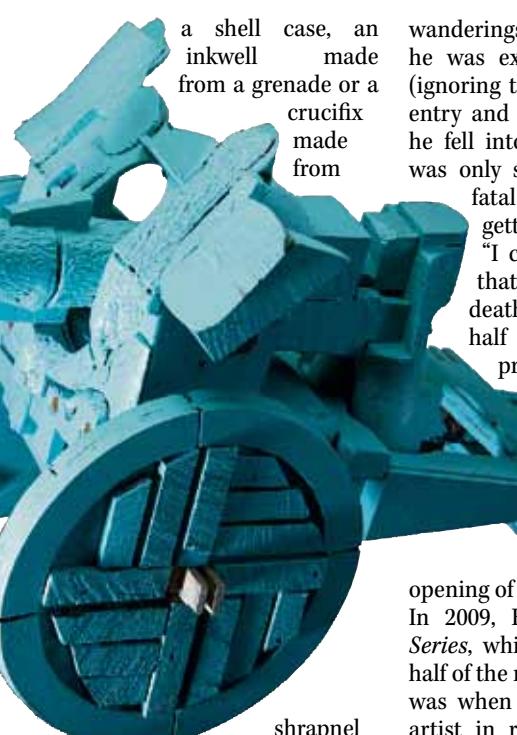
A second category – much larger in terms of quantity – refers to objects made by civilians during and immediately after a war. In Flanders, the civilian manufacture of Trench Art during the First World War quickly became a cottage industry, with items being sold to both Allied and German armies.

After 1918, Trench Art became a means of making a living. Returning refugees discovered that their villages, towns and farms were devastated, and the agricultural land

"They did not 'give' their lives. Their lives were taken from them, then as now"

is art made by soldiers during breaks in combat. In the Westhoek area of Flanders during the First World War, many soldiers drew pencil sketches on whatever scraps of dry paper they could find. Or they made simple carvings out of wood, chalk or bone. Some even had time to produce

rendered useless and dangerous by saturation shelling. As de-mining brought more metal to the surface, local Flemings made and sold Trench Art to battlefield pilgrims. Many bereaved widows, sweethearts and relatives returned to their homeland clutching an ashtray made from



The final category is art made by civilians long after a war has ended, often with the purpose of reminding us about the grim reality of conflict. Into this category falls a collection on display at the In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres. *Ypres, the Great War and the Re-gilding of the Memory* is a retrospective of the work of British artist Stephen Hurst. It includes an extensive overview of sculptures and graphic work, as well as the never-before-exhibited *Ypres Series and Diaries*.

Encounter with death

Hurst is irrevocably linked to Flanders. His parents travelled to Ypres in 1919, 13 years before Stephen was born. They belonged to the first group of battlefield pilgrims who had many dead to commemorate: a father, a brother, uncles and brothers-in-law. Stephen's childhood took place in a world that prepared for the next war, and he himself served in Malaysia in the 1950s. "The experience strengthened his dedication to becoming an artist," says Piet Chielens, the museum's curator. "Not to get rid of the war but to comprehend it, to understand the people who fought, worked and lived in it, to depict the cruelty of war and to attack the cynicism of its leaders." The exhibition includes the *Somme Series* of sculptures, painted reliefs and research, both drawn and written. First exhibited in the UK in 1977, this was Hurst's first foray into Trench Art. It partly came about when he fell into a trench while searching for the major mine craters in the Somme battlefield. During his

wanderings along the Ancre Valley he was exploring a private wood (ignoring the stern signs forbidding entry and warning of death) when he fell into a ventilation shaft. He was only saved from a potentially fatal fall by his drawing board getting wedged into the shaft. "I cannot swear that it was that close encounter with death, on the site of a battle half a century earlier, that precipitated the *Somme Series*, but it was one amongst several stimuli," Hurst

tells me at the opening of the exhibition.

In 2009, Hurst started the *Ypres Series*, which makes up more than half of the retrospective. The catalyst was when Hurst was invited to be artist in residence at In Flanders Fields, a museum devoted to the First World War. Hurst and his wife, Sylvie, lived in a house in Guido Gezelplein, from where they explored the Westhoek.

