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#287

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Climate accord

After years of work, Flanders approves its programme to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 15%



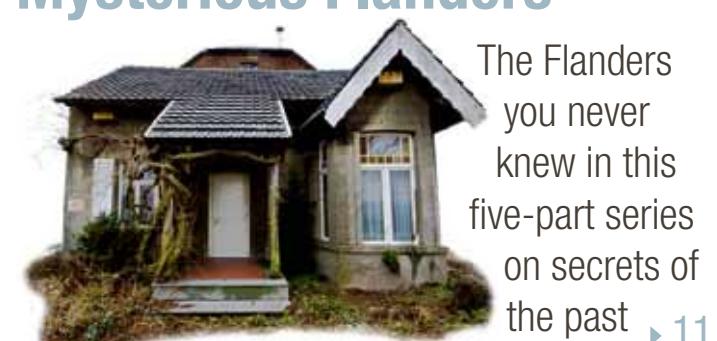
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New to the neighbourhood

Antwerp's ambitious Nieuw Zuid will create an entirely new residential community in unused space

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Mysterious Flanders



The Flanders you never knew in this five-part series on secrets of the past ► 11



Part of the haul uncovered at Antwerp's Melkmarkt

Digging deep

Flemish archaeologists hope decree will help them continue to shed light on region's past

Angela Chambers

Flemish archaeologists say they need more support to properly conduct their work, which helps preserve the region's earliest history. The Heritage Decree, currently under consideration by the government of Flanders, could relieve some of their concerns.

In a dimly lit basement, an Antwerp archaeologist and two field technicians dig through rubbish dating from the 14th century. What was once discarded is now shedding light on a hidden past.

Above ground, much of the architecture from this and

previous periods was demolished in the name of progress. The Steen, a medieval fortress, is the only remaining structure from the early city centre since the expansion of the Scheldt river triggered the end of its surroundings.

This story extends from Antwerp to most Flemish municipalities. The creation of modern historic monuments has helped preserve several important local sites, but the area's oldest knowledge is often buried. Without archaeologists, the region may forever forget or misinterpret the lessons our forebears still have to share.

"Our future challenges on a global scale – climate change, migration, nutrition, health, religious issues, technology –

are not new but have been encountered by societies in the past," says Tim Bellens, Antwerp archaeologist. "Archaeology can help us understand how our ancestors encountered these changes and challenges."

Bellens worked to uncover finds in a building on the Melkmarkt in Antwerp last month, which Belgian national footballer Moussa Dembélé, from Wilrijk, plans to turn into a hotel.

While archaeological excavations are now required when new developments occur on historic sites, archaeologists from across Flanders say they aren't given enough time or financial support to study their findings in depth. They may register a

► continued on page 3

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

Lize Spit



Lize Spit of Brussels has won this year's Write Now, an international contest for young authors writing in Dutch. Spit, 24, was born in Lier, and the biography on her very creative website relays that she graduated in 2010 from the Rits school in Brussels with a Master's in creative writing. "In the 20 years between those two days a bunch of things happened", she notes.

Her work consists of poems, brief and enigmatic, usually barely more than a dozen lines long. There are also short stories and three screenwriting projects still in the development stage.

The Write Now competition was launched in Rotterdam in 2000 and over the years has spread to the whole of the Dutch-speaking world, with prizes for winners in the Netherlands, Belgium and Suriname and an overall prize from among those finalists – which Spit won.

Her winning story is titled *Ordehandhaver* (Law Enforcement Officer). According to the jury, she "blew everyone away with a story about the most poignant pursuit we had

ever read". The short story, they said, "stood out head and shoulders above the rest". They're not the only ones who thought so. *Ordehandhaver* was also the public's pick for the Metro Vlaanderen prize.

The pleasure of the victory was only slightly spoiled by the fact that two days before the prize ceremony, on Anspachlaan in central Brussels, Spit was knocked from her bicycle by a passing car. A temporary cast later, she was allowed to go to Rotterdam. Her story's set-up is comical: a man and wife row in the car park after a party. She won't get in the car if he's driving; he throws the keys to the ground and sets off to walk home. She follows behind, in first gear, all the way.

And yet it's also tragic, touched by an insight into the kind of exhausted relationship that was the terrain of Raymond Carver. So few words to say so much, as in this key sentence: "She always managed to portray him as the kind of guy he himself would never be able to get on with".

► www.writenow.nu

FLANDERS TODAY

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VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

Hans De Loore

News in brief

As *Flanders Today* went to press, Flemish tennis player Kirsten Flipkens had beaten Italy's Flavia Pennetta to reach the quarter-finals of Wimbledon, the furthest the world's number 20 has ever advanced in a Grand Slam tournament. The 27-year-old Flipkens won in straight sets 7-6, 6-3.

Three-year-old Basil has become the first deaf pre-school child in Flanders to be **accompanied by a sign-language interpreter**. The Bruges pre-schooler's parents, both of whom are also deaf, won the right to have him taught in his mother-tongue: Flemish sign language. The decision comes after a year of talks with the education ministry and provides for a signer for 20 hours a week for the coming school year, when the right becomes valid for all deaf schoolchildren in pre-school and primary school.

Unions representing workers at the airports of Ostend and Deurne have called on their members to **suspend industrial action**, after an agreement was reached last week between unions, the Flemish government and Egis, the French-owned company that will run the two airports. Under the agreement, staff not retained by Egis will be given six months of career counselling and will not be required to resign, which would have cost them redundancy benefits and unemployment payments.

Flemish education minister Pascal Smet has proposed that secondary school **students wanting to move on to higher education** should be required to take an examination to determine basic ability and to provide an indication of the best course of study. The proposal is meant to reduce the number of drop-outs in the first year of tertiary education, Smet said.

Two of the seven men held in connection with the **diamond robbery at Brussels Airport** in February have been released by a court in Brussels due to lack of evidence. The seven were among 31 arrests made in May in connection with the robbery, in which armed men dressed as police robbed a Swiss aircraft of at least €50 million in diamonds. The release of the two men is likely to lead to appeals by others among those still detained, only one of whom has been officially charged.

The parents of nine children who were among a group of 15 **left unattended in an apartment** in the Brussels district of Anderlecht are still being sought by police, and the children have been placed in care. Police discovered the children, belonging to three different families, in the care of a 19-year-old girl last week.

Leading politicians from four Flemish parties will take part in the **next series of the popular TV quiz show** *De slimste mens ter wereld*, broadcaster VIER announced. They are innovation and media minister Ingrid Lieten, Open VLD president Gwendolyn Rutten, Groen president Wouter Van Besien and N-VA member Ben Weyts, the man tipped to succeed Bart De Wever as his party's president.

A family of four beavers who set up house on the banks of the Dijle in the centre of Leuven were **scared away by a TV crew** from the VRT nature programme *Dieren in nesten*, a local tour operator claimed. Jan Loos of Landschap vzw had been leading "beaver safaris" for visitors and claims the TV crew ventured too close to the beavers' lodge. The VRT denied the claim. The animals are thought to have moved further downstream in the direction of Mechelen.

A **free wi-fi network** covering the Brussels metro system and the city's parks, announced last year by regional minister for informatics Brigitte Grouwels, has had to be scaled back due to budgetary constraints. The plans will now be limited to a pilot project on Flageyplein in Elsene and the Warandepark in central Brussels. The issue has become less urgent in recent months, Grouwels said. "There are more and more service providers offering mobile internet at reasonable rates."

Police and fire services in Merelbeke, East Flanders, were last week called out to deal with a **kangaroo running around** the E40 motorway. The escaped marsupial was slightly injured while being trapped and was treated at the nearby faculty of veterinary medicine at Ghent University.

A man who stabbed two police officers and tried to stab a third in a Brussels metro station last year has been **sentenced to 17 years in prison** by a court in Brussels. Brahim Bahrir, 35, travelled to Brussels from Paris in the aftermath of disturbances in Molenbeek sparked by a police identity check in June. Two of the officers received minor injuries. Bahrir was found guilty of three counts of attempted murder aggravated by terrorist motives.

A 21-year-old **scout leader due to be deported** to his homeland of Cameroon has been given leave to remain in Belgium for another year. Scott Manyo has lived in Boortmeerbeek, Flemish Brabant, for four years but last year saw his asylum application rejected. He was allowed by federal asylum minister Maggie De Block to stay in order to complete his studies at a technical school in Mechelen. However, he failed to graduate and is now allowed to enrol for another year.

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

A port is a port is a port

The federal government released two promotional videos last week to promote Belgium abroad. They show a collection of very familiar sights: the Atomium, horse-drawn carriages in Bruges, the triumphal arch of the Jubelpark, Salvatore Calatrava's magnificent train station in Liège. Titled "Belgium ... beyond expectations", the clips drew immediate responses on Twitter, though they were not especially complimentary. One person pointed out that Belgian ad agencies had recently come away from the industry awards in Cannes with no fewer than 25 awards, yet none of that talent was evident in the new films. Another called it "schools TV". The most common complaint: that the vast advertising and musical talent in this country was not employed in the making of the clips, which they say were ultimately lacking in imagination and creativity.



They all look the same anyway

The clips also didn't go down well with the management of the port of Zeebrugge. In one scene, we read how Antwerp is the "second biggest port in Europe", while seeing containers stacked up – on the quays in Zeebrugge.

"If they wanted to use our images, they could at least have mentioned our port by name," said managing director Joachim Coens, pointing

out that the pictures used in the film come from a film Zeebrugge itself made and which has been on YouTube since 2009.

"The campaign is aimed at overseas investors," said government spokesperson Pierre-Emmanuel De Bauw. "They won't know the difference."

► www.belgiumbeyondexpectations.be

Digging deep

Below ground, archaeologists battle lack of time and funding to uncover our past

► continued from page 1

found object, but they can't study the broader context.

"I may find something from the Iron Age, but how does this relate to the Iron Age in Flanders and in Western Europe? They don't pay you to do this research," says Jeroen Vanden Borre, project manager for the private archaeological firm BAAC, based in Drongen, East Flanders. "Now, we are just writing reports, and it's put on shelves. I'm not sure if anyone will look at it again."

Archaeologists believe that the *onroerendergoeddecreet*, or Immovable Heritage Decree, could provide options for better research and update the complicated archaeological regulations currently in place. Supporters say the decree reflects the changing dynamics in Flemish archaeology and the need for more attention from both the government and general public.

Community presence

Since work is often done below the surface, city dwellers are commonly unaware of archaeologists' discoveries. However, some public projects are beginning to develop. For example: When exiting the National Bank car park in Antwerp, three floors below ground, a visitor may be surprised to discover a row of photos with detailed explanations and an area marked "Bastion." A section from a well-preserved wall that once surrounded Antwerp has been available for public visits in this space since April.

The Keizersbastion, or the Imperial Bastion, is a fortified city wall built during Spanish rule in the 16th century. It included defence bastions to protect the city from threats. While the ground-level wall was demolished in the 19th century, the remaining structure gives the public a chance to see a tangible piece from this period of Antwerp's history. This is partly thanks to the European Regional Development Fund.

Antwerp archaeologist Karen Minsaer is at the site to guide visitors when the Bastion is open, from 14.00 to 16.00 on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month. While she's enthusiastic about the Bastion, Minsaer doesn't see the same excitement for historic sites in Flanders that she's observed in other countries. She hopes more projects like the Bastion develop so that archaeology is given a bigger focus in the future.

