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# Vision through building

## The ideas, designs and urban planning of architect b0b van Reeth changed the Flemish landscape

Tom Peeters

"In education and also in the media, one tends to reduce architecture to objects, to buildings. But it's much more important what those buildings do with us, how they intervene in the public space and in our life." So says Antwerp's b0b van Reeth, whose life's work is on display at Bozar in Brussels.

**S**howing old and new projects from first draft via scale model to final plan, Bozar offers a trip into the mind of b0b van Reeth (1943), one of the most important post-war Belgian architects. His designs were often controversial, as some old television footage proves in this exhibition, but were embedded in a broader perspective on city planning.

Most consider van Reeth (*pictured*) a pragmatic architect; he takes it as a compliment. "Today everybody wants to make icons, which is ridiculous. It's only worth it when it concerns us all. But making every bank building or housing unit an icon is the most foolish thing you can do." Van Reeth did it once with the Van Roosmalen House (1985-1988), a black-and-white Antwerp landmark at the quay of the river Scheldt. Back then there was no architectural or urban vision for what would become one of Antwerp's most expensive residential areas.

"Luckily this exploit helped the area fulfil its potential," van Reeth says. "But that's not the role of architecture or one striking building. This should be the main goal of policy and city planning." Through making new choices, van Reeth helped to change our landscape. As the first appointed Flemish government architect from 1999 to 2005, he laid the foundations of our urban

architectural policy. "Though my position came from the higher authorities, we were very lucky in the beginning as local governments also asked for advice when building sports halls, libraries and so on. That made our choices visible."

It all could have turned out so differently if one day during his teens he hadn't been in the car with his older brother, driving by the high-rise apartment blocks of architect Renaat Braem in the working-class Antwerp neighbourhood of Kiel. "After bad results at school I had to leave the Jesuit college and my brother, a lawyer, was asking what was going to become of me. 'When are you finally going to do something serious, other than basketball and tennis?'

"We were driving past these blocks and I said: 'I want to make high-rise buildings.' 'Then you should become an architect,' he said. "I always wondered what would have become of me if we had driven past a *fritkot* (*laughs*)... maybe rich."

### Intelligent ruins

At the Sint-Lukas art school in Brussels, it appeared that van Reeth was a good student after all, thanks to the sheer enthusiasm of his teachers. "It was the most wonderful time," he says. "The music teacher talked about paintings, the film teacher about music, the maths teacher about literature. Architecture I would only learn about later during higher education, but then I really dived into architectural history."

During his long career, sustainability – not the catch-all word it has become today – was always an important goal. "But I was not the first," says van Reeth, putting this eagerness "to build for eternity" into its historical



© Marco Mertens

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## FACE OF FLANDERS

### Vincent Kompany



Even for someone as internationally lauded as the Red Devil and Manchester City captain Vincent Kompany, last week was a week to be proud of. Not only was he nominated for the Flemish Youth Council's annual Klein Duimpje prize, but his new club BX Brussels was launched. And to top it off, he was singled out, with national teammate Romelu Lukaku, as one of two inspirational role models for young Flemish people in Brussels, in a speech in the Brussels town hall on Flemish national day, 11 July, in front of minister-president, mayor and prime minister. Vincent Jean Mpo Kompany was born in the Brussels commune of Ukkel in 1986 to a Belgian mother and Congolese father, and went to a Flemish school in Brussels. In July 2003 at the age of 17 he signed for Anderlecht and made his debut a month later against Antwerp. He then played for Hamburg before moving to Manchester. In February 2004, still only 17, he became one of the youngest players to wear the Belgian national colours, and became captain in 2011. In March this year he took some of his fortune and used it to buy struggling third-division side FC

Bleid, then sitting at the bottom of their league with 19 defeats from 25 matches. "To maximise opportunities I want to put a lot of effort into the staffing so that youngsters not only learn the right way to play a sport but become familiar with the social aspect in their (often complex) lives," he said then, making it clear the venture was as much a social project as a sporting one. The Youth Council nominated him, and his new football team, now called BX Brussels, for the prize because of the inspiration he has provided for young people, "encouraging them to discover and develop their capabilities". He's one of five nominees, and the winner will be announced on 12 August, international day of young people. The other tribute came on the official celebration of 11 July in Brussels, when city alderwoman Ans Persoons described him as "a product of one of the most important achievements Brussels has realised: Dutch-language education". Speaking to the assembled dignitaries, Persoons said Kompany was "an extraordinary talent". "A guy like that is the best export product Flanders could wish for," she said.

Alan Hope

## News in brief

Homeopathic remedies may only be **prescribed by a qualified doctor, dentist or midwife** under a new law agreed by federal ministers last week, and only by those qualified personnel with a diploma in homeopathy. The much-contested preparations are currently handed out by 340 homeopaths who are members of a professional federation, of whom 20% are estimated not to fall into the three categories now permitted.

An official investigation has turned up **no evidence of sexual or other abuse** of children at Blokkendoos pre-school in Antwerp, city mayor Bart De Wever said. The school closed early last month after demonstrations by parents, some of whom had made abuse allegations. De Wever promised those who had stirred up the campaign against the teachers concerned would be pursued for making false accusations. The ringleader is reported to be a member of the extremist group Sharia4Belgium.

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters was among the guests at a **lunch given by the outgoing and future kings**. This week the retiring king tours the three language communities in the run-up to the succession to the throne of Prince Filip on Sunday. Meanwhile, Brussels minister-president Rudi Vervoort said it was "not necessary" for a weekly meeting to be held between the new king and the regional ministers-president, something Peeters said he would push for.

Heritage and tourism minister Geert Bourgeois last week opened a **new extension to the Passchendaele Memorial Museum** in Zonnebeke, West Flanders, which includes an open-air recreation of a network of British and German trenches. It's one of the main projects commemorating the centenary of the First World War. The museum received subsidy

of €819,000 as part of a grant of almost €2 million for the Legacy of Passchendaele project.

The four laureates for this year's **Flemish Monument Prize** have been announced. They are C-Mine, on the former mine site of Winterslag in Genk, Limburg; St Dionysius church in Sint-Denijs-Westrem, East Flanders; the Grote Post cultural centre in Ostend and the Villa Elza in Wenduine, West Flanders. Each receives €2,500, with the overall winner, announced on 2 September, receiving a further €12,500.

Every Flemish municipality will from next year have a **single reference point for childcare**, allowing parents a broad view of local childcare, the government of Flanders has decided. And from April, all childcare facilities whether subsidised or private must obtain the same certificate covering safety, infrastructure and communication, the family organisation Kind & Gezin said.

Three South African soldiers thought to have died during the Allied attack on Passchendaele in September 1917 were **reburied last week** in Tyne Cot military cemetery in Zonnebeke, West Flanders. The three, whose identities have not been established, were found near a brickworks in Zonnebeke in 2011. They join 93 other South Africans buried in Tyne Cot.

Exports by Flemish technology companies fell by 7% to €54.87 billion last year, to make up **29.1% of all Flemish exports**, the sector federation Agoria said. Agoria warned that 2013 would also be a difficult year, as shrinking demand for Flemish exports in traditional European markets would not be compensated for by increased sales to emerging economies.

The monks of the Norbertine abbey of Averbode in Flemish Brabant are to **resume brewing beer** after a break of almost 100 years, to raise funds to renovate the abbey. The abbey produced beer until 1917, when the German military commandeered the copper brewing kettles during the occupation. The new beer and an Averbode cheese are expected to come to market next spring.

A Japanese TV company is to make a **documentary based on the case of Els Clottemans**, the 29-year-old convicted in 2010 of the so-called parachute murder and sentenced to 30 years in prison. Clottemans was accused of tampering with the parachute of love rival Els Van Doren, causing a fatal fall in Opglabbeek in Limburg. The verdict and sentence caused controversy due to the lack of physical evidence and the failure to investigate other potential suspects.

The Brussels parliament has approved a compromise plan to allow the introduction of **high-speed 4G mobile data signals** in the region. Operators will be allowed to measure signals according to whether they are 2G, 3G or 4G, and apply the three-volt-per-metre radiation restriction for each signal separately. The region will also help determine new sites for masts and set up a group of experts to look at health risks. 4G is already operating in cities in Flanders, where radiation restrictions are less strict.

Prince Philip will use **both versions of his name** in signing acts of parliament into law when he becomes king. He had previously announced he would use only the French version - Philippe - which appears on his birth certificate. However, the government last week approved an amendment to the law which will allow him to use French and Dutch versions interchangeably.

## FLANDERS TODAY

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## OFFSIDE

### Road to ruin

If you've ever been out walking or cycling on Flanders' open roads, you'll know how dangerous it can be. There you are, minding your own business, when along comes some maniac with no respect for the speed limit, forcing you on to the grass verge and bringing life and limb into peril.

Cyclists are a growing plague, and something ought to be done about it. *Wielertoeristen*, they call themselves - cycling tourists - but more and more they're being described as *wielerterroristen*. In 2011, Dendermonde city council introduced a law banning the Lycra Lads from going out in groups of more than 10, on pain of fines up to €120. Now the government of Flanders has taken the decision to lay down traffic-calming bumps on the former towpath on the banks of the Scheldt between Zwijnaarde and Oudenaarde, a popular strip for cyclists because they can travel 30km without having to brake.

Not any more. The so-called rumble strips are 1.5cm high and placed at 10m intervals over the space of 100m, and repeated roughly every kilometre over 23km. When crossed at full speed, they cause a sensation, according to one cyclist, like having your insides churned up in a mixer. The intention is to slow down the fastest sprinters, who often exceed the 30kph speed limit and

cause havoc for more leisurely road users.

The measure, introduced by the government's waterways and sea-canal agency, has united sports cyclists of the Wielerbond and the more sedate Fietsersbond in opposition. The strips could be a danger to those not expecting them, it's pointed out. They cause discomfort for everyone, not only *wielerterroristen*. If the government wanted to help cyclists, pro Iljo Keisse posted on Twitter, it would do better to build proper cycle-paths. Despite the opposition, the agency warns the strips could appear in other places, beginning with the roads along the Dender and the Ghent-Ostend canal.



