

Mooving into the future

New online platform Moovley make it possible to create your own ad animations

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Climate change before your eyes

The Flemish government unveils plans for a series of ecosystem chambers in Limburg



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Ready to run?

A new tourist company in Ghent asks you to lace up and get jogging to see the sights



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At your service

After a two-year delay, modern library and meeting place Muntplein is now open in Brussels

Andy Furniere

The road to the establishment of Muntplein has been full of obstacles, but now the Flemish Communications House is open, launched with a festive party last weekend on Brussels' Muntplein. At first glance, it appears to have been worth the wait.

Muntplein's festivities last weekend heralded the opening of a library where, as well as reading or studying, you can meet writers, attend concerts, take cooking workshops or experiment with city gardening.

Through intense co-operation with Dutch-language organisations, Muntplein also provides visitors with practical information on living, working and studying in the capital. Its impressive appearance belies the struggles related to establishing its headquarters on Muntplein, in the heart of the city. When B-architecten started work in January 2010, the opening was scheduled for November 2011, but infrastructural issues caused a delay of almost two years. Today, the investment of €22 million by the Flemish government and the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels has resulted in a lively meeting place, modern library and bustling eatery.

Finally, we get to see what we've been hearing about for the last four years.

A tower of books literally forms the axis of Muntplein, as a central rectangle of book shelves dominates each of the six floors. The floors, each decorated in a different colour, have separate themes revolving around youth, art, fiction, Brussels, science and media. Naturally, there are also plenty of CDs and DVDs to be borrowed. Gaming enthusiasts can immerse themselves in virtual worlds via three games consoles. All around the spaces are comfortable couches and chairs where you can sit and read. Toddlers are invited to their own

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FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

Bart Tommelein



Bart Tommelein has just been appointed the new fraction leader for the Open VLD liberals in the Flemish parliament, a sign, according to political analysts, that the party is ready to move up a gear in opposition as next May's elections approach.

Tommelein, 51, was born in Ostend and studied communications in Ghent before starting what would be a long career with Anhyp Bank (later bought by Axa Belgium). He became youth president of the nationalist party Volksunie, later sitting as a council member in Ostend and provincial chair for West Flanders.

After a four year break from politics while he built his professional career, he switched to Open VLD, joining the cabinet of Flemish minister-president Patrick Dewael. He also stood for election in Ostend in both the federal and Flemish parliaments. He was co-opted into the Senate in 2010.

Tommelein has always been thought of as combative. Like few others, too, he has learned how to use social media – in particular

Twitter – on the one hand to offer an image of an ordinary citizen devoted to his five kids, and on the other to fire off cutting one-liners aimed at his political opponents. And all of it, of course, delivered straight to the public, without the intervention of the media or, indeed, the gatekeepers of his own party.

Tommelein has experience leading his fraction in the federal parliament and the Senate but never in opposition – a quite different sort of job. At the Flemish level, he's in opposition with the Greens, with whom his party has little to share, and Vlaams Belang, who are in a years-long quarantine. The weight of the governing coalition is such that the opposition has had little success influencing anything.

Former fraction leader Sas Van Rouverij was more conciliatory, a seeker of compromise. Tommelein seems to be more the choice of a party that needs to prove its power if it doesn't want to lose more votes to the N-VA in the coming elections.

News in brief

The 25th anniversary edition of **Open Monument Day** last Sunday attracted some 470,000 visitors across Flanders, according to organiser Herita. Among the favourite attractions were the private residences of furniture designer Pieter De Bruyne in Aalst and architect Juliaan Lampens in Nazareth, East Flanders. Bruges and Antwerp were two favourite destinations, with 25,000 and 30,000 visitors respectively.

Environmental organisations in Brussels and Antwerp are holding "protest picnics" to complain about the **fine particulates in the air** in Flanders' cities, which are among the highest levels in the world. Belgians lose one year of active life on average because of particulate pollution, according to Bond Beter Leefmilieu.

Just over one in five candidates (22.5%) passed this year's exams for **admission to study dentistry** at Flemish universities. The overall figure, including the first exam in July, is 11.4% higher than last year. Record numbers of students are this year sitting exams to enter dentistry and other medical studies. A shortage of workers in these areas has led to a near 0% unemployment rate in the field.

Pedestrian crossings on Wetstraat between the inner ring road and the Schuman round-a-bout in Brussels are being **fitted with countdown lights**, said the region's mobility minister Brigitte Grouwels. The lights show the number of seconds remaining before pedestrians can cross, which leads to fewer instances of crossing against the light. The ministry is also considering installing the lights on the parallel Belliardstraat.

Delphine Boel, who claims to be the daughter of former king Albert II, has

dropped her lawsuit demanding DNA samples from King Filip and his sister, Princess Astrid. Boel is now **filing suit to have the former king himself provide** DNA to prove paternity, as he is no longer immune to court order. Last week a lawyer for the royal palace broke Albert II's silence on the matter, saying that he did not recognise Boel as his daughter. At the same time, the first of a two-part documentary aired in which Boel's mother, Sybille de Sels Longchamps, also says that Boel is the daughter of Albert II and gave details of her affair with the then prince, which she says lasted nearly 20 years.

The English-language **International School of Leuven** has started its first academic year. The primary school is a jointly operation by the university, the Flemish Institute of Biotechnology, nanotechnology research centre imec and the city of Leuven. The ISL currently has 14 pupils and four teachers.

The services of FAST, which intervenes in cases of road accidents to **clear away wreckage and re-open roads** as quickly as possible, will be increased, said mobility minister Hilde Crevits. Set up in 1997, the system currently covers the Antwerp ring, the A12 and a number of locations in Limburg and West Flanders. Other high-risk areas will be covered by the end of the year, said Crevits, as contracts are agreed with private tow-truck companies.

Police in Kortrijk have reopened the investigation into the **murder of Caroline Vyncke**, whose body was found in April 2011, two months after her disappearance. Her boyfriend confessed to killing her but was declared unfit to stand trial. Now new evidence, including a knife with traces of blood and

the victim's mobile phone, has been found in the home of another suspect at the time, neighbour Thomas C, who is currently in prison on unrelated charges.

The cleaning services of the city of Brussels will now **remove graffiti from façades of houses** free of charge. Cleaning was previously free only for first occurrences unless occupants showed their façades had been treated with anti-graffiti preparations.

The Arboretum College in Kraainem, a secondary school that planned to give lessons in Dutch, French and English, has had to **postpone its opening for another year** because of administrative problems, management said. The planned opening in 2012 was postponed because of low enrolment numbers. Lessons for first-year pupils, 15 of whom are already enrolled, will begin next September.

The Ghent public prosecutor is considering **legal action against five members of the medical staff** of the city's university hospital involved in an incident in 2011 in which a 14-year-old girl died after a feeding tube was inserted into her airway instead of her oesophagus. The family filed a complaint at the time, and the investigation is now nearly complete. A court will rule in October on whether there will be trial proceedings.

Three men appeared in a Brussels court last week, **accused of the shooting deaths** of a family of three in their home in Wemmel in 2010. The men had gone into the house to steal the keys to the family's two cars. The case will be heard by a jury and is expected to last three weeks.

FLANDERS TODAY

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



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

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Bags of fun

The saga of the seabirds plaguing our North Sea resorts continues. Offside readers will recall previous reports about aggressive seagulls that attacked railway workers in Zeebrugge, sending one man to the emergency room. Local councils along the coast started coming up with ideas to rid themselves of the nuisance, like mooring bins of food offshore to lure the gulls away, scaring them using hawk-shaped kites or fitting a fake fox to a remote-controlled car.

Zeebrugge's neighbours, Knokke-Heist and Blankenberge, joined in the chorus begging to be allowed to take measures against the birds, which are a protected species (several protected species, in fact) but which were frankly getting on the nerves of the tourist industry.



Ostend even tried the food-bins idea, but it turns out that gulls are not gullible: The fine weather this summer brought untold numbers of tourists to the coast, packing

sandwiches for the beach or filling up on *visschotel* and *wafels* at the seafront restaurants. How much more lucrative, from the gulls' point of view, to feast on the leavings of tourists than to settle for whatever old rubbish they've used to stock the offshore bins.

Last week, Blankenberge mayor Patrick De Klerck announced the latest innovation: gull-proof bin-bags. The bag is made of layers of plastic laid across each other in different directions, which makes it impossible for a gull to pierce a hole large enough to get at the rubbish. The city will begin with some test-bags to see how the gulls react before rolling out the system to the whole town and, no doubt, the rest of the coast. Still, something tells us that this story is not yet over. More seagull news as it comes in.

At your service

Muntpunt provides a single contact point for the Flemish community in Brussels

► continued from page 1

room with toys and cuddly animals, where storytellers will read passages from children's books. For students, there is a special study room with 90 seats and 60 computers, closed off from the rest of the library by a wall made of glass.

The study room is the only place where silence is required. In the rest of the building, chatting and working together is very much encouraged during the numerous activities taking place in this library of experiences. A large event will be the Lezersfeest, or Readers Festival, on 19 October, with activities for a broad public of book enthusiasts: workshops, author meet & greets, readings and debates. The first confirmed guest is arguably Flanders' most famous

they interview in turn. A little more interactive for visitors to the salon is the monthly games night.