One project that's been called an example for other sites is the Kogge, a well-preserved boat that sunk in the Scheldt River around 1325. In 2010, it was moved to Antwerp's Waterbouwkundig Laboratorium, or Hydraulic Laboratory, for further research. Regular updates about the boat are available on Twitter, Facebook and a blog at www.kogge.be. This project is supported by Onroerend Erfgoed, or the Flemish Heritage Agency, which was created as part of the government's 2009-2014 Coalition Agreement to reshape Flemish heritage policy.

Beyond Antwerp, other archaeological projects are also developing for public viewings. At Veldwezel-Hezerwater, Limburg province, an excavation discovered a Middle Palaeolithic site with some of the oldest traces of human inhabitants in Flanders. Not only is this unique for Flanders, but the well-preserved Neanderthal camps are also rare for northwest Europe as a whole.

In Ennem, East Flanders, a pilot project for archaeological deposits is now available. This means that when there is a shortage of storage space for new archaeological finds, particularly in small municipalities, it can be kept in the Ennem space. This allows the pieces to stay in good condition and not become lost.

"Open Trench Days" were started in 2003 in Mechelen to bring visitors to archaeological sites. The city also produces newsletters and gives workshops. From 2009 to 2011, while excavating the graveyard at Sint-Rombouts' cathedral, people could "adopt" one of the skeletons found there.

"These people became the ambassadors of our dig, spreading the word and informing others of our work, and they were the first to be informed when new discoveries were made," says Bart Robberechts, Mechelen archaeologist.

Another important site developing for the public is in Liereman, outside Turnhout. A Stone Age discovery will teach visitors about the settlement choices of hunter-gatherers.

Financial burden

Some projects have the backing of Flemish and European funding, especially with the creation of the Flemish Heritage Agency. But that's not the case for all of them.

Maarten Smeets, manager of the Studiebureau archaeological firm in Kessel-Lo, a district of Leuven, says that because current laws place a strong financial obligation for archaeological excavations on

© Photos: Angela Chambers



Antwerp archaeologist Tim Bellens records data at the Melkmarkt site

developers, some cities have shown a negative reaction to archaeology because it may hurt progress. "We've tried to work with cities to have an exhibition of our findings, but local authorities often aren't happy about it because it costs builders a lot of money," he says. Vanden Borre says he contacts schools that may want to visit his excavations, but because he's doing so on a voluntary basis, it becomes difficult without funding for these projects.

New attitude

The negative feelings toward archaeology may change if the proposed Heritage Decree places more financial responsibility on national and international funding and less on developers. Criticism also may subside if it's made clear who pays what from the beginning. "Currently, the client knows only after a building permit is issued whether archaeological excavations are needed," says Flemish heritage minister Geert Bourgeois. "The new decree clearly explains what developers have to go through during an archaeology project. New



Field technician Dieter Leclercq helps raise a wheelbarrow to ground level

procedures for building permits will mean delays are reduced to a minimum. These time savings also mean that builders will have a financial gain." These solutions are in line with the 1992 Malta Convention, which set targets for protecting European archaeological heritage.

For particularly notable projects, each year the government awards the €12,500 Flemish Monument Prize for achievements in Flemish heritage.

Another focus of the decree is giving more authority to local

archaeological departments, which could speed along the process of their projects. To make sure procedures are followed, the decree proposes an increased enforcement of rules to properly protect important sites.

In Mechelen, a creative solution was recently implemented to deal with budget cuts. To help reduce costs and receive more support from the Flemish government, the city council decided its archaeological department would now be shared with other municipalities that don't currently have this service.

"It is a great opportunity, not only to continue safeguarding the archaeological heritage of Mechelen, but also to develop an archaeological service for the region," says Robberechts.

Preserving quality is another important factor in the decree, which notes the need for a code of good practice and workshops to promote professional archaeology. New legislation isn't the only path to good archaeology, according to Maarten Berkers, Ghent archaeologist. "It's more than just following rules," he says. "It's also having an insight into what the site is telling you and being creative. Today, though, there isn't enough time to fully think about and discuss what we've found."

The Heritage Decree, if it receives enough votes from the Flemish Parliament this summer, will likely be implemented by next year.



Items found at the Melkmarkt project in Antwerp by Tim Bellens and his team

Climate programme approved

Flanders will cut emissions by 15% over the next seven years

Alan Hope

The government of Flanders gave its final approval to the Flemish Climate Programme for 2013-2020 last week, presented by environment minister Joke Schauvliege. The programme is the result of years of work that cut across the responsibilities of most of her colleagues, in fields such as energy, housing, mobility, economy and agriculture. The basics of the climate programme were first laid out by Schauvliege on the eve of the Durban conference of the UN in December 2011.

The plan is Flanders' response to an obligation imposed by the EU to cut greenhouse gases by 15% by 2020. The EU does not say how the Belgian state is to divide that responsibility between its regional governments, but Flanders has pre-empted the discussion by enforcing 15% on themselves, thereby imposing the same obligation on Brussels and Wallonia.

Among the measures contained in the plan are:

- Tougher energy standards for new home, office and school constructions, as well as premiums for renovation work, in an effort to



Flanders' programme would encourage recuperation of heat from waste treatment

cut greenhouse gas emissions

- Tackling energy consumption in schools, making social housing more energy efficient and employing energy consultants in a variety of areas
- New rules to limit leaks of fluorinated gas (which are particularly harmful to the ozone layer) by industrial cooling plants
- A pilot project with public transport authority De Lijn to run minibuses powered by biogas

The programme also stresses the contribution that can be made by members of the public. According to a recent study by the EU, choices for healthier and more balanced diets, smaller cars, tele-working and lowering the thermostat at home could account for a reduction of 600 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year by 2020 – one-quarter of all emissions.

An investment

"The measures included in the Flemish Climate Programme are investments in the Flemish green economy that will lead to more growth opportunities and more jobs," Schauvliege said. "Our choices and our everyday behaviour

are what determine to a large extent our greenhouse gas emissions. The solution begins with each of us."

The programme of measures comes with a bill of €20 million in 2013-2014 alone, paid for by the Flemish Climate Fund, which is funded by the sale of emission licences to business. Another €16.5 million will be spent on buying up licences in order to close the gap created in 2008-2013 between the real situation and Kyoto targets.

The above aspects come under what the government calls its mitigation plan, aimed at cutting emissions. However, the programme also includes an adaptation plan, designed to tackle the actual effects of climate change. Those would, for example, include measures to deal with the rising sea level at the coast. Meanwhile the opposition in the Flemish parliament criticised the plan. "This policy can no longer be taken seriously," said Groen member Hermes Sanctorum, noting that the programme was not ambitious enough. "The Flemish government has completely failed."

► www.klimaattips.be

Budget cuts shock Antwerp social, cultural groups

Cultural organisations in Antwerp are protesting a round of spending cuts that have left some of the city's most prominent institutions without any municipal subsidy. The amended budget for 2013 was announced last week and saw deSingel and theatre groups Rataplan and Tutti Fratelli lose their entire subsidy. Others, such as the Ballet of Flanders, Toneelhuis and the Flemish Opera, also suffered cuts.

Cuts were even more shocking for other organisations. The Centre for General Welfare lost a subsidy of nearly €500,000, while the social aid

agency and the city's health-care agency were both severely affected. Care for the young and the elderly will be cut by amounts yet to be determined, and associations for Turkish and Moroccan minorities both lost their entire €50,000 subsidy. "This is only the beginning of the savings exercise," said mayor Bart De Wever. "It will get a lot tougher and more difficult yet."

For finance alderman Koen Kennis, there was no option. "If we look at the multi-year budget for 2014-2019, we see that without extra savings there remained 0.0% of margin for



Culture centre deSingel loses its €180,000 subsidy from the city of Antwerp

investment. No city can survive without investment. That's a slow kind of death."

Meanwhile in Ghent, public-sector unions said they were waiting with trepidation for the details of planned savings there. Last week the city council approved an amended 2013 budget, which includes €9 million in cuts. Unions were counting on mayor Daniel Termont, one representative said, to keep a promise made during the elections last year. "As I recall, he declared he had no intention of laying people off," said Dirk Van Himste of ACOD.

Wartime liberation hero honoured

Flemish welfare and family minister Jo Vandeurzen last week paid tribute to a Polish Second World War hero of the liberation of Flanders and laid a wreath on the tomb of the unknown soldier in Warsaw.

Stanisław Władysław Maczek (1892-1994) was a Polish general who commanded the First Polish Armoured Division in Normandy landings. His tanks then moved up through Belgium, where he liberated Ypres, Passchendaele and Ghent before heading on to the Netherlands

and Germany. He was knighted by the British and given the DSO; he also received the *Oorlogskruis* (War Cross) from Belgium and was heavily decorated by the Netherlands and his native Poland.

Vandeurzen was in Poland to attend the laying of the first stone of a building dedicated to the administration of health services in Warsaw, in a joint venture between Flanders' Christian Mutual and private interests in Poland. "The Polish don't have mutualities in the

way we know them," explained Ruben Lemmens of Vandeurzen's cabinet, who accompanied the minister. "And there are a number of areas where the CM can help them."

Vandeurzen also took part in an advanced celebration of Flanders Day, marked here on 11 July, together with the Flemish representative in Poland, Koen Haverbeke. "Often we arrange to mark the day in foreign missions in advance if a minister is scheduled to be present," Lemmens explained.

Carte blanche for young broadcasters

Flemish public broadcaster VRT launched a new youth initiative last week called *Carte Blanche*. The project was announced by VRT director-general Sandra De Preter and is under the patronage of Siham El Kaouakibi of dance group Let's Go Urban. It pairs successful young candidates with experienced media

experts to "throw the rules overboard" and "take part in a revolution" in the creation of youth-oriented programmes to be aired on the OP12 network.

Candidates can apply until 15 July, and selections will take place during the summer.

► www.krijgcarteblanche.be

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

86.8%

of trains arrived at their destination on time in May, according to the NMBS, slightly down on the figure for April

10%

fewer jobs for students this summer than last year due to the economic crisis, according to interim bureau Randstad

69,446

babies born in Flanders last year, a decrease of more than 1% on the year before. The decrease is probably due to the economic crisis, said Kind en Gezin

€30 million

to be invested by Telenet over the next four years in Flemish audio-visual productions. Projects include films by Dominique Deruddere, Jan Verheyen and Stijn Coninx

40%

increase in the number of bars closing down in the two years since the introduction of a smoking ban, according to NSZ, an organisation that represents the self-employed

15

people suspected of taking part in a VAT fraud went free after the case against them ran out of time. The case dates back to the 1990s but was plagued by procedural delays

Brave new world

Antwerp's Nieuw Zuid is a brand new residential community in a disused district

Angela Chambers

Installing 21st-century technology amid cities with protected medieval architecture is often complicated and expensive. But in Antwerp's Nieuw Zuid (New South), a developing district in what's currently a largely vacant area, the city can create an environmentally friendly neighbourhood entirely from scratch. Construction will begin this year on a mixed residential community that includes housing, parks, businesses, schools and sports facilities.