Alan Hope

# Vision through building

## Bozar exhibition traces Antwerp architect's career in reverse

► continued from page 1

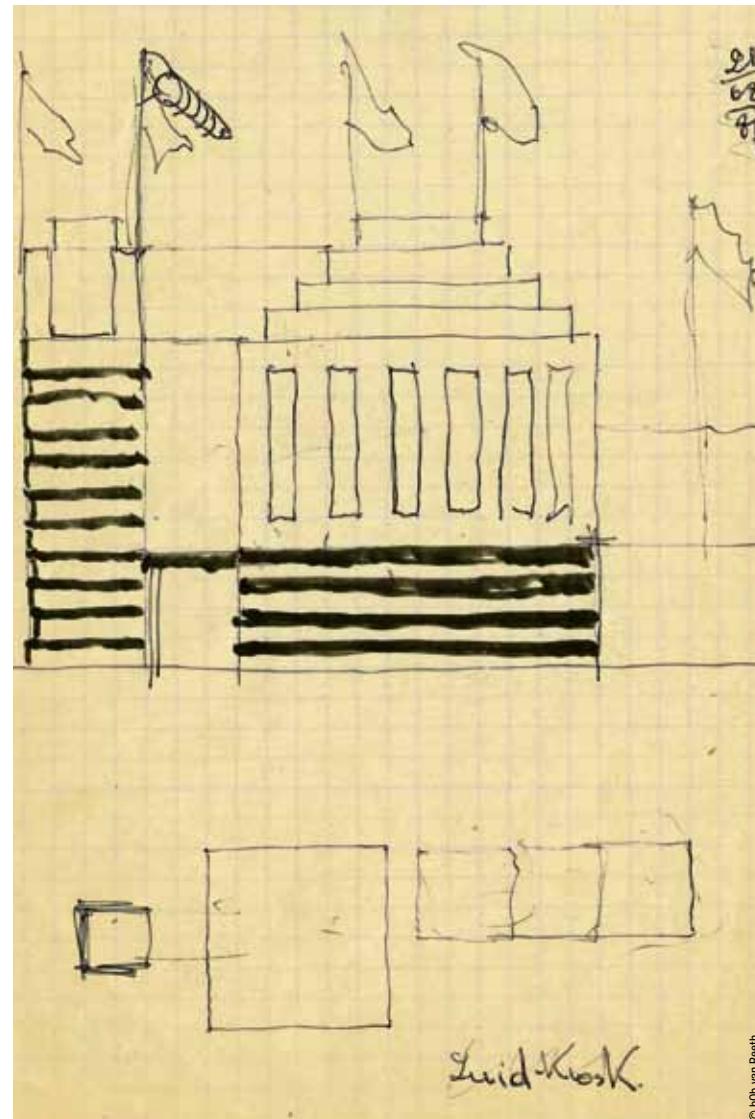
context. "In the Renaissance era, architects who were not building with eternity in mind were not taken seriously. I always attempted to build intelligent ruins and not to fossilise iron. Plans should have the generosity and the maturity to be flexible, meaning that as an urban planner and as an architect you have to distinguish five layers with a different lifespan."

The urban footprint of our cities is almost eternal, he explains. You cannot change it, unless you are as smart as the French civic planner Georges-Eugène Haussmann, the man responsible for rebuilding Paris in the mid-1800s. The structure of a building and its facades should have a lifespan of 400 years. The other layers have a much shorter lifespan: the installations (30 years), the use of the space (10 to 15 years), and the overhaul of the buildings (five years). This allows buildings to survive long term.

### Pick up the values

Asked for examples, he puts forward two of his most recent projects: Kazerne Dossin (2006-2012), Mechelen's new Holocaust museum, and his extension and renovation of the Trappist Sint-Sixtus Abbey in Westvleteren, West Flanders (2005-2012). "For starters, I didn't have to convince the brothers of the abbey to build something for eternity! On the other hand, I didn't have to invent something: Since the 12th century there's been a fixed typology for every Cistercian monastery."

Van Reeth revamped the old church of the abbey with a new floor, a refectory on the ground level and a library on the upper floor: very simple and basic, in brick. "The ornament of the building is the silence and the light," he says. "So the message was basically: Don't intrude. As an architect you have to pick up the values of the building." The same was true for the Holocaust museum, a totally new construction that had to make



First steps: van Reeth's sketch for the Zuiderterras in Antwerp

visible what had been hidden away for more than 60 years. The original barracks had been converted into luxury apartments. Though as a result van Reeth couldn't use this space, the idea of a hidden history became the starting point for the design, using the old detention building, which was still state-owned, as a building site. "Unlike most other buildings, this one had to be an icon," he says. "Because it concerns us all."

The architect was unpleasantly

surprised recently by the plans of the Brussels authorities to tear down the King Baudouin Stadium, which he renovated in the mid-1990s. It's not just capital waste, he claims, but worse: "Giving up the athletics track, the charm of the stadium, would be a real disgrace for the original architect. I think it's an alibi for property development, which is something completely different from city development. But politicians seem to sometimes mix the two up."



The Kazerne Dossin Holocaust museum in Mechelen, which opened last year (top); the Westvleteren Abbey

### UNTIL 8 SEPTEMBER

#### b0b van Reeth: Architect

Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels

► [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

## TANGIBLE INSPIRATION

Before I visit the exhibition, van Reeth warns me: "It's not a real retrospective. If so, there would have been 700 designs." Curators Christophe Van Gerrewey, Bart Verschaffel and Birgit Cleppe chose only 67 projects, to make it more manageable. All major projects were included, but that doesn't necessarily mean they get more space than lesser-known buildings. For every Kazerne Dossin or Van Roosmalen House there's a house, garden pavilion or office block that characterises his approach just as well.

"They asked if they could dive into my archives," says van Reeth. "They stayed there for a whole year taking whatever they thought they

needed, be it a sketch or a finalised plan. I had no say in their choice, so for me too it's a surprise to see stuff that otherwise would never have left the archive." He considers the exhibition a search, focusing on how a draft on a piece of paper becomes a drawing and a drawing ultimately becomes a design and a building – or not.

The curators also show a fascination for unbuilt projects, as they are more revealing about the risks van Reeth was willing to take. Take his prize-winning entry for Ostend's casino, 20 years ago now. Walking through the exhibition we meet by coincidence the architect himself. He's watching an old, rather critical interview about

this "megalomaniac" project that would have given Ostend the allure of a real seaside city, with a 90m tower on an artificial peninsula. "Bad timing," he grimaces. "The political world was not ready,

"They asked if they could dive into my archives and stayed there for a year"

elections were too close." What van Reeth did was take the urban planning of Leopold II, the last person to really leave his mark on Ostend, to a higher level. Years later this sort of architecture was done by dozens of others with less

vision. "Hopefully time will enlarge our minds," we hear him say to the interviewer, countering her criticism with arguments, patience and a bit of arrogance: typical for this headstrong Antwerp native.

The curators emphasise how ideas grow, how inspiration becomes tangible. "It always starts with tinkering, and sketches on a napkin, from which point an idea can start to grow," van Reeth explains. To witness this process

of creativity is a real pleasure. We get his projects in reverse chronological order, starting with his most recent projects and finishing off with his first renovation project and an unbuilt student draft.

Most enchanting of all is a short documentary about the playground van Reeth created in 1975 in a working-class quarter in Mechelen. We see housewives in old-fashioned aprons praising the multifunctional playground, pigeon fanciers playing cards and little kids being little kids. All manifestly pointing out the architect's main device: Architecture doesn't have to be iconic. Above all, it has to be social.

# Finch-singing contests recognised as cultural heritage

## Bird protection agency unhappy with decision

Alan Hope

The Flemish bird protection organisation Vogelbescherming Vlaanderen (VBV) has reacted angrily to news that the unusual sport of finch-singing competitions has been included in the register of Flemish cultural heritage, announced by culture minister Joke Schauvliege last week. "This is a slap in the face for all those interested in the protection of birds in Flanders," said director Jan Rodts.

The sport, known as *vinkenzetting*, involves placing a male chaffinch in a closed box, then recording how many times it chirps. The boxes are lined up along the street, with the birds' proximity to each other encouraging them to chirp to compete with rivals and establish their own territorial limits. In the past, the birds were blinded; now they are kept for the occasion in a closed box.

There are estimated to be about



© Donarreis/CC0/Wikimedia Commons

13,000 enthusiasts in Flanders, breeding 10,000 birds a year. However, VBV says, many of those used in competitions are wild birds trapped illegally. Schauvliege said the sport was covered by the

general law on animal welfare and the government fully enforced the EU-wide ban on trapping. Other inclusions in the register include the special method for cultivating *witloof* under banked-up

soil, the Waregem Koerse horse races and the traditional Flemish flower parades. It already includes the Aalst carnival celebrations and the Holy Blood procession in Bruges.

- Animal rights organisation Gaia is "delighted" with a change to the law making it illegal for circuses to feature wild animals. "It is clear the welfare of wild animals in circuses cannot be guaranteed," said director Ann De Greef. "These animals don't belong there, so a ban is the only fair measure. This is a new milestone in the struggle for animal rights."

Gaia began campaigning in 1995 for a ban, and in 2005 the government imposed on circuses the same rules on space and amenities as apply to zoos. Since then, 230 municipalities have banned wild animals in circuses on their own territory. The new law sets up a list of permitted animals, including buffalo, llamas, camels, sheep, dogs and cats. All those not on the list are forbidden.

## New system to trap persistent speeders

Drivers who are caught by speed cameras several times on the same stretch of road could face multiple fines under a new approach to speeding being examined by the federal police. The system involves mobile squads setting up several cameras on a stretch of road to catch those who slow down when approaching a camera and speed up again as soon as they have gone past. In tests last week on the E411 between Brussels and Luxembourg,

more than 800 drivers were caught by the system. Earlier on the E314 in Flemish Brabant and Limburg, 184 were caught and six had their licences confiscated. Traffic police announced in June they would carry out one major action a week somewhere in the country.

The system will give drivers the impression that the chances of being caught are greater, traffic experts said, and that could have an effect on even the most persistent



speeders.

- The Brussels regional authorities have been examining various scenarios for the introduction of a congestion charge on vehicles

entering the city. Experts looked at three possibilities – tolls of €3, €6 or €9. According to their results, the €3 toll appears to be the most effective, producing an 11% reduction in the number of cars entering the city. The toll would raise €450 million a year, to be reinvested in public transport, and would have an easing effect on the whole Brussels periphery, as research has shown drivers switch to public transport as close to home as possible.

## New logo for Flanders

The Flemish government has a new logo. It's still a lion, but the rampant posture is gone, as are the claws and teeth. The new logo depicts the stylised face of a lion, half-obscured, and the text "Vlaanderen". It also exists in English for an international audience (pictured). Minister-president Kris Peeters said: "The lion is obviously there. It's a contemporary lion, and the aggression some saw in the old one is gone. But he is upright, facing straight ahead. He's looking you right in the eye."

The logo, at present available only



in black and white, will later be incorporated into the government's communications media with the traditional grey and yellow. It was designed by the Absoluut agency in Leuven, which also had a hand in its predecessor and in Brussels' iris logo.

