

Perchance to dream

A new Flemish non-profit is sending speakers around the world to inspire young women



▶ 5

Twelfth-century metropolis

Zoutleeuw was once Brabant's most powerful city, and it still packs a punch for visitors

▶ 9

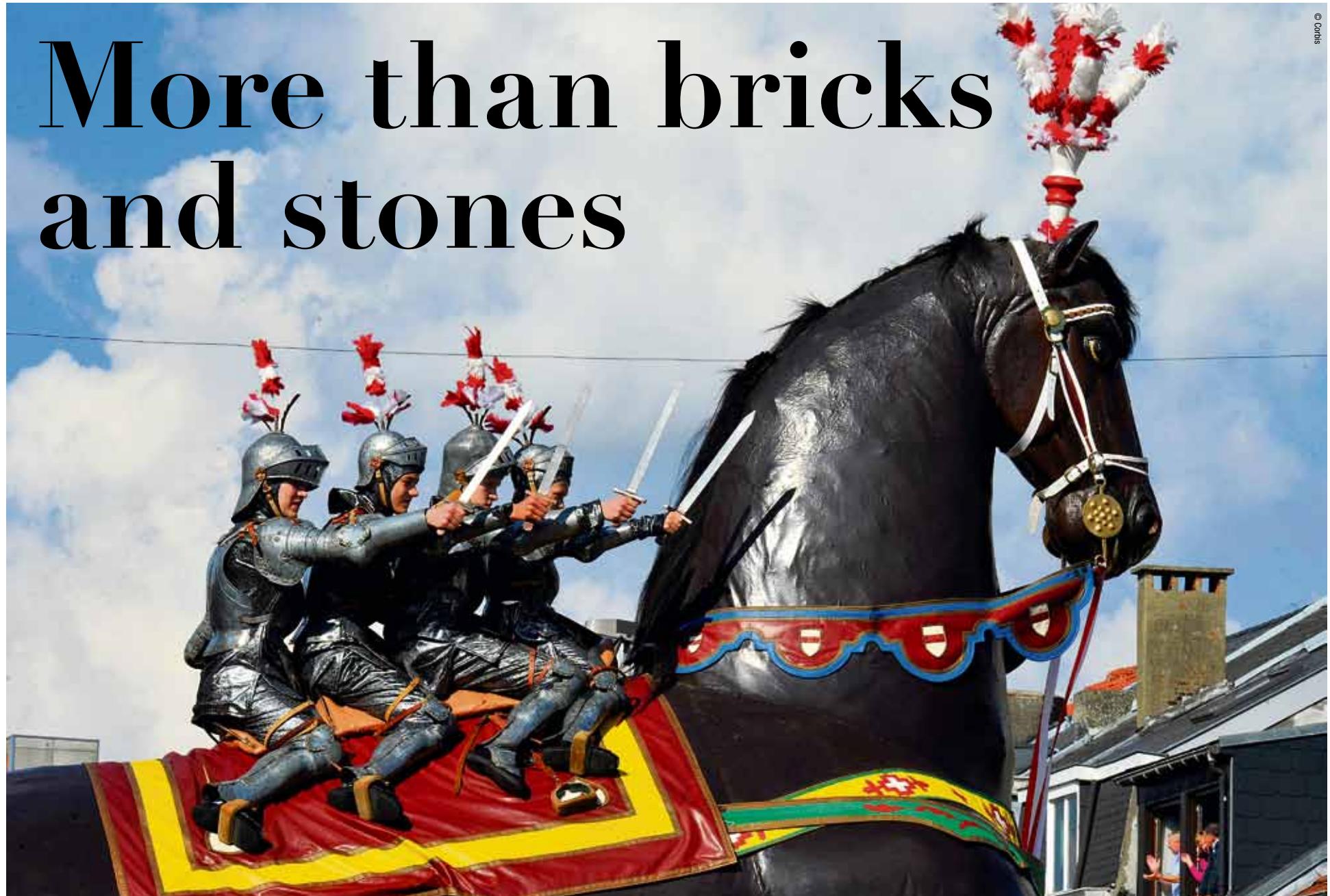
True colours

Don't be afraid to let them show at Brussels first festival based on the Indian rite of Holi



▶ 11

More than bricks and stones



© Doms

The Flemish Unesco Commission wants to have an impact "in society as well as politics"

Linda A Thompson

While world-famous sites like Machu Picchu and the Acropolis catch the international attention, the work of Unesco is also being quietly carried out closer to home. The Flemish Unesco Commission explains its mission in the fields of science, culture and education.

The Flemish Unesco Commission's central task is to function as a go-between for Flanders with Unesco (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Focusing on education and science, culture and heritage, media and communications, Unesco is essentially the United Nations' cultural arm. Flanders' commission works on many fronts but has struggled to bring visibility to the broad scope of its work in recent years. Marc Vervenne, a professor in Hebrew studies at the University of Leuven and the president of the commission since 2010, says that the average Fleming doesn't know much about the

commission. "Or when you talk about Unesco, they think it's about World Heritage, bricks and stones – and that's it," he says. Under the stewardship of Vervenne, of vice-president Stefaan De Ruyck and of former secretary-general Jan De Bisschop, the commission has increasingly streamlined its activities and attempted to expand its appeal, mapping out a policy and work programme for the first time in its nine-year history. "It's rather complex; it's like an octopus now," says Tijs D'Hoest, the current secretary-general. The commission has also begun to reach out to the national commissions of neighbouring countries, particularly those of Germany and the Netherlands.

"The strategy and the working procedures of the commission have profoundly changed over the years," explains Vervenne. He says the impetus to reach out came from both the members' heartfelt conviction in the importance of the commission's work and, on a more practical level, their busy agendas.

"Each of us has his or her own job; we are not paid for the commission work," he explains. "We have tried to make clear

that, as a commission, we want to have an impact. We are not there to play to the gallery. We are convinced that Unesco is important and, in line with that, that the Unesco national commissions must have an impact in society and in politics as well."

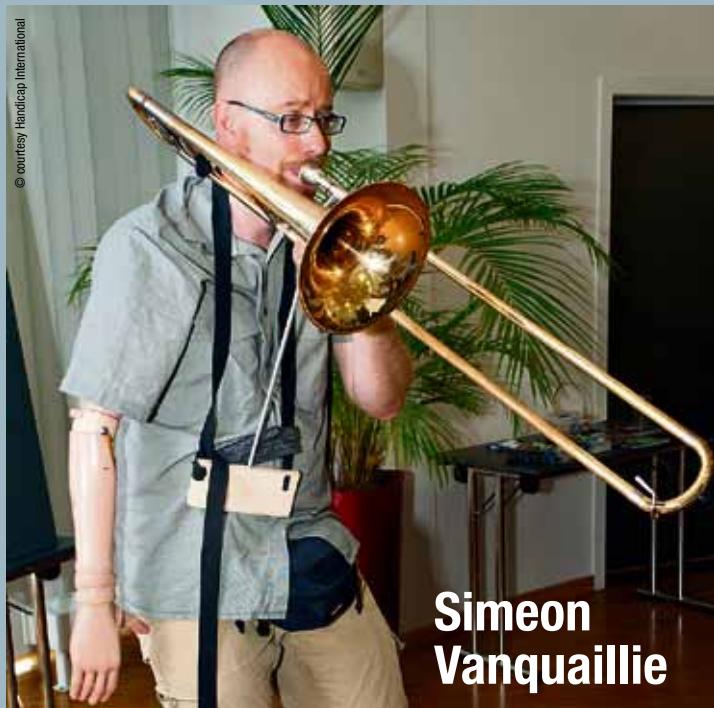
Stopping politicisation

So from 2010, the members began to stage more initiatives to increase the commission's reach. For instance, in April, with the Dutch and German commissions, they organised a conference that focused on the preservation of World Heritage sites in light of the increasing politicisation of site nominations. "A lot of countries lobby to have their site carry the Unesco label because it's good for tourism. So they actually ignore advice from their experts," D'Hoest explains. "We are trying to form something like a bloc against politicisation; that's why international co-operation is really needed."

The Flemish Unesco Commission is something of an anomaly

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Simeon Vanquaillie

A trombone looks like a relatively simple instrument to play: none of that tricky fingering of a stringed instrument, none of the keys of a trumpet, say, or a clarinet. Just a good set of lungs and a strong pair of arms to hold the thing up while you're shoving the slide back and forth.

Simeon Vanquaillie, a keen amateur trombonist, had just such a strong pair of arms until 2010, when he lost his right one in an accident on the E17 motorway as he was headed to Antwerp. He was ejected from the car and found 12 metres away in a puddle of water. Half of his forearm had been ripped off, and the rest had to be amputated.

The father of three and an administrator at rail authority NMBS took it for granted he would never play the trombone again. Prior to the accident, he had also played guitar and piano, but neither of those could take the place of his beloved trombone. "Making music is something beautiful," he told *De Morgen* last week. "It feels unfair if you can't do it anymore."

Vanquaillie tried playing the trombone one-handed, but the

strain was too much and led to muscle pain elsewhere.

Then came four knights to the rescue: Jonas Maertens, Arne Malfait, Suzan Debruycker and Elien Vanhee are students at HoWest university college in Kortrijk. Two of them are industrial engineers, two are ergo therapists, and all of them were inspired by the Design for Everyone project at the college, aimed at finding solutions to the problems of people with a handicap. Together they developed a device that Vanquaillie can wear to keep his trombone in the correct – and stress-free – position while his left hand operates the slide. "We have gotten so much satisfaction in being able to help someone in this way," said Malfait. "We realise how important music can be for someone."

The point also got through to the Belgian wing of the charity Handicap International, which runs a contest every year called Design with a Heart. The prize this year was shared by the HoWest team and the inventors of three other products.

► www.trombonehulp2013.blogspot.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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EDITOR Lisa Bradshaw

DEPUTY EDITOR Sally Tipper

NEWS EDITOR Alan Hope

AGENDA Robyn Boyle, Georgio Valentino

ART DIRECTOR Paul Van Dooren

PREPRESS Corelio AdPro

CONTRIBUTORS Daan Bauwens, Rebecca

Benoot, Robyn Boyle, Leo Cendrowicz,

Angela Chambers, Sabine Clappaert, Katy

Desmond, Andy Furniere, Diana Goodwin,

Toon Lambrechts, Katrien Lindemans, Marc

Maes, Ian Mundell, Anja Otte, Tom Peeters,

Senne Starckx, Linda Thompson, Georgio

Valentino, Christophe Verbiest, Denzil Walton

GENERAL MANAGER Hans De Loore

PUBLISHER Corelio Publishing NV

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

Gossetlaan 30 - 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden

tel 02 373 99 09 - fax 02 375 98 22

editorial@flanderstoday.eu

FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS

subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu

or sign up online at www.flanderstoday.eu

ADVERTISING

Evelyne Fregonese

02 373 83 57

advertising@flanderstoday.eu

VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

Hans De Loore

News in brief

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters said that the region **suspended all arms exports** to problem areas of the Middle East and Africa in February 2011. The areas concerned include Egypt, as well as Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. In addition, he said, Flanders adheres to international arms embargoes against Libya, Lebanon and Iran. The Flemish government's measures go further than the steps taken by a special EU foreign affairs council held in Brussels last week, Peeters said.