The 15-year project covers 70 hectares, or about 140 football fields, and is just below the current Zuid district, starting from Namenstraat, extending south to the Ring motorway, going east to Brusselstraat and west to the Scheldt quays. This is the same area where the annual Laundry Day music festival is held (and will be again in September).

Large-scale

Since the transhipment industry left the area in the 1960s, the site has been mostly deserted, though the recently constructed courthouse on the Bolivarplaats is one step in the community's revival.

The city expects a significant increase in new residents within the next 10 to 15 years, so developments like Nieuw Zuid are necessary, says Sandra Lintmans, project director for the City of Antwerp.

"A neighbourhood with 2,000 new dwellings is very unique in Flanders," she says, "so it's on such a large scale that you can change things, like adding an ecological



An architectural drawing of Antwerp's community development Nieuw Zuid, which will be ready for residents by 2028

central heating system, which we don't have in other parts of Antwerp, and an efficient water scheme."

Instead of multiple gas installations, Nieuw Zuid will have one system to heat the entire area, which is not only good for the environment, it should also save residents money since it is highly energy efficient. This type of system is used in Sweden, which is ranked as one of the world's most environmentally friendly countries. While it's a central installation, each person will have settings to control the room temperature.

The city wants this area to be in line with the European 2050 climate targets for carbon neutrality, or lowering the carbon footprint to offset other carbon emissions from energy, transport and so on. Along with sustainable water and energy management, Nieuw Zuid will focus on pedestrians and bicyclists

with parking underground. Nieuw Zuid's landscape design is also environmentally oriented. The city wants the district to be "rainwater neutral". This means that rainwater will be collected in a system to benefit plant life rather than be lost as it falls onto buildings and streets. Much of the vegetation used in the design is native to the area, which will contribute to the ecological design.

Green space

"The new neighbourhood is not adjacent to a green space but is actually built within a park structure," explains Bas Smets, the Brussels-based landscape architect chosen for this project. A park of about 15 hectares will connect to other green spaces leading to the Scheldt river and the popular 't Zuid district.

Apartment terraces will also provide an outdoor space that

actually adjusts with the weather. "The terraces will have a system where you can either have it open or enclose it with glass if there is a lot of wind," explains Sam De Maeyer of Attis, a developer assisting with the site. "If there's sun, but it's still cold, you can close it and stay warm." Another way the New South is distinct from other parts of Antwerp is the fact that there will be eight buildings that are 60 to 80 metres high, which will provide more housing. This means the underground parking is even more essential to keep the streets free for pedestrians, says Lintmans.

Best of both worlds

The buildings in Nieuw Zuid will have both large and small residences, with one to four bedrooms so that families with children, singles and seniors can all share the space. Views of the Scheldt are normally fairly

expensive in Antwerp, but Nieuw Zuid will provide less pricey options.

"One of the biggest advantages of this area is that it's like you live outside the city," says De Maeyer. "But you also live in the city, with a 200 metre walk to 't Zuid, and you're close to the motorway." The on-going project to renovate the Scheldt quays will also allow a tramway to go along the quay and continue into Nieuw Zuid.

The first stage will begin with construction from the northernmost point and continue to the south so this new district is directly connected to the city. Developers plan to build the housing, green spaces and other public facilities together to make Nieuw Zuid immediately feel like a community rather than just a residential area.

► www.nieuwzuid-antwerpen.be

The new Gordel

Flemish government relaunches the annual day of recreation with more activities

Alan Hope

The Gordel, Flanders' annual day of recreation in the municipalities surrounding Brussels, is no more, and in its place comes the Gordelfestival: lasting two days instead of one, featuring music and entertainment as well as sport and covering much more territory.

The Gordel – the word means "belt" and refers to the *Vlaamse rand*, the municipalities in the leafy green belt around the Brussels-Capital Region – has been staged annually every September since 1981. It was aimed at a broad public – from serious cyclists on the 100km course to families out for a stroll.

The event was staged as a recognition of the cities being located in Flanders, as expats and French-speakers from Brussels were moving into the areas in ever-greater numbers. Flemish politicians have traditionally been highly visible at the events, which drew protesters from the French-speaking community, who regularly

showed up to switch road signs or strew the roadway with tacks to damage bicycle tyres. Last year Bioso, Flanders' government agency in charge of sporting activities, announced that the Gordel would no longer continue in its existing form. The public in recent years had voted, as it were, with their feet: numbers were dwindling year on year.

Gordel Festival

Last week, Geert Bourgeois, Flemish minister for tourism and *de rand*, and Philippe Muyters, Flemish minister for sport, came together to announce the Gordel's successor: the Gordelfestival. The event will now take place on the traditional first Sunday in September but also the previous Friday, when sporting activity will make room for music, with concert by Flemish bands, including De Nieuwe Snaar and Senne Guns.

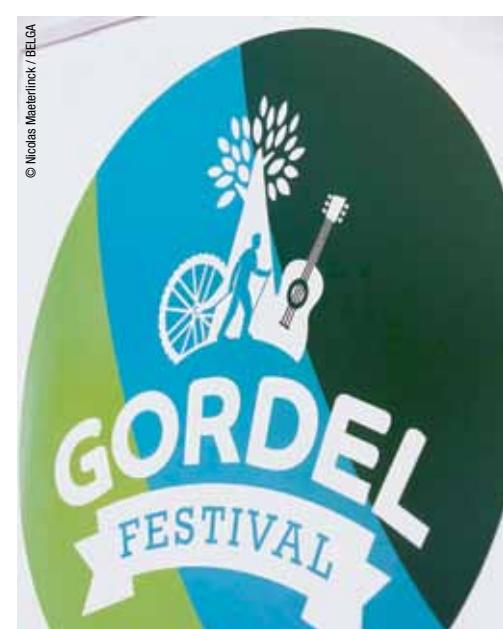
The 100km cycle course is extended to

115km, and the biking and walking are supplemented by mountain-biking, hockey and this year's Sport of the Year, golf. The provincial domains of Hofstade and Huizingen are the twin epicentres of the event, and the town of Pepingen does the honours as the inaugural guest town: in coming years there will be two of these annually.

In those three locations, as well as in community centres in the municipalities with language facilities in *de rand*, there will be music, sport and street theatre during the whole weekend.

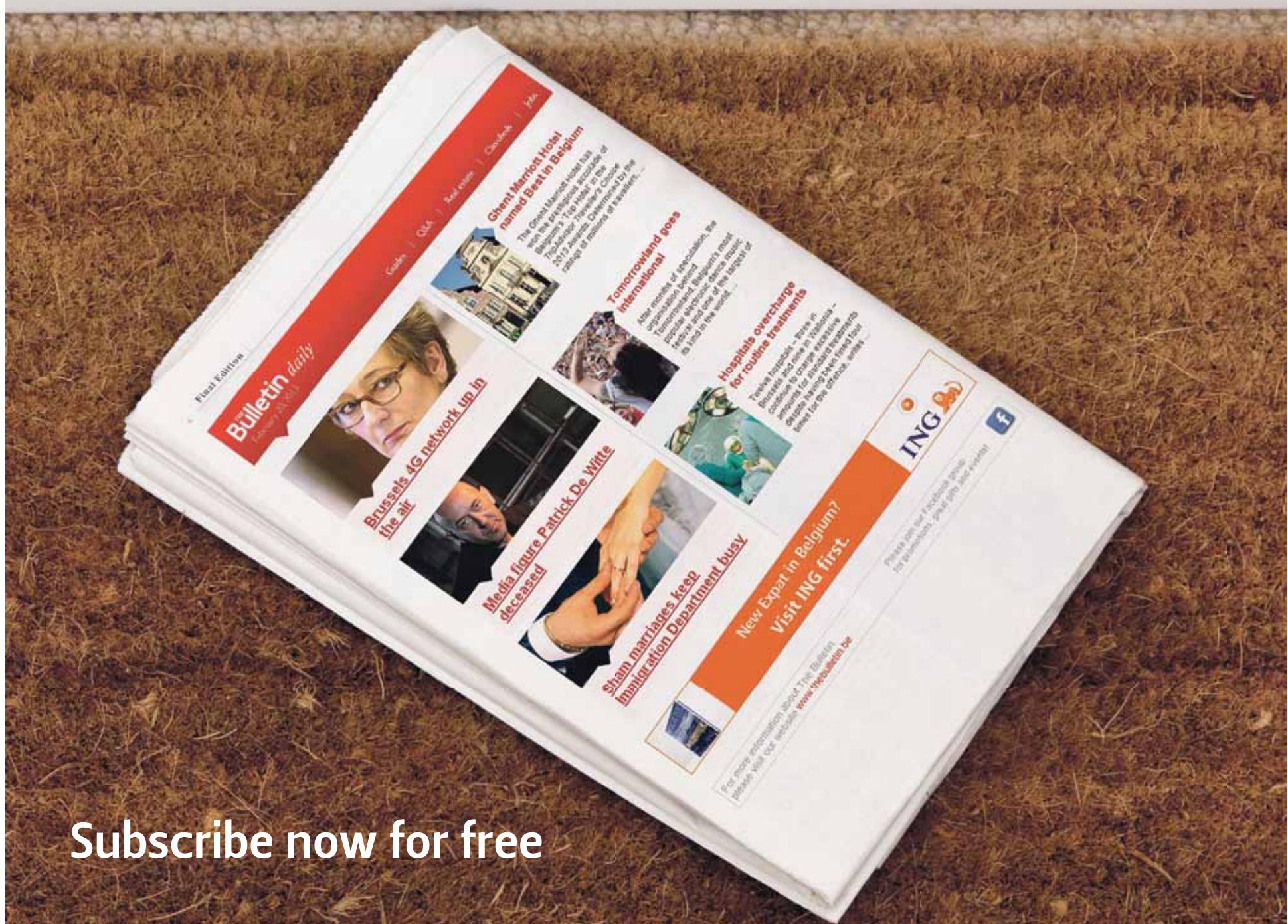
"It was time for something new," Muyters said. "We wanted to throw away the bathwater, but hang on to the baby. The addition of the word 'festival' to the name is a sign of the fresh new wind blowing through the foundations of the former Gordel."

► www.gordelfestival.be



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Media giants merge

Corelio and Concentra fuse newspaper operations

Alan Hope

Two of Flanders' major media groups, Corelio and Concentra, last week announced they were combining their newspaper activities into one joint venture, to be known as Mediahuis.

Corelio is the publisher of *De Standaard* and *Het Nieuwsblad*, as well as *Flanders Today* through its subsidiary Ackroyd Publications. It also owns shares in De Vijver, the company that owns TV production house Woestijnvis.

Concentra owns the regional dailies *Het Belang van Limburg* and *Gazet van Antwerpen*, as well as cable channel Acht and Radio Nostalgie. The new Mediahuis will be 38% Concentra- and 62% Corelio-owned.

The creation of Mediahuis leaves just one other major player in the media market: De Persgroep, which publishes *De Morgen* and *Het Laatste Nieuws* and owns an interest in *De Tijd* and VTM.

The existing titles will continue, the



CEOs Marc Vangeel (left) and Luc Missorten announced the merger of their companies last week

CEOs of both companies stressed. "We know each other, and we're good partners," said Luc Missorten, CEO of Corelio. "We've had an industrial agreement since 2010 under which we print each other's newspapers, which is no small matter. But our traditional revenue

model is under intense pressure. As publishers, we're obliged to invest in the digital area, and that costs a lot of money."