## Paralympians in King's last honours list

Paralympian Marieke Vervoort and international judge Chris Vanden Wyngaert are among those awarded honours by King Albert II in his final round of honours.

Van Den Wyngaert, who becomes a baroness, is a permanent judge at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, having previously filled the same role at the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

Wheelchair athlete Vervoort,

24, from Diest, won gold in the 100m and silver in the 200m at the Paralympics in London last summer. She is made a Grand Officer of the Order of the Crown, as is Paralympic equestrian Michèle George from Ostend, who won two golds.

Others honoured include quantum physicist François Englert and businessman Rudi Thomae, chairman of the Federation of Belgian Enterprise, both made baron.

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

9

species of wild orchid found growing in a nature reserve in Rosdel in Hoegaarden, Flemish Brabant, in calcium-rich grassland bought by conservancy organisation Natuurpunt 12 years ago

€31.3 million

spent in 2012 on Flemish diplomatic representations overseas, according to a study by professor Jan Wouters of the University of Leuven. Flanders has 120 foreign posts, almost as many as the EU

38.5%

of albums sold in Flanders in 2012 were by local musicians, according to the Belgian Entertainment Association. Of the 200 top-selling albums, 68 were by Flemish artists, down from 80 in 2011; most were not in Dutch

27%

of prospective science students who took part in a voluntary orientation test organised by the universities of Leuven, Antwerp and Ghent passed with flying colours, with 57% passing with advice to revise one or two subjects

100

Brussels celebrities have come out in support of the MAK, the museum of contemporary art planned for the canal zone. They include film director Michaël R Roskam and actor Josse De Pauw, led by Flemish MP Yamila Idrissi

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Reason to celebrate?

Whether 11 July, the official Flemish holiday, was a reason to celebrate this year depends on where you stand politically. According to prime minister Elio Di Rupo and Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters it was, as an agreement was reached on the state reform Flanders has demanded for years.

The agreement devolves a number of competences, including child support, tax deductions on mortgages, legislation on the private renting market and household service cheques. The federal entities will also get more fiscal autonomy, worth more than €12 million.

Di Rupo was particularly proud of the agreement, holding up a stack of papers with the proposals of laws at the press conference. This is the third success in a row – after agreements on BHV and the unified statute of white- and blue-collar workers – for Di Rupo and his tripartite government.

Peeters (CD&V) too pronounced himself pleased with the agreement, which to him means a shift of power from the federal to the regional and community governments. Peeters has been having a difficult time lately, with his coalition partners SPA and N-VA at each other's throats. After Peeters himself had pleaded with Di Rupo for more competitiveness, both leaders agreed to co-operate to bring down job costs, only to see this new co-operation nearly torpedoed by Flemish budget minister Philippe Muyters (N-VA). Muyters brought to mind Flanders' policy of not making extra efforts to make the country's budget balance – at a particularly bad time. If Peeters wants to cash in on his personal popularity at next year's elections, incidents like these are to be avoided.

Either way, the Flemish nationalist N-VA, which is in opposition at the federal level but remains part of the Flemish government, saw no reason to celebrate on the holiday it holds dear. To Bart De Wever's party, state reform boils down to a bill of no less than €15 billion, as Flanders does not receive all the means that go with the devolved competences and faces new financial responsibilities too.

Next week, new celebrations are planned, as the national holiday will also include the installation of the new King Filip. Whether that is a reason to celebrate, however, depends on where you stand politically...

# The expat files

## Survey reveals how international community feels about life in Brussels

Alan Hope

Expats in Brussels are more integrated than anyone previously thought, more politically interested, and slightly greener than natives, according to a survey published last week by the Brussels-Europe Liaison Office (Belo).

Most of those taking part in the survey – 85.8% – live in Brussels, with a preference for the municipalities of Brussels-City, Etterbeek and Elsene, and to a lesser extent Schaerbeek, Sint-Pieters-Woluwe and Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe. Another 10.7% live in Flanders, mainly in the municipalities on the periphery of the capital; only 3.1% live in Wallonia. Most but not all – 92% – are non-Belgian, with 2.7% North American, 2.8% other non-EU nationalities and the remainder from the other member states of the EU. The Belgians who took part completed a shorter questionnaire than the expats, given that some questions did not concern them. A significant majority – 63% – have lived here for less than 10 years, with 73.1% aged between 30 and 62. Because the sample was not constructed to be representative, Belo stresses, the results are merely indicative. For example, the EU institutions were active in recruiting respondents, so a large proportion, about 80%, are employees of the EU. No similar agreement was reached with Nato, however, so they – like employees of private-sector companies, the retired or “trailing spouses” who do not work at all – are under-represented in the sample.

It's commonly thought that expats



Portraits of EU citizens at the European Commission building in Brussels on Europe Day in May

in Brussels live in an international “bubble” with little contact with their host people, and some of the survey results, largely as a result of the sample composition, bear that idea out. For example, 46% of respondents live with a partner or spouse of the same nationality, most of whom were met here or moved here at the same time; only 36.7% of those partners work outside the EU or international sector.

Among those with children, 46% would not consider sending them to a Belgian primary school, and 53.5% rule out sending them to a Belgian secondary school. The main reason given is not to

interrupt a child’s education in its own language when work postings may only be for a few years. The bubble is, however, neither impermeable nor permanent. For instance, while nearly one in four of those who have been here less than two years report having no Belgian friends, that figure goes down to 16.1% from three to five years, and way down to 6.6% among those who have lived here more than 10 years. And the longer people live here, the more Belgian friends they have: One in four long-term expats have more than 10 Belgian friends. Most people – 61.7% – admit they know too few Belgians; 32% ascribe the problem to Belgians being “too

distrustful” of expats; 54.1% though say it is “not difficult” to get to know Belgians with a little effort. One way is to become involved in an association, such as a sports club, religious association or political party. Just over half – 51.3% – are involved in some way, with sports clubs by far the most popular. Political party membership accounts for only 7.2%, but expats in general are more interested in local politics than might be expected, with 15.3% having voted in the last municipal elections before the survey was conducted, in October 2006. The figure for the 2012 elections could be expected to be higher – 38%

expressed the intention to do so. Of those who did not vote, nearly half cited the compulsory vote as the main obstacle, although one in five were just “not interested”.

Expats appear greener than usual, with some 60% travelling in the city on foot almost every day, and only 26% using the car daily. Fully 50% use metro, tram and bus daily, but only 24% use a bicycle, including the Villo rental bikes, with any sort of regularity. The difficulties of cycling in the city seem however to become less of a barrier the longer one lives here.

The main areas of Brussels life where expats have praise to offer are the rich cultural offering, gastronomy, health care and the cost of housing. The main criticisms are litter, traffic, poverty and security. No less than 79.6% of respondents agree Brussels is too dirty; 51% don’t feel the city is safe; and 77.5% think urgent measures need to be taken to control traffic. Despite those figures, just under half – 49.3% – consider the quality of life to be high, rising to 58% among long-term expats. The statement “I like living in Brussels” met with agreement by 74.5% of those polled; only 17.1% disagreed. Belo is a non-profit organisation set up by the Brussels region to promote the city as capital of Europe. The survey was carried out online from 2 May to 8 June last year, with responses from 9,072 expats, most of them working for the EU institutions. It is available in Dutch, French and English.

► [www.blbe.be/en/survey](http://www.blbe.be/en/survey)

# Brussels by water

## Waterbus begins service along capital's canal

Alan Hope

Venice has its *vaporetti*, London has its Thames Clipper, and now Brussels has its own Waterbus, which was launched officially on 5 July and came into service right away.

The Waterbus runs on Tuesdays and Thursdays only for the time being, with eight voyages a day between Vilvoorde station and Saincteletteplein in Brussels (next to Yser metro). The service was described by Brussels region mobility minister Brigitte Grouwels as a “mobility solution”, although regular commuters would require a service at least five days a week starting earlier than 8.30 (the first departure from Vilvoorde) and finishing later than 17.00, the last departure from Brussels. The full trip takes 82

minutes.

Tourists, on the other hand, may find little to interest them in the industrial landscape through which the canal runs – although the Waterbus does pass under the Buda Bridge, soon to be made famous in an HBO thriller of the same name by *Rundskop* director Michaël R Roskam.

“As well as being environmentally friendly and traffic-jam free, the Waterbus is more than anything a pleasant and original way to get around,” Grouwels said at the launch. “It also fits perfectly with other forms of public transport. Waterbus passengers can transfer on and off public transport, or continue their trip by bike or hire-bike. Inter-modality is one of the main aims of this project,” she said.



Tom Dehaene is the Flemish Brabant provincial representative of Kanaaltochten Brabant, one of

the backers of the project. “What we’re offering for the moment is a good start, and the vision and ambition are there, but there’s a long road of development still to be travelled,” he said. He thanked the National Lottery and the two regional governments, Brussels and Flanders, as well as the municipal authorities in Brussels-City, Vilvoorde and Molenbeek, through whose territory the Waterbus runs. “Working together in concrete ways despite the boundaries of municipality, city, region, language and competences: That’s the real challenge of this project,” he said. The Waterbus runs until October and costs €2 or €3 depending on destination; bicycles are carried for €1. Reservation required via 02 218 54 10.

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

THE WEEK  
IN BUSINESSAir travel  
► Brussels Airlines

Brussels Airlines said it carried 143,600 passengers in the week of 25 June to 1 July – a record in the company's history, a spokesman said, and a 6% increase on the same period last year. Friday, 28 June – the last day of the school term – was the best day, with 23,326 passengers taking off.

## Brewing ► AB InBev

Leuven-based AB InBev, the largest brewer in the world, has been ordered to strictly limit exclusive contracts for the distribution of its beers in Mexico, competition authorities there said. According to market analysts, the ruling will bring the number of exclusive contracts down from 85% of sales to 20%. Existing contracts will be allowed to continue until they expire, however.

Postal service  
► bpost

Johnny Thijs, CEO of bpost, the former Post Office, bought shares worth €200,000 in the recent launch of the company on the stock market, he told the federal parliament's infrastructure committee. Other members of the board of management bought shares for €100,000 each. Bpost staff were offered a 16.7% discount on the launch price on condition they hold the shares for two years. Shares are currently trading at around €14.30, down on the initial price of €14.50.

## Property ► Allfin

Property developer Allfin is to convert part of the site occupied by former offices of chemical company Solvay to a 150-room hotel, CEO Marnix Galle announced. The company already has plans to install a rest home, apartments and student accommodation on the site.