Belgium's men's **hockey team made it to the finals** of the European championships in Boom last weekend, ultimately losing to Olympic champions Germany 3-1. Tom Boon scored the Red Lions' single goal off a pass from Felix Denayer. The women's team was shut out in the semi-finals by Germany, who also went on to win the title.

► www.trifinanceurohockey2013.be

North Sea minister Johan Vande Lanotte said he would seek talks with the Dutch government about **Dutch boats fishing illegally** in Belgian waters around the wind turbines. The numbers of cod and other fish have been increasing around the bases of turbines, as a result of reduced sea traffic in the area.

Members of a VRT television crew shooting in the streets of Cairo were **arrested and detained by police** for more than an hour. The crew, including correspondent Inge Vrancken and an interpreter, was recording public reactions to the release of former president Hosni Mubarak to house arrest. The crew was released after the intervention of a member of the Belgian embassy staff and a spokesman for foreign minister Didier Reynders, who happened to be in the Egyptian capital at the time.

Wanted: test pilot for all roller-coasters in Belgium's theme parks.

No experience or qualifications required, but must have strong stomach and head for heights. The leisure website *outmetkorting.be* is looking for a candidate to tester roller coasters. The job appears not to be a paid post, but free tickets for the attractions are offered.

► www.outmetkorting.be

The province of Antwerp will stop paying a subsidy to Flemish public transport authority De Lijn for **free night buses at New Year**. The plan started in 2000, and last year 99,000 people made use of the free service across 60 municipalities. De Lijn said it would consult with the municipal authorities involved, who were also part of the scheme.

Ghent is the **"sunniest municipality in Flanders"**, according to the Flemish gas and electricity market regulator VREG. The city gave out the highest number of green energy certificates – 42,031

– in 2012, more than closest rival Antwerp with 39,297. Bruges made the most use of wind energy, Bocholt in Limburg province of water energy and Beveren-Waas on the banks of the Scheldt of biomass energy.

Customs officers at Brussels Airport last week seized an animal transport from Togo that included **174 illegal exotic reptiles**, including chameleons, marsh turtles and savannah monitor lizards. All the reptiles were taken to the animal shelter in Opglabbeek, Limburg province. Another 526 legal reptiles were allowed to enter the country for delivery to pet shops.

Luc De Witte, deputy director of the special interventions unit of the federal police, has been appointed to take over as **head of the security service of the royal palace**. De Witte, 48, is a former member of the royal mounted escort and will be in charge of a team of 249, including

150 police officers who guard the royal residences and 65 who act as bodyguards.

Tax inspectors in Belgium and the Netherlands have uncovered a large-scale **fraud involving mussel traders**, worth hundreds of thousands of euros in lost VAT. One of the largest Dutch traders in the business is said to be involved, although no names have been revealed; 80 people working for 20 companies are suspected.

The prosecutor's office in Brussels has received more than 70 complaints related to the Jet Travel agency in Schaerbeek, which went bankrupt in April but is suspected of continuing to sell **fictitious holidays**. Investigators said other complaints have been filed in other jurisdictions, but the full extent of the problem is not yet clear.

Two suspects aged 17 and 21 have been arrested in connection with the creation of Facebook pages earlier this year featuring photos of young women accompanied by insulting comments, the Ghent prosecutor said. Investigators received the **assistance of Facebook and Microsoft** in tracking down those responsible. "The message is that culprits will be identified sooner or later and will be pursued," said spokesperson An Schoonjans.

Residents in the north Brussels neighbourhood of **Haren have started a petition** to have the area declared an independent municipality, the 20th of the Brussels-Capital Region. Haren was independent until 1921, when it was joined with the Brussels-City municipality, along with Neder-Over-Heembeek. Locals are now opposed to the "colonisation" of the area by newcomers from Brussels. The petition is not expected to succeed.

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

At home in the harbour



A local trade union in Beveren, East Flanders, has started a food collection for the C Ladybug, a cargo ship whose crew has been marooned on board in Antwerp's remote Deurgangk dock for more than four months. But the 11 members of the all-Chinese crew are not being held hostage. They are refusing to leave the ship until they get their wages.

For some of the crew of the C Ladybug (*pictured*), the trip so far has lasted 14 months – four months more than it should have taken. American shipping line TMT, which owns the Ladybug, went bust in June, by which time the crew had not received any pay for two months.

The ship was by then already moored at Antwerp, loaded with second-hand cars bound for Namibia. But it was unable

to leave the port because, as well as abandoning its crew, the company had defaulted on its harbour charges.

So the captain and crew are stranded. One of the men has had news from home that his wife gave birth to a baby girl. The ship's provisions look set to run out by the end of the month. To the rescue comes the National Royalist Movement Beveren-Waas, which is now asking residents of their town, adjacent

to the docks, to gather together non-perishable food for the crew. ACV, another trade union, donated food to the crew in June, at the beginning of the situation.

Last week, crew members received a visit from a delegation from the Chinese embassy in Brussels. According to an embassy spokesperson, the captain and crew are "very grateful for the help they have received" from locals. "We will do everything possible to handle this case and give them whatever help they need," the embassy said.

Last week a court in Antwerp granted an order to the owners of the freight to allow them to unload it from the C Ladybug and make other transport arrangements.

More than bricks and stones

Flemish Unesco Commission advises on projects around the world

► continued from page 1

in the global Unesco family, which now encompasses 199 national commissions. Flanders is one of the rare sub-state entities to have its own local Unesco commission. Aside from the Basque region, Flanders was the only region to have a direct co-operation agreement with Unesco when the commission was inaugurated in 2004.

Meeting at least three times a year, the commission is made up of five members with advisory votes and 12 members with full voting rights, each with their own area of expertise. Newly appointed by the

Since the government's policy portfolio includes the four Unesco activity areas – education, science, culture and communication – the local commission is the first stop for Unesco in the orientation and development of its international programmes in Flanders. One of its tasks as a local commission was to introduce the Memory of the World programme in the region. This international Unesco initiative aims to facilitate preservation of and raise awareness about the world's documentary heritage.

In May, the Flemish commission

"The public thinks that the work of Unesco is limited to World Heritage"

Flemish government in 2010, these full members are mostly policy experts, high-level civil servants and academics.

D'Hoest is a crucial axis in this constellation. As the secretary-general, he functions as a liaison between the Paris-based Unesco headquarters and the Flemish government and local experts here. For instance, Unesco has a long-running programme on erosion problems in the West African country of Burkina Faso. Regularly, D'Hoest examines if there are any new Flemish experts on water he can direct to the project or if new research has been carried out at local universities that could be linked to it. "This way Flemish expertise is integrated into a Unesco project," he says.



On the cover: The Flemish Unesco Commission is responsible for getting Dendermonde's Ros Beiaard Procession recognised by Unesco as Intangible Heritage. Held only every 10 years, the procession requires four brothers to ride astride a horse as high as the rooftops in celebration of the local legend

established a Memory of the World working group in which the National Library, local heritage institutions and research bodies all had a voice. This committee offers recommendations on inclusion of local elements in the Unesco Memory of the World Register like, for instance, the former archives of the University of Leuven. (They were accepted.)

And then of course, there are the World Heritage operations for which Unesco is best known. The Unesco stamp of approval recognises a site's cultural or historical importance as being of international value. The commission's role here, too, is to advise the government of Flanders on the merit of site proposals. Belgium currently has 11 World Heritage sites, with the early 20th-century Stoclet House in Brussels, designed by architect Joseph Hoffman, among the most recent additions, alongside the historic centre of Bruges and Flemish *begijnhoven*.

In addition to advising the government of Flanders on Unesco matters, the commission also works to spread the Unesco heritage and goals in the region through projects of its own. Last May, for instance, it organised a photo exhibition documenting the impact of climate change on World



Antwerp's Plantin-Moretus printing house, family residence and museum are all recognised Unesco heritage



© courtesy Flemish Unesco Commission

Last spring, the Flemish Unesco Commission hosted a photo exhibition in Leuven on climate change and world heritage sites

Heritage sites in Leuven. *Satellites and World Heritage Sites, Partners to Understand Climate Change* vividly documented the threat of climate change – shrinking glaciers, desertification and flooding –

hovering over World Heritage sites around the world.

As part of that same awareness-raising mission, the commission is recruiting a youth representative to join as a member with an advisory vote. In addition to attending the Unesco Youth Forum in Paris this November, he or she will also be expected to develop initiatives to spread Unesco goals and heritage in Flanders and will liaise with the Flemish Youth Council – a first.

The commission also plays a substantial role in promoting and funding research, with several Unesco chairs at universities across Flanders focusing on themes like peace-building, monument maintenance and desertification. Its best-known research-funding effort is perhaps the Belgian L'Oréal-Unesco fellowships. (see sidebar).

While advances have been made in the last two years, much of what the commission does remains behind closed doors because it essentially functions as a liaison office and advisory body. "We feel that the

public doesn't know us at all and that they think that the work of Unesco is limited to World Heritage – that's the idea that everybody has," D'Hoest says.

Pointing out that most Flemings would probably agree with the intrinsic value of the commission's work, he says: "I think the problem is not that they don't accept what we do, but that they just don't know what we do."

A new and more intensive collaboration agreement with the non-profit Unesco Platform Vlaanderen, whose chief task is to promote Unesco at large in Flanders, should soon bring relief. The two organisations have agreed to work even more closely in the future and will soon join forces to make the commission's work and the Unesco legacy in Flanders more visible. "That's truly the goal for our commission now," says D'Hoest, "to change the view of what we do and who we work with."

► <http://unesco.flanders.be>

WOMEN IN LIFE SCIENCES

Together with the French cosmetics powerhouse and other partner organisations, the Flemish commission awards Belgian L'Oréal-Unesco grants to young female researchers in life sciences every two years. Leen Mathys (pictured) was one of the three 2011 For Women in Science winners. The award, she says, was a heaven-sent gift. Her research examines the role of glycans, or sugar structures, in the entry of the HIV virus. Her budding research career had come to a screeching halt when she found out that her application for funding had been rejected; it looked like her research project would never see the light of day. But someone from L'Oréal called. The Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (Scientific Research Foundation) had forwarded her file, and she had been selected to receive a \$40,000 fellowship. Mathys, 23 at the time, was both surprised and ecstatic. "It was a really prestigious award to get," she says. "It

was really encouraging to start a PhD that way." Mathys should obtain her doctorate at KU Leuven in two years and plans to do postdoctoral research after that. "I want to stay in academia and hopefully become a professor."