Historically, the companies had only local competitors. Now there is much more international competition, "and the economic

situation of the last few years hasn't helped things at all," said Missorten. "The editorial departments will remain independent," promised Marc Vangeel of Concentra. "It would be inadvisable to try to create a sort of one-size-fits-all situation, and that's another reason for working with Corelio: We have the same values, the same DNA. This is an economic decision, but in the newspaper world editorial values are still important elements." Despite uncertainty among staff – according to Missorten, "we will be looking to see where the organisation can be made more efficient" – Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten was guardedly welcoming of the announcement. "In the current economic situation, a joining of forces is necessary. I think it's a positive sign that Flemish companies are working with each other," she said. The planned fusion requires the approval of the federal competition authorities.

Federal budget approved

The government of Flanders will wait and see exactly what form the latest federal budget takes before deciding whether and how much it is prepared to contribute, minister-president Kris Peeters said last week. Late on Sunday, federal ministers announced they had reached an agreement on this year's federal budget and made important headway on next year's.

Peeters' statements came after statements by his budget minister, Philippe Muyters, that Flanders "has paid enough" and was not prepared to contribute any further to helping the federal government out of its budgetary difficulties.

"They seem to think we're sitting here with our pockets full of money," Muyters said in an interview with *De Standaard*. "The reality is that we've had to tighten our belts for the last four years to achieve a balanced budget, despite reduced growth, higher inflation and a smaller federal grant. Do they expect us now to scrap our plans for extra school capacity? To invest less in child care? Or to let the Flemish roads waste away?"

Peeters, meanwhile, said that his major concern at present is the achievement of a competition pact with the federal government, the communities and the other two regions, which would reduce the wage costs that create a serious competitive disadvantage for Belgium. Peeters has on prior



"Everyone gave up something": Federal finance minister Koen Geens at a press conference following budget agreements early this week

occasions expressed an unwillingness to bail out the federal government, but this time around, diplomacy won the day.

"We first have to see, together with the federal government and the other regions, which measures we can take to improve our competitive power," Peeters said. "Only then will we see who has to pay what."

Tense week

The federal budget agreement, reached after a tense weekend of constant negotiations, succeeded in finding €750 million in savings and new income, €200 million more than the budget

monitoring committee said was required. It also found €2.4 billion of the €3.5 billion required for the 2014 budget.

Among the measures agreed to were an increase in the duties on alcohol and cigarettes, which will increase by 8 cents a pack. An increase on the excise duty on diesel, sought by some, did not make the final cut.

The new budget also introduces a "fairness tax" – a minimum to be paid by all businesses not based in Belgium, as well as by inter-municipal enterprises active on the private sector market. At the same time, savings will be made within the administration, VAT could be imposed on lawyers' fees, and school premiums – the annual payment made in September to parents of school-going children – will be cut by 15% this year and another 15% next year.

"This is a good and balanced agreement, a combination of achievable savings, justifiable new income and support for small businesses," prime minister Elio Di Rupo said at the conclusion of talks. "This budget cost us blood, sweat and a lot of coffee."

Federal finance minister Koen Geens said that "everyone has had to give up something. A few sacred cows had to disappear, but there will be no unjustified taxes."

Government launches career guidance voucher

Flemish labour minister Philippe Muyters last week launched a "careers voucher" aimed at providing employment guidance for employees and the self-employed. The voucher, available for €40 from the employment and training agency VDAB, entitles the holder to four hours of career coaching from one of 68 human resources consultants – a value of €550 of which the Flemish government pays the remainder.

"The training covers questions like: What do I like to do, what ambitions do I have and where will I be in 10 years'

time," Muyters explained. "Professional advisers are able to explain what your talents and abilities are and what you need to do to achieve your goals." Each user is entitled to two four-hour sessions every six years.

The vouchers replace a more ad hoc system whereby various agencies offered guidance at prices ranging from free to €150. The new system, Muyters said, was demand-led. "It's working people themselves who obtain the vouchers and who decides with which of the approved consultants they want to train."

Priorities set for competition pact

The government of Flanders has set out its three priorities for measures that need to be taken for the recently agreed "competition pact". The pact is an agreement among the three regional governments and the federal government to work together to tackle the labour costs associated with the difficulties Belgium faces in remaining industrially competitive.

- Encouragement of private investment, in part through the workings of the banking plan
- Maintain the level of government investment, particularly in research and development
- Regain market share of export demand, lost over

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Airports

► Brussels Airport

Brussels Airport is investing €71 million to build a "connector" structure to link the main hall with the Schengen terminal from 2015. Included in the project is an enlarged security screening area and additional shops.

Aviation ► Abelag

Zaventem-based business aircraft operator Abelag has been acquired by Luxembourg's Luxaviation. The enlarged company will operate around 50 jets in Germany, France and the Benelux.

Brewing

► Lindemans

Vlezenbeek-based kriek and gueuze brewer Lindemans is investing €15 million to double its capacity. A new production line is to be added to the almost 200-year-old brewery, which exports its products to Europe, Asia and the US.

Investment ► Gimv

The Flemish government's investment company Gimv is participating in the funding of a €12 million research programme on Alphabodies initiated by biotechnology company Complix. Gimv has also acquired a majority stake in the University of Leuven spin-off Luciad, which specialises in geo-space data management software.

Distribution ► WDP

Industrial building developer WDP is to invest €10 million in a 23,000-square-metre multimodal distribution centre in Meerhout, Antwerp province.

Metals ► Nyrstar

The world leader in zinc and non-ferrous metals mining and production, based in Balen, is splitting its corporate structure in three to meet the challenges of its growth over the past five years. The new operational units will be mining, processing and sales and sourcing.

Transport ► MIVB

Brussels public transport authority has signed a €50 million contract to buy 172 buses from Germany's Evobus. The decision is a disappointment for Lier-based bus producer Van Hool, which was also bidding for the contract.

Weapons ► Sales up

Sales of weapons and electronics supplies in Flanders jumped 42% last year to €285 million. However, most of the equipment sold falls in the "catch-all" category for which European export licences are not required as they are of a non-military nature.

“I don’t have time to stop”

World Food Prize winner discusses GMOs and the balance between science and commerce

Alan Hope

The award of the World Food Prize last week to a trio of scientists who work in the field of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) led to inevitable criticism, especially since one of those honoured with what has been referred to as the Nobel Prize for agriculture is the chief technology officer for the agro-business multinational Monsanto. But another of the recipients, Marc Van Montagu, was having none of it. The majority of the criticism of GMOs is not based in science, according to the emeritus professor at Ghent University – the first Belgian to have ever won the prize. Instead of helping, he says, the loudest critics of GMOs are in fact making things worse by pushing the technology into the hands of a small monopoly of multinationals, depriving the developing world of the benefits other than at huge cost.

Van Montagu, 80, is the former director of the department of plant systems biology at the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and a pioneer of transgenic plants. Transgenic plants are those that have had the genetic material of another organism transplanted into their genes, for a variety of purposes.

First transgenic plant

Van Montagu and his colleague Jeff Schell created the world's first transgenic plant, a tobacco plant that was modified to resist a common pest. Since then, genetic modification has been used to make plants resistant to cold, drought, salty conditions, natural pests and even manufactured herbicides.

His criticism of the opponents of GMO use is based in first principles. “People still believe that nature is pure and that if you change something, you are harming the planet,” he tells me. “We have been harming the planet for as long as our population has been increasing. Our industry and the way we go about our agriculture are an insult to the planet.”

Genetic modification, in the form of cross-breeding of animals and the creation of hybrid plants bred for particular characteristics, he argues, goes back thousands of years. “The plants and the animals we use for food are all natural,

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Marc Van Montagu, the first Fleming to ever win the World Food Prize, is still in demand at the age of 80

using what you could call genetic engineering for breeding. People didn't know what they were changing, yet they did not hesitate to do it.”

Opponents display their lack of scientific rigour, he says, when they “talk as if the genome is

section of its own genetic material. The discovery led them to develop a technique whereby genetic material from one organism is spliced into the genes of another. That was the beginning of gene therapy as we now know it. I ask Van Montagu how it felt to be

“People still believe that nature is pure and that if you change something, you are harming the planet”

something stable, almost sacred. In fact the genome is in permanent evolution. That's the basis of evolution: No living organism could survive if its genome didn't change.”

It was the late 1970s when Schell and Van Montagu discovered the mechanism whereby the micro-organism *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* causes tumours in plants: It injects them with a

there at the dawn of that new day: It must have felt like switching on a light in a dark room. “Not really,” he responds. “It goes so slowly. The first step is that you have a bacteria that may induce tumours with one type of compound, and other bacteria that make another type of compound. Then we start working on hypotheses. Then we have to prove it. So this is really work that takes four, five or six years as we

draw closer and become more convinced our hypothesis is right.” There's never “a Eureka moment,” he continues, “from one day to the next. That's the way it goes in science: You have a problem, you analyse what it could be, and then you start working on hypotheses. Some are not correct and some turn out to be correct.”

He notes that the scientific process depends entirely on transparency: Scientists publish their results so that other scientists can tear them apart. A theory can only be considered valid when it has been tested to destruction by other researchers.

Another criticism of GMOs is that they lead not to transparency but to absurd situations where, for example, a huge company can try to patent a genetic mutation – as recently happened, unsuccessfully, when a company tried to patent a gene used in diagnosing breast cancer.

Van Montagu understands both sides of the issue. “In the

beginning, in the 1960s, all work was open and all the basic concepts had been worked out. There was no commercial interest, so no products were made. Scientists don't need patents, they need communication, because that's the way science progresses. But society needs patents because society needs products.”

Laypeople, he says, question the value of money spent on basic university research that has no immediately obvious application. But at the same time, they criticise companies who create scientific products based on that research when it is done for profit.

“Take astronomy, for example,” he says. “In the 19th century, nobody thought it was important. Now astronomy has become important. We're no longer in the Utopian world of the 19th century; we need a balance between public and private sectors, where the public sector does the important research and then industry makes the products.”

He admits, though, that “you have to pay very close attention to how to create value out of research. Try to get industrial support for the basic research, so that if the product is there you also have some returns. And that's something that Flanders does well.”

Spread the word

Professor Van Montagu is now 80, but he's no less busy than he was in those pioneer days: I caught him at lunchtime on a day he was sandwiched between meetings at Ghent University and a meeting of the Beijing Genomic Institute, for which he's an advisor.

“I'm all over the world,” he smiles. “I could easily double or triple each minute and still not have enough time. There are always people asking, and things that have to be evaluated and people who have to be convinced. It's an enormous task. We are nowhere at the moment in Europe, and Europe holds up the rest of the world because everybody looks up to Europe. My task is to try to spread the good word. That's why I take on a lot of jobs like president of the European Federation for Biotechnology. I don't have time to stop.”

► www.worldfoodprize.org

Flemish universities attract most corporate sponsorship

Nowhere in the world does the business sector sponsor more academic research at universities than in Flanders. A total of 16.1% of the research costs at Flemish universities are paid for by enterprises, according to the inter-university group that monitors the economics of research

and development in Flanders (Ecoom). Germany comes second in this ranking of countries by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, with 15.1%.

Firms mainly finance the research of economic, medical and engineering departments.