## Retail ► Delhaize

Supermarket giant Delhaize Group is to sell all 25 of its properties in Montenegro to Expo Commerce, bringing an end to its activities in the former Yugoslav republic. The 25 stores brought income of €50 million in 2012. Earlier this year Delhaize sold off its activities in Albania.

## Telecoms ► BIPT

Comparison-shopping for telecommunications tariffs can lead to savings of €40 a month or contracts that are three times cheaper, according to a study by the industry regulator BIPT. Prices for mobile telephony have come down 20% in recent months, with wide variations in prices between providers, particularly for "packets" grouping internet, telephony and digital TV, BIPT said. The website [www.bestetariebe.be](http://www.bestetariebe.be) offers a comparison of current rates.

## €20bn state reform agreed

**"Centre of gravity" moves to the regions, Peeters says**

Alan Hope

The federal government will hand over around €20 billion in 2016 with the transfer of responsibilities and competences to the regions and other levels of government, under an agreement finalised last week. It brings into force the sixth phase of state reform, agreed in principle by the government coalition parties (and the two green parties) in late 2011, which have now been translated into legal instruments. Flanders, as the biggest region, receives the largest share: €11.588 billion or 56.4%, divided into €7.077 billion for the Flemish community and €4.511 billion for the Flemish region. Brussels' share amounts to 5.9% or €1.212 – although many matters are covered by the funding for Flemish and French-speaking communities.

"The sixth reform makes it very clear that the country's centre of gravity has now moved to the regions," said Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters. "Right now we have a budget of €27 billion; after the reforms that will be €38 billion. That means the Flemish budget will be larger than the federal budget, if we exclude social security." The measures come into force



Flemish negotiators Wouter Beke and Servais Verherstraeten (second and third from left) and prime minister Elio Di Rupo (second from right) present the reform package last week

when they are approved by parliament, but the figures relate to 2016 because that is when the budgets for hospitals are passed from the federal to the regional. The competences which pass from the federal government to Flanders include the following.

• Child allowance will be paid by the region, though the federal government is only transferring the equivalent of 87% of the budget for this item, with the rest being picked up by Flanders. The rules

in juvenile detention facilities will be determined by the Flemish government.

• Flanders will set the interest deduction on mortgages, service vouchers and energy-saving renovations, and take control of driving schools and vehicle roadworthiness certificates. Driving licences and motorway speed limits remain a federal matter, but Flanders will decide on the speed limit on other roads.

• The changes widely affect labour

policy: Employment agency VDAB will have the power to check if unemployed people are doing enough to find work and apply sanctions if not. Flanders will also be able to grant premiums for selective employment by the private sector – for example if companies take on low-skilled workers.

• In health care, the cost of a hospital stay will be decided by the federal government, but standards of care will be a matter for Flanders. In rest homes, the Flemish government will set costs.

The package was criticised by N-VA, the only main party not to take part in the negotiations on the reforms as part of the formation of a government in 2011. Chairman Bart De Wever said: "Flanders gets a lot more responsibilities, but only gets 87% of the money to pay for them."

However, the party's opposition will not prevent the reforms being carried out in Flanders, Peeters said. "N-VA is an opposition party on the federal level, but we have an agreement within the Flemish government that we will implement the reforms, and I have a guarantee from N-VA that they will co-operate without reservation," he said.

## Holiday homes "operating without licence"

The Flemish government is allowing advertising on its tourism websites for privately operated holiday homes that have failed to come up to the government's own standards, according to the Flemish ombudsman in a report to the parliament's tourism committee.

Anyone who rents out a holiday home in Flanders has to comply with a set of rules on fire safety, hygiene and maintenance, the report says. Anyone who carries on renting after failing to obtain a permit can be fined up to €25,000 and ordered to stop immediately. Those who obtain the permit are eligible for certain benefits, including advertising on official tourism websites

of the government, provinces and local authorities.

"That advantage is actually worthless," the report states, because the homes that are in order are swamped on those websites by homes with no permit. At present, 800 permits have been issued; 14,000 properties are in the middle of the procedure. That leaves around 11,000 with no permit, said ombudsman Bart Weekers.

The question has been taken up by the socialist party, whose Bart Martens described the situation as "dishonest and unacceptable". The Flemish parliament is in recess, and it will not now be dealt with before the autumn.



## Polar station in financial storm

The Princess Elisabeth Polar Science Station at the South Pole is experiencing financial difficulties because of the federal government's lateness in paying the sums agreed in subsidy, according to the International Polar Foundation (IPF), run by explorer Alain Hubert.

The station (pictured) is owned by the Belgian state but run by the IPF. According to the IPF, the government has agreed to pay €3 million of the €4.2 million it costs to run the station for a season. However, the government is a late payer, forcing the IPF to advance the money needed, the foundation said in April, placing it in financial difficulties. The government's response was to suspend the budget for 2013 and agree to pay only if the IPF would abide by rules on transparency of spending and on the award of public contracts.

The IPF has been subject to eight audits

in the last three years, according to director Thierry Touchais. "They found nothing. We have nothing to hide." The two sides said they would continue to attempt to reach an agreement in time for the budget of 2014 in March.



## Peeters pleased with Texas trip

Minister-president Kris Peeters and Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte "put the Delta region on the map" during their visit last week to Houston in Texas, according to Peeters. The two were taking part in the first joint trade mission involving the two governments, to promote the area known as the Delta region, taking in the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp.

During talks with business leaders, Peeters said, they had been able to explain the new name "and that came across well. The Delta region has a lot of potential." He also praised his colleague: "With Mark Rutte you have an outstanding dynamism. Kris Peeters and Mark Rutte: That works."

He sounded a warning note, however, on the fragility of the region's competitive edge. "The companies we visited, like Exxon Mobil, said they wanted to stay with us but that a number of conditions had to be met," he said. Thanks to the extraction of cheap shale gas, he said, the US was building up a competitive advantage and it would take measures from Europe to ensure the continent remained an attractive investment market. A delegation from the two governments will meet on 8 October to discuss what steps can be taken to stimulate the chemicals industry in Europe, as well as future joint trade missions.

# A colourful future

## Vito and imec are developing the next generation of cameras to observe the earth

Andy Furniere

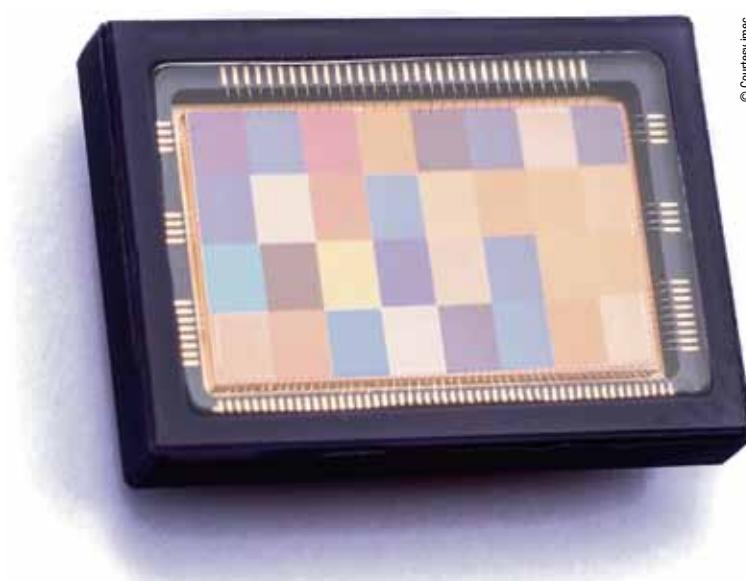
You may have heard of satellites like the Proba-V – built with Flemish expertise and mapping the world's vegetation as we speak. To improve the region's knowhow on earth observation from space, the Flemish Institute for Technical Research (Vito) and nanotechnology centre imec are working together on the development of revolutionary hyperspectral camera systems. Imec's compact technology also provides an array of applications in the agricultural, industrial and biomedical sectors.

The Flemish knowledge centres made their collaboration public at the recent Paris Air Show, one of the most prestigious events in the aviation and spaceflight business. They announced that they would pool their strategic research on hyperspectral imaging for at least the next three years, to become a world player in this promising domain. The European Space Agency (ESA) will follow their progress closely, to use the technology in future space devices.

### Technical terms

On a European level, Vito has for 10 years been one of the leading centres in the processing of hyperspectral images and development of compact camera systems for earth observation. Tanja Van Achteren, project manager at Vito, explains the technical terms: "The human eye sees light in three bands of red, green and blue. Spectral imaging systems can divide light into many more bands of subtle colours. Among these systems, hyperspectral cameras provide the largest amount of data, which can thus be used to create the most detailed maps."

The images can, for example, help national and international agricultural institutions predict



Imec's chip-based hyperspectral filter technology

their yield or an invasion of grasshoppers. "They can thus indicate an increased risk of famine," says Van Achteren. The images can also assist specialists in evaluating the risk of flood, drought or other natural disasters. Experts study the maps to monitor climate change trends, and international organisations such as the UN and European Commission regularly access the information.

While Vito already processes such data gathered by the Proba-V satellite with high-quality multispectral camera systems, these multispectral systems do not provide the same amount of information as hyperspectral imaging. With hyperspectral applications, researchers can detect smaller variations in vegetation, in the health of vegetation and in water quality. Vito will equip a similar satellite for the Vietnamese government with hyperspectral technology. A

consortium of Belgian companies, among them QinetiQ Space from Kruibeke, East Flanders, will develop this environmental observation satellite, named VNREDSAT-1B. When launched in 2016, the satellite will be used for regular and rapid monitoring of the environmental situation in southeast Asia.

Just as in most technology sectors, space researchers are always trying to develop smaller, lighter and cheaper systems. For this, they often turn to the experts at imec, based in Leuven. For about 20 years, imec has equipped ESA satellites with its technology. For example, the Mars Express has for a decade been providing images of the Red Planet's surface and atmosphere thanks to imec's innovations.

The nanotech centre recently developed hyperspectral filter technology, to divide the light into bands of colours, in the practical form of a chip. "Our filters open up

a whole new range of applications because the chips are lighter, more compact, cheaper and easier to produce in mass quantities than the current technology," says Jean Roggen of imec.

Imec and Vito will now work together to integrate this chip completely into the camera technology, which would mean a large improvement on the current systems with filters that have to be mechanically attached to a camera's sensor. The resulting lighter and more compact cameras would be ideal to install on Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems – commonly known as drones. Because drones are a lot easier and cheaper to deploy than satellites or planes, they can bring the advantages of hyperspectral imaging to small local organisations.