Less than noble

The experience was stimulating, if at times harrowing: "I frequently found myself in a small cemetery surrounded by wheat with a soft wind blowing over the bright green shoots," says Hurst, "reading those familiar regiments and familiar names and, to my surprise, discovered tears running down my face."

But Hurst is no romantic. His view on war is down-to-earth, based on his own reality of the horrors of fighting in a distant country. He is particularly critical of those who describe young soldiers as making the supreme sacrifice or giving their lives so that we might live.

"Young men did not talk or think like that. They did not 'give' their lives," he says. "Their lives were taken from them, then as now, by a mixture of ingenious and highly lucrative technology and official stupidity. They were slaughtered, shredded in a gigantic meat-grinder."

In this context it is no surprise that some of Hurst's most recent work focuses not on the First World War but on later conflicts. They include drawings made in 2003 that "bear witness to the illegal American oil war" (Iraq). Others drawn last year illustrate the murder of British soldiers in Afghanistan by their Afghan allies. This is Trench Art at its most powerful and hard-hitting.

► www.inflandersfields.be

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Animal Rescue by Flemish director Michaël R Roskam is the last film made featuring American actor James Gandolfini, who died of an apparent heart attack last week. Roskam shot the film for Fox Searchlight Pictures in New York recently and is still in the city working on post-production. "I see him day in and day out as I'm working," said Roskam. "I don't even feel like editing anymore because I'm always confronted by it. But we're going to keep going so we can deliver a film he would be proud of." *Animal Rescue*, an adaptation of a short story, is about a barman who rescues a puppy only to be swept up in violent intrigue by the animal's owner. Flemish actor Matthias Schoenaerts also appears in the movie.

It has been determined that the **baby spectacled bear** born in the Antwerp Zoo in late February is a boy. The bear made his first public appearance a couple of weeks ago and can now be seen following his mum around in their habitat. The public could help name the bear, and he now goes by Oberon.

► www.zooantwerpen.be

More museums, retail outlets and restaurants have been **added to the Brussels Card**, which offers access to many of the capital's museums and discounts at other venues for 24, 48 or 72 hours, depending on the option you buy. The Museum of Cocoa and Chocolate and the Belgian Museum of Freemasonry are now accepting the card, and discounts can now be had from Brüssel comic shop and Blender01 design. New restaurants taking the card include Moeder Lambic. The card also offers free access to public transport and is sold at tourist offices, MIVB's Bootik offices and several museums.

► www.brusselscard.be

Diamond Friends Forever, a group of young people from different academic backgrounds in Antwerp, will soon open a **Diamond Pop-Up Museum** in the city's Kavka youth centre. A graduate thesis by two of the members focuses on museums as participatory experiences, and they want to find out if young people are interested in the diamond industry or a diamond museum. The city's Diamond Museum closed last April after it was forced out of its home on Astridplein by the expansion of the Antwerp Zoo. The interactive pop-up museum will be open from 3 July to 27 August.

► www.diamondfriendsforever.be



A retrospective of the Trench Art of Stephen Hurst is on view at In Flanders Fields

UNTIL 15 SEPTEMBER
Ypres, the Great War and the Re-gilding of the Memory

In Flanders Fields Museum, Grote Markt 34, Ypres

► www.inflandersfields.be

Tunes at noon

Midis-Minimes & Zomer van Sint-Pieter

Marie Dumont

Oh, the joys of staying behind in the summer months while everyone else is away on holiday! The relaxed traffic, the inviting café terraces, the long lazy lunch breaks... Speaking of which, you could do a lot worse than to spend those at Midis-Minimes, a two-month-long music fest that kicks off in a few days' time, as most other Brussels cultural ventures pack off until September.

Offering bite-sized concerts every weekday lunchtime in July and August, it's a laid-back affair that draws office workers, students, families and the odd sassy tourist. The programme is so unfailingly good that you can almost go with your eyes closed, certain of making a great discovery. And if Ligeti or Cossack songs definitely don't work for you, all you'll have lost is 35 minutes of your time, and a fiver.