Chairs at the University of Leuven (KULeuven) are for example sponsored by Kellogg's, Deloitte and Pfizer. The Free University of Brussels (VUB) established a chair on ethical financial services with among others Belfius Insurance and Ethias.

The Ecoom expertise centre

states that the high percentage demonstrates the quality and relevance of the scientific work at Flemish universities. The future rector of the KULeuven, Rik Torfs, however, emphasises the importance of remaining independent from large companies. Paul De Knop, rector at VUB,

stresses that universities decide who is in charge of a chair. Both rectors admit that businesses determine the focus of sponsored research but indicate that the Flemish government does the same by accentuating, for example, equality of opportunity and gender issues. **Andy Furniere**

Joining forces to beat Alzheimer's

Academia and pharmacy bridge the gap in research on brain diseases

Senne Starckx

Earlier this year, the American neurologist Dennis J Selkoe received an honorary doctorate at the University of Leuven (KULeuven). Following the ceremony, the 70-year-old Harvard professor gave an inspiring lecture called "Preventing Alzheimer's Disease" in front of a crowded auditorium. The speech focused on prevention of the best-known (and most feared) brain disease in the absence of real progress within the medical community in the search for a cure.

Only a decade ago, many researchers in the field were optimistic that a cure for Alzheimer's would be developed "within a foreseeable period". Nowadays, most of them have lowered their expectations. Even Selkoe, the most-cited Alzheimer's expert in the world and a born optimist, strongly doubts that doctors will ever be able to stop the disease entirely.

That's why – and this was the message in his lecture – we should concentrate our efforts now on preventing and delaying, rather than curing, Alzheimer's.

No magic pill

Selkoe received this honorary degree thanks to a nomination by two Flemish colleagues: Bart De Strooper and Wim Robberecht. Both are neuroscientists and lead research teams at the Flemish Institute of Biotechnology (VIB) and KULeuven. De Strooper's work concerns the basic mechanisms causing Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, starting from the genetic forms of these disorders. Robberecht's team investigates neurodegenerative diseases with locomotive symptoms, like amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) – the one that keeps cosmologist Stephen Hawking in a wheelchair. Add to these two well-established



KULeuven rector Mark Waer (right) presents American neurologist Dennis J Selkoe with an honorary doctorate

names Christine Van Broeckhoven of VIB and the University of Antwerp – one of the world's pioneers in dementia research – and it's clear that Flanders boasts a strong and thriving research tradition in neurodegenerative diseases. But articles and citations in high-ranked scientific journals alone won't get people with Alzheimer's or Parkinson's anywhere. (However, there is a small possibility that elderly people might postpone getting ill by just trying to decipher these articles, as an example of mind-training.) To prevent, delay or even to better diagnose these brain diseases, we need new drugs and treatments and state-of-the-art imaging techniques.

However, in spite of all the excellent work that has been done at the fundamental research level, no one has really come up with a "magic pill" that keeps our brain cells alive.

New funding

Now Janssen R&D, the research division of the American pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson, wants to deliver some extra momentum to the painstakingly

slow process of drug and treatment development. The company has allocated €5 million to a new grant scheme that aims to bridge the "translational gap" in research on neurodegenerative diseases. Janssen's new project bears the name Stellar and will run for at least five years. Its first call for research projects is aimed at VIB, KULeuven and Leuven's University Hospital, which are united in the Leuven Institute for Neuroscience and Disease. A second call will go out later this year, when other academic centres from the Benelux are also invited to request a grant.

BECOMING AN EPIDEMIC

Approximately 160,000 people suffer from dementia today. In two out of three cases, this is caused by Alzheimer's – the other third is caused by common loss of memory associated with ageing. Because of rapid ageing in Western societies, the number of patients with dementia and Alzheimer's is

A scientific board made up of independent researchers and Janssen's R&D division will evaluate every submitted project proposal and decide which one gets funding for the next five years – and how much.

"Today there are several research groups doing excellent work on neurodegenerative diseases, but what we still lack is cross-fertilisation between all these sub-areas of research," says Jérôme Van Biervliet of VIB. "Stellar makes it possible to overview the relevant research landscape from a higher perspective and to explore what's really inside that could contribute to further applied research."

In any case, he continues, "we need a big partner if we are to move on in this field, if we want to bring a possible drug or treatment from the lab to the hospital bedside."

"Traditionally, we have been concerned with patients with neurodegenerative diseases," says Husseini Manji, head of Janssen R&D's neuroscience division. "We believe that co-operation with external innovators is essential to making ground-breaking discoveries – those that put us on the right track for working therapies in the future."

▶ www.stellar-project.be

rising quickly. In 2030, it is estimated that 250,000 people will have lost, in full or in part, their main cognitive abilities – unless neuroscientists come up with a magic pill that keeps the brain healthy while ageing. The question remains still what consequences this will have on society in the future.

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

According to Flanders' Drive, the wireless charging of electric vehicles is feasible, safe and user-friendly. With nine companies and two universities, the research centre tested new techniques over two-and-a-half years. The consortium designed a system in which the battery is charged by a magnetic field between the underside of cars or buses and an application in the road. Charging starts automatically from the moment the driver parks the vehicle on a charging spot, and vehicles could even be charged on the move. Flanders' Drive tested systems that charge vehicles in just one hour.

▶ www.flandersdrive.be

The Foundation against Cancer launched its campaign "Slimmer in de zon" (Smarter in the Sun), which offers free examinations nationwide of skin damage caused by ultraviolet (UV) radiation. After a measurement with an UV scanner, participants will receive a score and suggestions on how to protect their skin against the sun. According to the foundation, the number of skin cancer patients increases by 5% each year, while it could have been prevented in 90% of cases. Skin cancer is the most common cancer for people aged between 15 and 29.

▶ www.slimmerindezon.be

The University of Leuven will build a new campus in Bruges, close to the railway station. The campus, expected to open by 2016, will house students of industrial sciences and technology, and physical therapy and rehabilitation sciences – until now provided by the Catholic University College of Bruges-Ostend. Most professional Bachelor studies that were offered in Ostend will also move to Bruges.

The current rector of Ghent University, Paul Van Cauwenbergh, will become the new president of the University College Ghent on 1 October when his term as rector ends. Van Cauwenbergh succeeds Frans Verheeke, who has been president since the school opened in 1995.

Flemish education minister Pascal Smet wants to introduce measures to keep children in school in the last week of the school year. Every year, many families leave on holiday during the last week. Notes from parents to the school that refer to "compelling familial circumstances" will no longer be accepted, and Smet is encouraging schools to organise more pedagogical activities during the evaluation period. There also could be exams planned in the last week. AF

Q&A

Professor Johannes Schöning of Hasselt University received the international ACM Eugene L Lawler Award for humanitarian contributions within computer science and informatics, with the project GI@School

What is the "GI" that you teach in schools?

GI stands for geoinformatics, the use of informatics technology to solve problems in geography and related geosciences. The GPS is a good example of how geoinformatics is making our daily lives easier. With our project, we teach students of all ages how this technology works and how to develop concrete applications. We want to rouse their interest in computer science but also help them address certain needs in their communities through the development of their own applications.

What kind of applications do the students create in class?

Basic applications include online maps of their schools or mobile

systems to navigate through their home town. But in one week, groups of students also designed an online map of their village that



displayed on which roofs solar panels would have the most effect. Students were also involved in an archaeological project, creating an online map of a medieval village through the study of old maps and information assembled by a quadrocopter with an infrared camera.

Can you summarise the GI@School project's evolution?

I started GI@School with Thomas Bartoschek, a fellow student at the University of Münster in Germany, in 2006. Thomas, now a PhD student at Münster, runs the project with my support. The original idea was to organise a geoinformatics project at the schools of our wives, who are both teachers. Because of the positive response, we expanded our

activity to other German schools and launched the project in Venezuela, Russia, India, Rwanda, Portugal and Brazil. We train Master's students in computer science at Münster to teach classes and offer workshops to interested teachers. In addition, we are working on a textbook that explains how to incorporate the project in lessons.

Why are these advanced computing skills so important?

Youngsters now grow up in a world where this technology is everywhere. They should be able to exploit its full potential by adapting it to their personal needs. These skills will become just as important as writing, reading and mathematics.

Andy Furniere

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Uneasy riders

A pretty grassy field belies the sinister history of the *bokkenrijders* of Limburg

Text & photos: Toon Lambrechts

The rich history of Flanders has left enough traces to fill a shelf of travel guides. And still, much remains to be discovered: hidden places with unknown stories, sometimes mysterious, sometimes quite sinister. Welcome to the first our five-part series "Mysterious Flanders"

The Bonderkuil in Wellen is an idyllic meadow. Nothing hints at the gruesome scenes that took place here in the 18th century: On this spot, 19 people were executed, accused of being *bokkenrijders*, or members of a satanic gang of robbers.

Life was particularly hard at that time in the Landen van Overmaas, as Belgian and Dutch Limburg were then called. Diseases and crop failures took their toll. Most people could barely survive, so the lure of crime was strong.

Out of the impoverished population arose gangs of robbers, which made the region dangerous, meaning wealthy farms and churches were no longer safe. A popular means of extortion was the *brandbrief*, or fire letter. A rich farmer would receive a letter under the door demanding that he leave a large sum of money somewhere in a remote field. If he refused, his farm would go up in flames.

Soon panic spread around the



region, with rumours – this being the 18th century – of satanic gangs flying through the air on the backs of goats. (*Bokkenrijder* literally means "goat rider".) Gang members would trample people and drink magic potions in a ritual to secure a pact with the devil.

Arrest and torture

Government officials hit back with a ferocity reminiscent of the witch trials: Anyone accused of being a *bokkenrijder* was led to the rack. After days of torture, virtually anyone was willing to confess to just about anything, even nocturnal flights on the back of a goat. A long list of accomplices were usually part of these fantasised confessions. Many hundreds were killed in the successive waves of persecution of alleged *bokkenrijders* between 1730 and 1780.

Two farms in Wellen (just south of Hasselt) that still exist today – Homestead Corfs and Homestead Wouters – received fire letters during that time. The case of Homestead Wouters is the most notorious. In January 1774, Farmer Wouters received a letter demanding that he hide a large amount of money somewhere close to the chapel of Oetersloven, or he could say goodbye to his farm. The word *bokkenrijder* is mentioned for the first time in

this letter, as is the pact with the devil.

At the drop-off spot the farmer recognised Johan van Muyzen, who was arrested and tortured. His arrest was the beginning of a wave of accusations and detentions in Wellen.

The legend continues

In total, 31 residents from Wellen were accused of being *bokkenrijders* between June, 1774 and February, 1776. This gave the village a reputation as a den of *bokkenrijders*, a reputation that still lingers today.

One managed to escape; two convicts died in their cell. The rest were executed in the Bonderkuil, and it was a particular bloody affair. Their punishment had to be a strong deterrent for others, so a number of convicts were strangled at the stake and then burned; others were burned alive or first had their hands cut off. Even for the time, these methods were extremely cruel.

The *bokkenrijders* continue to fire the imagination, especially since little is known with historical certainty. In Wellen and in other municipalities across Limburg, many names and monuments refer to the *bokkenrijders*. The image of the robber who made a pact with the devil, riding on the back of a goat through the darkness, is alive and kicking.