### Food standards

Food processing plants, for example, can use the cameras to inspect the food on conveyor belts and agricultural organisations or enterprises could use drones to check on the quality of crops. Roggen also envisions applications in the biomedical sector, for example to detect skin cancers. Although it is the first time imec and Vito have set up an exclusive partnership for a hyperspectral imaging project, they are also both involved in a Flemish initiative in this domain: the Chameleon consortium, which also includes the universities of Leuven, Ghent and Antwerp. Until December 2014, these knowledge centres will focus on transferring the potential of hyperspectral imaging to relevant industrial applications. The Chameleon project is funded by a grant from the Flemish Agency for Innovation by Science and Technology.

## THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Researchers of the University of Hasselt, the Hospital East Limburg in Genk and the American University of Colorado have developed a **cheap fertility treatment** that costs less than €200. The usual in vitro fertilisation method is at least 10 times more expensive. The research is part of The Walking Egg, an international project with the goal of making fertility care more accessible to people in developing countries.

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

The Belgian Science Policy Office (Belspo) and the European Space Agency (ESA) are organising the **first Belgian National Trainee Programme**. By offering internships, Belspo wants to raise interest in careers in the space sector. Young Belgian engineers and scientists can apply until 31 August for an internship at the ESA's operational department. The internships last between one and two years.

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

European Commission figures show that a record number of 7,091 Belgian students participated in the **Erasmus European exchange programme** during the 2011-2012 academic year. In 2010-2011, 6,824 Belgian students went abroad to study or take on an internship. The most popular destinations are Spain, France, the UK, Germany and Italy. Ghent University is the most involved Flemish university, with 748 outgoing and 719 incoming exchange students.

For the first time since the split in 1969, students of the Dutch- and French-speaking universities of Brussels (VUB and ULB) **have graduated together**. A total of 69 students received a double Master's diploma in the engineering sciences, thanks to the collaborative project of the Brussels Faculty of Engineering. In the common Master's studies, students can choose to follow a fully English-language programme, a programme in English and Dutch or in English and French.

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

Eighty-three percent of all Flemish students who **took the cycling exam** of the Flemish Foundation for Traffic Knowledge passed the test. Almost 8,000 students in the sixth year of primary education took the exam, which is organised with support of the government of Flanders. The exam prepares students for the transition to secondary school: Students often have to cycle independently to the secondary school, which is usually further from home than the primary school. The exam tests practical skills such as giving right of way.

AF

## Q&A

### Maths teacher Kristof Van Campenhout wins the Queen Paola Prize for education with the innovative M@thM@tes project

#### Who are the M@thM@tes?

Students at the technical department of Don Bosco Haacht secondary school, who are helping each other to understand maths



better. During lunch breaks, students who are good at maths explain the study material to classmates who are having problems with the course. I act as a coach during these sessions and have also established an online platform where students can support each other through informative presentations. Everyone is free to participate; the project is not an obligatory school assignment. Logically, the interest peaks shortly before tests or exams.

#### What information do students exchange on the website?

Study tips and clarifications of difficult formulas, for example, but I also challenge them to find practical applications of

mathematical concepts. It bothers me that I am not always able to explain to students how maths is related to our daily lives and why it is useful. One student really surprised me by making a presentation about how the life cycle of cicadas is based on the prime numbers 13 and 17.

#### Do you notice a clear improvement in their grades?

It's a utopian idea to hope that every student will achieve marks of about 90% on their tests. But students definitely get better grades, because they are more motivated. It's good to see that students will skip a football match to attend a session and nice to hear from parents that their children are discussing a

presentation for the website at the dinner table. The atmosphere in the class also improves through the noon sessions because I try to bring together students who didn't have much contact before.

#### Are you planning to expand the project outside your own classrooms?

Yes, at the start of the next academic year I will assist interested colleagues at our school to introduce the M@thM@tes concept to their students. I'm also planning to present my initiative at other schools in the Don Bosco network and am compiling an online brochure that all Flemish teachers can use to start the project in their classes. Interview by AF

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# The fountain of life

## A maternity hospital in Flanders helped the Nazis pursue their obsession with racial purity

Text & photos: Toon Lambrechts

To make sure not a single Aryan child was lost, the Nazis established a series of homes for unwanted babies. There were so-called Lebensborn clinics across Germany, Norway and Austria – and, it transpires, one in Waverem, Flemish Brabant. It's the focus of the third part of our Mysterious Flanders series.

The Nazis were obsessed with race, and the low birth rate among the German population was a great concern to them. Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, ordered the creation of a network of secret maternity hospitals in a programme called Lebensborn – meaning “fountain of life”. In these hospitals, women who fit the right racial profile and had an unwanted pregnancy could give birth in optimal conditions. The child would then belong to the Third Reich. In the last days of the war the Nazis destroyed all records of the programme, and many children never saw their parents again.

The first Lebensborn clinics were open only to German women. The programme was then extended to occupied territories, because of the number of affairs between German soldiers and local women. Later, the SS began to abduct children with sufficiently Aryan



The short-lived Lebensborn clinic in Waverem, now a home for people with mental illness

characteristics in eastern Europe and Yugoslavia. In Norway, SS soldiers were even ordered to impregnate Norwegian women – the Nazis considered the Norwegians to be an unspoilt part of the Aryan race. It was already known that a

Lebensborn clinic had operated in Wérimont in Liège province. But last year, *De Standaard* broke the news that there had also been a clinic in Flanders, in Waverem. Amateur historian Yves Louis got wind of the clinic while carrying out research in the archives of the

German occupying force during the Second World War. High-ranking SS officer Leonardo Conti was responsible for the Lebensborn programme. His mother, Nanna, president of the National Socialist Midwives, helped organise the maternity

hospitals. For the Belgian Lebensborn clinics, they appealed to the Ghent gynaecologist and collaborator Frans Daels and Adele Vankerckhove, director of the provincial nursing school in Ghent.

Initially, the plan was to set up a maternity ward at the Brugmann Hospital in Brussels, but ultimately the Nerom estate in Waverem was selected because of its remote location. In November 1942 the first women arrived: they were mainly Germans; Belgian women pregnant by German soldiers were taken to Wérimont. The centre in Waverem didn't exist for long. On September 1, 1944, the Germans hastily evacuated it; it's likely there were no more than a few dozen children born there.

After the war, terrible stories about the Lebensborn clinics were brought to light, stories of a breeding programme to create “super babies” and impregnate women by force. Such stories were never confirmed, but what is certain is that the human cost of the Lebensborn programme was very high.

The Lebensborn clinic was on Neromstraat in Waverem. The building itself is now a home for people with mental illnesses and cannot be visited, though the vast park surrounding it is open to visitors.

## LOST HIGHWAY

There's a deserted stretch of motorway in Machelen that feels like a scene from a film, where you could imagine the rest of humanity has been wiped out by some nasty virus. Three flyovers, large floating highway overpasses, have been deserted for years. They look well maintained, but suddenly the highway stops and only a poorly paved stretch of land remains, covered in weeds.

The highway junction in Machelen connects the E19 highway with the Brussels outer ring road. But only half the intersection is effectively in use; the rest has never been used. In keeping with the spirit of the 1970s, the original plan was to extend the E19 to the centre of the capital. Fortunately, the plan was changed, but this section had already been built. The intersection in Machelen is an example of what is called *grote*



*nutteloze bouwwerken* (big useless structures), large public construction works without any use. Sometimes the buildings were never used because the plans changed; sometimes it was just a matter of poor planning. Belgium has its fair share of big useless buildings thanks to the infamous *wafelijzerpolitiek* (waffle-iron politics) of the past. This meant that if a large public building project was planned in Flanders, Wallonia also had to have

one, and vice versa. A well-known example is the now-demolished ghost bridges in Varsenare. These two bridges, built in 1976, stood alone in the fields until 2011, waiting for a highway that never came. The Machelen junction is just on the border with the Brussels region. Walking there is not allowed, but if you decide to do it anyway, be very careful not to stray into parts of the highway that are in use.

## OUR OWN ATLANTIS

Zoutleeuw is just on the border of the provinces of Flemish Brabant and Limburg. It's a little gem, with a rich heritage and a range of historic buildings. However, once upon a time, Zoutleeuw came close to total destruction.

The legend goes that Zoutleeuw sank completely into the ground, as a punishment by God. To test the inhabitants' faith, God sent the Archangel Gabriel undercover, disguised as a beggar. But the wealthy residents of the city looked the other way and gave him nothing. God was displeased with their selfish behaviour and sank the entire city into the ground. It's said to have happened in the marshes of Zoutleeuw, where the Het Vinne nature reserve now lies. Such legends of places that sank into the ground as a punishment for their sins are not uncommon in Flanders. Sometimes the

stories are about villages, sometimes castles or monasteries where the inhabitants behaved so badly that they incurred the wrath of God. Curiously, sometimes it appears that there are indeed remains of buildings in the ground in these places; often they are remains from the Roman period and the middle ages. In the past, farmers used to find these things when ploughing and thus created the



legends. Archaeological finds have been made at Het Vinne, dating from the early middle ages. The spot is notable for another reason: it's the largest natural lake in Flanders. And although it was once drained, today it is a beautiful nature reserve again. The visitor centre is in Ossenwegstraat in Zoutleeuw, and there are a number of hikes to enjoy in and around the reserve.

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# Let's get this party started

One of the biggest festivals in the world is about to begin in Ghent

Lisa Bradshaw

**D**on't try to get anything done in Ghent over the next two weeks. No matter where you might want to do business, be it a civic authority, an insurance office or a watch repair shop, you'll see the same scrawled note in the window: "Closed for the Gentse Feesten". The Gentse Feesten is like Christmas in July.

Everyone does something during the Gentse Feesten. *Everyone*. If you are old, you go to the Puppetbuskers Festival (on the pretext of taking the grandkids). If you are young, you go to rock festival Boomtown. If you are young and stupid, you drink until you fall into a gutter and are swept up the next morning like so many plastic cups.

In fact, there are as many people in the streets of downtown Ghent at 4.00 (whether standing or lying) as there are at midnight. Gentse Feesten doesn't shut down. There is a kind of lull between 8.00 and 13.00, when some citizens have actually found their way to bed. But it's the calm before the storm. I know people who live in the centre of town who go on their annual holiday to escape these 10 days in July when the noise never stops.

## Complaints

And that is the problem, say residents of the city centre who belong to a group called Leefbaarheidskader (Liveability Panel). For years they have been trying to get the Gentse Feesten to pipe down after midnight. "We don't want to get rid of the *feesten*, but there should be a cut-off time for the concerts," says spokesperson Kati Couck. The group has been threatening over the last few weeks to file a legal complaint against the event but have not yet done so.

In any case, the city's alderman for culture, Christophe Peeters, is having none of it. "Anyone who moves to the centre of Ghent knows that it's not quiet, not even



at night," he says. "We shouldn't let a small group of egotistical residents force their demands on everyone else."