The auditorium, meanwhile, serves as a cinema every Thursday, when you can watch a documentary there for free. Anyone who's up for a literary party is invited to "books & beats" after work or school, one Friday evening per month. On 20 September, TV journalist Lieven Verstraete will fill the library with his southern vibes and rhythms as his alter ego DJ Satanic Samba. More intimate are the acoustic performances of both local and international talent, organised twice a month with Brussels' cultural associations. During the monthly "playlist" events, Brussels' music experts, like AB artistic

"Our concept is unique in being both a modern library and a comprehensive guide to life in the city"

author, Tom Lanoye, who will take the opportunity to talk about his new novel *Gelukkige slaven* (Happy Slaves).

But there will be all sorts of activities all year round. One of the hotspots in Muntpunt is the literary salon – a name that only partly covers its purpose. This autumn, it will play host to book presentations and interviews with well-known writers, but literature doesn't always take centre stage.

The salon also hosts diverse workshops on topics such as city gardening, beer tasting and foreign languages. For the *Chou de Bruxelles* (Brussels Sprout) programme, notable *Brusselaars* first discuss their life and work during an interview session and then invite the next guest who

director Kurt Overbergh, offer tips on what you shouldn't miss in the following weeks.

There is also room for urban art. Young people are welcome in the creative laboratory where they can reflect on life in the city through storytelling, poetry, slam, rap, music and graffiti. During the first workshops of the Listen Up! programme in October, led by the artist Mr Leenknecht, youngsters can experiment with graffiti and poetry as a form of artistic rebellion. Muntpunt also offers three other lab projects, of which the most remarkable takes place in the Bokaal (Jar), a small room surrounded by glass walls and dedicated to exhibitions and pop-up workshops. The first artist to set up shop in the glass cage is Brussels illustrator Tom



Muntpunt is more than just a library – it's a place for old and young to meet, chat, study and discover

Schamp. For eight weeks, visitors can follow the gradual creation of his new book *HochHausBuch*, which includes designs of apartment buildings. Schamp will challenge visitors to put together their own designs with paper and cardboard boxes, communicating with them via an intercom.

To make sure the events of Muntpunt and its partner organisations are

adapted to the needs of Brussels' youth, they have established a think tank made up of local young people. Last Saturday night, second-year students in Dutch-language secondary school tried out the whole library and devised ideal events to be held there. This is the first of a series of similar activities to be held throughout the year.

Muntpunt is assembling a digital

portrait of the capital on a website called "Brussel is... 1,000 lives, one city!". Via social media tools such as YouTube videos and Instagram images, a diverse community of *Brusselaars* are writing their personal pages in an online book about everyday life in their home town. You can upload your own contribution at www.brusselis.be.

Fighting illiteracy

Muntpunt will also continue its battle against illiteracy by co-operating with associations that send out storytellers to people's homes. In June, Muntpunt won the Flemish Community Prize for Local Cultural Policy with its "I Book You" project, an innovative approach to not just raising awareness about illiteracy but getting those with low literacy involved in reading.

The team first organised the exhibition *100 Book Covers To Fight Illiteracy*, which was displayed outside on the glass windows of the library. International artists had adapted the covers of the books on *The Observer's* famous 2003 list of "The 100 Greatest Novels of All Time". For the follow-up I Book You Junior project, Dutch-language schools in Brussels were encouraged to organise a book reading in their classes, with pupils then given the opportunity to draw a cover for the book.

Muntpunt's communication is primarily in Dutch, but it also caters to English speakers. A majority of the library's books are in Dutch, but it holds nearly 20,000 titles in English and thousands more in 55 other languages, including French, German, Spanish and Italian. From next year, a language icon on the website will indicate how much Dutch-language knowledge you need to participate comfortably in activities.

WHY MUNTPUNT?

The idea for Muntpunt dates back to 2006, when the government of Flanders and the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels decided to combine their information and promotion efforts into one Flemish Communications House.

"Muntpunt in practice unites the services of the former Metropolitan Public Library and the organisation Reception and Promotion Brussels," explains Ann Steenwinckel, the project's co-ordinator in the Flemish government.

The goal was to improve both the reputation of the capital with the Flemish and the visibility of Dutch-language services. Brussels is the capital of Flanders as well as being the capital of Belgium, but, says Steenwinckel, "many Flemings – even commuters – never find their way in Brussels because they are not aware that there are many services and activities offered in their native



Your city guides: the staff of Muntpunt

language. This communication problem caused a great deal of frustration among the politicians who spent a lot of time and effort in setting up or supporting these initiatives."

Steenwinckel went abroad to search for inspiration, including in the Netherlands and the UK, but she says that she didn't find a clear example to copy. Muntpunt "is unique in being both a modern library and a comprehensive guide to life in the city," she says. "The staff can, for example, show visitors the best way to search for health-care services, cultural activities, a job or a house in Brussels."

To fulfil this role, Muntpunt has set up a network of the previously fragmented Dutch-language organisations in the city. "Our team doesn't take over their core business but provides them with an infrastructure for activities and increases the impact of their

communication and promotion campaigns," explains Steenwinckel. "Muntpunt needs to operate as a junction, where different information streams come together and are made accessible to anyone who is interested."

Muntpunt also offers internships to students at the House of Dutch, which provides Dutch-language courses, so they can fine-tune their language skills in a professional environment. Another organisation with which Muntpunt closely collaborates is the House for Health, which helps Flemings find health-care providers who speak Dutch.

The government of Flanders and the Flemish Community Commission provide Muntpunt with a general budget of about €4.9 million a year, with additional funding for employment of the staff and the running of the building.

New stadium OK with Flanders

Memorial Van Damme could go ahead in existing venue

Alan Hope

The government of Flanders will not attempt to block progress on a new national football stadium, said minister-president Kris Peeters last week, responding to newspaper reports that said he was holding up an as-yet-unannounced agreement involving Belgian football union KBVB, Brussels minister-president Rudi Vervoort and prime minister Elio Di Rupo.

The new stadium on what is now Parking C of the Heizel complex has been proposed by the Brussels-Capital Region, but the land lies in the bordering Grimbergen, part of Flemish Brabant. Brussels wants to solidify the plans in order to bid to host the European Championships in 2020, which must be submitted this week.



"All parties want the solution involving an athletics track, movable stands and no roof to be examined for its economic viability," Peeters said. "All

governments now need to discuss this proposal, and there was no question of signing any agreement at this stage." Anderlecht football club, which

might be interested in moving into the new stadium, also wants to carry out a feasibility study, Peeters said. Brussels minister Guy Vanhengel said the existing Koning Boudewijn stadium would not be demolished until a solution had been reached for the Memorial Van Damme, the country's most important athletics event, which took place in Brussels last week. Proponents of the new stadium have no plans to include a track for cost reasons, which has created division over the project. Wilfried Meert, organiser of the Van Damme, said he was in favour of allowing the Koning Boudewijn stadium to remain for athletics events and other sports, while the new stadium is devoted entirely to football.

Children shouldn't cycle alone, expert says

Children under the age of 12 should not cycle alone to school on major roads without adult supervision, according to road traffic specialist Stijn Daniels of the University of Hasselt.

Last year 2,103 children were involved in traffic accidents in Flanders, in most cases while on their way to and from school. Last week as school started, three children were injured in accidents, two while cycling in Lier and Heverlee and one while crossing the road after getting off a school bus in Meise. According to Daniels, children under the age of 12 lack the ability to correctly judge distances and speeds of other vehicles, as well as the insight to know whether a driver has seen them. His advice was backed up by the cycling organisation Fietsersbond. "Cycle along with your children, point out to them

the possible dangers and don't always go for the shortest route," said a spokesperson. The Flemish Youth Council, however, said removing children from the roads would only increase the danger for other cyclists. "The real work for road safety isn't done by removing children from the roads but by making schools more safely accessible for children," said chair Lander Piccart. "What is needed are more car-free zones around schools and better cycle links." Education minister Pascal Smet and mobility minister Hilde Crevits, meanwhile, have proposed a plan to increase the number of primary schools taking part in cycling tests. The government is not in favour of making adult supervision for school-going children legally obligatory, Crevits said.

Mega-prison with a humane face

The new prison planned for the Haren neighbourhood in the north of Brussels will be a "prison village" with a "humane face", according to secretary of state Servais Verherstraeten, announcing the plans last week. The complex, which will house 1,900 inmates and begin operating in 2017, will include a courthouse, a workshop, visiting rooms, a hospital and offices for staff. There will be three men's prisons, two for women, a youth detention wing and a section for those under psychiatric internment. The new prison, the largest in the country, will replace outdated buildings at Vorst and Sint-Gillis and the women's prison at Berkendael, as well as providing more capacity for the overcrowded prison system.

The complex is the subject of opposition from local people for the amount of open land it will take up and the cumulative effect with other on-going projects, including social housing and new premises for Nato. Verherstraeten pointed out that the architects had made creative use of the area's varying terrain to provide local residents and the prison's inmates with "a variety of views". Construction work is due to begin in 2015, and the complex will cost an estimated €331 million.