Diversity is 44-year-old programmer Bernard Mouton's byword. A musician himself – he plays the recorder in Sephardic music ensemble La Roza Enflorese – he boasts impeccable tastes, wide-ranging interests and an indefatigable knack for spotting new talent. The programme features pieces from off the beaten track, unexpected

takes on classics, musicians new to Belgium and household names in unfamiliar roles – such as the violinist Ning Kam who picked up second prize at the Queen Elisabeth Competition 12 years ago and is returning as a conductor.

Mondays are devoted to world and traditional music, Tuesdays to early sounds, Wednesdays to the extraordinarily rich 18th century, while the 19th and 20th centuries will be covered on Thursdays and Fridays. Piano freaks should take note of the week of 29 July, which will be entirely devoted to the instrument, with recitals by up-and-coming Belgian talents Julien Libeer and Philippe Ivanov.

Founded in 1986, Midis-Minimes has grown in popularity and prestige and has even spawned a replica event in Leuven, Zomer van Sint-Pieter, which repeats all the concerts. Funnily enough, neither festival this year will be hosted in the venue after which it is named. Midis-Minimes, once staged in the church on the edge of the Marollen district, decamped to the nearby Conservatory a few years ago. As for the Leuven do, it will be shared

between Sint-Michel's church and the Wagenhuys cultural centre but should return to the gorgeous Sint-Pieter's church on Grote Markt next year. Some people make a point of attending every single concert with a season ticket. If you can only manage a few, I recommend the intoxicating improvisations of gypsy violinist Roby Lakatos; Schubert's lovely *String Quintet* by the local Alfama Quartet, joined by young cellist Camille Thomas (pictured); Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in an unusual version for piano and percussion, with the outstanding Alexander Gurnig at the piano; and the very intriguing bluesy take on Dowland's songs served up by new jazz combo Music 4 A While.

Not to forget the Grétry opera arias and the Bartók and Tchaikovsky concert, both with orchestral backing, which will rather grandly open and close the event. Until recently, tight finances meant that the festival had to restrict itself to solo and chamber recitals, but mounting success and new funding from the National Lottery have encouraged Mouton to think big. There's no knowing where he might stop.



1 July to 30 August

2 July to 31 August

Royal Conservatory, Regentschapsstraat 30, Brussels

Sint-Michel's Church & Wagenhuys CC, Leuven

► www.midis-minimes.be

► www.zomer-van-sint-pieter.be

CONCERT

Grey Lotus

To use a cliché, the Netherlands' Grey Lotus are the best band you've never heard of. For the past five years, singer Joost Verhagen and multi-instrumentalist Daan Arisz have recorded a sequence of EPs and albums that sound every bit as fragile and uncanny as their band's name suggests. Grey Lotus combine the folk whimsy of early Genesis, the musical breadth of late Talk Talk and the anaesthetised majesty of Nico in all her seasons. This year's album *Our Little World of Glass* has earned the boys flattering reviews in their native land, but they remain an unknown quantity south of the border. This Brussels concert is only their second appearance here – indeed only their second jaunt outside the Kingdom of Orange. The core duo of Verhagen and Arisz is assisted for the concert by an A-Team of Haarlem musicians, including young conservatory prodigies (and identical twins) Lars and Niels van der Weiden. **Georgio Valentino**



29 June, 20.00 | Pianofabriek, Brussels | ► www.pianofabriek.be

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Tommigun Duo: Brooding duets from husband-and-wife Kaat Arnaert and Thomas Devos, an honest confrontation of their different yet harmonious voices