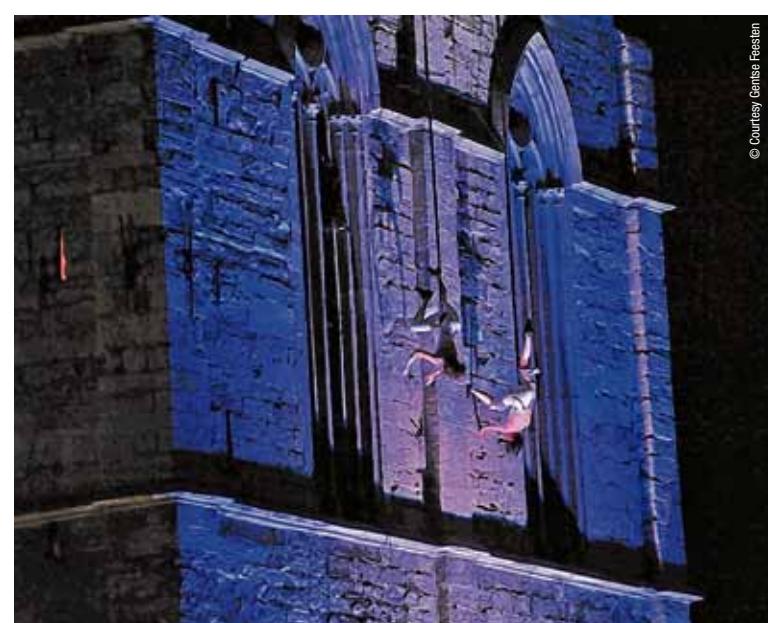
In true Ghent fashion, another group has formed calling itself the Feestbaarheidskader (Festability Panel) and launched the Tien geboden van de Gentse Feesten, or Ten Commandments of the Gentse Feesten. The amusing and good-natured advice for polite partying spread like wildfire across the internet this month.

It's hard to pinpoint exactly why this event grew into the largest of its kind (music and theatre festival) in the world. Its origins were modest: After 19th-century city authorities cracked down on the drunken merriment that accompanied neighbourhood feasts on Sundays – more because of absenteeism in factories on Mondays than because of any moral obligation – they decided to placate the masses by throwing them one big festival a year. It hardly seems the same, but the event has stuck around for 170 years.

By the 1960s, Gentse Feesten had degraded into a tacky fair, all rides and cotton candy. And then the

hippies took over and saved the day. (Isn't that always the way?) The iconic beat bar Trefpunt, still going strong today, began staging free music outside its front door during the Feesten. Eventually, they got a stage. And one by one, all 10 squares in the centre of Ghent became a stage for music, from hip-hop to *schlager* and everything in between. Last year, 1.7 million people went to the Feesten.

Aside from the stages, the official street theatre festival MiramirO (this year they have special productions for babies – how cute is that?), the Puppetbuskers Festival and the techno fest Ten Days Off, you'll find plenty of ad-hoc events such as performers who just show up and work the streets for your coins. A few MiramirO events require a modestly priced ticket, but almost everything else is free. And then there's just a lot of hanging about, drinking some brews, eating food from stands, chatting with people you don't know. In fact, that is the Feestbaarheidskader's 10th commandment: *Uw laatste pint drinkt ge met een volslagen onbekende*. Drink your last pint with a complete stranger.



Who us? Noisy? Some residents complain, but the city is not putting the brakes on the Gentse Feesten; a festival within a festival, the Polé Polé world music stage stretches across the canal; schedule your theatre experiences or just happen upon them

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Across Ghent

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

## STREEKPRODUCT SERIES

Alan Hope

### Pork sausages

Pork in various forms features strongly among the products granted the official Flemish designation of *streekproduct* – a traditional, regional product – for one simple reason: Flanders is pig country. Even in earlier times, the region was relatively densely populated, leaving not much space for the pastures required for cattle, and those that were kept were mainly dairy cows. Pigs, however, can live on food scraps and whatever they can root for themselves.

As a result, the *streekproduct* lists are filled with hams, pâté, bacon and sausages. In the last round of approvals, when the certificates were handed out, three sausages were added. Dried ring-sausage is a typical product made by butchers all over Flanders since time immemorial. As made by Filip Vermeulen and Petra Van Beneden in Sleidinge in Evergem in East Flanders, it consists of roughly minced

pork – usually the odds and ends not destined for other more expensive preparations – seasoned simply with salt, pepper and nutmeg, packed into natural intestines and hung up to dry for between three and seven days to extend its shelf-life. That also gives the sausage a riper, more complex flavour.

Vermeulen Butchers make theirs in long strands which are sold by weight. De La Court in Antwerp, where dried sausage is also a speciality, make theirs in a horseshoe shape of around 200g (*pictured*), which is a style that has somewhat gone out of favour because, it is said, it requires more work. These sausages are also less dry than is usual, although they can be dried further at home if need be, just by allowing them to hang in a cool, dry place. Gaston Wauters of Sint-Pieters-Leeuw in Flemish Brabant just outside Brussels region was given his certificate in the last round; he



too makes dried sausage, which lays claim to the magical air of the Pajottenland, that area of the Zenne that also produces lambic beer from the yeasts which naturally occur in the air. The sausages themselves, available in different stages of driedness, are scented with nutmeg but also ginger or mace, and

they're the perfect accompaniment to a glass of the local geuze.

Finally, a sausage of a different sort: the cervela, which dates back to the 16th century and which is made mainly of pork but with the occasional addition of beef or horsemeat, and whose seasoning includes nutmeg, ginger and mace but, most importantly, garlic. The typical cervela of Coppens-Dirix butchers in Zemst, Flemish Brabant, is red in colour; when it's smoked it turns brown, and then it's known as a chasseur – the word means "hunter" in French and the sausage is something a hunter would typically bring along to gnaw on during the day's sport. Nowadays, of course, it's more usually found on sale at the local *fritkot*, where it's eaten deep-fried.

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

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# Beaver fever

## Once-endangered wild animals are returning to Flanders

Tom Peeters

Panic in the streets of Leuven: The beaver family that lived on the shores of the river Dyle in the centre of the student city has disappeared. For a few weeks last month they were a major attraction for animal lovers and nature photographers, bringing national TV crews and people from all over Flanders flocking. But, frightened away by partying pupils celebrating the end of school, they moved on.

**I**t was a lovely sight while it lasted: Every night between 21.00 and 22.00, about 200 people would gather to wait for Leuven's beaver family – a parent and three young – to pass a bridge very close to the Groot Begijnhof. In exchange, the beavers entertained them with a spot of diving, before having a break at the shore to nibble on plants and trees.

A local guide can tell you everything about these new kids in town. How they live in small families, and are usually shy. How they mark their territory with castoreum, the yellowish secretion that in days gone by was praised for its healing potential and contains salicylic acid, one of the components of aspirin. And, most significant of all, how they finally returned here, 160 years after the last wild beaver was seen in Belgium in 1848.

"Beaver safari guide" Jan Loos, the impassioned managing director of the non-profit association Landschap, is an expert on the once-endangered animals finding



The family of beavers has left Leuven, but their presence was evidence of the creature returning to Flanders after a long absence

their way back to Flemish land- and cityscapes. Ok, the beaver got some help after it was released into the wild again, first in the Netherlands in 1998 and 10 years later in the Ardennes and Walloon Brabant. But other wild animals are trying to get back here all by themselves. Five years after the beaver programme started, the return of the northern hemisphere's biggest rodent is undeniable:

By now there must be 200 wild beavers living in Flanders, Loos estimates. "They are now in almost every Flemish province," he says, "reaching Limburg from the Maas and Flemish Brabant from the river Dyle, moving up to the other Flemish provinces through the Scheldt. West Flanders is the only place they haven't reached, but they will get there eventually through the canals and the river Lys."

Loos believes there are two developments that explain the renewed presence of wild animals. "First of all, big areas of land for agriculture often stay empty and uncultivated, giving wild animals more space. Large parts of Europe are depopulated." For example, the wild Argonne forest region in northern France, just 200km from

"Beavers were previously hunted for their fur, meat and castoreum. But even the sheer thought of them eating fish – which they don't; they only eat plants! – was enough to make people hunt them down. Luckily this attitude changed, and now they are getting the chance to develop again." Just like other wild birds and animals that used to hang around in this area centuries ago.

The white-tailed eagle is brooding in the Netherlands, 40 minutes from Antwerp, while the peregrine falcon can be seen on practically every cathedral, cooling tower and factory chimney in Flanders after decades of nearly total absence. "But predators are making their comeback too, after almost being wiped out," Loos says. "Packs

up again thanks to cleaner water. Foxes have re-entered their former habitat, exploiting our waste society." The story about the seagull flying every day from the North Sea coast in Zeebrugge to a Croky Chips factory in Mouscron 60km away to have his portion of comfort food is illustrative of our attitude to littering and its knock-on effects.

### Another comeback?

This doesn't mean nature is doing great, Loos warns. "A lot of species disappear very fast – birds, insects and the more vulnerable sorts that cannot adapt to our changing landscapes." He advises us not to look at animals as our enemies. "They don't do any harm. Even wolves are scared of people. Let them play their natural role."

And what about the Leuven city beavers? "No family ever stayed so long and so close to people," says Loos, impressed by the rodents' coolness. "The young beavers were probably born here. But they had to draw their conclusions, pestered by noisy teenage pupils throwing bottles into the river."

Eventually they will return, or another family will take their place, he believes. "I'm sure there will be more beavers taking unexpected walks in the streets. Some eye-witnesses said they even followed the pathways in the nearby park!"

Now that the beavers in Leuven have gone on their way, Landschap can focus again on trips to observe seals in the Western Scheldt and go badger and beaver spotting in the Ardennes.