THE HOUSE BY THE CANAL

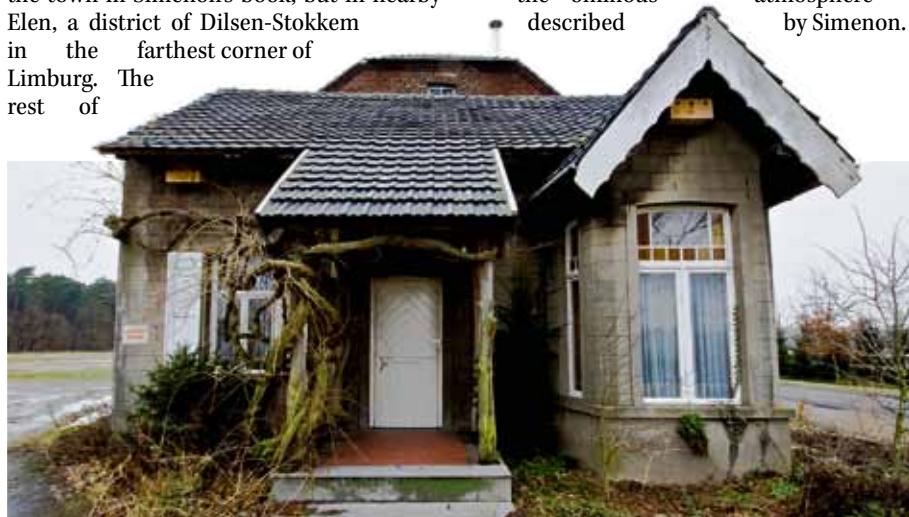
Twentieth-century Belgian writer Georges Simenon is best known for as the creator of the pipe-smoking police inspector Maigret. Another famous book of his is *La Maison du canal* (*The House by the Canal*). In the story, the young Edmée is forced by the death of her father to go and live with relatives in far-away Limburg, where the characters are portrayed as gnarled, twisted people. This they have in common with their surroundings, which are described as marshy, dark and lonely. Needless to say, the story doesn't have a happy ending.

Few people know that the house by the canal really exists. Not in Neeroeteren, the town in Simenon's book, but in nearby Elen, a district of Dilsen-Stokkem in the farthest corner of Limburg. The rest of

the details are correct, thanks to the fact that the Flemish side of Simenon's family – his mother's side – owned the house, and he actually stayed there occasionally. Rumour has it he wrote the book during a stay in the house.

The house (*pictured*) sits in a secluded spot on the Watering next to the Zuid-Willems Canal, surrounded by forests and meadows. Apparently, the place didn't make a good impression on the young writer, even then, though now that would be even more understandable. Abandoned, its desolation is palpable. On a grey day, the gloomy picture is complete, and it is easy to grasp

the ominous atmosphere described by Simenon.



THE FIRST TOUR HERO

To call Flanders bicycle-crazy is an understatement, so it's strange that so few people know the figure of Marcel Kerff. He took part in the first Tour de France of 1903, but apart from an almost illegible inscription on a forgotten war memorial (*pictured*) in Moelingen, a village in the Voerstreek, little remains of him.

Frenchman Maurice Garin won that first Tour, with Kerff in an honourable seventh place. At that time, the Tour was totally different. Only the French cyclists had a team, while entrants like Kerff were on their own. That means that they had to look for their own room and board before

the ride, and trainers and masseurs were out of the question. Kerff even had to fight for a sip of water once. His seventh place, however, yielded him a well-earned medal. Eleven years after his performance, the First World War broke out. The Germans had set up a huge camp in the fields between Gravenvoeren, Moelingen and Bereau. The ever-intrepid Kerff wanted to see what was going on first hand. His curiosity would cost him a heavy price: He was arrested and accused of espionage. On the morning of 7 August 1914, he was hanged in retaliation along with several other prisoners of war. A sad end for Flanders' first Tour hero.





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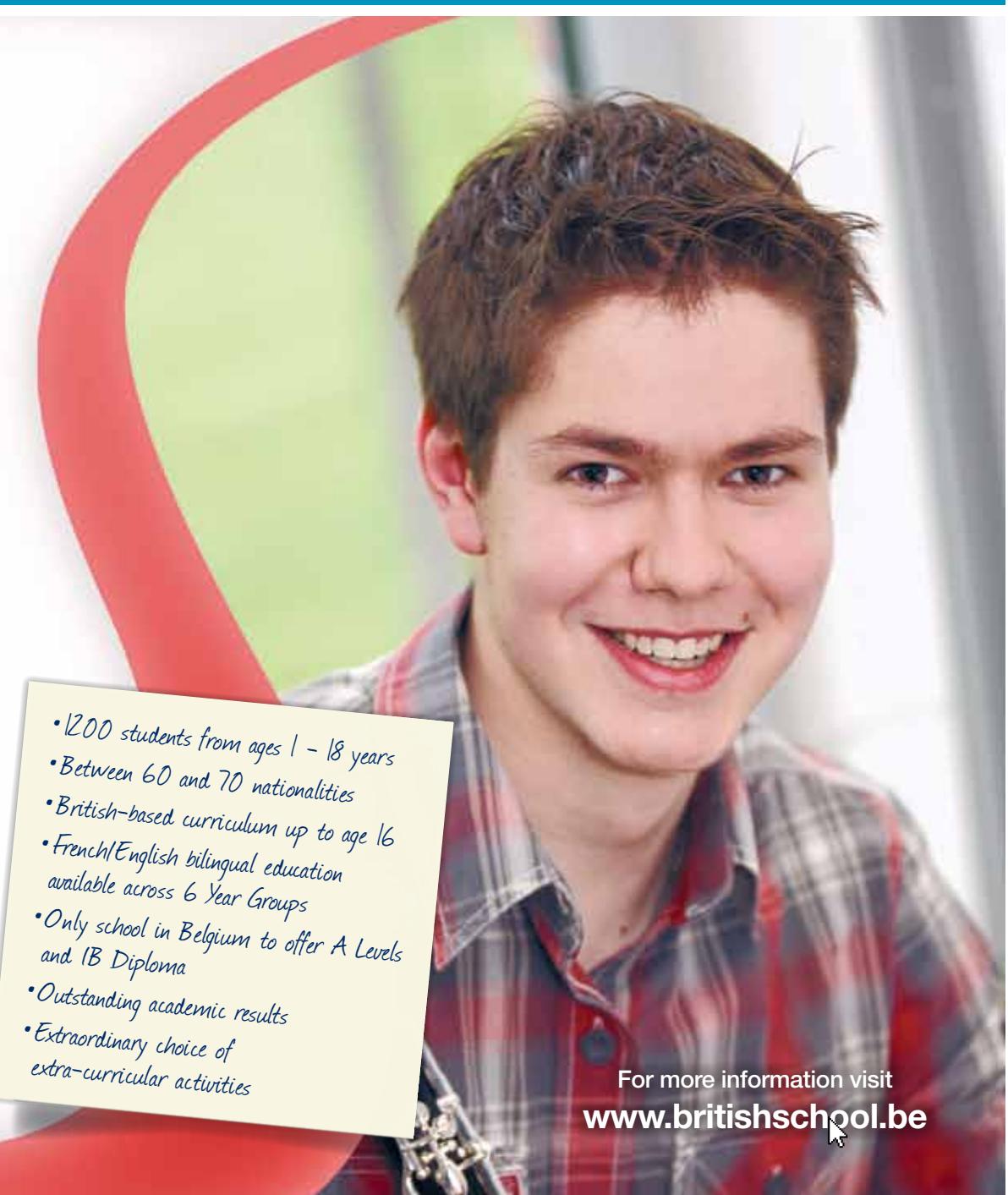
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Inter-connected

Diane Broeckhoven's new novel shows how little events make a world of difference

Rebecca Benoot

Diane Broeckhoven went to the Netherlands more than 40 years ago to work as a journalist, focusing on human-interest stories. She continues to do so to this day, albeit from back home in Antwerp. Having now published nearly 30 books, she has recently finished her latest, the story of a woman's search for her past through lost belongings

In 1980, Broeckhoven made her fictional debut with a collection of short stories for children called *Dagboekje van Matthijs* (Matthijs' Diary). The 67-year-old award-winning author crossed over to adult fiction in 1989 with *Het verkeerde keelgat* (The Wrong Way).

"I loved writing for children," a calm but chatty Broeckhoven tells me from her home in the Antwerp *begijnhof*, "but when your children grow up, you start to lose touch with that atmosphere. Also, when you write for adults, there are a lot more themes and characters you can convey."

She almost immediately proved her worth in fiction for grown-ups: *De buitenkant van Meneer Jules* (A Day with Mr Jules), her second book for adults, launched her international career. It has been translated into 16 languages, including English, and has sold more than 250,000 copies.

Her new novel, *Wat ik nog weet*



(What I Remember), was inspired by a segment she saw on television about a woman who went in search of her belongings after her children sold them to pay for her nursing home when she was declared terminally ill. But she recovered and spent her days

roaming second-hand shops looking for her possessions. Full of memories, our belongings, she claimed, are not only a part of us, they are what make a house our home.

Broeckhoven turned the premise into a triptych dealing with the complicated

and slightly tumultuous relationship between a mother, Manon, and her son. Alternating between the protagonists at three important points in time, Broeckhoven paints an intricate portrait of connection, communication and consequences.

The details

"Most stories deal with relationships because that's what life's all about," she says. "A mother-son relationship isn't per se easier, but it is probably more straightforward than a mother-daughter relationship. I chose to portray these characters at crucial moments in their lives, with plenty of time in between, so you can see how not just the characters – and the son in particular – evolve but also how their relationship evolves. It's not only our experiences that change us but our relationships as well. The older he gets, the more he is able to relate to his mother."

Manon and her husband get divorced, creating a ripple effect. "It causes a lot of confusion and resentment for a young teenager," Broeckhoven continues, "which naturally has an effect on the relationship with his parents."

Everything is connected, and the smallest events sometimes have the biggest impact. It was no coincidence that Broeckhoven quotes Hungarian writer Sandor Marai at the beginning

of her book: "Only through the details we will be able to grasp the essence". *Wat ik nog weet* is a subdued and intimate novel. Broeckhoven is a master at the art of suggestion. "I don't want to write everything," she explains. "I like giving my readers the chance to read between the lines and fill in the blanks for themselves."

Due to the highly recognisable situations, you could easily see yourself becoming part of this family, making the book very accessible. "It's a compliment when people tell me I made them reassess their lives," she says.

The novel also deals with perception and prejudice; everyone assesses a situation from his or her point of view, making certain things more relevant to some than others. Communication, it becomes obvious, is crucial. "If you don't communicate, complicated situations might arise that could easily be avoided, and the older you get, the more nuanced it gets," she says.

A perfectly dosed depiction of tragedy and truth, *Wat ik nog weet* eventually comes full circle, making the red armchair that graces the cover a symbol of both loss and identity. Written in simple yet sincere language, this toned-down novel is the perfect introduction to Broeckhoven's oeuvre and a delightful way to pass a warm summer's eve.