JUN 28 19.00 at Beursschouwburg, A Ortsstraat 20

► www.beursschouwburg.be

Sic Alps: American indie garage rock band from San Francisco

JUN 28 20.00 at Madame Moustache, Brandhoutkaai 5

► www.madame-moustache.be

FOOD & DRINK

Bierpassie Weekend

Don't you love it when you are innocently wandering around the streets of some city or village and suddenly come upon a charming outdoor market? For some of us, the joy is increased many times if it happens to be a market of beer. This annual festival sponsored by beer sommelier Ben Vinken brings 32 carefully selected Belgian brewers to Antwerp's Groenplaats, creating one giant open-air café. Add up all the varieties, and you'll find there are more than 200 local beers from which to sample. (Take it from me, don't try to taste them all.) The atmosphere is kept lively with music by Geire Bei Band, the Dixieland Street Band, the Red Hackle Pipe Band and Toffe Jongens, among others. **Lisa Bradshaw**



28-30 June | Groenplaats, Antwerp | ► www.bierpassieweekend.be

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Antwerp

A'Petit: This city walk introduces you to four restaurants, where you will enjoy one course in each. A guide introduces you to fun facts about the city in between stops

Throughout the year, arranged through Vizit

► www.vizit.be

Ghent

Flemish Food Fest: Three of Ghent's top chefs host this refreshingly casual and affordable festival of Flemish food, featuring a farmer's market and barbecue using local products

JUN 30 10.00-22.00 at DOK, Koopvaardijlaan

► www.flemishfoodfest.be

Ostend

A l'Ostendaise: Ostend chefs give cooking demonstrations and prepare dishes with fish and shellfish straight from the North Sea, fishing lessons, fish cleaning workshops, soul music and more

JUN 29-30 11.00 at Zeeheldenplein

► www.ostendaise.be

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Ommegang

History buffs love this epic annual recreation of medieval celebration in Brussels. A parade of 1,400 costumed participants re-enact Charles V's 1549 procession through Brussels. The event marked the city's coming-of-age. Once a swampy backwater, Brussels was finally recognised as a bona fide European metropolis by no less an authority than the Holy Roman Emperor (who happened also to be a native of Ghent). The modern version of the parade ends with an epic show in the Grote Markt with knights in shining armour, damsels in distress and plenty of men in tights. In addition, a medieval market is held on Agoraplein and an entire medieval village erected at the Zavel. There you can enjoy period entertainments, falconry and equestrian competition. Jousting, anyone? **gv**



2-4 July | Across Brussels | www.ommegang.be

MORE FAMILY ACTIVITIES THIS WEEK

Brussels

Drakenzoektocht (Dragon Search): A special museum parcours for adventurous kids aged six and up

Until JAN 14 2014 at Royal Museums for Art and History, Jubelpark

www.kmkg-mrah.be

Hasselt

Bubbels met Noten (Bubbles with Notes): A jubilee concert to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Children's Choir Academy, for kids aged four and up

JUN 29 10.30 at City Conservatory, Kunstlaan 12

www.kinderkooracademie.be

Oostduinkerke

Yourin Beach: Kids' very own summer music festival, for ages eight and up

JUN 27 8.30-16.00 on the beach at Astridplein 6

www.beach.yourin.be

VISUAL ARTS

Robert Mapplethorpe

Robert Mapplethorpe was perhaps the most controversial contemporary artist of the 1980s. In that conservative decade, the American photographer found inspiration in the underground S&M clubs of his native New York. "I'm looking for the unexpected," he once said. "I'm looking for things I have never seen before." Many in the art world looking for the same lauded Mapplethorpe for his intimate portraits, which balance an almost lascivious glorification of the body and an equally intense awareness of the subject's humanity. "Family-values" advocates, however, were scandalised by the patent homoeroticism on display. *Au Début* is a selection of Mapplethorpe's early works from the 1970s, many of which have never been exhibited before. Among the 100 pieces on display are self-portraits, still lifes and portraits of friends, lovers and celebrities (including Patti Smith, Sam Wagstaff and lots of naked dudes). **gv**



Until 20 July | Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussels | www.xavierhufkens.com

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Georgio Morandi: Retrospective of the Italian painter, one of the great masters of modern oil paintings and watercolours, in addition to several works by Flemish guest artist Luc Tuymans

Until SEP 22 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23

www.bozar.be

Ghent

In alle staten (In All States): Gideon Kiefer: Solo show by the Flemish modernist, featuring drawings of medical professionals conducting bizarre and absurd experiments