THE WEEK IN FIGURES

€18 million

approved by the education and environment ministers to help finance the cleaning up of school grounds, such as leaking heating fuel tanks. About 90 of Flanders' 6,400 schools are thought to require urgent attention

12cm

in height gained by the average Flemish man in the last 100 years, going from 169cm to 181cm, according to research by the VUB. Women grew from 159cm to 167cm

1,326

children got lost at the Flemish coast this summer, according to the lifeguard service. Blankenberge saw the largest number of cases, with 188 in July and 118 in August

€210 million

approved by the Flemish environment ministry for 117 sewer projects in 2014. The work is required to improve river water quality and to meet EU targets

50c

charge imposed by the city of Mechelen for children who bring lunch to eat at school rather than go home for lunch

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Growing pains

Is Turnhout ungovernable, yes or no? The city council voted on a rather unusual topic recently. And the surprising answer was: Yes, Turnhout is ungovernable. The city government no longer has a majority.

The vote came after months of bickering within the local N-VA. With 11 of the 35 seats on the city council, N-VA was the clear winner of the 2012 local elections, and Erwin Brentjens became mayor. Shortly after, he was contested from within his own ranks. A number of N-VA councillors believe that Brentjens and alderman Willy Van Geert are not fit for their positions and have reminded them of an internal agreement to step down in case of a negative evaluation.

The power struggle in the city in Antwerp province remained largely behind closed doors (though the national N-VA leadership sent over a mediator), until the recent vote exposed the internal divisions. Now even CNN is moving in to see what exactly is happening in Turnhout. No less than six of the 11 N-VA council members voted against the mayor, accusing him of putting his own ambitions before the town's interest.

Well-known novelist Walter van den Broeck, a Turnhout local, describes the situation as a "laboratory for Flemish politics". N-VA has grown so much in recent years that plenty of the politically inexperienced as well as fortune seekers are being elected as its representatives. In other words: Turnout's small-town politics may be symptomatic of what awaits other municipalities. Already another N-VA rift has come to light in the Brussels commune of Anderlecht.

No wonder N-VA's national leadership is annoyed by the situation and wants it ended as soon as possible. In a swift reaction, it has kicked out all of the Turnhout "mutineers", reducing the local N-VA fraction to less than half its size. Not surprisingly, they were infuriated. "We are not the dissidents, the mayor and his alderman are," they said. They also accuse N-VA of "Eastern European" policies, with no freedom of speech.

To make matters worse, the minister responsible for Flanders' local governments is Geert Bourgeois, founder of the N-VA and a staunch defender of "good governance" – something that Turnhout definitely has been in need of since N-VA came to power. Bourgeois has asked Antwerp province's governor, Cathy Berx, to mediate. If no solution can be found, a new coalition will replace the doomed N-VA/SP.A/CD&V coalition.

An animated world

Online tool reduces the technical complexity and cost of developing multimedia designs

Andy Furniere

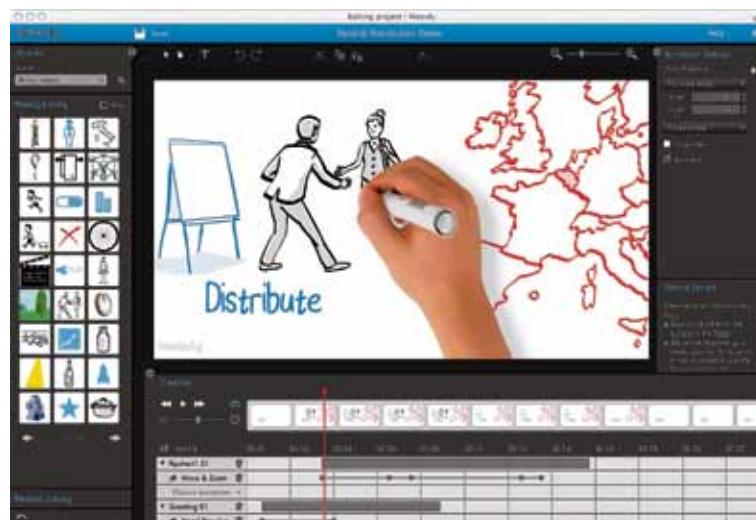
Presentations everywhere are about to become a lot more lively, if the entrepreneurs who developed Moovly have anything to say about it. This online instrument should make the creation of multimedia designs like animated presentations, videos, advertisements, infographics, video clips and e-cards as easy as filling in PowerPoint slides. The entrepreneurs, based in Machelen, just next to Zaventem, aim to reach the business and marketing sectors but also teachers and the everyday internet user.

The idea for the application was born during brainstorming sessions at Instruxion, the Brussels-based digital communication bureau led by Moovly co-founder Geert Coppens. Instruxion makes animation videos for customers such as KBC bank and the Flemish public broadcaster VRT. The major focus was simplifying the process of modifying animations when the featured product, service or application has changed.

Together with experienced entrepreneur Brendon Grunewald, Coppens decided to establish a



Moovly CEO Brendon Grunewald



Machelen-based Moovly puts easier animations at everyone's fingertips

separate company to explore the various opportunities that Moovly offered. The co-founders hired Ghent creative studio Dreams & Creations and asked 17 of Instruxion's clients to test the technology of the new tool.

When logging in to Moovly, you gain access to a large library of multimedia objects that you can assemble to create new animated content directly on the platform. In a few relatively simple steps, users without much technical knowledge can add texts, movements, special effects and sounds – like your own voice.

As an example: You can quite easily synchronise a spinning globe and a person walking in a video, to convey the image of travelling around the world.

There will always be a free, basic

version available on the website, so that everyone can become an animator. There are a wide variety of possibilities to use Moovly, for both private and business users. You could use it to create

"Teachers can, for example, apply the tool to explain complex concepts such as vectors with easily accessible movies"

animated e-cards for events such as birthdays, original messages for friends on social media or dynamic presentations. "We want to democratise the development of animated movies," explains Coppens.

If you want the Plus version, you pay \$9.95 (€7.55) a month, which

provides a larger catalogue of objects and more storage space. Plus users can also upload video fragments and avoid the Moovly trailer included in the free projects. The Business version includes a customised library with objects and fonts in line with the company's graphic guidelines. The price for that still has to be set.

To make complex flash animations, you still need the assistance of graphic designers, but Moovly makes it possible to upload them and adjust them to your needs. External multimedia specialists can also advertise themselves on Moovly's Marketplace, where they can offer their animated objects, templates, sounds and services.

Important target groups are advertising and PR bureaus, internet marketers, web designers and multimedia creators. Moovly should help them to answer the growing demand of customers for animated content in company

with Moovly can be useful to spice up presentations and meetings, while it could also be a practical tool to reduce the costs of internal communication, e-learning or tutorials.

Another potential market is the education sector, where the increasing use of electronic equipment has stimulated the interest in animated presentations as didactic instruments. Animations can assist teachers in illustrating their lessons with dynamic images. "Teachers can, for example, apply the tool to explain complex concepts such as vectors with easily accessible movies," says Coppens. For higher education students, meanwhile, Moovly could provide a method to make presentations of higher quality.

CEO Grunewald, who has South African roots, envisions a global future for Moovly. He hopes to open a sales and marketing office in the US in the near future, to be commercially competitive with other online instruments such as Prezi. For the moment, Moovly has assembled a budget of about €600,000 through investments by business angels like Jan Vorstermans, former operations director of Telenet.

The team is also planning the development of a mobile application for smartphones and tablets. The app will enable users to make a movie with their smartphone and directly upload it to Moovly, where they can add animations and texts.

► www.moovly.com

Competitive proposals expected this year

Peeters looks for concrete action, while Belgium's competitiveness ranking holds steady

Alan Hope

The federal government should present concrete proposals before the end of the year to realise the competitiveness pact proposed a few months ago, Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters said last week, speaking to the Flemish chamber of commerce Voka as the political world returned to work after the summer recess. "The Flemish government has already laid several concrete proposals on the table regarding incentives via corporation tax," he said, "proposals that bring salary costs and, in particular, the employers' contribution to social security down to a more acceptable level."

According to Peeters, waiting until after next May's elections – when both the federal and Flemish governments will have a new configuration – is not a solution. "It's time for action," he said. "Not next year and not under the next government. We need to get to work this autumn. I expect a positive response from the other governments."

Meanwhile, Belgium has maintained its place at number 17 on a list of 144 countries ranked according to their global competitiveness. The list is compiled by the World Economic

Forum from information collected from more than 13,000 business managers by national partners of the WEF – in Belgium's case, by Vlerick Business School.

Belgium's highest-ever spot on the list was number 15 in 2011, and the lowest was number 20 in 2007. According to Vlerick professor Leo Sleuwaegen, the country has always occupied the same narrow band of places since the criteria for the list were changed in 2006 to take more of a long-term view of growth prospects.

Belgium's border countries had differing fortunes. Germany rose from sixth to fourth place to land behind leaders Switzerland, Singapore and Finland. The Netherlands fell from fifth to eighth, and the UK from eighth to 10th. Luxembourg stayed steady at 22, while France fell from 21 to 23.

"The Global Competitiveness Report defines the long-run capacity for growth of a country," explained professor Sleuwaegen. "Belgium has maintained its 17th position in the global ranking, but the growing gap with Germany, our main trading partner, has become a point of serious concern."