FRESH FICTION

Mogelijke memoires (Possible Memoirs)

by Herman Brusselmans • Prometheus

There's no way round it, Brusselmans loves talking about himself these days. In his latest novel, he's on about his youth in Hamme, but this time, he also includes his family, like his grandfather Frans, and his wacky friends. He also visits the future to encounter an imaginary son. Constantly shifting between fact and fiction, the prolific Flemish

author keeps us on our toes and makes us wonder where the strange and twisted truth really lies. Colourful, tongue-in-cheek, intertextual subplots ... it's Brusselmans doing what he does best.

De zwarte messias (The Black Messiah)

by Chika Unigwe • De Bezige Bij

Nigerian-born Chika Unigwe, a long-time resident of Turnhout, has written a historical yet extraordinarily relevant novel about Olaudah Equiano, alias Gustavus Vassa, who bought his own freedom and went on to play an important role in the battle against the slave trade in the 18th century. Unigwe, who is known for her novels on migration and identity, writes the monologue in an archaic mix of English and Dutch, giving a distinct voice to Equiano while inventing a fictional private life in this elegant novel about finding your place in the world.

De laatkomer (The Latecomer)

by Dimitri Verhulst • Atlas

Désiré Cordier is an old man who, to the outside world, has lost his

marbles – but nothing could be further from the truth. Senile, incontinent, you name it: He isn't going to make life easy for his wife and the people in the retirement home who take care of him. Until one day, someone arrives who makes him rethink his bad behaviour. Verhulst's trademark whimsical misanthropy rears its head once again. It's far from Verhulst's best work, but *De laatkomer* is humane and tragic by turns.

Het alfabet van de stilte (The Alphabet of Silence)

by Walter van den Broeck • De Bezige Bij

Using the media circus surrounding former Flemish bishop Roger Vangheluwe, who was accused in 2010 of sexually abusing several minors, as a premise for his new novel, Van den Broeck dives head-first into the Catholic roots of the region. The story is made up of interviews that character Kristien is collecting for her university thesis. By using multiple voices, Van den Broeck paints a harrowing portrait of a conservative rural town where values and secrets are easily entwined.

Ten stories, one movie: Ghent director seeks multiple scripts

"It's going to sound very corny," begins Declan Lynch, "but it started for me with the Triggerfinger cover of 'I Follow Rivers'."

The Irish documentary filmmaker moved to Ghent last year, when his partner was offered a training position at the university hospital. "I spent a lot of time walking around Ghent discovering the city, and that track was omnipresent."

Having been inspired by the Flemish rock band's song, he called his new film project *Follow*. And he has his work cut out for him: *Follow* will fuse 10 different scripts by 10 different writers. Each submitted script must have one male and one female character, and they must play out their approximately nine-minute story – any story – somewhere in Ghent. The stories will then be connected into one 90-minute feature.

"I normally work in a very structured way," says Lynch, whose company Unity Productions is based in Dublin. "A classic production, be it film or television, is made this way with good reason. So throwing out the traditional rulebook can be fun creatively. The finished film will be a partly unknown quantity during production. It is in effect a totally

incorrect way to work."

Intrigued by the concept, the International Film Festival of Flanders in Ghent has agreed to screen the finished product at this year's edition in October. That means Lynch has just over three months to get it shot and edited. Less, really, since he's extended the script deadline to 29 July.

"The deadline is set, the clock is ticking," says Lynch, remarkably calm. "The scripts are coming in, which means writers have stories to tell. The difficult part is good production value." The project, he admits, is "no to low budget," so he's seeking volunteers in the industry to donate a few hours to production.

Scripts are accepted in either English or Dutch. "Scripts are judged on quality and on whether they might work as part of an overall piece," says Lynch. "What's been surprising with the submissions so far is how bizarre and varied the mix has been. It looks to be heading somewhere surreal. My impression is that Flemish audiences could handle that mix; but it remains to be seen." Lisa Bradshaw

► www.tinyurl.com/followgent



Welcome to modernism

Michelangelo Antonioni: Master of Modern Cinema

Gorik de Henau

Together with the likes of Fellini, Visconti, Rossellini and Pasolini, Michelangelo Antonioni ranks as one of the most important figures of post-war Italian cinema. The director, who is the focus of an exhibition at Bozar this summer, made his first films during the apex of neorealism, the movement that grew out of the horrors of the Second World War. But when neorealism lost its documentary touch and degenerated into increasingly melodramatic forms, Antonioni went his own way.

He began addressing issues in contemporary society such as the rapid socio-economic changes, lack of communication and the difficult relationship between the sexes.

His "existentialist" trilogy *Lavventura* (*The Adventure*), *La notte* (*The*

Night) and *L'eclisse* (*Eclipse*) in the early 1960s marked the beginning of his own idiosyncratic style: a meandering plot without a clear-cut resolution, alternately scarce and profuse dialogue and a sense of alienation.

Later films like *Il deserto rosso* (*The Red Desert*, his first effort in colour), *Blow-Up* (shot in English in Swinging London) and *Professione: Reporter* (*The Passenger*, with Jack Nicholson) confirmed his reputation as the first modernist filmmaker. He succeeded like no other in expressing the post-war feeling of malaise, while keeping abreast with developments in other art forms.

Antonioni's stringent, almost abstract, images were akin to contemporary painting and architecture, whereas films like



Blow-Up (pictured) and *Zabriskie Point* abound with references to the pop and youth cultures of the day. The exhibition at Bozar draws heavily

on the personal archives of the Italian, which were acquired by his native city Ferrara in 1997, before his death in 2007. His films are present by way of well-chosen fragments. Excerpts of his scripts and scribbled notes shed light on the preparatory stages. A number of photos evoke the hustle and bustle of the actual movie sets. The obligatory film posters and press clippings are supplemented by other paraphernalia such as album covers of bands that supplied music to his soundtracks, eg The Grateful Dead and Pink Floyd.

Special attention is given to Antonioni's relationships with the artists of his time. He corresponded with all manner of creative people: Among those on view is a handwritten letter by the Russian filmmaker Andrey Tarkovsky. Antonioni also

painted, a little-known aspect of his talents, and several enlargements of his minuscule works adorn the walls at Bozar.

A very special treat are a number of prizes, such as the Golden Palm he won for *Blow-Up* and his honorary Oscar from 1995. Also watch out for an endearing screen test with a bashful Monica Vitti, his one-time lover.

To coincide with the exhibition, Cinematek is showing a complete retrospective of his films until the end of August, from the early neorealist shorts to the accomplished feature films of his heyday to the ultimate collaborations with Wim Wenders and others. The acclaimed masterpieces are also being shown at Flagey and later on in a number of other cities in Belgium.

Exhibition: Until 8 September | Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels | ► www.bozar.be

Film retrospective: Until 30 August | Cinematek, Baron Hortastraat 9, Brussels | ► www.cinematek.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Picnick at Dhondt-Dhaenens

Ever wanted to sit down to a picnic with an opera singer? Deurle's Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens gives us just such an opportunity. Visitors are greeted with champagne in the museum's immaculately landscaped garden, then regaled by the Flemish Opera's woodwind trio. But this is merely an appetiser, the main course being the vocal acrobatics of opera singer Louise Kuyvenhoven, served with a side of brunch. You can bring your own grub or graze at the house buffet. After lunch, picnickers are invited to visit the museum.

Meanwhile, back in the garden, gypsy swing band Monkey Business provide a sonic digestif. For those who don't know, Museum DD has promoted modern art in East Flanders since the 1960s. The current exhibition is drawn from the 20th-century collection of Flemish architect and arts patron Charles Vandenhove. **Georgio Valentino**



7 July, 11.00 | Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle | ► www.museumdd.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Brussels Beach: The capital's canal district is transformed into a sandy beach for a month-long party featuring sports events, barbecue, cocktails and plenty of lounge chairs

JUL 5-AUG 11 at Saincteletteplein

► www.brusselbad.be

Eetbaar Park (Edible Park): Urban activism meets gastronomy at this weekly open-air tasting of sustainable cuisine. Dishes are made with fruits and vegetables that can be grown in your garden or terrace

Thursdays 17.00-21.00 at Kunstberg

► www.leefmilieubrussel.be

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Gooikoorts

Folk music is making a comeback on the pop charts, but in the Flemish Brabant town of Gooik, it never went away. The Gooikoorts festival has promoted the genre in all its forms for more than a decade. You'll find the full spectrum of folk, from staunchly traditional forms to daring, contemporary experiments, from national folksters such as young Flemish quintet Broes to international artists like Italian percussion ensemble Tamburellisti di Torrepaduli (pictured). Spectators become participants in hands-on (or rather feet-on) dance evenings. Vendors peddle all manner of exotic folk instruments at the international luthier market. There's also a children's area for the wee ones as well as several workshops for young and old alike. **gv**



5-7 July | Dorpstraat, Gooik | ► www.gooikoorts.be

MORE MUSIC FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Bruges

Cactus Festival: This major pop/rock festival balances home-grown and imported talent, this year featuring dEUS, Daan, Hooverphonic, Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore, Calexico and more

JUL 12-14 at Minnewaterpark

► www.cactusfestival.be

Ghent

Ghent Jazz Festival: Seven nights of music on two stages. Headliners include Elvis Costello and Diana Krall, but the main attraction is the Bryan Ferry Orchestra

JUL 12-20 at De Bijloke, Godshuizenlaan

► www.gentjazz.com

Lommel

Gracias a la Vida: Eclectic charity festival with concerts, DJs, workshops, urban art, street performance and global cuisine.

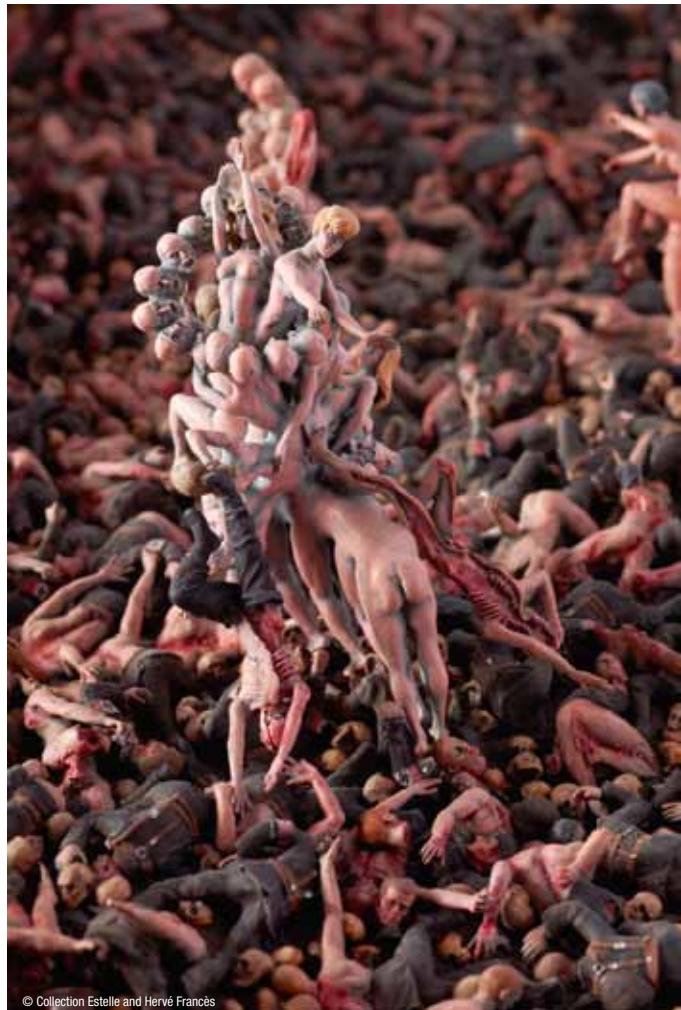
JUL 6 at Burgemeesterspark

► www.graciasalavida.be

EXHIBITION

In alle staten (In All States)