© Courtoisie

Academics protest against pressure to publish

Rectors, government ministers and researchers agree to talks

Alan Hope

A group of young academics who circulated a petition to protest at the pressure on them to publish scientific papers have said they are "very happy" at the reactions of university authorities and the Flemish government. The problem of publication pressure has been building for some time among the ranks of mainly young postgraduate researchers in Flanders' universities. Critics complain that the Europe-wide Bologna agreements on higher education have introduced a system where researchers are evaluated mainly or even wholly on the basis of how many papers they publish in academic journals, with priority given to the most elite journals in each field and to publication in

English. "That single criterion has become hugely important and drives people to publish as much as possible," explained Anton Froeyman, a researcher in the philosophy department of Ghent University and one of the group behind the petition. The result, he told *Flanders Today*, is that the quality of the research can be compromised, as academics keen to publish a lot allow their standards to slip. "Secondly, the university's role in education and social engagement is also forced into a lower priority," said Froeyman. Following recent cases of fraud involving researchers educated (though not at the time working) in Flanders, a group of researchers



launched a petition calling on the government and the universities to rethink the evaluation criteria. Last week, Flemish education minister

Pascal Smet and innovation minister Ingrid Lieten jointly promised to take the researchers' concerns into account when considering the next round of financing for higher education.

Meanwhile, the rectors of the five Flemish universities also joined to say they were prepared to get around the table with academics' representatives to discuss the issue.

"We're very happy with the reaction the petition has had," Froeyman said. "The whole idea was to get a fundamental debate going about the higher education system and the evaluation criteria used. We're very happy with the openness shown by the rectors and the minister to start that discussion. That's what we set out to do."

Test project will heat homes with sewer water

Brussels houses could soon be heated by energy derived from the city's sewers, according to the success of a test project in the district of Molenbeek launched last week by water supply company Vivaqua. The water in sewers is normally warm, with a temperature of 12 to 15 degrees, and in warmer periods up to 20 degrees. Vivaqua has placed heat exchangers in the sewer at the junction of Gentsesteenweg and Mirtenlaan, where the warmth of the water can be extracted and stored. The energy can then be used for other purposes, such as domestic heating. The energy is not only virtually free, it is also carbon

neutral.

The technique is common in other parts of the world, closest to home in the Dutch towns of Arnhem and Raalte. If the Molenbeek tests prove positive when they end in the spring of next year, Vivaqua said it would extend the idea to other parts of the city when sewers are being renovated.



Murder suspect commits suicide in cell

Andrei Grigoriev, the man accused of the murder of Aurore Ruyffelaere in Ghent last month, was found dead in his cell at the weekend. According to prison authorities, Grigoriev had hanged himself. Grigoriev had attempted suicide once before, shortly after his arrest. At the time, he denied being responsible for Ruyffelaere's death. After being released from hospital and returned to his cell, he admitted to strangling the 29-year-old. According to his lawyer at the time of the confession, he had been consumed by remorse. Grigoriev was on suicide watch, which means he was checked every seven minutes, 24 hours a day. "It is extremely difficult to prevent anyone who is determined to do such a thing," said prison spokesperson Laurent Sempot.

Government finances forests and farmland

The government of Flanders has purchased 63 hectares of open land in Asse, Flemish Brabant, to help maintain the green and open character of the area, environment minister Joke Schauvliege said.

The Hoeve Hooghof is a traditional square of farm buildings sitting on land adjacent to the Brussels Ring in Zellik, a district of Asse. The buildings are a listed monument, and the land is used for arable crops and extends to the border of another property in neighbouring Wemmel. The two sites together form an area of open green land, which is very unusual in Flemish Brabant, the environment ministry said.

Part of the package is 26ha lying between the Brussels Ring and the border of the Brussels-Capital Region, which will be managed

by the Nature and Forests Agency (ANB) and transformed in time from agricultural land into a nature reserve.

"I've released the funds necessary for the purchase because I believe in the protection of open land in the Flemish belt around Brussels," Schauvliege said. "With the acquisition of this land, a good many of our policy goals for the belt will be realised."

Schauvliege also announced financing for five new forestation projects, all of which were a result of a call from the ANB earlier this year. The projects are in Mechelen, Ostend, Ronse, Evergem and Stekene. The projects range in size from half a hectare to 5.71ha, and in total will see the creation of 10.91ha of new woodland – about the equivalent of 14 football pitches.



THE WEEK IN FIGURES

495

foreigners voluntarily left Belgium to return to their country of origin in the month of July, the highest number in six months

600

deaths between 6 July and 4 August as a result of high temperatures and high ozone concentrations, according to an estimate by the federal Scientific Institute for Public Health

1.5 million

visitors for the month-long South Fair in Brussels, which ended on 18 August. The first weeks were affected by hot weather and Ramadan, but the figures for the later weeks made up for the dip

250th

species of spider discovered in Antwerp last week, in a private garden. The wolf spider (*Pardosa amentata*) adds to the 249 species recorded within the city during a major research project in 2008

1,389

families in Flanders have to pay back their education allowances for the year 2010-2011, because the student was absent too often without an excuse. 361 cases involve pre-schoolers who are not obliged to go to school unless the family claims an allowance

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

A bit generous

The federal parliament consists of two houses: the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate, the latter of which has become obsolete. Most politicians have favoured the abolishment of the Senate, but that turned out to be easier said than done, as the senators had to vote themselves into oblivion.

However, in the newest state reform, the old Senate finally meets its end, to be replaced by a forum with representatives from the communities and regions.

Another accomplishment of the Di Rupo government, one might think, were it not for the details. Last week it was revealed that shutting down the Senate will not save a great deal of money. In fact, the Senate agreement by socialists, Christian-democrats, liberals and greens also includes a generous bonus for the larger political parties, which will receive a total of €8.1 million annually.

The negotiators of the agreement have a perfectly good explanation for this. Senators' aides worked not just for their own boss but mostly for the parties they belong to. Many a spokesperson was being paid through the Senate. To Wouter Beke, CD&V party president, the new situation will result in more transparency, as people working for parties will actually be paid by the parties themselves.

However, to the public at large, it is hard to explain how politicians can decide to grant themselves a generous bonus during times when the country's budgets are under strain and cuts are needed everywhere. To N-VA, in the opposition at the federal level, the deal is no less than "politicians' self-enrichment". (Although N-VA as a large party stands to benefit greatly itself.)

Government party financing amounts to more than €60 million annually. It has gone up significantly over the past decades, mainly as an alternative to business financing, which led to a number of corruption scandals. The money is used for campaigns but also to employ a good number of aides of all types. Still, it is something most politicians prefer to keep quiet about.

The traditional parties are more than annoyed at N-VA's criticism. They recall the last time the party financing system was adjusted – to help out a party with just one elected MP. Which party? You guessed it, N-VA. Getting rid of 40 senators is a cut in itself, they also point out. But the perception remains of them having been more than a bit generous.

Anything is possible

A new Flemish initiative will help girls around the world live their dreams

Tamara Gausi

In her best-selling book *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg recounts the story of a meeting she once hosted: While all the male attendees automatically took seats at the boardroom table, the female attendees sat to the side. She bemoans the fact that their seating choices made the women look like "spectators rather than participants," and she's not wrong. But with so much focus on helping women climb the corporate ladder, it's easy to lose sight of the problem that the gender, cultural and socio-economic factors that affect whether women even make it into the boardroom to begin with actually take root a lot younger.

And therein lies the philosophy behind Dream, Girl, a new Flanders-based initiative launched to inspire young girls between the ages of 12 and 19 from disadvantaged backgrounds around the world to dream big and learn how to make those dreams a reality.

First stop: Cape Town

The brainchild of *Flanders Today* contributor Sabine Clappaert, Dream, Girl events will provide a platform for inspirational women to impart the secrets of their success to their young audiences. "I've been playing around with the idea for about two years," says Clappaert, "but this January I finally threw out the idea to some friends."

Four of them – journalist Ineke Van Nieuwenhove, photographer



Sarah Eechaut and communications consultants Janita Govinden and Sally-Anne Amakye – have been working diligently ever since to make it happen.

The website launched at the beginning of this month and the first Dream, Girl event is scheduled to take place in the Cape Town district of Khayelitsha this December. In attendance will be five speakers, each of whom will give a short presentation about their journey to success, followed by an informal lunch where the girls can ask the speakers questions.

"The elevator pitch for Dream, Girl is 'TED Talks for girls,'" says Clappaert. "I absolutely love TED, but I've always wondered why we don't have something similar for young girls living in a township in Africa or a disadvantaged community in Belgium. Who is reaching out to inspire them?"

As a journalist and a communications specialist, Clappaert's passion for gender equality, diversity and inclusion has always been at the forefront of her work. For example, another of her projects is a book called *Wisdom's Daughters*, in which she has teamed up with a photographer to



"Who is inspiring the girls?": Sabine Clappaert founded Dream, Girl with four other local women

tell the story of "100 women who will change the way you see the world". But it was her desire to "pay it forward" that propelled her to create Dream, Girl. "I was born in Flanders but moved to South Africa in 1980 when I was eight years old," she says. "This was during the height of apartheid; so there I was, a middle-class white kid with a loving family, living this life of amazing privilege, right next to people who had literally nothing – no rights, no freedom. It made a huge impression on me."

Although Clappaert clearly absorbed the national trauma of apartheid, she's still a passionate cheerleader for her adopted homeland. "South Africa gave me a lot. It's the place where I spent my formative years, so I'm just happy to be in a position where I can give something back."

Clappaert says that, even with her comfortable upbringing, she wishes

shed had someone to encourage her to dream. "Nobody put these role models in front of me when I was younger and said you can be a rocket scientist or whatever, and I really wish I had had that."

Still, as someone who is no stranger to dreaming big (in 2009, for example, she and a friend drove 7,000 kilometres from Belgium to Gambia to raise awareness for high child birth mortality rates in Africa), Clappaert found she actually had to scale down her early plans for Dream, Girl. "Initially, I wanted 800 to 1,000 girls to attend the event, but my partner reminded me that TED Talks didn't start out as big as they are today. So we decided to start with 250."

There are some things, however, on which the team is not willing to compromise. "One of the founding principles of Dream, Girl is that the role models should be local. They might not always be famous, but it's really important that their achievements seem obtainable." For that reason, the speakers will also be as close in age to the students as possible.

The project is still in its early stages, and the Dream, Girl team is actively looking for funders and supporters. But Clappaert knows that the success of the Khayelitsha launch will be a manifestation of everything she and her team are trying to teach their young audiences: With hard work, faith and, of course, a dream, anything is possible.

► www.dream-girl.org

Debating the future of the capital

Brussels Summer University tackles numerous issues affecting the global city

Lisa Akinyi May

With next year's European, federal and regional elections looming on the horizon, the multilingual day-long Brussels Summer University (BSU) will focus on the region's future and the impact of the Citizens' Forum of Brussels.