Until OCT 6 at Museum Guislain, Jozef Guislainstraat 43

www.museumrguislain.be

Knokke-Heist

Art@Knokke-Heist: Eighth edition of the massive open-air art exhibition featuring 40 galleries over two square kilometres

JUN 29-30 at Toerisme Knokke-Heist, Zeedijk-Knokke 660

<http://art.knokkeheist.be>

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Cocoon Heroes

6 July, from 16.00

On the beach at Knokke

July equals summer. And summer equals beach, right? So how about an outdoor party for a change? We've certainly waited for summer long enough.

Event organiser Cocoon Heroes throws big outdoor parties at festivals and beaches all over Europe. It was launched in Ibiza in 2011, by Cocoon, an electronic music organisation led by one of Germany's most accomplished DJs, Sven Väth. While a trip to Spain's party island might not be on your summer holiday agenda, nothing should stop you from enjoying the Ibiza vibes on the sands of the Flemish coast.

The place to be is Knokke's "event beach", where the party starts at 16.00 and lasts until 4.00. The event is co-sponsored by techno collective Area 51, which has been throwing great parties since 2005. The line-up next weekend features local DJs as well as a few members of Cocoon Germany.

There's André Galluzzi, known for his extravagant and euphoric performances that sometimes result in a 10-hour set. Oliver Huntemann will blast his techno beats through the speakers. From Frankfurt to Tokyo, Sydney to Los Angeles, Gregor Tresher has played for crowds all over the world. I'm sure the producer-cum-remixer will win over the Knokke crowd, too.

Alongside the Germans, Area 51 has got some of their crew behind the decks. Bruges is the featured city, with

energetic techno partners in crime Voxter & Balance joining the party, as well as Lexic, who combines deep tunes and techno grooves. That should work wonderfully with some sand between your toes, wind in your hair, a cold drink in your hand and hundreds of other party lovers.

Tickets are €16 in advance and €20 at the door. I suggest you buy ahead.

www.area51techno.be



BITE

Restobières ★★★★

"Local", "traditional Belgian" and "beer cuisine" were some of the words flying around in online reviews, prompting me to suggest this "quintessential Brussels" restaurant to a group of friends. We are eight on this Sunday afternoon, and lucky to get a table without booking.

At first we're charmed by the interior, complete with wooden tables and tiled floors, low ceilings and plenty of vintage knick-knacks. But disappointment sets in early, as we're blatantly ignored by our server. When he finally does arrive with the menus, it's clear that he'd rather be somewhere else. And speaking Dutch to our all-Flemish party (myself excluded) does not appear on his list of job requirements.

Ever quick to oblige, my dining companions express their wishes in French: three orders of cow's tongue, three orders of Flemish stew, one baked sole fillet and one sausage with *stoemp*, or Brussels' famous veg-and-potato puree. The menu lists more classic dishes, like *choesels*, offal stew prepared with lambic beer, *kip kap*, or headcheese, and *bloempach*, a 10cm thick fried blood sausage.

While we're waiting, some of us drink kriek and geuze, the most appropriate refreshment when in the city of lambic-based brews. We also devour a basket of still-warm, fresh-baked bread smeared with golden butter.

While there are no complaints about the dishes, none are particularly memorable either. One dish contains tender pieces of cow's tongue covered in a tangy tomato sauce and served with some of the same rather bland leek *stoemp* that



appears on every plate (except for the plain pan-fried sole *meunière*, which comes with fries).

The best dish appears to be the Flemish stew made with Rodenbach beer. The beef is falling apart in its rich and

flavourful, if not too sweet sauce. My dish of juicy sausage with onion sauce and butter-braised *witloof* is not bad, either. Where the restaurant excels is its prime location in one of the cosiest cobbled streets in the Marolles district, its old-fashioned interior and authentic Brussels menu and beer list. While that hardly makes up for sub-par food and service, at a mere €19 per person none of us can really complain. Chalk it up to another unexceptional dining experience.