A country's competitiveness is determined



"It's time for action": Kris Peeters, pictured on this week's economic visit to China

by a wide range of indicators. Belgium scored highly on health care and primary education (third in the world) as well as higher education and training, the sophistication of the business climate, the efficiency of the goods market and both number and quality of local suppliers.

Belgium lost points because of its restrictive labour market regulations, punitive tax rates, the lack of financial market development and the inefficiency of government bureaucracy – all concerns that have long been stressed by business and industry.

"Belgium has markedly moved downwards for the pillars macro-economic environment and labour market efficiency, two pillars that also in the past pushed us down in the ranking," Sleuwaegen said. "Heavy government involvement, the effect of taxation on incentives to work and the lack of flexibility in hiring and firing practices continue to appear as the most problematic factors. From the positive side, progress has been made regarding institutions, infrastructure and technological readiness."

► www.tinyurl.com/globalcompreport

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS

Chemicals ▶ Solvay

The Brussels-based chemicals and plastics group is building a 300,000-tonne-a-year hydrogen peroxide production unit – on of the largest in the world – in Saudi Arabia. The investment of more than €100 million is a joint venture with the country's Sadara chemical company.

Diamonds ▶ Omega

The Antwerp-based diamond dealer, embroiled in a massive tax evasion and fraud case, is being sued for a further €2.6 billion and is also facing a fine of €2 billion from the customs department for illegal trade of stones from Angola. Omega has already paid €160 million to tax authorities.

Energy ▶ Exmar

The Antwerp-based gas transport and processing company is building a €350 million liquefying gas terminal in Kitimat, British Columbia, on Canada's west coast. The company is already developing a similar project in Colombia.

Food ▶ Kellogg

The US-based breakfast food producer inaugurated a new research facility last week in Leuven in partnership with the city's university. The facility, one of nine R&D centres worldwide, is expected to employ some 20 scientists.

Mail ▶ bpost

Belgium's national post office is building a new sorting centre in Brussels. The facility, expected to start operation in 2016, will employ some 1,500 workers.

Supermarkets

▶ Picard

The French frozen food retailer inaugurated its first outlet in Flanders last week, in Brasschaat, Antwerp province. The chain, which already operates seven stores in the Brussels area, has plans to open outlets in Antwerp, Mortsel and Bruges.

Textiles ▶ Picanol

The world-leading textile looms producer, located in Ypres, is investing €5.5 million in new equipment to increase production capacity, following a 39% growth of its activities in the first half of this year.

Transport ▶ Van Hool

The Lier-based bus manufacturer has won a €26 million contract to supply 119 new A330 buses for Wallonia's public transport authority TEC for delivery in 2014 and 2015. The company hopes to secure a further tender of 76 buses, worth €22 million, later this year.

Government funds child-friendly projects

As the birth rate goes up, more infrastructure for children is needed

Alan Hope

The Flemish government's minister for cities, Freya Van den Bossche, last week announced funding totalling €220,000 for nine child-friendly urban projects.

"We've seen in recent years that various Flemish cities are getting spectacularly younger, certainly the major cities like Antwerp and Ghent, but also Mechelen, Hasselt, Kortrijk and Roeselare," Van den Bossche said. "The number of children is just going to go on getting bigger in the coming years, according to forecasts. Birth rates are up, and, unlike in past decades, more and more young people are making a conscious choice to remain in the city once they've had children. Those children are the future of the city."

The nine projects subsidised are:

- Housing for families with children within the ring around the historic centre of Antwerp, together with a participation project that collects the views of young people on urban development – €26,530
- The Kanaal design laboratory in the Brussels district of Molenbeek invites designers and local organisations to plot out a future for
- A project built around the principle



© iStockphoto

this part of the city, beginning with a design competition on the theme of play infrastructure – €24,310

- A project around communal vegetable gardens in the Antwerp district of Berchem, home to one of the highest population densities in the region and very little green. The project also includes play areas for children – €26,530
- Teenagers are the focus of the Tampico site project in the Luchtbal area of Antwerp, which offers them

a space to exercise their creativity. Part of the work involves the construction of temporary premises, as the permanent youth centre for the area is not yet completed – €26,530

• The boat Overmorgen was fixed up 20 years ago by local young people in Turnhout and has been used since then for youth weekend trips. Now the local youth centre wants to install the boat in the courtyard, to provide a safe haven for creative thought and experimentation – €26,530

• Cycling to school is fairly common throughout Flanders, but for children with a handicap it's not so simple. Hence the cycle-bus in Leuven – €20,760

• A project to promote cycling in Ghent to children aged three months to 12 years, with a bike-sharing scheme – €24,830

• Villa Basta in Hasselt is a project for children in the sixth year of primary school to develop a sense of co-operation and civic responsibility, with its activities publicised on BastaTV and the project's blog – all of which are run and edited by the children – €17,680

Lieten unveils KlimOp loans for Limburg

Government investments minister Ingrid Lieten (*pictured*) last week announced the creation of a new credit facility to aid business reconversion in Limburg province after the closure of Ford Genk, due to take place at the end of next year. The KlimOp loan – the name refers to the Dutch word for the climbing plant ivy – is a subordinated debt administered by the regional investment agency LRM and is intended to ease the access of start-up companies to venture capital. Loans range from €50,000 to €250,000, running for seven years at a fixed interest rate of 4%, dropping to 3% if a company succeeds in creating a minimum of five new jobs.

The KlimOp loan will involve a simplified evaluation procedure and criteria. "I'm always hearing complaints from business owners about the reticence of banks in allowing credit," Lieten said. "Nevertheless rapid finance for enterprise projects is fundamentally important for a healthy economic environment. With these KlimOp loans, Limburg's businesses will find a concrete solution to their problems. Businesses who use the loans to create new jobs can count on additional support. This launch demonstrates how we have given the LRM a central role in the government's Limburg plan."

Coastal tax on second homes illegal, says appeal court

A tax imposed by three coastal cities on second homes could be under threat after a ruling by the appeal court in Ghent that the tax is in conflict with the basic principle of equality under the law. The court was ruling on a case brought against Koksijde (*photo*), which charges non-residents a tax on residential properties that it does not charge residents. A similar scheme operates in De Panne and Knokke. According to the court of appeal, the tax is in breach of the principle of equality, as it does not apply equally to all property owners. Some 350,000 families in Belgium have a second home, 85,000 of them at the coast. Koksijde will fight the ruling all the way to the Cassation Court, the town's mayor Marc Vanden Bussche said. However, since the Cassation Court only rules on questions of legal procedure, it would take an action before the Council of State to have the tax rules struck down definitively.

Unemployment highest in seven years

Unemployment in Flanders in August reached 8.13%, the first time the jobless figures in the region have topped 8% since September of 2006, before the start of the global economic crisis.

At the end of August, labour minister Philippe Muyters announced, the number of unemployed was 241,292, an increase of 7.6% on the same period last year. Male unemployment, he said, was gradually increasing: Before the crisis, women formed the majority of the unemployed, but the figure for men has now reached 52.2%.

The high figure for August is not in itself unusual. The month's figure is typically inflated by the arrival of school graduates on the unemployment registers for the first time.

Meanwhile, a study by the federal employment ministry and the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight Against Racism has shown that employees of non-European immigrant background have more chance of being made redundant, are paid less and have less advantageous work contracts. The employment rate among native Belgians, the study shows, is around 74%. For immigrants from outside the EU, that figure drops to 35%. For women from non-EU countries who have been in Belgium for less than five years, the employment rate plummets to 18%.

Difference of views over executive pay-offs

The question of CEO severance bonuses hit the headlines again last week, as Jannie Haek, former CEO of the rail authority NMBS Holding and new CEO of the National Lottery, announced that he would forego the severance bonus to which he is entitled on quitting his former position, worth €750,000. "I would never have been able to justify that [payment] to myself, my family or the people around me," he said. Another top executive had other views. Jean-Claude Tintin was chief

executive of Belgocontrol, the air traffic control agency in charge of Belgium's airspace. Tintin was unsuccessful in his bid to have his term of office prolonged, and he will be replaced by Johan Decuyper, until now chief of staff at the federal ministry for the civil service.

Haek's contract specifies the payoff amount he has decided not to take; Tintin's does not, but he is claiming €530,000 based on his 15 years of service in the job.