The annual event was launched three years ago by Aula Magna, a Brussels-based think-tank created in 2005. "We started the event in order to discuss the future of Brussels as a multilingual, global city with a diverse group of inhabitants," says Eric Corijn, Aula Magna's general secretary. "We wanted to put demographic growth, the education crisis and urban questions on the political agenda."

One of Aula Magna's most significant endeavours was the launch of the Citizen's Forum of Brussels, a unique effort in mobilising civil society to discuss the future of the city. Five years ago, the think-tank advised policymakers on initiatives



Philosophy professor Philippe Van Parijs will address the globalisation of cities at Brussels Summer University

at an academic, cultural and economic level. BSU will now look at the effects, if any, of that advice. "We want to know what conclusions the political authorities drew from the recommendations we formulated," says Corijn.

BSU, which is open to the public, is a day of knowledge and assessment, with lectures, debates and workshops that will attempt to prioritise issues such as the demographic boom and questions of employment and housing. Brussels' status as a global city

means it has its own identity apart from being the country's capital, explains Corijn. A significant proportion of people living in Brussels have a foreign background, making urban issues much more complicated to solve, he says.

The think-tank has managed to push forward new visions on urban governance. However, with the population of Brussels due to rise by 200,000 inhabitants in 10 years' time, new problem-solving methods have to be put in place, according to Corijn.

"At the event, academics and politicians will have their say in Dutch, English or French, as we are

expecting a multilingual audience," he explains. Speakers will mainly use their mother tongue but may comment and sum up in others, while questions can always be asked in English.

Speakers include VUB political science professor Patrick Deboosere, who will talk about multilingualism, and SPA politician Yasmine Kherbache, who will sit on the diversity panel. Philippe Van Parijs, a Brussels-based philosopher and social scientist, and former mayor Patrick Janssens will talk about cities facing globalisation. The event is free, but registration via the website is required.

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THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS

Brewing ▶ Duvel

Duvel Moortgat brewery, based in Puurs, Antwerp province, will release 5,000 bottles of its new whiskey, Duvel Distilled, on 15 October. Based on hops, the whiskey has been aged for six years in oak vats. Consumers can sign up for a bottle on the Duvel website now.

▶ www.duvel.com

Economy ▶ Consumer confidence

The National Bank indicator of consumer confidence rose for the fifth consecutive month in July to reach its highest level in 15 months.

Energy ▶ Vesta

The Danish manufacturer of wind energy equipment is developing a €4.5 million wind farm maintenance centre in the port of Ostend. The new facility will help maintain the 127 windmills in the Belwind and Northwind offshore farms.

Hotels ▶ Hainan

The Chinese airline and hotels group is investing €72 million in its local affiliate, which operates three hotels in Belgium, two of them in Brussels. The Sodehotel in Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe will increase the number of rooms to 181, develop its meeting facilities, create a spa and fitness centre and rename the hotel Tangla. Works are slated for completion in early 2015. Meanwhile, the 65-room Carrefour de l'Europe in central Brussels will also be renovated.

Investment ▶ GIMV

The Flemish government's venture capital fund GIMV has sold its stake in the Swiss Endosense medical equipment producer to US-based St Jude Medical with a book profit of €5.4 million, doubling its initial investment.

Payments ▶ PayPal

The US-based on-line payments system has opened an affiliate in Brussels to serve its customers in Belgium and Luxembourg. The group previously handled those markets from Amsterdam.

Telecoms ▶ America Movil

Mexico's America Movil, the telecommunications group owned by the world's richest man, Carlos Slim, is buying the Dutch KPN group, owner of local mobile network provider Base. It is believed that Slim's next move may be a bid for Belgacom to help America Movil reach critical mass in Europe.

€2 million financing for business-friendly cities

Tourism and restaurant industries are focus of new call for projects

Alan Hope

Last week, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters issued the fourth call for projects for financing under the Enterprise-Friendly Municipality scheme. The call is an invitation to city authorities and business organisations to submit project proposals for financing from a total budget for this year of €2 million.

The aim of the scheme is to improve co-operation between municipalities and businesses in an effort to provide the most business-friendly public services possible. Successful projects will include an exchange of information between municipalities, as well as between different services within municipalities.

This year the emphasis is on tourism and food services – restaurants, cafes and other catering businesses. Both sectors, the government says, have enormous potential for

© courtesy Toerisme Vlaanderen



The economic benefits of tourism and catering are not being fully realised in Flanders, says the government

earnings and employment, but that potential is not being fully exploited. City governments have an important role to play in stimulating and facilitating the development

of businesses in the two sectors, through city-led marketing, among other initiatives.

Projects financed in previous rounds include WinkelWeb, a network of

retail centres in West Flanders; a region-wide starters' academy that provides advice and support to entrepreneurs opening new shops for the first time; a digital platform for entrepreneurs in the Kempen area; and a programme of administrative simplification for businesses in the province of Limburg.

"With this fourth call ... we are focusing on two sectors that are of vital importance for local economies," Peeters said. "Tourism and the food service industry are crucial for employment in a municipality, so it's in the interest of all that cities and towns make a conscious effort in these areas. I hope the interest shown in this new call will be as great as it has been in the past."

▶ www.tinyurl.com/enterprisefriendly

Government may work around CEO salary cap

A proposal last week by the federal minister for government enterprises to cap the salaries of CEOs of state-owned businesses may be circumvented in some cases, after the boss of national postal service bpost made it clear he was not prepared to do the job for the future salary on offer.

Bpost CEO Johnny Thijs (*pictured*) is generally regarded as having done an excellent job in turning a profit in difficult times for mail services worldwide. He also brought bpost to the stock market successfully earlier in the summer. Thijs announced last week, however, that if the government goes ahead with the plan from minister Jean-Pascal Labille to cap his salary at €290,000 a year, he was prepared to walk.

Thijs last year took home a total remuneration of just over €1.1 million. The level of the maximum salary is the amount earned by the prime minister, whose salary is set by parliament.



Houses prices go up, but more slowly

Prices for all types of residential property as well as land for construction all increased last year, but the year-on-year increases of the past appear to have peaked. Although the latest figures for house prices produced some records, the increases are less than they were last year at this time.

In Flanders, the largest increase was for building plots, which went up in the first half of the year by 5.1% to an average of nearly €180 per square metre. Apartment prices went up by 2.9%. Both cases were all-time records.

Limburg was the province with the lowest prices, with an average price of €182,000 for a house; Flemish Brabant was the most expensive, with the price of an average house at €245,000. Mesen in West Flanders is the cheapest place to buy, at €118,500, while Wezembeek-Oppem, just outside of Brussels, is the most expensive: €365,000. In Brussels, the most expensive district is Vorst, where the price is €919 a square metre.

Bar owners await fallout of fraud case

As many as 800 bar owners across Flanders are waiting to see if they will suffer from their involvement in a huge fraud case involving one of the region's major drinks wholesalers. Last week, the De Wilde family, owners of Creve Drinks in Waarschoot, East Flanders, reached an agreement with tax inspectors to pay a settlement of €15 million to avoid prosecution for evading VAT. In order to raise the money, Creve Drinks has sacked all 29 employees and is seeking a buyer.

Horeca Vlaanderen, the organisation that represents the food service industry, last week called on authorities to be "flexible" when dealing with bars involved in the scheme, in order to avoid further job losses. During the investigation into Creve Drinks, tax inspectors examined the books of around 800 clients.

Creve made deals with bars to only list part of their deliveries on invoices, while the rest was paid in cash under the table. This allowed cafes to sell drinks without declaring the income and pocketing the amount comprising VAT.

Bars involved can expect to have to repay taxes owing and to be charged a sum in lieu of a fine to avoid prosecution. "We are expecting a good number of bankruptcies as a result of the procedure," commented Danny Van Assche, managing director of Horeca Vlaanderen.

General Motors sues Antwerp Port Authority

General Motors Belgium, owners of the site of the former Opel Antwerp motor manufacturing plant, has started a legal action against the Port of Antwerp Authority over the terms of the sale of the site. Opel Antwerp closed in 2010.

Under an agreement signed in the 1960s, the port received a first-purchase option on the land. GM wants €90 million; the Port Authority was prepared to pay €30 million. The value of the site was set at €43.6 million by the commercial court in Antwerp, based on the report of a panel of experts. The Port Authority accepts the court's valuation, but GM disputes the report, which it argues is "based on incorrect, unrealistic and hypothetical assumptions".

"It is incomprehensible, in these very difficult economic times, that

a multinational like GM should try to prevent us from creating new economic activity and additional employment with these judicial measures," said Antwerp's alderman for port affairs, Marc Van Peel.

GM denies claims that its action stands in the way of redevelopment of the 90-hectare site. "On our side, we have always tried to bring this matter to a good end as quickly as possible," spokesman Ron Dubois told the VRT. The case is not expected to be heard before April next year.



Giants of the sea

Antwerp prepares for the arrival of the world's largest container vessels

Marc Maes

The number of ultra-large container ships (ULCS) calling at the port of Antwerp will have grown from three per year in 2007 to a whopping 190 by the end of 2013. Altogether, there are now some 720 ship movements on the Scheldt by vessels longer than 360 metres. (That's more than three times as long as a football pitch.)

And they're just getting bigger. With the introduction of the Maersk Mc-Kinney Møller, the first Triple-E class ship, a new generation of container vessels measuring 400 x 59 metres will be calling at ports worldwide. "Flemish ports all have one thing in common: access through shallow waters," explains professor Katrien Eloot of Flanders Hydraulics Research (FHR), a centre of expertise in Antwerp that carries out tests and research on water systems and navigation. "We specialise in the topic of navigating in shallow and confined waters."

The use of specialised software allowed engineers at FHR to build realistic simulation models to be used for the design of infrastructure and training of pilots preparing shipping manoeuvres. "The main goal is to realistically simulate a ship's behaviour," says Eloot. "Earlier projects preparing for the arrival of the ULCS and for manoeuvring into the Deurganck dock were very much appreciated by everybody involved in the transport chain on the Scheldt."

Bridge simulator

The FHR, which is opening its doors to the public next month, has a simulator of a ship's bridge, with a 360-degree view. For the newest generation of Triple-E container carriers, Eloot and her team "developed mathematical models with twin-screw and twin-rudder systems to be able to simulate manoeuvres to both the port of Antwerp and the port of Zeebrugge on our bridge simulator. This offers a very realistic impression of what navigating such a ship is like."

She adds that the pre-arrival calculations of the new generation



A simulation by Flanders Hydraulic Research offers a realistic impression of what navigating one of the new generation of giant ships is like

Almost one in three teachers firmly **oppose the reform of the education system** planned by the Flemish government, while in the general humanities education more than 85% are against it. These are the conclusions of a survey by weekly magazine *Knack*, which questioned 1,004 teachers. The magazine also surveyed 600 parents, of whom 65% do not support the reform. Education minister Pascal Smet has said teachers and parents will be thoroughly informed from the start of the next school year and will be closely involved in the gradual changes.