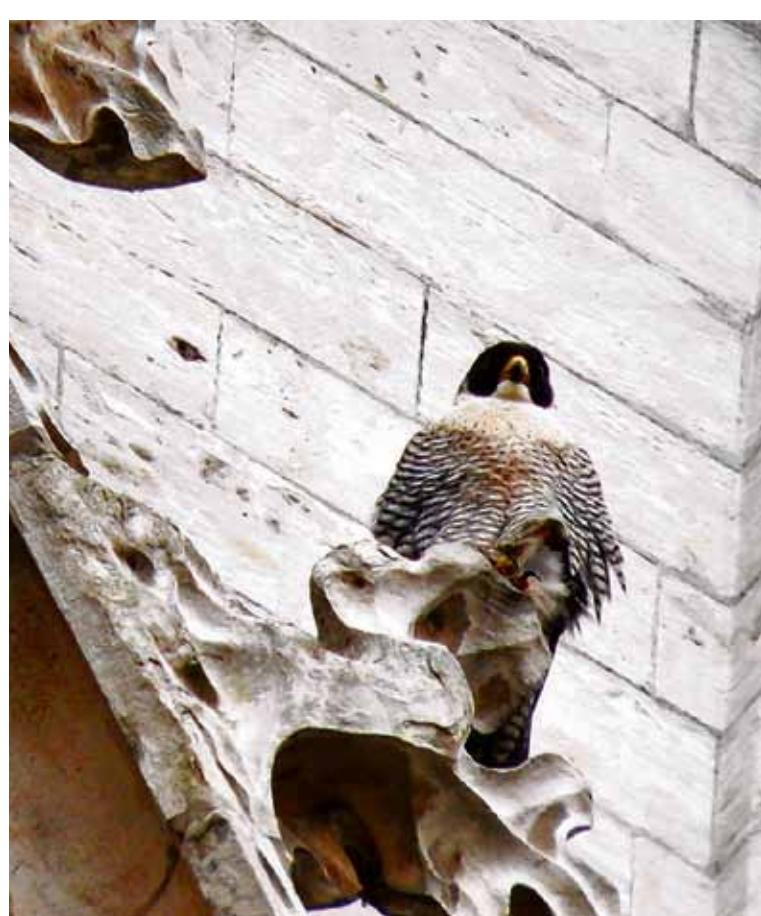
**"Beavers are now in almost every Flemish province. West Flanders is the only place they haven't reached, but they'll get there eventually"**

Paris and Brussels.

"Besides that, endangered species that used to be chased and hunted down are now protected by Europe. Laws lead to a better conservation of wild animals. And the expansion of the European Union, most recently by Croatia, implicates more countries." This comes with a change in mentality: In earlier times, people really hunted these animals with the goal of wiping them out.

of wolves have been spotted in Germany only 15km from the Dutch border. They are moving up slowly from eastern to western Germany, and from the south of France to the north. It's likely that young solitary wolves wandered through the Belgian Ardennes looking for new territory and a partner.

"Even closer to home, wild boars are back in Limburg and wild cats in the Voer region. The otter was declared destroyed, but popped



A peregrine falcon at the cathedral of St Michael and St Gudule in Brussels, where for 10 years a pair of the birds has been breeding. A webcam streams the birds' progress online

*Provocative art encounters*

# Kunstenfestival Watou

Jacqueline Fletcher

Watou is a village in West Flanders surrounded by verdant fields, with old-world charm and a thoroughly modern summer arts festival. Last week, the sun was smiling on visitors eager for the first day of the fifth annual Kunstenfestival Watou, a remarkably abundant blend of visual arts, poetry and music that anchors itself modestly in humanity's "collected histories".

This year's event is called *Concerning the Love We Don't Understand*, and it's a curatorial triumph, placing the excellence and diversity of Flemish art in an international context alongside works by world-renowned artists such as Marina Abramovic, Tracey Emin and Louise Bourgeois, as well as artists from across Europe plus Russia, Algeria, Syria and Israel. It is clear that those things we do or do not understand about love unite us across boundaries, races, religions and cultures.

The exhibition starts at the ticket office-cum-bookshop in the historical Douchiehuis, with a work by the Italian photographer Valerio Loi

called *Human Feelings as Drugs*. Five medicinal phials containing coloured liquids are displayed, each labelled with the emotion contained: love, joy, peace, empathy and hope, accompanied by a brief definition of the emotion itself. The labels have a barcode and the manufacturer's name – the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Natural Human Feelings – evoking the complexity of human emotions in our present social environment.

A tone of personal inquiry is set and visitors follow a trajectory of challenging encounters with sculptures, photography, installations, paintings and video art. Along the route, love poems by Dutch and Flemish poets are displayed. Location three is simply a line of telephone booths, an installation entitled *Dichter aan de lijn* (Poet Calling). Lift a receiver and a poet recites his or her love poem for you. Among the exhibits is a magnificently and disturbingly visceral sculpture by the internationally renowned Flemish artist Berinde de Bruyckere and, as a contrast, the charming video-animation *Damaged Goods*



by Barnaby Barford, which uses china figurines. In the church, interacting with Catholic Baroque

the installation *Llorando* by Spanish artist Carlos Aires creates a striking image as kitchen knives engraved

with expressions lovers might use seem to rain down on the dead Christ (pictured).

Marcantonio Raimondi Malerba's sculpture, *Madre*, of a pregnant woman offering her heart is deeply moving and juxtaposed to *Toxic Mary* by the British graffiti artist Banksy. Pawel Wocial's monumental *Look at Me* and *The Hummingbird*, and *Orla* by Israeli artist Sigalit Landau also provide startlingly original and provocative images.

The works are displayed in 10 evocative locations: 17th-century houses, a traditional Flemish farmhouse, a brewery, an old cloister, an orphanage and a modernist town hall. The locations contribute to the atmosphere, eliciting stark contradictions, engaging the senses: a narrow twisting staircase in the house of love? Cramped rooms and the smell of damp and decay? The sensual enticement of a caressing summer breeze? These elicit responses alongside the exhibits. A programme of events for children and adults will take place throughout the summer.

Until 1 September | Across Watou | ► [www.kunstenfestivalwatou.be](http://www.kunstenfestivalwatou.be)

## FAMILY

### Benelux Freefly Record

Skydiving is a frightening enough proposition. Freeflying, its extreme variant, is even more so. Group freeflying takes the concept to a new level, where few of us have the nerve to follow. Then there's record-breaking group freeflying. It's not for everyone, that's for sure. Dutch skydiving club ToraTora is looking to break the Benelux record which it set last year with a 22-way jump. Yes, that's 22 people jumping out of a plane together. ToraTora's goal this year: a 30-way, with 20 Belgian and 10 Dutch. All participants have qualified through a series of training weekends in Flanders and the Netherlands. No newbies allowed. Come out on Saturday to watch the excitement as the group make repeated jumps until they get it just right ("just right" meaning 30 parachute jumpers make a formation while rocketing towards the earth head-first at about 300kph). If they don't break the record straight away, they'll have the chance on Sunday to give it another go. **Georgio Valentino**



20-21 July | Para Centrum Vlaanderen, Moorsele

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

## MORE FAMILY ACTIVITIES THIS WEEK

### Antwerp

**Miracoco:** Monumental blow-up labyrinth designed by Architects of Air, made up of enchanting passageways filled with points of light and iridescent hues

Until JUL 28 at Koningin Astridplein, Astridplein 27

► [www.architects-of-air.com](http://www.architects-of-air.com)

**Rooftoptigerrrr:** Circus attraction on a rooftop for kids aged nine and up

Until SEP 1 at Parking Nova, Van Schoonhovenstraat 25

► [www.uitmetvlieg.be/tips/rooftoptigerrrr](http://www.uitmetvlieg.be/tips/rooftoptigerrrr)

## SPECIAL EVENT

### Belgian Championship Mobile Phone Throw

Planned obsolescence is a winning strategy for tech peddlers but it sure can make us consumers feel like losers. Don't forget your Monty Python, however: Always look on the bright side. Those old mobile phones aren't junk; they're sporting goods. And they just might help you win the World Phone-Throwing Championship, hosted in Finland on 24 August. First you'll have to take the national title. The event is sponsored for the fourth time by Belgian telecom provider JIM Mobile and held on a sandy stretch of Flemish beach. The winner in each of the four divisions moves on to Finland. In all seriousness (or at least in some seriousness), you might be surprised to see how far these things can be flung. Last year's national winner tossed his phone over 70m. Impressive. Most impressive. In case you're wondering, the world record is over 100m. **GV**



21 July | Twins Club, Bredene | ► [www.jimmobile.be](http://www.jimmobile.be)

## MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

### Brussels

**Feest in het Park:** Celebrate Belgium's National Day with a party in the park, complete with concerts, demonstrations by the national services with military tanks and planes, the exhilarating Death Ride and, finally, a fireworks display starting at 23.00

JUL 21 10.00 in and around Warandepark

► [www.sibp.be](http://www.sibp.be)

### Ghent

**The Abbey on Sundays:** Visit the peaceful grounds of the seventh-century Abbey of Sint-Baaf, Ghent's oldest site, and enjoy laid-back concerts or a picnic in the grass

JUL 21 13.00-17.00 at Sint-Baafsklooster, Voorhoutkaai

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

### Roeselare

**Brouwen & Fietsen (Brewing & Biking):** Guided tour of the brewery combined with a 30km bike ride around the capital of Flemish red ales

Until AUG 29 at Rodenbach Brewery, Spanjestraat 133-141

► [www.roeselare.be/Toerisme/Roeselarelaureaat.asp](http://www.roeselare.be/Toerisme/Roeselarelaureaat.asp)

## FESTIVAL

### Blues Peer

Peer is a modest town near the dividing line between Belgian and Dutch Limburg. But once a year, it becomes the centre of the blues universe, thanks to Blues Peer. In the nearly three decades since its inauguration the festival has grown into one of the region's biggest celebrations of Southern soul. The blues, of course, long ago transcended their origins in the Deep South of 20th-century America. They've gone global. To wit, not all the Blues Peer acts are Southern or even American, although British actor/singer Hugh Laurie plays one on TV. The Excitements, on the other hand, are indeed Southern: The band hails from Catalonia. This 29th edition is a poignant occasion for headliner Robert Cray (*pictured*). The American bluesman performed at the very first edition of Blues Peer in 1985. At the time the fresh-faced Cray was touring behind his second album. He now has 16 under his belt. **GV**



19-21 July | Deusterstraat, Peer

► [www.brbf.be](http://www.brbf.be)

### MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

#### Knokke-Heist

**Kneistival 2013:** Free music festival with concerts in a wide range of genres, featuring Praga Khan, The Van Jets, Milk Inc, Sarah Ferri, Spinvis and Zornik, among others

JUL 20-26 at Heldenplein

► [www.knokke-heist.be](http://www.knokke-heist.be)

#### Sint-Martens-Leerne (Deinze)

**NeverendingFestival:** Music festival for all ages with three stages featuring pop-rock, dance music and R&B concerts, plus a children's village complete with bouncy castle

JUL 20 11.00-1.00 at Ooidonk Castle, Ooidonk

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

#### Tienen

**Suikerrock:** 27th annual Win For Life music festival featuring top international acts including Bush, The Kaiser Chiefs, Within Temptation, The Scabs, Golden Earring, The Opposites, Sting and Joe Cocker, among others