Life under a dome

From ecosystem chambers in Limburg, scientists will witness the consequences of climate change

Andy Furniere

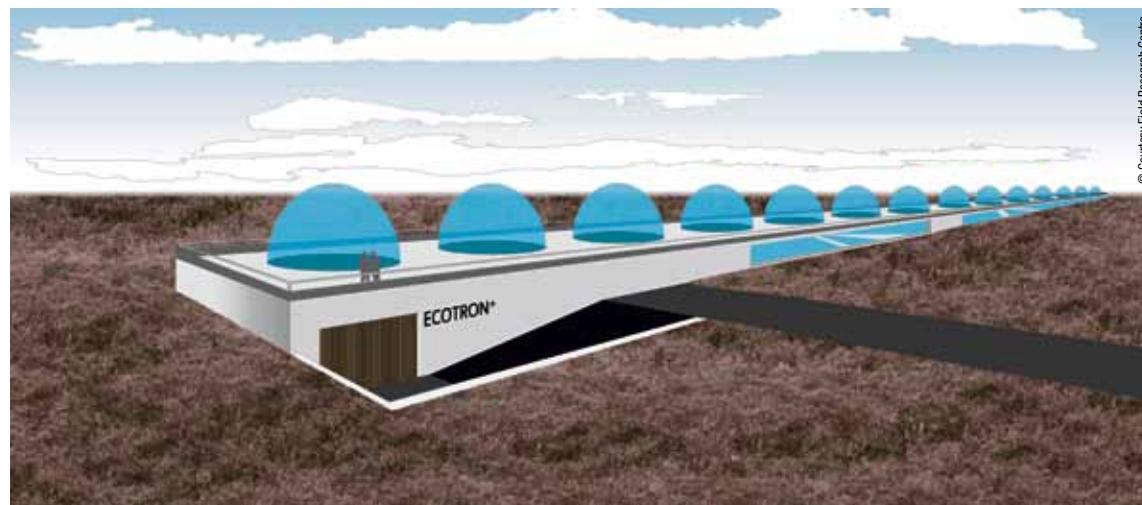
The Hoge Kempen is Belgium's only national park and so extremely well known for its natural beauty. But soon multiple ecosystems are going to pop up in the park – and all inside.

Construction has started on Ecotron+, a series of unique ecosystem chambers that allow scientists to perform environmental and climate research. The new infrastructure should attract interest within the international scientific community to Flanders. The Ecotron+ project is the next step in the development of the Field Research Centre of the park and Hasselt University (UHasselt). This centre is also part of Limburg's sustainable tourism strategy.

Workers have already started erecting an ecosystem measuring tower at the park's main gateway. This tower, called Connecterra and about five metres high, will collect data on the relationship between the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and the biodiversity of the heathland. At the end of next year, Connecterra should be connected to the 12 ecosystem chambers of the Ecotron+ project. Together with labs and offices for researchers, this infrastructure will make up the prestigious Field Research Centre.

Via the Flemish government's Hercules Foundation, minister for innovation Ingrid Lieten is contributing €3.2 million to the establishment of Ecotron+, which will cost around €5 million in total. The rest of the funding comes from UHasselt and Limburg Sterk Merk, a foundation that supports economic development projects in the province.

The ambitions are high. "We may not have a tropical rainforest or a coral reef in Flanders, but we can create top facilities that have an international impact," says project co-ordinator Natalie Beenaerts of UHasselt's Centre for Environmental



Ecotron+ will consist of domed chambers, each with its own environmental conditions

Sciences. Beenaerts is negotiating with several universities from abroad that are interested in using the new installations for research projects.

There actually are many forms of ecotrons, a name that refers to any unit designed for ecosystem research under confined, controlled environmental conditions. What makes the chambers of Ecotron+ especially innovative is that their domes, which are made of a transparent Teflon material, let in daylight. The French city of Montpellier is the only other place to have a similar installation.

Monoliths of heathland ground, dug out at the park, will be installed inside the chambers, about five metres wide. The blocks of soil are put in lysimeters, vessels that enable researchers to measure the rate of downward water movement and collect this water for analyses. The purpose is to use each of the 12 chambers simultaneously for the same experiment over a period of several years. The focus will be to study the consequences of climate change for biodiversity.

"We can replicate different conditions that are possible in the future by, for example, changing

the temperature, humidity or CO₂ concentration in different chambers," explains Beenaerts. "By constantly monitoring the separate situations, we can compare the evolutions to those in a chamber where we didn't manipulate these parameters. This way, we can predict the repercussions of climate change."

The detailed data can help research in diverse fields such as ecology, geography, geology and ecotoxicology. There is, for example, little known about the consequences of climate change for micro-organisms in the soil, such as bacteria. Furthermore, this will be the first heathland location where greenhouse gases will be monitored, although heathland is a prominent ecosystem in Western Europe.

Researchers will have lab facilities and offices on the terrain at their disposal. For students, the innovative infrastructure of the Field Research Centre will also provide an intriguing way to learn about biodiversity and climate. "We hope to organise internships, summer schools and excursions for university or college students from different kinds of study areas, from

biology to tourism," says Beenaerts. Limburg's Provincial Nature Centre will assemble educational packages for primary and secondary schools. To develop the Ecotron+, UHasselt's Centre for Environmental Sciences worked with the Plant and Vegetation Research group at Antwerp University, non-profit Regionaal Landschap Kempen en Maasland and the Flemish agency for nature and forests. The Field Research Centre also plays an important role in the "Master Terhills" project by Limburg investment agency LRM. LRM plans to create a large ecological hub for sustainable tourism in the region. It is hoped that the impressive 1,000 square-metre Ecotron+ chambers will attract a broad public interested in ecology. National park rangers will be kept up to date with how the research evolves so they can inform the tourists they guide around the park or visitors who stop there on a cycling or walking trip. In the visitor centre, a large information screen will convert a live stream of scientific parameters into understandable data on life in the chambers.

► www.uhasselt.be/fieldresearchcentre

Q&A

Erwin Blonsma is the CEO of Okapi Sciences, a Leuven-based biotech firm that develops antiviral treatments for animals. The company recently signed a lucrative deal with pharmaceutical giant Novartis

Are the treatments that you develop for animals similar to those for humans?

Our treatments of feline infections use molecules that are similar – but not necessarily identical. Typically, these treatments have dedicated formulas for each target species. One advantage of being in animal health is that the drugs can have applications in other species, too – and occasionally for other diseases. Our drug candidate for classic swine fever, for example, could be used to treat bovine viral diarrhoea in cattle or border disease in sheep and goats. Our feline Aids product can be used to treat feline leukaemia as well.

Is there a large demand for the drugs you develop? And are they only for cats?

Market studies have shown that at least 10 million dogs and cats with some kind of viral disease are seen by veterinarians in Europe every year. The only thing they can do today is treat symptoms, not diseases. So yes, there is certainly a demand. And recently we have put two treatments for dogs in the pipeline.

How will the deal with Novartis affect your company?

Our company will definitely grow, which means a significant increase in staff in the coming years and

an expansion inside the existing building in Heverlee. The deal with Novartis may also facilitate our discussions with new investors.



How did you get into the business of drug development for animals?

I'm a mix of an entrepreneur and a scientist, you could say. After my PhD in applied biological sciences, I worked for Janssen Pharmaceutica for several years. In 2000, I joined a start-up in the Netherlands offering R&D support to the pharmaceutical and chemical industry. In 2007, I met with the two other founders of Okapi Sciences and joined them in writing our business plan and preparing the investment, and I have been involved ever since.

Interview by Senne Starckx

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

For her Bachelor's thesis, informatics student Linsey Raymaekers of Hasselt University developed TAP (The Augmented Piano), an application that assists with learning the piano. From a display on top of the digital piano, coloured projections on the keys indicate when and for how long you need to touch them. Every keystroke is checked by the computer. The goal is not to replace traditional music scores but to offer a complementary training of practical skills. TAP has won the Nokia Ubimedia Mindtrek Award, worth €2,500.

► <http://research.edm.uhasselt.be/tap>

Professor Marc Claeys of Antwerp University and two Master's students have found that a decrease of the minimum temperature by 10 degrees Celsius leads to 7% more heart attacks. The team analysed the link between 16,000 heart attacks and various parameters between 2006 and 2009. They cite the activity of the cold receptors on our skin leading to an increase of pressure and clotting of the blood as a possible reason for the link.

Starting this year, hearing-impaired children in primary education can have the support of an interpreter in Flemish sign language or a captioner who types out what is being said. This support is already available in secondary, higher and adult education. In the past, it was assumed that primary school students didn't understand sign language sufficiently to follow lessons via an interpreter. Now the children will have to prove their knowledge of sign language (or of Dutch, for the captioner). The measure should permit hearing-impaired children to enrol in the general education system.

Amateur archaeologist Bart Van Camp has discovered remnants of a Roman villa from the second or third century in Gooik, Flemish Brabant. On the construction yard of a new building, he found about 1,000 objects, including a bronze pen, pottery fragments, window glass and pieces of iron. Everything has been handed over to the Flemish Agency for Immovable Heritage.

The number of PhDs awarded at Flemish universities has doubled in the last decade, from 862 per year to 1,670, according to Ecoom, the inter-university group that monitors the economics of research and development. The largest numbers of PhDs were awarded in sciences, applied sciences, medicine and applied biological sciences. Nearly one-third of the graduates stayed at the university. AF

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Speed sightseeing

City Running gives joggers a tour of Ghent while on the move

Toon Lambrechts

Normally journalism is not really a physical challenge. Interviewing someone over a cup of coffee, reading documents or typing up a story: There's little chance of sore muscles the next morning. Today will be different. I meet Wim Van De Putte, the man behind City Running Ghent, at the Marriott Hotel on the Graslei, the tour's usual starting point. The idea is simple: getting to know the city of Ghent while running. "The formula is ideal for someone who is staying in Ghent but has little time," explains Van De Putte. "A half-day guided tour is often too long for someone who is only here for one night. We offer them a quick taste of the town while doing a little sport."