A student's **ethnic background** **strongly influences** their chances of repeating a class, according to researcher Stijn Baert in his PhD for Ghent University. Baert found that students with a foreign background were more likely to repeat a year, whatever their socio-economic situation. The fourth year of secondary education appears to be a crucial point at which a difference arises based on ethnicity. Baert analysed a survey of 9,000 students born in 1976, 1978 and 1980 and questioned at the age of 23, 26 and 29.

In the port of Ostend, a cluster of 33 concrete "reef balls" have been lowered on to the seabed to form **an artificial reef near wind farms** to encourage plant and fish life. Wind farms in the North Sea already serve as nursery habitat for fish and other creatures, as fishing is prohibited and the foundations provide places to hide from predators. The project is financed by Flemish wind power companies Belwind and C-Power. It is the first step in North Sea minister Johan Vande Lanotte's Action Plan Seal. One aim is to attract seals to the area, as their presence is a sign that the marine environment is clean.

On average, the **weight of Flemish students' schoolbags** is about 15% of their body weight, while international recommendations by the UN recommend 10% as the maximum. When schoolbags are too heavy, students change their posture and walking pattern, leading to back problems, warns Belgium's occupational well-being agency IDEWE. The organisation recommends backpacks that distribute the weight evenly and lockers at school where students can leave their sports gear and books. IDEWE also advises parents and teachers to weigh schoolbags at the beginning of the year and suggest which materials can be left out.

AF

Q&A

Professor Wout Boerjan of life sciences research institute VIB led the Belgian part of the international team that discovered new possibilities for efficient biofuel production using poplar trees

Why can poplar trees be a good source for sustainable fuel?

Fast-growing plants such as poplar trees are a good alternative to the food crops, like corn, that are now often grown for producing biofuel. An impediment, however, is the chemical substance lignin, which, together with sugar molecules, makes up a plant's cell wall. Lignin is like a kind of cement that gives firmness to plants and protects them against diseases. But it makes it harder to convert cellulose to glucose, which can then be fermented to biofuel – like how beer is made. Removing this lignin requires a lot of chemicals and energy.



How will your breakthrough improve biofuel production?

In a thale cress plant, we identified a new gene that is pivotal to the production of lignin. Knocking out this gene, called CSE, resulted in 36% less lignin per gram of stem

force and direction." D'Havé admits that the combination of the FHR's simulations and the expertise of river pilots results in "navigating on the edge", but he emphasises that, in the six years that big ships have been calling at Antwerp, only one problem occurred, with only minimal damage.

Teamwork is key

It works both ways, says Robert Walter, general manager of operations at Maersk Line Antwerp. "We are very impressed with the work and the level of detail that the lab provides us with. ... and the real teamwork that is key in such an operation. The testing and simulations are vital to make sure that all aspects have been considered and tested, to make sure we have a flawless and, above all, safe operation at all times."

The head of the Antwerp Port Authority has also been watching the preparations for the arrival of the new generation of giant cargo ships closely. "The work of the FHR is of great value and allows us to offer a

substantial return on investment for the Scheldt deepening programme," says Eddy Bruyninckx.

He says he is confident that FHR's preliminary work and the realistic training environment in the simulator will allow the port to fulfil the demands of the market. "I'm convinced that our port can accommodate the new generation of Triple-E ships, keeping Antwerp in the premier league of European ports; we're happy with what we have today."

This year is the 150th anniversary of the reopening of the Scheldt, after having been closed to navigation since the 16th century. Bruyninckx: "When necessary, the Flemish and Dutch regions will take conscious measures to safeguard the river Scheldt's access – like we did 150 years ago."

Flanders Hydraulic Research is open to the public on 29 September. Visit the website closer to the date for details

► www.watlab.be

material. The remaining lignin also had an altered structure that made the biomass easier to process. As a consequence, the conversion of cellulose to glucose was four times more effective. Our VIB team at Ghent University worked with British colleagues at Dundee University. We will now experiment with knocking out the CSE gene in poplar trees.

You have been conducting field experiments with genetically modified poplars for a few years now, right?

Yes, since 2009. In these poplars, we partially knocked out another gene – called CCR – that also reduces the lignin production. However,

the trees turned out smaller than normal. The new technique should not affect their growth, but new field experiments are necessary to ascertain this.

How do you react to protests from environmental organisations?

I believe there has not yet been scientific proof that such genetic modification damages our ecological system, as some organisations claim. Our goal is actually similar to theirs – to develop a sustainable economy and to protect nature. By making the production of biofuel more efficient, less forests and fossil fuels have to be sacrificed for human needs. *Interview by Andy Furniere*



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Where the lion sleeps

Once an important trade centre, Zoutleeuw still offers much to curious visitors

Denzil Walton

Hidden off the beaten path in far eastern Flemish Brabant, Zoutleeuw is awash in the history of the region. A hugely important city 800 years ago, it still bears some of the trappings of the time and one of the region's best recreational parks

First of all, let's deal with its strange name. Zoutleeuw. Does it originate from the times when lions (*leeuwen*) with a taste for salt (*zout*) roamed the hills of Flemish Brabant?

Not at all. Until the 16th century, the village was simply called Leeuw. Disappointingly, it has nothing to do with lions at all. It's believed to be a corruption of the old Germanic word *hlaiwa*, meaning a tumulus or burial mound. The salty bit was added much later, probably referring to the salt tax that Leeuw charged neighbouring villages.

Today, the once-prominent town of Zoutleeuw is hidden away, found only by those seeking it out. The E40 flashes by to its south. Shoppers descend on the larger nearby towns of Tienen and Sint-Truiden. But things were different in the 12th century. Then the town – still called Leeuw, remember – was on the important Bruges-Cologne trade route. Even better, it was the first/last border crossing between the Duchy of Brabant and the principality of Liège. In 1312, it was named one of the most important cities in Brabant. Such a strategic location demanded



Het Zinne nature reserve is well worth a visit for its wildlife and playtime opportunities

© courtesy Stad Zoutleeuw

strong town walls – dating back to 1130 and still evident today. In the 14th century, four new city gates were added. Soon afterwards, a new garrison was built to house the soldiers sent to Zoutleeuw to keep law and order in such a bustling and economically important place. Alas, by the 16th century Zoutleeuw was struggling to maintain its reputation. In 1525 the navigability of the Grote Gete river was extended to Tienen, which became the most important centre of trade in eastern

Brabant. The Flemish cloth industry began to decline in the face of English competition, resulting in less trade with Germany. In retrospect, the construction of Zoutleeuw's magnificent town hall in 1529 was more of a swansong than a demonstration of its wealth. Worse was to come. The great flood of 1573 submerged most of the town, and the resulting plague decimated its inhabitants. Five years later the Spanish army plundered what was left of Zoutleeuw. The final nails in its coffin were no less than three huge fires between 1676 and 1706.

Past on view

And yet, amazingly, much of Zoutleeuw's magnificent past can still be seen. The town hall was renovated in the 19th century and is a wonderful example of early Renaissance architecture. Alongside is the small but splendid Cloth Hall, which dates from 1317. Opposite, the huge Sint-Leonardus church looms over the Grote Markt.

All three buildings can be visited, while an interesting four-kilometre walk takes in the remnants of the town walls and gates. It ends on the Grote Markt, where you can enjoy a drink on the terrace of one of the cafes, while admiring other remarkable buildings such as the Spiegelhuis (Mirror House) and the Huis de Rode Leeuw (House of the Red Lion). That's your morning done, and, after a bit to eat (see sidebar), it's time to head to Het Vinne, the provincial nature domain just two kilometres from Zoutleeuw's Grote Markt. It really is a lovely area to walk in, and it, too, is swathed in history.

Het Vinne is mentioned as far back as 1278 as an area set aside for the residents of Zoutleeuw to cut peat for their fires. Peat-cutting ceased in 1844 when the Union Allumetière company planted the area with poplars, which they harvested to make matches. When the match-making industry fizzled out, the province of Brabant bought the whole



Zoutleeuw's town hall is a wonderful example of early Renaissance architecture



See fine sculptures of Leonard, patron saint of the imprisoned and women in labour, in the church that bears his name

friendly. You may find it hard to drag your offspring away from the large playground at the entrance, but once you do they will find plenty more to occupy themselves. This includes the visitor centre with a lot of easy-to-understand displays; an insect hotel and a bee village; a cute collection of rabbits, sheep, goats and donkeys; and part of the forest where they can run wild, jump on tree trunks, build camps and pretend they are Bear Grylls.

Also, there are numerous well-signposted walks around the lake. You may have to hold your little one's hand tightly on some of the boardwalks that extend over the water, but they are well worth following as they lead to four observation hides to give close-up views of the local birds.

After all that, you're probably in need of more sustenance, so you'll be pleased to know that Bistro Het Vinne offers an excellent selection of drinks and meals. As the terrace overlooks the children's playground, you can relax over a Herkenrode Tripel while keeping an eye on the kids as they burn off their remaining energy.

Now there's just the evening left! For the perfect end to your day in Zoutleeuw, what about a hot air balloon flight? Rainbow Ballooning specialises in flights over Zoutleeuw and the surrounding region in the safe hands of professional pilot Bart Liesmons. One of their packages even includes a barbecue at Het Vinne.

Or if you like to keep your feet on the ground – or your wheels, rather – you can rent bikes at Het Vinne and take off for a pleasant evening's cycle ride through the region. One interesting 33-kilometre route starts in the domain and passes through the valleys of the Kleine Gete and Grote Gete rivers.

► www.zoutleeuw.be

EATING AND SLEEPING

Between your walk around the town walls and your afternoon spent at Het Vinne, you'll need some refreshment. Peppermill (pictured) is an American sports bar and restaurant on the Grote Markt that does a mean burger and blueberry cheesecake, while, for the more refined palate, L'Air des Sens on the nearby Vincent Betsstraat offers an eight-course meal that focuses on local produce and regional specialities.

Finally, if you think there is enough



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Hue and cry

Colors Festival brings the vibrant spirit of India to Brussels

Daan Bauwens

It's a known fact among experienced travellers: When it comes to intensity, there is no place in the world that can compete with India. And when it comes to intensity in India, there is nothing like Holi.

Every year at the beginning of spring, chaos erupts all around the nation. Tens of thousands of Indians lose their minds and rush out on to the streets to say goodbye to winter and welcome back colour into their lives.

People sing, dance wildly and build fires – wherever. But that's not all. They continuously throw coloured powder at each other, creating huge clouds of colourful – if occasionally dangerous – dust. That's what makes Holi truly dazzling and like no other spring festival in the world. But now there's no need to travel halfway across the globe to experience the so-called festival of colours. On 21 September, Brussels is hosting its very own Holi for the first time. It's called the Colors Festival.