► www.restobieres.eu

〒 Vossenstraat 9, Brussels; 02.511.55.83

🕒 Daily 12.00-15.00 & 18.45-23.00
(Closed Monday lunchtime)

€ Mains: €12-24

ⓘ Charming restaurant serving up typical Brussels specialities that are nothing to write home about

TALKING SPORTS

Little summer shine in tennis or cycling

The passing of the summer solstice used to signal Flemish sports stars imposing themselves in two key disciplines: tennis and cycling. But this year, with Wimbledon and the Tour de France starting within days of each other, it would take a brave fan to put money on a Flemish victor emerging from either event.

The Tour, which begins in Corsica on Saturday, will have few Flemish contenders. Some of the surprises of recent years will be there again, but they seem diminished this time round. Take Philippe Gilbert: He was the third-placed sprinter in the 2011 Tour, while topping the UCI WorldTour Ranking, and last September was crowned UCI Road World Champion. Yet he is still searching for his first win of the year.

The best chance is likely to be Jurgen Van den Broeck, who last year repeated his 2010 fourth-place finish. The 30-year-old Herentals rider with Lotto Belisol is again a podium contender this year, but don't expect him to get close to favourites Chris Froome and Alberto Contador.

There are three notable absentees. Tom Boonen, the former world champion, has been benched by his Omega Pharma-QuickStep team after an elbow infection in January, crashes at Gent-Wevelgem and the Tour of Flanders, and a broken rib in April.

Jelle Vanendert, who came third in the ranking for the red-and-white-checked jersey for the climbers in 2011, has been ruled out apparently due to a parasite in his intestines. And Stijn Devolder, winner of the Belgian Road Championships on Sunday ahead of Gilbert and Van den Broeck, who was not even selected.



Jurgen Van den Broeck pictured earlier this month at the Critérium du Dauphiné in France

Not that tennis is offering any more sunshine. A year after Kim Clijsters took her final bow at Wimbledon, her Flemish successors would probably see anything beyond the third round as a stunning success. But Yanina Wickmayer and Kirsten Flipkens are still struggling to make anything like Clijsters' impact. Flipkens, now ranked 20th by the WTA, did at least reach the final of the Topshelf Open in the Dutch city of Rosmalen on Saturday, losing to Simona Halep in a rain-interrupted match. At the same

Leo Cendrowicz

The last word...

Playing ball

"We're offering Flanders another Zaventem."

Brussels minister André Antoine wants a bilingual status for the new national stadium, which Brussels plans to build in the Flemish city of Grimbergen

Cold coast

"Compared to last year, bookings for an apartment or house for rent in July are down 10 to 15%. And 2012 was already 15% lower than the year before."

Kurt Coelus of the estate agents federation coast branch on the prospect of a dismal summer

Long arm of the law

"We're not completely powerless." The Brussels prosecutor's office was unable to suspend the driving licence of a persistent offender, so they seized his car and sold it instead

Recording artists

"No band wants to admit it, but it was really very obvious with Muse at certain points. But I know that tapes can be very seductive."

Patrick Demoustier of sound engineers PRG Productions, on rumours that British band Muse were using background tapes during a performance at Werchter Boutique

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

You might think of Turkey or Egypt as a hotbed of archaeological research, but in fact Flanders is having a boom period in the science, as construction workers digging foundations for new buildings continually come across bodies buried under squares and streets. We'll tell you where new findings are happening as well as how they lend to a better understanding of Flemish history

Science

As you've seen in Face of Flanders (p2), professor emeritus Marc Van Montagu has won the world's most prestigious award for research in agriculture. But it isn't without controversy: Montagu was instrumental in perfecting the ability to alter the genetics of plants, leading to much-contested genetically modified foods. We talk to the 80-year-old about his ground-breaking work and how he feels about the future of the bio-science

Tourism

Flanders is a small region, and you probably think you've seen it all. Think again. Our correspondent headed into corn fields and down dirt roads to find the oddest sites and monuments the region has to offer. Welcome to part 1 of "Mysterious Flanders"