And off we go. First stop is the Prinsenhof neighbourhood, birthplace of Charles V, followed by the beautiful Sint-Veerleplein, with the Gravensteen castle across the street. Classic sights for every visitor, and it would indeed be a pity to miss them due to lack of time.

Van De Putte offers a brief word of explanation, giving you the chance to catch your breath. "I am a runner myself and a real *Gentenaar*. For me this is an ideal way to show people something of my city and share my love for sports."



Wim Van De Putte stops for a breath as he passes on his knowledge of Ghent during a City Running tour

His participants are mainly business people or those visiting conventions. "Many of them are around only for a few days and would be glad to go out for a run but don't really know where. In the end, they've been everywhere and seen nothing. For them, a city run combines sport and culture. Also, a lot of business people

are quite sporty, so they are happy to have an opportunity to train." The tour takes us from the Vrijdagmarkt to the Vooruit, as Van De Putte talks about how the World's Fair of 1913 has influenced the appearance of Ghent. Arts centre Vooruit (a former socialist co-operative) celebrates its 100th

anniversary this year, so City Running has organised a special tour of the many places that have played a role in its history. In February, he'll be leading a poetry run in collaboration with the Poetry Centre, visiting spots related to literary history.

But even his regular tours, he says,

"are different every time. I adjust the route and the story to my audience. When I am with British or Americans, for example, I tell them about the Treaty of Ghent [the peace treaty that ended the war of 1812] or Lieven Bauwens, the man who stole the spinning machine from the English."

There are similar running tour initiatives in other European cities, including Amsterdam, Paris and Geneva; most major cities can be explored in running shoes. But City Running Ghent is the only one in Belgium. "I have taken part in running tours in Barcelona and New York," says Van De Putte. "In Ghent, we started in May; it's quite recent, but the idea is working out well."

A city run ranges from 6.5 to 8.5 kilometres, and Van De Putte is quite happy to run with only a few participants – even just one. "And a little rain won't stop us; it's only in case of really stormy weather that the tours don't take place," he says. And the condition of the participants? "Usually no problem," he confirms. They know what they are getting into. "A 40-minute run at a leisurely pace. But a more intense running experience is also possible."

► www.ready2go.be

Eat your way round the capital during Brussels' restaurant festival

Last year the government of the Brussels-Capital Region teamed up with several international partners to put on the inaugural edition of Eat! Brussels, an open-air culinary festival designed to highlight the diversity of the region's thriving food scene. The event returns this weekend, and this time with even more flavour. Thirty Brussels restaurants are set to colonise the green spaces of the Ter Kamerenbos and offer sample-sized bites to tens of thousands of visitors.

It's safe to expect more than just mussels and fries here. Eat! Brussels represents all the nations and cultures that can be found in the capital. You'll taste local and European specialities as well as African, Asian and American dishes, often prepared by established and acclaimed Brussels restaurants. The Katanga region of Congo, for example, is ably represented by Elsene eatery Café Baraka. Proprietor Jeanine Mwadi brought the secrets of this spicy cuisine with her to Brussels.

China's Sichuan province is sending its own ambassadors. The chefs of the popular restaurant Daronghe have been tickling taste buds in their home town Chengdu for years; now they're in Brussels preparing their world-famous cuisine for the festival crowd. Closer to home but still waiting to be discovered is Budapest. Nicknamed the Paris of the East, the Hungarian capital has emerged from a half-century of Communist rule to become a hotspot of gastronomy and viniculture. Hungarian chef Áron Barka is on hand to demonstrate the fusion between the traditional and the modern on which Budapest's culinary reputation rests.

Quebec, Bulgaria and Morocco are also official partners of the event, though much more of the world is also here. Entry is free (though tasting is not). The site is wheelchair-accessible and ecologically sustainable. Finally, parents need not fret: Eat! Brussels has plans for your kids, too. **Georgio Valentino**

► www.eatbrussels.be



A taste of things to come

Geert Bourgeois wants to take Flanders' regional products to the world

Flanders needs to do more to promote its regional products to the rest of the world, with a co-ordinated strategy instead of the present ad hoc representation, according to tourism minister Geert Bourgeois.

Speaking last month on a visit to businesses in West Flanders, Bourgeois announced his intention to develop a new model for the promotion of *streekproducten*, or regional products, with the co-operation of a number of tourist and food-related agencies, including Toerisme Vlaanderen, Flanders Investment & Trade and the Centre for Agricultural and Fisheries Marketing (VLAM).

At present, the promotion of authentic regional products recognised by the Flemish government is the responsibility of VLAM alone. In the meantime, provinces nominate and promote their own selection of local products, as do some municipalities like Hoogstraten in Antwerp province, famous for its strawberries.

The new plan, said Bourgeois, was to put regional products in the spotlight during foreign trade missions and conferences, as well as to run specific campaigns in other countries. While the task of promotion will initially be shared among official agencies, he also left the door open for the scheme, which will probably kick off before the end of this month, to include the participation of companies at some later stage.

Among the businesses visited by the minister during his trip were three food producers that have already had some success promoting themselves in other countries: Mestdagh Artisan of Veurne, which produces sweet and savoury baked goods; pastrymaker Poppies International from Zonnebeke; and biscuit



and cake specialist Jules Destrooper, perhaps the best-known of the three and one that has succeeded in positioning itself as a luxury brand.

"These family businesses are the backbone of our economy," Bourgeois said. "We're here on these visits to listen to how they've put themselves on the world map, but we're also here to listen to their problems."

Meanwhile, Antwerp province last week launched a website to promote its farm and local products that meet its four criteria: raw materials from the province, a history of production going back at least 10 years, artisanal methods of production and accepted by local people as a genuine local product (like the Antwerpse *handjes*, pictured).

The site works on desktops as well as mobile devices and includes a search function and map integration. "Anyone who is out walking or cycling will have no trouble finding out where to go for fresh farmhouse ice cream," said the province's deputy for tourism, Bruno Peeters. **Alan Hope**

► www.lekkersmetstrekken.be

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The eyes have it

Jan Fabre unveils his new permanent installation in Brussels' Museums of Fine Arts

Lisa Bradshaw

The next time you're in the Old Masters section of Brussels' Royal Museums of Fine Arts, you might feel like more eyes are watching you than just those of Rembrandt's portrait of Nicolaas van Bambeeck. And much larger eyes, in fact.

They are part of a new installation by contemporary Flemish artist Jan Fabre called *The Gaze Within (The Hour Blue)*. Four years in the making, the permanent exhibition opened to the public on 11 September.

When the museum decided to use the space for contemporary art, they didn't have to think long to decide on Fabre, whose work is famously inspired by classical art and who is



a master at integrating his work in dialogue with established settings. Fabre was the first-ever artist to be invited by Paris' Louvre – in 2008 – to incorporate his multi-media works into the institution's permanent collection, in an exhibition called *The Angel of Metamorphosis*. This installation might be smaller in scope, but it's an attention grabber nonetheless. Even from the bottom of the stairs, one of the largest of the seven panels is impossible to ignore – a huge pair of eyes appear from the deep blue canvas, practically daring you to mount the stairs. When you do, you'll find four more pairs of eyes on other panels – and they're not all human. They are looking at each

other, and they are looking at you – a bit of a turn of events in our normal interaction with works of art.

There's nowhere to go once you're at the top of the stairs, so the landing acts as a kind of mini exhibition room. You'll have to rotate to see all the pieces – because of the narrowness of the space, you can't see them all at once.

The installation is a continuation of Fabre's *The Hour Blue* series, which explores death and rebirth. All of them were created wholly or in part – including those of *The Gaze Within* – with a blue Bic ballpoint pen. "Within these poetical transformations," says the museum in a statement, "the existential contradictions between

man and animal, day and night, life and death, lust and pain, beauty and horror dissolve away."

Considering the history of this particular staircase, it's also a politically intriguing choice of imagery: The only part of the interior of the early 19th-century building that has never been altered, the stairs originally served as a private entrance and exit to and from the museum for King Leopold I and Queen Louise-Marie. Now, it would seem, privacy is a thing of the past for royalty – not to mention for everyone else. All eyes are on us.

► www.fine-arts-museum.be

Band of brothers

New comedy *Los Flamencos* finds a group of thieves facing their own mortality

Lisa Bradshaw

Herwig Illegems is a man dedicated to his craft. For the film *Los Flamencos* by Flemish director Daniel Lambo, he had to sit through four hours of makeup – to be ready to shoot by 8.00. Add in a little breakfast and travel time, and you've got a 3.00 wake-up call.

Illegems is a prolific film and TV actor but really won plaudits for his portrayal of the quintessentially nosy, annoying customer of the local butcher in the 2009 TV series *Van vlees en bloed* (Of Flesh and Blood). The 51-year-old underwent such pains to play 80-something César in *Los Flamencos*, which opens across Brussels and Flanders this week. The broad comedy is the story of three elderly brothers (formerly known as "the terror of Turnhout") who decide to embark on

one more big heist before hanging up their shotguns for good.