Admittedly, it's been westernised: Colors is not being held in the streets but carefully kept within the fences of the Tour & Taxis compound in Brussels. And don't count on seeing famous gurus chanting to tabla and sitar. You'll be bouncing away to Belgium and Europe's finest underground house and techno.

From Berlin to Brussels

"It's been two years since Holi came to Europe for the first time," says Thomas Van Orshaegen, organiser of the Colors Festival. "That was in Germany. I remember going there and having such an amazingly good time that my friends and I actually had no choice: We had to organise the same in Belgium."

And that's what they did. "But we



The Holi festival in Berlin last summer. Germany was the first country to bring the colourful celebration to Europe

also wanted to make it unique," he continues. "Together with the powder, we're presenting a line-up of internationally renowned artists." The Colors Festival is already thinking big for its first edition. It promises to provide 14 hours of music, with 24 DJs and bands spread over five stages. Its line-up includes electronica legends such as Marc Houle, Christian Burkhardt and the immaculate producer Andreas Kruger in his DJ collective Der Dritte Raum. Younger and local DJs will get their chance, as well. Flatfish, for instance, is an Antwerp-based duo from the infamous Café d'Anvers.

Colors is being organised by Hertz Events, a young events company from Ghent that specialises in new

festivals with innovative concepts. It's responsible for the first Doomsday electronic music festival,

bands and DJs ... but during the day there are several countdown moments when the crowd will

"This festival is all about a feeling of togetherness ... it stands for unity, equality and freedom"

which drew more than 10,000 visitors last year to Antwerp Expo. Next month, Hertz is presenting the first edition of the open-air Roots of Minimal festival in Ghent.

But the Colors Festival stands out, says Van Orshaegen. "Imagine a festival, just like any other, with

start throwing colourful powder through the air! It will be an unforgettable scene. People will be taking pictures; it will be a visually exhilarating experience. In between the countdowns, people will get super enthusiastic about the next powder moment. That's what it's all

about."

If you've ever been to India, you know that if you wind up in the middle of a powder bomb, that stuff can make it hard to breathe. In Brussels, the powder isn't in fact powder at all but "micro confetti". It's made out of completely organic materials and so safe for skin and hair and won't leave you gasping. In terms of your clothes, removing the powder, organisers say, will depend on the washing machine and detergent you use. They strongly advise against wearing your best clothes and add that the powder looks best on white clothing.

Though Colors isn't directly linked to the original Holi, with its spiritual aspect, it is definitely inspired by it and shares the same ideals, says Van Orshaegen. Like Holi, Colors promotes the ideology of bringing people together in love and peace.

"This festival is all about the feeling of togetherness and multiculturalism. Religion, rank and race are put aside in order to celebrate freedom and equality," he says. "We want to organise a festival that is accessible for as many people as possible. That's also part of the reason why we chose Brussels as a location for the first edition. It is central in Belgium and a very multicultural city. The city council was also very enthusiastic about it. If it turns out to be a success, we will start organising more Colors in other cities: Antwerp, Ghent and Hasselt. But Brussels seemed like the perfect spot to start."

Tickets to the festival are €24, which includes two bags of coloured powder. You can throw them wherever you want or at whomever you want – but make sure you wait until you hear the sound of the bell.

► www.colorsfestival.be

The smart viewer's choice

Perennial favourite quiz show returns to TV screens for 10th anniversary

Alan Hope

Next Monday sees the kids go back to school and, in an event that's become as much of an annual tradition, the return of *De slimste mens ter wereld*, the most successful quiz programme Flanders has ever seen, and one of the region's most popular TV shows ever.

The programme, now in its 10th edition, survived its move in 2012 from the public broadcaster VRT to the commercial channel VIER and, though viewing figures were down slightly, the programme's prestige – and its ability to attract big names – is solid.

The host, as always, is film director

Erik Van Looy, whose US version of the 2008 hit film *Loft* is due for release this time next year. Van Looy recently explained in an interview that he was happy to host the quiz yet again out of a sense of gratitude to production house Woestijnvis, which produces *De slimste mens* and also produced *Loft*.

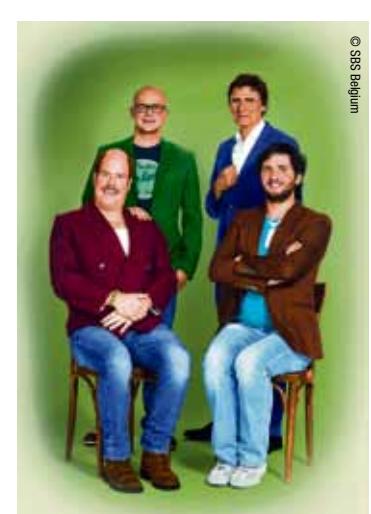
But Van Looy doesn't have to go it alone: He's backed by a "jury" of four, who exchange quips with him and the contestants. Comedian Philippe Geubels returns; joining him are Neveneffecten comedian Lieven Scheire and actor Bruno Vanden Broecke (*Wat als?*)

The contestants this year will include the usual run of actors, politicians and other *bekende Vlamingen* but not ordinary members of the public, despite the success of last year's experiment. In the last series, Ostend resident Magali Cobbaert, one of four non-celebrities taking part, made an impressive total of 11 appearances before losing in the final to basketball player Tomas Van Den Spiegel.

Politicians are heavily represented with the 2014 elections in sight, doubtless recalling the successful run by Bart De Wever in 2010, which lent in no small part to his electoral

success. This year, all but one of the major parties are represented: Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten for SPA, party president Gwendolyn Rutten for Open VLD, party president Wouter Van Besien for Groen and Ben Weyts for N-VA. Only CD&V is not represented, after Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters was asked and declined. "Then we decided, if Kris Peeters doesn't want to do it, then we just won't have anyone from CD&V," said Van Looy.

Clockwise from left (standing): Philippe Geubels, Erik Van Looy, Lieven Scheire and Bruno Vanden Broecke of the new season of *De slimste mens ter wereld*



© SBSB

“

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

Sam (School President, BSB)

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The end of days

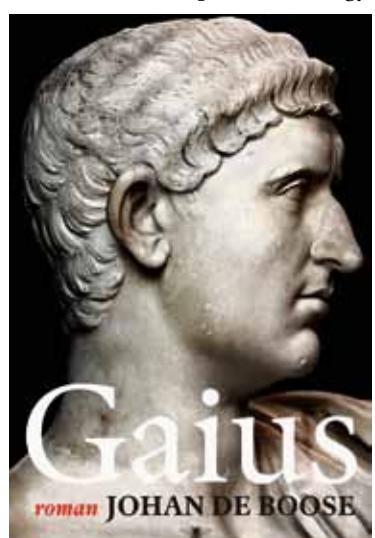
Johan de Boose returns with a challenging historical trilogy

Rebecca Benoot

By anyone's standards, Flemish author Johan de Boose (*pictured*) has an impressive body of work. His award-winning 2011 novel *Bloedgetuigen* (Blood Witness) is about collaboration in Eastern Europe during the Second World War. He's also penned various volumes of non-fiction stemming from his passion for Eastern Europe.

In 2011 the Slavic languages graduate was nominated for the Herman de Coninck Prize for poetry for his collection *Geheimen van Grzimek* (Secrets of Grzimek). De Boose, 51, doesn't just like to juggle several genres, he does it with aplomb.

De Boose's recently released novel *Gaius* is the first part of a trilogy,



called *Vloekhout* (Accursed Tree). "I've had this idea for several years now," he explains, "to write something about the moments in history when people thought that the end of days was upon us and how they dealt with it."

So he went in search of when these moments actually occurred and picked three: "the first century, when *Gaius* is set, the 14th century

and the 21st century." Part two will be out later this year, followed by part three early next year. *Gaius*, then, is set in the first century, the start of Christianity and the beginning of the demise of the Roman Empire. It's a period that fascinates the author. Hence his choice to call the trilogy *Vloekhout*, due to its Biblical reference.

Crucifixion

"*Vloekhout* is an Old Dutch word that refers to the wood that was used to crucify people," explains the Ghent-based author. "This piece of wood plays an important role in the trilogy. In the first part it is an actual piece of the cross that was used to crucify Jesus. It breaks off and it is found by Gaius, who thinks he can use it for one of his stage sets but ends up keeping it as a talisman. This wood fragment will play a vital role in each part of the trilogy. It sort of tells the entire history of Christianity."

During the first century, the title character builds sets for the theatre of Sepphoris, a town close to Nazareth. His speciality is building *deus ex machina* blocks that are rolled on to the stage at the end of tragedies to end all confusion.

One day Gaius is summoned by Emperor Nero and embarks on a tumultuous voyage from Bethlehem to Rome. There, he is enlisted to build sets for Nero's theatre as well as the torture devices for which Nero was famous. Gaius, though, falls into disgrace and flees to what is now Flanders – to a city that's now called Ennem, close to Oudenaarde.

In Ennem, Gaius stays with his friend, the weapons dealer Crapularius, to whom he tells his adventures. This is how the novel begins. Flashbacks of his numerous and often death-defying quests are alternated with his stay

© Koen Boose



at Crapularius' peculiar mansion, which has several skeletons in its closets.

Gaius is an ambitious and intricately constructed novel. As the first part of a trilogy, it sets the tone and pace and raises expectations: It's an eloquent endeavour full of philosophy, decadence and disaster. Bloody, witty and occasionally grotesque, *Gaius* is a picaresque novel that leads its readers through a labyrinth-like world occupied by an eclectic cast of (historical) characters.

"Everything I write has to be accurate," de Boose says. "I've also written a lot of non-fiction, so I'm quite accustomed to research. But when you're writing historical

fiction, you combine historical facts with your own ideas or image of a particular person, and sometimes they end up doing things that even surprise me as the writer. Things that might not be historically accurate, but they are correct in my imagination and my portrayal of them."

There are as many layers to the first part of the *Vloekhout* trilogy as there are characters. De Boose depicts the darker side of antiquity with such visual flair that you can almost smell the decay, emphasising the fleeting nature of not only human life but of one's ideals and beliefs. Theatrical and intoxicating, *Gaius* is an adventure that leads you deep into the belly of the beast.

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

He's only been king for about a month, but there is already a biography about to be published on Belgium's King Filip. The book will reportedly reveal all the facts of Filip's childhood, student years and fateful meeting with Queen Mathilda. The authors, journalists Barend Leyts and Brigitte Balfoort and contemporary history professor Mark Van den Wijngaert, all have previous experience publishing on the royals and will present the book at the BELvue Museum in Brussels on 4 September.