After a long and successful career in communications, French publicist Hervé Francès reinvented himself as a patron of the arts. His Fondation Francès, launched in partnership with wife Estelle, supports dozens of contemporary artists and curates exhibitions across Europe. The couple's collection is, to say the least, intense. These pieces examine the human animal from all angles (or in all states). There is beauty, of course, but there is also brutality—a lot of it. Indeed, the graphic content can be overwhelming at times, but the objective is not to shock the audience. The Fondation Francès and its partners at Ghent's museum of psychiatry hope rather to provoke thought and discussion about human nature, that most volatile of forces. The multi-media exhibition features works by Damien Hirst, Robert Mapplethorpe and Rinus Van de Velde, among many others. **GV**



Until 6 October | Dr Guislain Museum, Ghent

► www.museumdrguislain.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Jozef Linnig: The 19th-century Flemish painter left a treasure trove of cityscapes showing the architecture and daily life of Antwerp before city officials razed the Spanish fortifications and reworked the street grid

Until SEP 1 at Museum Plantin-Moretus, Vrijdagmarkt 22-23

► www.museumplantinmoretus.be

Brussels

Chat Noir: Immerse yourself in the bohemian world of the Chat Noir. The Parisian cabaret has become a symbol of the Belle Epoque, a time of artistic innovation and social upheaval

Until SEP 15 at Museum van Elsene, Jean Van Volsemstraat 71

► www.museumvanelsene.irisnet.be

Dr Livingstone, I Presume?: Belgium celebrates Scottish missionary-explorer David Livingstone's 200th birthday with this exhibition dedicated to his travels in Africa and his famous encounter with Anglo-American journalist Henry Morton Stanley

Until NOV 11 at BELvue Museum, Paleizenplein 7

► www.belvue.be

CONCERT

Elton John

GET TICKETS NOW

Antwerp's monopoly on mega-concerts is over. Brussels' Paleis 12 may have only recently opened its doors but the 15,000-capacity venue is already giving the Sportpaleis a run for its money. Upcoming headliners include David Guetta, Mylène Farmer and, biggest of all, Elton John. The Englishman with the crazy glasses needs no introduction, but here's one anyway. He shot to fame in 1970 with the ballad "Your Song" (co-written, like all of his material, with lyricist Bernie Taupin). He has remained in the spotlight ever since, thanks in equal measures to his over-the-top stage act and a never-ending stream of chart hits. Indeed, John is generally considered one of the most successful pop performers of all time. The last time he visited Brussels, he was accompanied only by percussionist Ray Cooper. This time he's bringing along the whole band. Tickets are on sale and going fast. **GV**

16 December, 20.00 | Paleis 12, Brussels

► www.paleis12.be



CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Golondrinas: The Amsterdam-based trio play folk music from Latin America, Spain, Cape Verde and Portugal. Olé!

JUL 5 20.00 at Art Base, Zandstraat 29

► www.art-base.be

Ostend

The Beach Boys: The legendary American pop group recently celebrated their 50th anniversary. Now they're back on tour, albeit without genius songwriter and bassist Brian Wilson

JUL 6 20.00 at Kursaal Oostende, Monacoplein

► www.kursaalostende.be

Agnostic Mountain Gospel Choir: Americana revivalists (who hail, ironically, from Canada) bring their blend of folk, bluegrass and gospel to Ostend's newest cultural centre

JUL 10 20.30 at De Grote Post, Hendrik Serruyslaan 18A

► www.degrotepost.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Daan Bauwens

De Kleine Kunst

Francis Lousbergskaaai 99, Ghent

I have to admit, I had been quite sceptical about this place. De Kleine Kunst didn't seem to be offering anything out of the ordinary. From the outside, it's plain, at best, and all I could see through the windows was a normal bar surrounded by old tables with wooden chairs. That's it.

Until that one night in the beginning of April. The bartender put on Frank Zappa's *Sheik Yerbouti*, and I suddenly found out I was not the only one who had grown up making fun of Bob Dylan. That was only the start. The Tibetan prayer flags on the ceiling made me dream of travelling, the terracotta walls made me feel warm, the beer was cheap enough for everyone to buy a round, young and old were sharing experiences. We left four hours later.

De Kleine Kunst has a hidden charm that is nothing short of addictive. What you see is what you get, is the attitude of enigmatic boss Marc Vandebos, who left his native Limburg 18 years ago for Ghent. "It is a simple but up-to-date neighbourhood bar."

Vandebos opened De Kleine Kunst exactly two years ago. He's a quiet type but is easily forgiven for that since his choice of music is impeccable. He organises two acoustic concerts



a week, and during the first three days of August multiple bands are invited to come play at the bar's outdoor Gebuurtefeestenfestival. It

will be "the most memorable event since the opening," he smiles, "after marrying Pam, the bar's madam, last September."

Vandebos politely requests that I mention his snacks: There's chili con carne, spaghetti, croques and *hutsepot* in the winter. They make

everything themselves on site with fresh ingredients.

The pair have succeeded in making De Kleine Kunst the beating heart of the city's young Visserij district. The terrace has already become legendary, despite a lack of warm evenings. Look no further in your search for a friendly, honest watering hole in Ghent.

► www.cafedekleinekunst.be

BITE

The House of Elliott ★★★★

The swinging '20s meet chic Parisian boutique in this one-of-a-kind Ghent restaurant with an interior inspired by the 1990s BBC fashion house drama of the same name. The snug space is filled with ornate baroque frames, pearl-beaded curtains and mannequins donning feather boas. The whole atmosphere breathes decadence and nostalgia.

The specialty here is lobster. It's served in various ways, but never without a big smile and witty discourse from owner Freddy Bové. He runs his business with the same passion with which he started it more than 20 years ago.

Our party of three enjoys aperitifs of pastis and gin and tonic. On the table are a basket of fresh bread, butter and potted cress with miniature scissors, inviting you to clip off a leaf or two of the herb to spice up the bread.

Perfectly in line with the season, our *amuse-bouche* features a tender stalk of white asparagus, covered in parmesan foam and North Sea shrimp.

An ice bucket holding a bottle of crisp and outspoken white wine is delivered to our table with the first dish in our three-course market menu. One half of a bright red lobster and three thick stalks of green asparagus come topped with a pile of the salty herb salicornia, a wafer-thin sesame seed cookie and buttery shallots. The meat is sweet, warm and tender. Before the other half of the lobster arrives, we're treated to a refreshing glass of lemon-lime sorbet with *neuzekes* syrup (made from the traditional cone-shaped Ghent candy).

The main dish lobster is dressed up with lemony whipped mousseline sauce, a runny poached egg, silky potato puree

and chunks of grilled white asparagus. The dish's flavours are delicate and well-balanced, its textures pleasantly contrasting.

After polishing off the bottle of wine, we order a round of coffees to go with the chef's dessert. That features fat, juicy strawberries arranged around a scoop of mascarpone and white chocolate. This rests atop a crispy cookie, strawberry parfait, tangy coulis, a dusting of powdered sugar and sprig of mint.

We all agree that €60 apiece is a steal for a meal of this calibre. We've barely stepped out into the cosy Jan Breydelstraat before Freddy runs after us with a bottle in one hand and three tiny glasses in the other. Apparently we'd left without a complimentary taste of his signature digestive, a sweet and herbal potion offered to all customers on their way out. No wonder this is among Ghent's most legendary restaurants.

► www.thehouseofelliott.be

📍 Jan Breydelstraat 36; 09.225.21.28

🕒 18.00-22.00 Thurs; 12.00-14.00 & 18.00-22.00 Fri-Sun

💶 Mains: €25-€32

ℹ️ Famed Ghent restaurant marvellously decorated and specialising in lobster prepared fresh



© Robyn Boyle

TALKING DUTCH

Bob is dead

You may have seen the signs along the motorways. *Bob is dood*, they announce – Bob is dead. If you are new to this country, you might be a little bit puzzled. Who is Bob? And why are they announcing his death on the motorway?

Well, Bob is not a person. Bob is a road-safety campaign that was introduced in this country back in 1995 to discourage drunk driving.

The idea is quite simple. When a group of people go out for a beer, they pick one person to stay sober. That is Bob. He (or she) is the designated driver for the evening. The idea was a huge success. Something like 46% of Belgians have now been driven home by a Bob and 86% of the population disapproves of drinking and driving.

The idea was such a good one that it was taken up by dozens of other countries. Sometimes Bob has had to change his name – in France he is Sam, in Luxembourg Bob has become Raoul. You now come across Bobs in the most unexpected places: "Who's your sober Bob?" it says on the side of buses in the Northern Territory of Australia. But now the Belgian road safety institute thinks that the Bob campaign is flagging. "*Het begrip Bob bestaat al 17 jaar*" – the idea of Bob has now been around for 17 years, said Karin Geno of the road safety institute – "*maar nu vonden we het nodig om de campagne op te frissen*" – but now we think it is necessary to freshen up the campaign.

The road safety experts say that there are still too many road accidents in this country involving drunk drivers. So they have come up with a new campaign. "*Bob is een werkwoord geworden*" – Bob has become a verb, the minister of transport explains. So the Dutch language has been enriched with a new verb, *bobben* – to Bob. You will be seeing that word a lot in the coming weeks as the campaign takes off. The slogan *Ik Bob mee* – I am Bobbing – will be appearing on T-shirts, the sides of taxis and gadgets. You might wonder if a simple word can have much impact on drink-driving. But it worked all those years ago when Bob was born. So let's hope the verb is just as successful.



Derek Blyth

The last word...

Paws for thought

"Don't bring puppies or any other animals home from abroad and have your own dog vaccinated if it's going with you."

Animal welfare authorities have warned of the danger of rabies in pups imported from Slovakia

Holiday hostages

"Unlawful and unacceptable." Education minister Pascal Smet condemned a school in Aalst that refused to issue report cards to children whose parents had outstanding arrears on their school bills

Missing millions

"If it had been true, I'd be lying on a foreign beach somewhere sunning myself now. Instead I have to go to work."

Co-workers assumed that Johan Feys from Roddervoorde, West Flanders, must have been the €94 million lottery winner when he failed to turn up to work for three days. In fact, he was sick

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

On this week's cover, we talk about Flanders' archaeological heritage. Since there's so much tourism during the summer, we thought we'd linger on the subject awhile longer and fill you in on the region's academic heritage policy, a co-operative platform between four major universities

Science

If you missed the Flemish focus on National Geographic's *Behind the Science* series earlier this year, you're in luck. It's being rebroadcast this month. We talk to the Dutch director as well as the Antwerp professor behind the series set in Flanders that covers topics like eco-economies, atoms and renewable energy

Living

Your kids think the school year is much too long; you think it's much too short. But don't despair: Brussels and Flanders have something going on to keep your kids occupied literally every single day of the year. Sometimes you get to play along, sometimes not – but in any case, we'll let you in on the best activities for young people right up until 2 September