There are jokes aplenty as they struggle with trying to remain tough at their age, sans teeth, quick reflexes and, occasionally, mental function. The move is a bit of a *Van vlees en bloed* reunion in fact, also starring Peter van den Eede as one of the brothers and Sien Eggers as a love interest/ accomplice. Long-time TV actor Mark Verstraete (*De kotmadam, Code 37*) plays the third brother, and normally leading man Koen De Bouw plays a police inspector. De Bouw's presence is part of the goal of recruiting as many actors as possible from the Turnhout area, where the film was shot. And – you might have guessed it – dialogue is spoken in the local dialect. It remains to be seen if



cinemas will show it with subtitles like they did with *Rundskop*. In *Los Flamencos*, the brothers find the perfect bank for their heist, which

they will cleverly break into, they devise, through the adjoining business. It's a funeral home, offering not only plenty of sight gags but a confrontation

between the aged band of thieves and the reality of death.

This is the original crux of the story, which Lambo – who is known for much more subdued work such as *Dry Branches of Iran* and *Traumland* – eventually built a comedy around. He dedicates the film to his father, who won a battle with cancer a few years ago "with the necessary sense of humour required," he says.

All the characters in the film, he continues, "are connected to each other through their disappointments – their frustrations over what they missed in their lives. And now, whether it's money, love, fame or – literally – their own voices, they are in search of a last chance to fill in that absence".

► www.facebook.com/losflamencosthemovie

Birds of a feather

American artist Thomas Broadbent invites wildlife inside in Lier

Christophe Verbiest

Sometimes you just get lucky. For five years, the American artist Thomas Broadbent mused over an idea for an installation with a spiral staircase. When he was invited by Voorkamer in Lier to create an *in situ* installation, he was informed that they had a spare one. "As a matter of fact," he explains with a big smile, "it was just standing somewhere in the back, and they were going to throw it out."

Voorkamer has been showing contemporary art in the small, charming town in Antwerp province since 1996. For seven years now, it has been occupying the Heilige Geesthuis (House of the Holy Spirit), a 15th-century building in the shadow of the famous gothic Sint-Gummarus Church.

The list of names who've showed



Climb inside Thomas Broadbent's big, red skirt to peer down on people (and pigeons) below

their work at Voorkamer is long and impressive. To name but one: In 1996, when the now internationally famous painter Michael Borremans was still a secondary school teacher, Voorkamer granted him an exhibition.

From its start, the organisation has also been supporting Broadbent. Every summer, it invites an artist to create a site-specific work. The Brooklyn-based artist specialises in watercolours and structures and has been doing a lot of work with fabrics. "Clothing is a second skin for people," he says. "It's a projection of yourself. It is also a form of protection."

Combine it with his interest in birds, and the result is *Temporal Habitat*. The central piece of the installation is a four metre-high red skirt that can also function as a birdhouse: Several

bird feeders are peering through holes in the cloth.

The work is built around that spiral staircase, which is fixed into the ground. You can climb it and stand on its small platform at the top: It's a sort of lookout, but people on the ground will see you as a giant.

While working in Lier, Broadbent enjoyed the company of a certain brave pigeon, unperturbed by the

artist's presence. The bird features in a beautiful watercolour and in a video, which is projected on a paper cast in the form of a ... pigeon. Moreover, you enter the site through a room filled with bird chatter.

"I don't have a particular love for birds, but they're symbolic for our relationship to nature. They're one of the few wild animals that live among us. But they're elusive, too."

UNTIL 15 SEPTEMBER

Voorkamer

Heilige Geeststraat 7, Lier

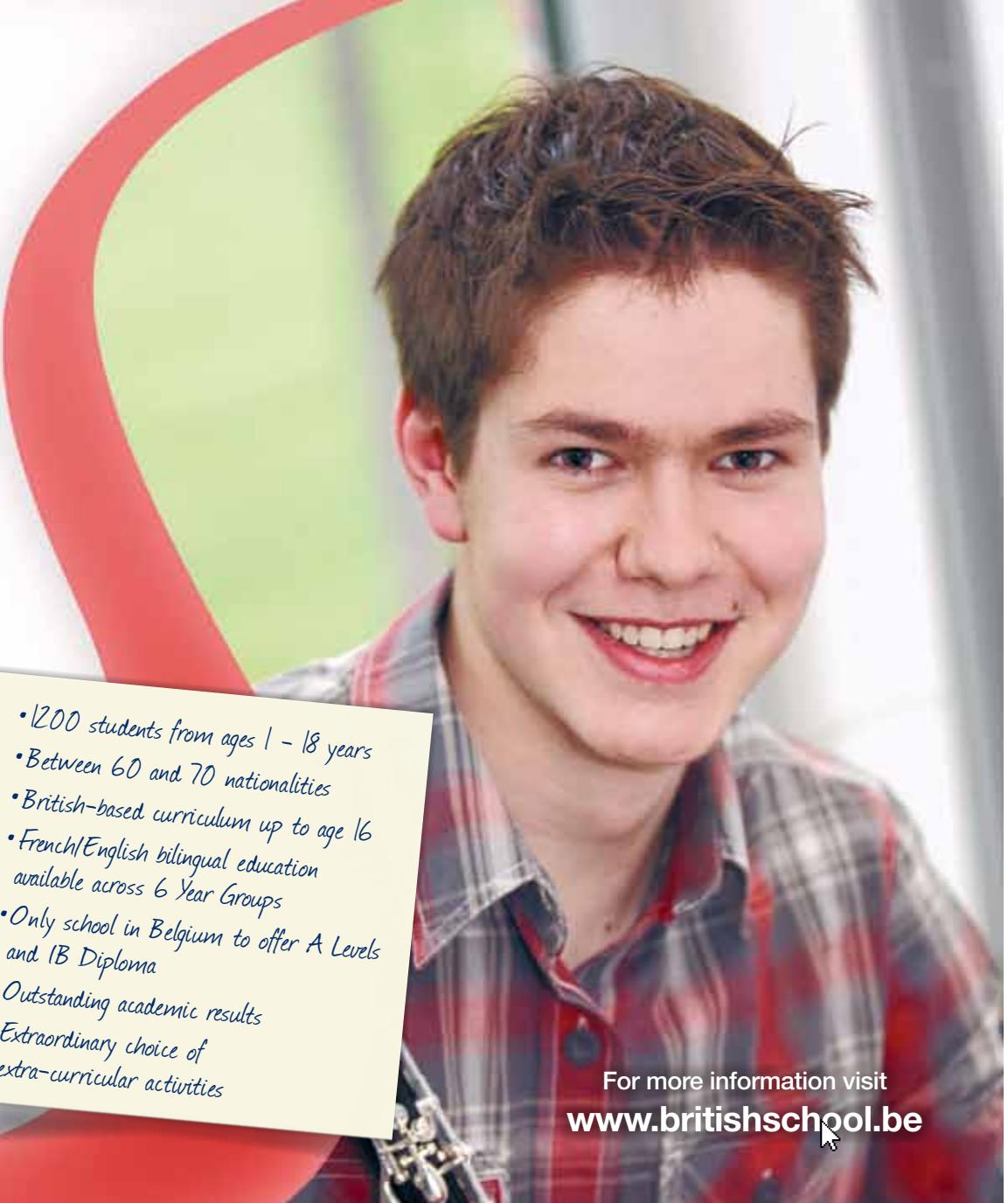
► www.voorkamer.be

“

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

Sam (School President, BSB)

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Third time lucky

Extra City Kunsthals opens its new space in Antwerp this weekend

Christophe Verbiest

This weekend, Antwerp art centre Extra City Kunsthals celebrates the opening of its new space near Berchem train station. They hope the move – their second in less than a decade – to the increasingly popular neighbourhood will revitalise their work and encourage more visitors to come through the door.

It's 20 August, and I'm standing on a busy construction site in Antwerp: A building that housed a defunct industrial laundry will be transformed into the new exhibition space of Extra City Kunsthals. In little more than three weeks, they'll move from their old location in the northeast of the city to this more central spot.

Artistic director Mihnea Mircan is confident that the most crucial work will be finished by the inauguration on 14 September. "Of course, there will still be things to be done after we get started," he says. "We can't decide on everything right now; for some things, you have to see a building function."

There are multiple reasons why this cutting-edge exhibitor of contemporary art felt it was time to vacate its previous space in an old brewery. First, only being able to access the space by a rattling scaffold limited the entry of artworks. "Due to the architecture of the building, we were not allowed to construct an internal staircase," explains Mircan. "The scaffold, a temporary solution at first, had been standing there for six years, but the fire department was not entirely happy with it. So we decided to cut the Gordian knot and cancel our lease."

Another reason for moving was the neighbourhood. "That part of Antwerp was expected to be gentrified, but it isn't happening. And the people of Antwerp didn't have a great urge to visit us there."

So they landed in Eikelstraat, not far from Berchem train station. The space is bigger than the old one,



and it's more modular, which is an advantage for artworks with specific spatial requirements.

This new location, though, is already the third in the rather short and bumpy history of Extra City. The "platform for the production, presentation and debate of artistic practices" was founded in 2004 by local curator and critic Wim Peeters and lodged in a former granary. Due to budget problems, the board replaced Peeters two years later with the Brussels-based German curator Anselm Franke. Around the same time, Extra City had to move to the brewery, as the granary was going to be dismantled.