The World Soundtrack Awards in Ghent have announced the nominations in the three top categories for the 13th edition, which takes place in the city on 19 October during the International Film Festival of Flanders. Nominees for Best Composer of the Year are Mychael Danna (*Life of Pi*), Alexandre Desplat (*Argo*, *Rise of the Guardians*, *Zero Dark Thirty*), Danny Elfman (*Frankenweenie*, *Hitchcock*, *Silver Linings Playbook*), James Newton Hower (*After Earth*, *The Bourne Legacy*) and Thomas Newman (*Side Effects*, *Skyfall*). Canadian composer Danna is also among the nominations for Best Original Film Score of the Year and Best Original Song. The prolific French composer Desplat will be at the ceremony to hear fragments from his work played live by the Brussels Philharmonic. The public can vote for the Public's Choice award on the organisation's website.

► www.worldsoundtrackacademy.com

More than 1,000 fans lined up outside the Fnac store in the Brussels district of Elsene last Wednesday to get the autograph of the dance and hip-hop musician Stromae, who just released his second album, *Racine Carrée*. The popular Brussels singer, who has a Congolese father and a Flemish mother, also hit the headlines a few months ago when videos were released of him apparently roaming the streets drunk. He soon revealed they were shot for his new video "Formidable". All Stromae's upcoming concerts in Brussels and Antwerp are sold out, but he will play in Brussels on 27 September as part of the Festival of the French Community.

► www Stromae.net

After 11 solidly successful months in Ghent, including winning the Flemish entrepreneur reality show *Topstarters*, the owners of the **Wasbar** have opened a second location in Antwerp. The combo bar and laundrette has received much attention from the national and international press and won a Silver A' Design Award. The new location in Antwerp is on Graaf van Egmontstraat in the 't Zuid neighbourhood.

► www.wasbar.be

FRESH FICTION

De zomer van de neusbloedingen (The Summer of Nosebleeds)

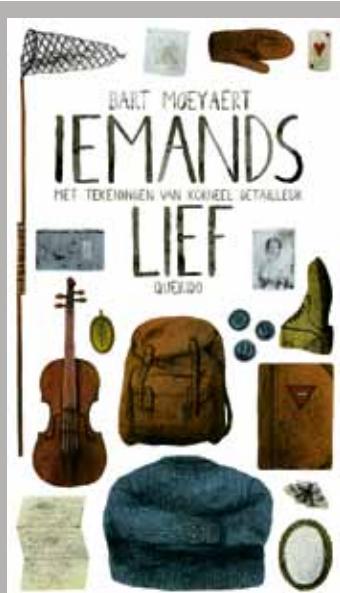
by Pjeroo Roobjee • Querido

That artist and author Pjeroo Roobjee has an uncanny vocabulary is no secret. Combining old, almost archaic Flemish words with the Ghent dialect, he has once again created a sumptuously rich and multi-layered novel both visually and linguistically. The deceptively simple story revolves around four couples who live in the same recently developed residential area. They drink, laugh and lust after each other, until one day lines are crossed and lives are changed.

Iemands lief (Somebody's love)

by Bart Moeyaert • Querido

In 2010, former Antwerp city



poet Bart Moeyaert and Dutch violinist Janine Jansen combined music and lyrics for *Iemands lief*, a musical production based on *L'histoire du soldat* by Igor

Stravinsky. Unable to let this story go, Moeyaert has taken the tale of a Russian soldier on leave who is conned into selling his one and only possession, a violin, to the devil, and turned it into a wonderfully poetic fairytale filled with passion, terror and an important life lesson. Once again, Moeyaert is proved to be a true wordsmith.

De verjaardag (The Birthday)

by Dimitri Casteleyn • Vrijdag

The main character in Theater Malpertuis director Dimitri Casteleyn's debut novel is a virologist who has a son with an illegal Congolese immigrant. As an experiment, he decides to raise the boy in the basement. It will be 16 years before Kaspar sees the light of day. After dabbling in poetry and children's fiction, Casteleyn has written

a thrilling – albeit harrowing – novel that questions the human condition and the essence of parenthood.

De verzamelde levens van Paula S (The Collected Lives of Paula S)

by Ingrid Verhelst • De Bezige Bij

In *De verzamelde levens van Paula S*, a psychiatrist meets a very troubled young woman. Captivated by her beauty and mystery, he sets out to discover who she was before she crossed his path. The story behind this mesmerising novel filled with poetry, sentiment and serenity is worthy of a novel in itself: Verhelst found a box filled with letters and notebooks on the front lawn of her house and started to put the pieces together. Six years later, she unravelled the real-life mystery.

A celebration of the magic of the cinema

Ostend Film Festival

Lisa Bradshaw

In its early years, the Ostend Film Festival staunchly chose celebs who hailed from the seaside city to act as the annual Master of Ceremonies, regardless of whether they were involved in the film industry. But now they – wisely – go for movie star power and have appointed Johan Heldenbergh as the face of the festival for this seventh edition. Visitors might be inclined to attach themselves to Heldenbergh's shooting star and fly over for some movies.

Heldenbergh has been a likeable stage, TV and film actor for quite some time but has never been so popular as he is now, with the release last year of *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, a film based on his own already über-popular stage play. He starred as an easy-going bluegrass singer in a heart-breaking story of loss that struck a chord with audiences inside and outside of Flanders.

Should you like to stargaze, the

46-year-old will host Meet & Greet at which he'll tell you about his play *Vorst*, which he based on one of his all-time favourite movies, *You, The Living*. You then see the fantastical 2007 film by Swedish director Roy Andersson.

You, The Living, is one of six films making up the Master Selection, chosen by Heldenbergh. They are a handful of his favourite films and suggest that – aside from westerns (this is the man who made Flanders' first western, *Schellebelle 1919*) – he has a penchant for quirky comedy. Both Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* and Hal Ashby's *Harold and Maude* also make the list.

Another chance to see the actor is during the closing film on 13 September, though we don't yet know what that will be. Scheduled to screen is the winner of Look!, the festival's new juried competition, with a focus on a film's visual flair.

As more and more consumers choose

to watch movies on their computers,



tablets and even smartphones, the Look! competition is the festival's way of reminding audiences that movies are really made for much bigger screens; they've programmed those with an expert and captivating use of photography.

One of the most talked-about is

upscale gated community. A darkly comic psychological thriller by Alex Van Warmerdam (*The Last Days of Emma Blank*), the film, also starring Flemish actor Jeroen Perceval (*Rundskop*), has impressed critics this year at festivals the world over. Another must-see in the competition is *Circles*, a multiple-award winner by Serbian director Srdan Golubovic (*The Trap*) that brings the Balkan war down to human size as five people struggle with the emotional fallout of an incident that changed all their lives 12 years earlier. The festival is also the host of the Ensors, the Flemish film awards. You can see several of the 2012 nominees, including Patricia Toye's atmospheric *Little Black Spiders*, which received the most nominations with 11; Peter Monsaert's debut feature *Offline*, nominated for best film and best director; and of course *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, with a number of nominations, including best film, best director and best script.

6-14 September | Kinepolis, Koningin Astridlaan 12, Ostend

► www.filmfestivaloostende.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Scottish Weekend

Alden Biesen Castle is where the Low Countries meets the Highlands. This scenic, 16th-century castle hosts this 28th edition of the Scottish Weekend, celebrating Scottish and Celtic culture. At the heart of said culture is music. Folk singers, bagpipes and organs are all on the programme; musical guests hail from Ireland and Scotland as well as the New World (see Canadian folk group Le Vent du Nord and American piper Issac Alderson). Some are even home-grown Celtophiles, like young Flemish folk-pop outfit Folgazán. If all this music stirs the laddie or lassie within, you're invited to join the Highland Dancing competition. Contestants face off all day on Saturday. Sunday is reserved for workshops and demonstrations. You know, for those who don't know an Irish Jig from a Scottish Lilt. Finally, you can don a kilt and a muscle shirt and take part in the Highland Games. Events include stone put, caber toss, barrel lift and the crowd favourite, team tug-of-war. **Georgio Valentino**



6-8 September | Alden Biesen, Bilzen | ► www.scottish-weekend.be

MORE EVENTS THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

Vlaanderen Zingt: Flanders-wide mass sing-along on public squares featuring popular songs in Dutch, French and English

Until SEP 7 across Flanders

► www.vlaanderenzingt.be

Ghent

Prinsenhoffeesten: Folky neighbourhood festival featuring a parade, flea market, barbecue, entertainment for kids and concerts by jazz and big bands

AUG 30-SEP 2 in Prinsenhof neighbourhood

► <http://users.telenet.be/dekenij>

Poperinge

Hophoogdag: September is hop harvesting month, which means Poperinge is abuzz with activities like bus tours to the fields and to St Bernardus Brewery for a taste of the local beers and a regional dish

SEP 5-7 across Poperinge

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

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Odegand

Ghent never looks prettier than when filled with lights, people and dozens of simultaneous concerts to bid summer goodbye and welcome the Festival of Flanders into town. Odegand, as it is called, is a joyous affair that takes over the city's venues, streets and canals for a full day and night every September and looks set to surpass itself this year to celebrate its 10th anniversary. Buy one pass and then make your own schedule of 45-minute concerts of classical and world music. Flamenco artist Adela Campallo, Brazilian singer Isaar França and Dutch cellist Pieter Wispelwey are a few of the artists rounded up for the occasion. Hop on a boat to get from one concert to the next, or just mingle with the crowd and soak up the party atmosphere on Graslei and Korenlei after dark.