JUL 25-28 at Grote Markt

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

## VISUAL ARTS

### Wonderwerk

The eight artists currently featured in the Literair Museum's Wonderkamer have two things in common. First, they illustrate children's books. Second, they have Limburg roots. That's where the similarities end. Indeed, the Hasselt institution has curated the exhibition to show the breadth of the field. Each illustrator brings a unique vision and technique. Like fingerprints, no two cuddly bears are the same. The inclusion of the late Lieve Baeten makes *Wonderwerk* a bit of a history lesson too. A pioneer in the industry, the Limburg native illustrated books written by other authors throughout the 1980s then created her own best-selling series about a curious witch named Lotje. These Lotje books can now be read in over a dozen languages. Other *Wonderwerk* highlights include Debbie Lavreys' surreal dreamscapes and Kris Nauwelaerts' stylised, almost minimalist compositions (*pictured*). **GV**



Until 6 October | Literair Museum, Hasselt | ► [www.literairmuseum.be](http://www.literairmuseum.be)

### MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

#### Antwerp

**You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet:** Photography book accompanied by a real soundscape, made by Studio Brussel on the basis of the works that appear in the book, resulting in a unique online soundtrack set to images, in collaboration with Spotify, the Swedish online music service

Until OCT 6 at FotoMuseum, Waalsekaai 47

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

#### Gaasbeek

**aXes:** Installations by artist Eric Joris and the Brussels company CREW that bring together film, holograms and drawings and include experiments with trifocal cameras, 3D drawings, motion sensors and special post-production techniques

Until AUG 25 at Kasteel van Gaasbeek, Kasteelstraat 40

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

#### Mechelen

**Enduring Srebrenica:** More than 70 photos and quotes by German-Dutch photographer Claudia Heinermann, based on the aftermath of the fall of the Srebrenica enclave 18 years ago, when more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys were captured and killed

Until NOV 11 at Kazerne Dossin, Goswin de Stassartstraat 153

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

## CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Daan Bauwens

### White Cat

Drongenhof 40, Ghent

In a dark alley in the oldest part of Ghent you will find a big black man in front of a soundproof door. Enter and be astounded. This basement is medieval but its furniture is vintage; it is terribly hot but you have never felt cooler. The speakers pump underground funk into the place and everyone is dancing, supermodel bar staff smile at you while working on a cocktail and you know you needn't look any further. Just about everything is delicious. This is the place where you will spend the rest of the night – if not the rest of all your summer nights. Don't get me wrong: This place is not at all about superficial boho fashion chic. White Cat has a soul. The brainchild of Nicolas Verbrugge, 34, and Nele Goovaerts, 32, in recent years the White Cat has become the place where local and international DJs try out new stuff and where experienced and unknown up-and-coming musical geniuses come together. With one mission: Make the people dance. "I come here to laugh, sweat and dance," says a blonde girl on the dance floor. She tells me her name is Sofie De Rous



and I soon find out she is something of a local celebrity. "This feels like entering a dark underworld," she says, "where gigs come by surprise and I always run into some handsome musicians." There are fans in every corner and as sunrise comes closer, the night gets wilder. Some extra details: The White Cat is also a gallery, where you can buy the art work exhibited on the walls. Mmm. Even more delicious.

Last November White Cat released its very first record, featuring high-class bands and DJs with roots in the soulful club. The bar is at the same time a colourful aquarium with lots of interesting fish. And during the Patersholfeesten – a cosy version of the Gentse Feesten at the beginning of August – the White Cat sets up camp in the neighbouring city park. Mmm. Even more delicious.

## BITE

## b'artiste ★★★☆

Normally I might run away from a place described as trendy, with photos of hot-pink walls and pop art to back it up, but in this case the online reviews are too good to look past. Roeselare is home to a surprising number of restaurants, and b'artiste is clearly considered among the best.

My partner and I visit early on a weekday evening with growling tummies and rather high expectations of the food. We're immediately treated to fresh prawn crackers with a shrimp dipping sauce to go with our freshly squeezed lemonade "aperitif". Soon after, an unexpected teaser arrives: white asparagus *panna cotta*, a creamy twist on the seasonal vegetable.

We're glad to see a straightforward menu, with just a few options but very appetising ones indeed. Passing up favourite starters like *vitello tonnato* and aged Mangalica ham, we opt for mackerel with cucumber and granny smith and fried nobashi prawns. The prawns are fat and juicy, covered in panko and lightly fried. Their dipping sauce, a tasty mixture of hot chilli, green onion and coriander, is missing a bit of acidity. Across from me, the mackerel is disappearing quickly between approving sounds as my partner enjoys every last bite. The fish itself is lightly smoked and marinated to bring out its nice briny flavour and silky-smooth texture. Beautifully arranged around the dish are scoops of foam and ice cream with hints of tangy apple and refreshing cucumber. Waiting for our mains to arrive is effortless, tided over as we are with a loaf of still-warm, freshly baked bread and clotted cream. In the meantime we find out that b'artiste has been around for almost six years now, according to owner Josefine Joye. Her husband, Stijn Lanssens, runs the kitchen.

Overshadowed by the fantastic first dishes, our mains are less rave-worthy. Baked sea bream is given a little Spanish flair with a medley of sautéed bell peppers, artichokes, squid



© Robyn Boyle

and chorizo. The underlying aubergine puree is too sweet and the whole dish is swimming in oil. My steak, meanwhile, may be a fancy cut of prime Australian Hereford beef, well cooked and with nice flavour, but all in all it's nothing out of the ordinary. The side of pepper sauce is so spicy I can only handle a couple of spoonfuls. Fortunately the dish comes with a pile of seasonal veg, including green beans, carrots and courgette, fries and homemade mayo. And my glass of Spanish house red is soft and well-balanced.

We finish off on a high note with a gorgeous dessert of raspberries with coulis, mascarpone sorbet, lime gel, yoghurt and cookie crumble. It's a delight to dabble in the cool, creamy, crunchy textures and sweet, sour, fruity flavours.

We realise as we pay the €93 bill that a menu would have made more sense economically, at €35 for three courses. But ordering à la carte is much more fun.

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

► Zuidstraat 50, Roeselare; 051.251.241

🕒 11.45-14.00 & 18.30-22.00 Tue, Thurs & Fri; 11.45-14.00 Wed, 18.30-22.00 Sat

€ Mains: €18-30

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## TALKING DUTCH

## Welcome to the middle ages

The British are often rude about this country. They say it's boring, or worse. British MEP Nigel Farage once described Belgium as a non-country, after he had described the country's former prime minister as having the charisma of a wet dishrag.

Well, the tables have finally turned. *De Britten ontdekken Brugge* – the British are discovering Bruges, a recent VTM news report announced. (Not strictly true. They'd already stumbled upon Bruges in the 11th century, and virtually rebuilt it in the 19th. But never mind.) The British are discovering Bruges again through the BBC historical drama *The White Queen*.

This 10-part series, which goes out on Sunday evenings, is based on a novel by Philippa Gregory set during the 15th-century Wars of the Roses. The plot is fiendishly complicated because every male is called Edward. Unless he is Henry. There are fabulous costumes, glittering interiors and the occasional non-medieval fashion accessory (forsooth, my lady's dress has a zip fastener).

In short, it is a very British costume drama. Yet almost every scene has been filmed in Flanders (and it's partly funded by the Flanders Audiovisual Fund). When King Edward IV secretly meets Elizabeth Woodville for a night of passion, it happens in the medieval Waterhalle on the ramparts of Bruges. When Elizabeth is crowned, she rides down the Blinde Ezelstraat (Blind Donkey Street, or Coronation Street as the film crew renamed it).

In other scenes, the attentive viewer can spot Ghent's Gravensteen,



Knokke's sandy beach and the cloth hall in Bruges (which normally has two *fritkots* parked outside).

So what, prithee, is wrong with England? Well, it seems that there is nowhere as pretty as Bruges. *Alle acteurs zijn ongelooflijk enthousiast over de gebouwen in de stad en de sfeer die Brugge uitademt* – all the actors were exceptionally impressed by the buildings in the town and the atmosphere in Bruges. They all agreed that you could never find such a beautiful location in Britain – *zo'n prachtige locatie vind je niet in Groot-Brittannië*.

It appears that Belgium takes more care of its historical monuments, so that old buildings look authentic and don't have security cameras and phone masts poking out from the battlements.

So *The White Queen* is helping to prove to the British that this country is not boring. Whether it will ever sort out the Henrys from the Edwards remains to be seen.

*The next episode of The White Queen is on BBC One on 21 July at 10.00. The entire series will be shown again on Flemish TV later in the year.*

Derek Blyth

## The last word...

## Taking it easy

"It was a beautiful morning and I thought, I'll put my shorts and that orange shirt on today. We were invited to a barbecue in the afternoon at my daughter's, and you don't have to get dressed up for something like that." Former prime minister Jean-Luc Dehaene was taken by surprise when VTM reminded him of an appointment to appear on the news, which he did, dressed in sandals and shorts

## Playing hard to get

"At first I was shy and said no. He had to ask me twice."

Melissa Somers from Duffel in Flemish Brabant was hauled onstage at Werchter at the weekend to sing along with Bruce Springsteen

## State of the nation

"I've never had so many compliments as for that news broadcast of 1 August, 1993. People said I was compassionate and subdued. I didn't mean to be: I was sick after a mussel dinner. I'd eaten a bad mussel the night before and I was feeling nauseous."

VTM anchor Dany Verstraeten looks back to the last change of monarch, 10 years ago

## Sporting challenge

"I'm taking life one step at a time, but I hope with all my heart I'll be able to take part in the Olympic Games in Rio in 2016."

Athlete Lyndsay De Grande took part in a meeting in Heusden in Limburg, despite receiving chemotherapy for leukaemia

NEXT WEEK  
IN FLANDERS TODAY

## Cover story

Take one staid seaside city, add an adventurous theatre festival, and you get Ostend's Teater Aan Zee, a 10-day music and theatre festival held at a range of extraordinary locations. We talk to this year's curators, Antwerp-based theatre company The Roovers, and find out what exactly they have in store for lovers of experimental theatre and those who'd like to dip their toes in its waters.

## Business

Electric dance music is big business, and no more so than for the brains behind Tomorrowland. They're finalising preparations for the first US version of the perennially popular festival – called TomorrowWorld – and the original version takes place later this month in Boom, Antwerp province. We look at the global phenomenon and hope to learn the secret of its success.

## Living

Since its creation last year in a merger of heritage organisations, Herita has become known as the Flemish National Trust, preserving the region's rich and varied heritage for generations to come. We talk to director-general Kristl Strubbe about her plans for the future of Flanders' past.