14 September, from 13.30 | Across Ghent | ► www.odegand.be

MUSIC FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Ghent

123-Piano: Seven pianos, seven artists and seven locations throughout the city, aimed at bringing people together for spontaneous performances

Until SEP 28 across the city

► www.123-piano.be

Jazz in 't Park: 20th jubilee edition of the annual open-air jazz festival, featuring Too Noisy Fish, Mâák Septet, BRZZVLL, The Whodads, the Philip Catherine Trio and more

SEP 5-8 at Zuid Park

► www.gent.be/jazzintpark

Sint-Truiden

Country Festival: Concerts by top international bluegrass, Americana and country artists, plus a children's corner, food & drink stands and more

AUG 30-31 at Château de la Motte, Helshovenstraat 28

► www.countryfestival.be

CONCERT

Trixie Whitley

Trixie Whitley's is a Cinderella story. Legend has it that the then-unknown Flemish-American songstress timidly offered her first demo to big shot producer Daniel Lanois (whose credits include U2's hit album *Achtung Baby*) at a Belgian music festival and then went back to waiting tables in Brooklyn, hardly daring to hope for the phone call that (inevitably) followed. Pop biographies often demand a wilful suspension of disbelief. The rest of the story, however, is verifiable. Lanois recruited Whitley to sing in his Black Dub project, which toured throughout 2011. Now Whitley's gone solo with her debut album *Fourth Corner*. As both a member of Black Dub and a solo artist, the local-girl-done-good has been especially well received in her native Belgium. Indeed, her last headlining gig at Brussels' Ancienne Belgique was a sold-out affair. **GV**

GET TICKETS NOW

PERFORMANCE

Het Theaterfestival

Theatre-lovers rejoice, for we will shortly come out of the summer doldrums and head into the exciting, uncharted waters of 2013-2014. But before we do, the annual Theaterfestival looks back on the best that the previous season had to offer in Dutch-language theatre. A jury of culture and media professionals invite over a dozen of their favourite Flemish and Dutch productions of the past year to take a last bow. Think of it as an encore and opening act all in one. Among the selected pieces are Pieter De Buysser and Hans Op de Beeck's *Book Burning* and Abattoir Fermé's *A Brief History of Hell* (pictured). Tristero's Kristien De Proost reprises *Toestand*, a (nearly) one-woman show in which De Proost's character delivers an unflinching self-analysis in the mould of La Rochefoucauld and Lucien Freud. The festival is also introducing a youth jury and accompanying programme so the kids have their say, too. **GV**



© Sier Lemans

29 August to 7 September | Kaaithéater and Bronks, Brussels | www.theaterfestival.be

MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

Berlare (East Flanders)

The Wizard of Oz: Festivaria presents the magical musical for young and old, performed in an open-air theatre by the water (in Dutch)
Until SEP 7 21.00-23.00 at Donkmeer, Donklaan 125
www.festivaria.eu

Ghent

Theater in het Park: Open-air theatre festival for the whole family, plus guitar and acrobatics by Mas Tango and a closing dance party (performances in Dutch)
AUG 30 20.00 & AUG 31 from 15.30 at Rozebroeken Park, Duivenstaartstraat 1
www.rozebroeken.be/theater-in-t-park-2013

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Toon Lambrechts

De Witte Non

Bonnefantenstraat 26, Hasselt

Where to go if you want to hear a little Alice Cooper at the bar? De Witte Non (The White Nun) in Hasselt is definitely an option. The probability of some loud classic rock is quite high, in fact, because De Witte Non is a purebred metal and hard rock cafe.

"Not only metal, write that down," notes owner Wim Beckerts, pointedly. "Some weekends, even 1990s disco makes it to the turntable." Together with Jan Vangeneugden, he has been behind the bar and on the decks for two years now.

But the first time he was in the bar was as "a 16-year-old brat," he says. The bar still draws in a crowd of fun-loving 20- and 30-somethings.

Cocktails at De Witte Non have names like Rotte Appelsien (rotten orange) or Fuel for Hatred. Each cocktail has a number from 1 to 12; those who like to gamble can throw the dice for €3 and accept your poison. Being located in Hasselt, they also have – how could it be otherwise – a very wide range of jenever.

The posters on the wall reveal a busy programme. "Metal gigs of course, but also a monthly comedy evening, with both familiar names and new talent on stage. And more fun events, such as our air guitar contest."

De Witte Non has already seen quite a lot of generations of pub-loafers. It existed here in the first half of the century when pubs were usually named after the owners – in this case Anneke Djats. In the 1970s and '80s, Steve Stevaert (indeed, the politician) turned it into a student bar. Only in the last decade has De Witte Non become a full-blown metal bar.

But a metal bar that does not take itself too seriously: a good place, for instance, to sing along to your favourite Deep Purple song. With a little luck, you'll witness something bizarre. Strange traditions prevail here, Wim confides. "If I play the song 'Modern Dancing', everyone puts a bar stool on their head and starts to prance like a deer. Seriously."

www.dewittenon.be



© Toon Lambrechts

21 October, 20.00 | Ancienne Belgique, Brussels

www.abconcerts.be

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Braids: Canadian art rock/electronic band whose first album, *Native Speaker* (2011), received praise for its innovative melodies and singer Raphaelle Standell-Preston's dynamic vocals
SEP 6 19.30 at Botanique, Koningsstraat 236
www.botanique.be

Ghent

The Skatalites: Legendary Jamaican ska band from the 1960s, known for their mixture of boogie-woogie, jazz, calypso and African music
AUG 30 19.30 at DOK, Koopvaardijlaan 13
www.dokgent.be

Wachtebeke (East Flanders)

Guido Belcanto: Flemish folk-rock singer who excels with subjects like the red light district, sailor bars and plastic roses
AUG 31 20.30 at Domein Puyenbroeck, Puyenbrug 1a
www.puyenbroeck.be

© Guy Kokken

BITE

Brooderie ★★★☆

On a rare early morning in the centre of Ghent, I realise I have plenty to choose from when it comes to breakfast spots. Blessed by its favourable location in a high step-gabled house near the Gravensteen castle and the Design Museum, Brooderie attracts a lot of tourists. But this cosy niche on a pedestrian street does its best to remain humbly local. By serving quality local products, like Hinkelspel cheese and jam made by the residents of a nearby sheltered workplace for people with disabilities, Brooderie shows that it cares what it puts on your plate. Organic loaves of bread, for example, can also be found lining the racks of one wall, everything from raisin-nut to sunflower seed.

On the same wall are stacks of books and a selection of daily newspapers. Brooderie indeed offers the kind of ambience that makes you want to linger, with plenty of sunlight shining off the oak wood tables and chairs.

When my partner and I arrive at opening, around 8.00, the atmosphere much resembles that of a library: hushed and peaceful, as if we're all waiting for the first cup of coffee to kick in. Luckily it does, and in no time the place is filled with all the comfortably familiar sounds of a bustling café.

I order the breakfast and my partner the brunch, the only difference being that his comes with an extra coffee or tea, pastry and plate of smoked salmon. The rest includes a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice, coffee or tea, an overflowing basket of various types of bread and pastries, one boiled egg and a platter of cheeses and ham.

We quickly determine that everything on our filled table is fresh and of top-notch quality. The crisp, buttery croissants



© Robyn Boyle

are the best I've tasted in Flanders, while the shots of Lavazza coffee and cappuccino are strong and well pulled.

What I really appreciate are the details: mini pitchers of cream and steamed milk with the coffee, raspberry jam that's more tart than sweet, a dish of room-temperature butter for smearing on the bread, paper-thin slices of nutty, lightly smoked ham and three sorts of cheese.

My partner's smoked salmon adds a nice dimension to his brunch and comes with lettuce, cucumber, perfectly ripe tomatoes and a bit of corn and green onion. Our soft-boiled eggs have a bright yellow, runny yolk that's ideal for dipping. Brooderie serves lunch, as well, with a homemade soup on the menu every day, as well as sandwiches, quiches and lasagne.

Not wanting to leave quite yet, my partner orders another coffee while I finish off the airy chocolate-filled pastry, which almost rivals the croissant in its tastiness. Perhaps the best part is that all this goodness comes to just €30 altogether.

► www.brooderie.be

► Jan Breydelstraat 8, Ghent; 09.225.06.23

⌚ 8.00-18.00, Tue-Sun

€ Mains: €8-€14

ℹ Small, cosy café and B&B serving breakfast, lunch, bread and homemade pastries

TALKING DUTCH

The right way to zip

I can remember being a bit puzzled when I saw the headline for the first time. *Vlamingen ritzen verkeerd*, the Flemish zip the wrong way. That was back in 2011 when the word *ritsen* was beginning to appear on traffic signs. The signs, too, must have baffled a few drivers. They certainly baffled me as I drove down the motorway to Antwerp wondering why they were telling me to zip.

It turns out that *rits* has several meanings. It can mean that clever little fashion accessory that replaced buttons in the 19th century. But it can also mean a driving manoeuvre to permit the smooth flow of traffic during construction. If your lane ends, you are supposed to merge into the lane next to you like a smoothly functioning zipper.

Only we don't, according to Flemish transport minister Hilde Crevits. *Vlamingen ritzen verkeerd*

bij werkzaamheden, the Flemish zip the wrong way at roadworks, she told us. *De beste manier is doorrijden tot de wegversmalling*, the best way to zip is to drive on to the point where the road narrows – not to slip in early on, in other words.

Ah, but don't people think you are a pushy driver if you do that? Yes, they do, but they are wrong, says Hilde.

Now this might seem like an infinitely small detail compared to, say, driving the wrong way down the motorway, but Flemish member of parliament Jef Vandenbergh thinks it is time for some rules.

Ritsen is momenteel gebaseerd op hoffelijkheid, he writes on his website – zipping is currently based on good manners. *Maar volgens de huidige wegcode is ritzen foutief*, but zipping is in fact illegal under the current highway code.

But I thought Hilde said we were

doing it wrong, not that we mustn't do it at all! But Vandenbergh says it is clearly wrong. *Nu heeft de bestuurder op de vrije strook voorrang*, at present the driver on the main carriageway has priority. He argues that the law has to be changed. *Vroeger was diegene die ritste in de fout, nu zal degene die niet ritst in de fout zijn*, in the past, the person who zipped was in the wrong, but in future it will be the person who doesn't zip who will be in the wrong.

The newspapers turned this into a rather alarming headline: *Wie niet ritst, riskeert boete van 110 euro*, anyone who doesn't zip risks being fined €110.

We will have to wait until parliament returns in the autumn to see if the law is changed. In the meantime, we need to be extra careful on the roads because some drivers will be zipping and some will not, and some will be zipping in completely the wrong way.



Demonstrating both the right way and the wrong way to *ritsen*

Derek Blyth

The last word...

Different goals

"Cycle racing is an investment. Football is a hobby."

Omega Pharma CEO and cycle team sponsor Marc Coucke has invested €1 million in football club KV Oostende

Unmentionables

"We carry out research into bacteria in our living environment, and we've discovered that washing clothes at 30 degrees is not always advisable. Sometimes it's downright ill-advised. Especially for underwear."

Professor Nico Boon of Ghent University advises laundering some clothes at a minimum of 60 degrees

CD player

"There we stood, just a few metres away from the thieves; but the police could do nothing."

A couple from Dilbeek used software to track a stolen computer to the Polish Embassy in Brussels, but police are powerless to act under diplomatic immunity rules

First impressions

"Hello. Bonjour. Goedemorgen. Guten tag. My name's Denise Bauer." The new US ambassador to Belgium introduced herself with a video on YouTube

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts, which is known around the world as "the fashion academy" but is really much more, is about to turn 350 years old. What do you think the founders of 1663 would have made of Walter Van Beirendonck? We'll take you through the history of the cherished institution and highlight the best of its celebratory events of the next few months

News

Don't you love a good mystery? In the run-up to the centenary of the First World War, Poperinge's Talbot House, where soldiers enjoyed a little down time and recreation, is searching for a missing document. It's called the Round Robin and was signed by everyone present on a certain day. We'll tell you about the unique piece of history and where it was last seen

Tourism

Do you suppose that 25 years ago heritage workers would have believed you if you'd told them that Open Monument Day would become one of Flanders' most successful region-wide initiatives? We'll tell you what's hot in history for this jubilee edition