In the spring of 2011, Franke was succeeded by Mircan, who is very happy with the new neighbourhood. "We feel that we can make a difference. Attendance at our housewarming exceeded our expectations. Moreover, the neighbourhood is very promising: a lot of young couples with children who have recently

moved here and need some sort of cultural outlet. We're trying to offer them a mix of drinks, exhibitions, film, debates and performances."

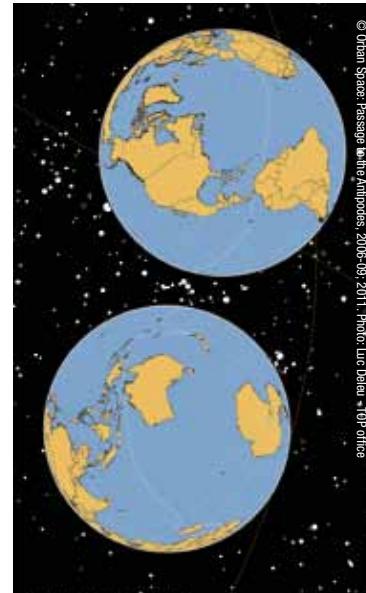
Though he clarifies: "We won't become a cultural centre by the standard of diversification that is the mission of a cultural centre."

But it's clear Extra City wants to promote itself more among potential visitors. That's why there's a cafe on the ground floor, next to a space where "the most demanding works in terms of spatial expression will be shown".

The first floor contains a bigger exhibition space and, another novelty, a cinema. "It's very important as a means of social activation," Mircan explains. "It's exactly for the public that I mentioned earlier, suggesting to them to not only have a look at an exhibition but also see a film and have a beer downstairs. This creates an even more interesting package." The film programme, which starts in December, will be a mix of art house and more mainstream movies.

On the second floor, there's more exhibition space and studios for which Extra City worked with Studio Start, an organisation in Antwerp that allows young artists or creative entrepreneurs to get started.

Before landing in Antwerp, Mircan, originally from Romania, worked at the Palais de Tokyo, the Paris institution for contemporary art, and as an independent curator. All his work is characterised by a political or social edge. He smiles when I mention this. "I don't think I will ever be able to drop that and make a purely formal exhibition. As much as I take aesthetic pleasure in art, I absolutely have the



At Extra City: American filmmakers Noël Burch and Allan Sekula's *The Forgotten Space* is showing in the brand new cinema; *All That is Sold Melts into Air* illustrates the painful transition to democracy in Romania; *Orban Space* is the result of four decades of work by Flemish artist Luc Deleu

need for some sort of relevance. It's quite important for me, as an ethical position, to establish why a certain work is relevant at a certain historical juncture."

Extra City has the reputation – and this didn't commence with Mircan – of hosting art that is difficult and inaccessible. Taking their past exhibitions as a whole, it could be seen as an unfair criticism; but it's also not completely untrue. To appreciate their exhibitions, you have to be an actively involved visitor.

Mircan agrees: "Exactly! It demands a lot from the visitor, but I hope they get a lot in return for this investment of attention. To put it rudimentarily, an exhibition guide is always necessary. Of course, there is an immediate aesthetic appeal of the works; we're not excluding art that is beautiful. But there's always a background story that needs to be mapped out for the works to make sense."

Apart from M HKA, Antwerp's museum of contemporary art, the city contains a dozen or so art centres, like Lokaal 01, LLS 387, NICC and Air Antwerpen. The question is sometimes raised as to whether there aren't too many subsidised organisations and if a concentration of the money might be wiser.

Mircan doesn't think so. "All these places have very distinct histories, target groups, preoccupations and allegiances. The position of Extra City comes not so much from organising it with these various partners – saying 'you do this, and we do that' – but rather polyphonically in tandem with all of them."

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

The Broken Circle Breakdown by Flemish director Felix Van Groeningen has been nominated in the People's Choice category of the European Film Awards. The public can vote online for their favourite European film of 2012 until the end of October, which includes the chance to win a trip to Berlin for the prize ceremony on 7 December. *The Broken Circle Breakdown* is one of 11 films nominated under People's Choice; other films include the British/Swedish Oscar winner *Searching for Sugarman* and Pedro Almodóvar's *I'm So Excited!*

► www.europeanfilmawards.eu

The well-respected Flemish dramaturge, essayist and author Marianne Van Kerkhoven died last week after a long illness. She was 67 years old. Since 1985, Van Kerkhoven had worked for Brussels' Kaaitheater, where she had the opportunity to collaborate on productions with all of Flanders' top playwrights and choreographers, including Jan Lauwers, Josse De Pauw, Guy Cassiers and the earliest works of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. Van Kerkhoven won the Flemish Culture Prize for Theatre in 1994 and the following year both the Blanlin Evrard culture prize from the University of Leuven and the Dutch Pierre Bayle prize for arts criticism. "With her work," said the Pierre Bayle jury at the time, "Van Kerkhoven shows how theatre can elucidate reality".

Faro, the government agency for the support of Flemish heritage, is co-hosting the biennial symposium of the International Commission for Research into European Food History from 17-19 September at its headquarters in Brussels. The theme this year is the presentations of food at major expositions of the 19th and 20th centuries and their influence on our understanding of food culture. Keynote speakers include Ghent University social historian Christophe Verbruggen, who will talk about World Fairs at the turn of the 19th century, and VUB heritage professor Marc Jacobs, who will use the Belgian waffle in his discussion of food appropriation and marketing. The event is only €5 and open to the public.

► www.tinyurl.com/foodsymposium

The long-time artist rights organisation NICC has moved from Antwerp to Brussels. It will continue to operate as normal but hopes that the move will "create an even broader artistic support on a national level," it said in a statement. Its new site in Anderlecht will host artist talks twice monthly and other sporadic activities across the country. NICC is led by Flemish artist Guillaume Bijl.

► www.nicc.be

THE OPENING TRIO

The "new" Extra City Kunsthals opens the doors of its new space this Saturday night, with a welcome by Berchem and Antwerp culture aldermen and the president of the board. After that, there's time to see all the exhibitions before the party starts at 22.00.

There are three opening exhibitions, which run until 17 November. *Orban Space: Luc Deleu – T.O.P. Office* is an overview of four decades of work by the Flemish artist. "He's the underestimated precursor of the current discussions around ecology, architecture and urbanism," says Mircan. "He is trying to rethink it as 'urbanism', so that the orb, the whole earth, is present in whichever way we respond to a specific place. It's a utopian exercise but also a permanent self-challenge."

Under the title *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, the Romanian duo Mona Vatamanu and Florin Tudor present two new films and an installation. "They can be seen as very strict and innocent, exotic case studies of the painful transition to democracy in Romania," says Mircan. "But also as allegorical pictures of ampler phenomena like environmental destruction and economic war."

In its cinema, Extra City will show *The Forgotten Space*, a documentary by American filmmakers Noël Burch and Allan Sekula, about the impact of globalisation on the transport industry. Mircan: "It's a gripping film about what the sea still means for us: definitely not a sublime expanse of water that encourages imagination, but rather one of the almost secret routes of the most brutal kind of trade and the most blatant disregard for human rights."

14 SEPTEMBER, FROM 18.30

Opening party

Extra City Kunsthals, Eikelstraat 25, Antwerp

► www.extracity.org

Far away, in the deep woods

Rinus Van de Velde

Christophe Verbiest

Last week in the Tim Van Laere Gallery in Antwerp: Rinus Van de Velde is adding the final touches to his exhibition, *The Story of Frederic, Conrad, Jim and Rinus*. The works are surrounded by texts, and he's still writing a few of these on the walls. He looks relaxed.

That he's one of Flanders' most promising young artists, who some predict will go on to a very successful international career, is too abstract an idea to stress him out.

Seen on the internet, or even in the gallery a few metres back, you may think his works are black-and-white paintings. They're not; they're drawings. But don't think paper and pencil. Van de Velde works on a canvas prepared with plaster and uses pastel sticks that he presses into the plaster. "But I also use my fingers. For me, it's like charcoal. I want the drawings to look painterly."

They certainly do. Moreover, their size adds to that effect. Most are between 1 x 2 metres and 2 x 3 metres, and some are even larger – spread out over two canvases, like the one you see here. As the title of the exhibition suggests, the 16 works form a narrative: about a



gallery owner, a writer, a philosopher and an artist. We see them together and separately – four people who seem to have cut their ties with the world and live isolated in the woods, filling their days with reading, writing,

drinking and eating. Like a lot of contemporary painters – it's less the case with those who draw – Van de Velde usually starts from a photo. For the first time, though, he built a set – sort of like a

film set. People sat in to represent his characters from *The Story of Frederic*, and a professional photographer took pictures. These form the basis for his drawings. But they're deliberately not photo-realistic.

Until 19 October

Tim Van Laere Gallery, Verlatstraat 23-25, Antwerp

► www.timvanlaeregallery.com

PERFORMANCE

Badke

Brussels' Royal Flemish Theatre KVS is known for its international collaborations that focus on artistic development rather than professional networking. The new production *Badke* is the fruit of one such programme. Back in 2006, KVS joined forces with Les ballets C de la B and the AM Qattan Foundation to organise a series of workshops with young Palestinian performers, most of them autodidacts from the Occupied Territories. The first show to result was last year's *Keffiyeh/Made in China*. This season it's *Badke*, which debuted last month in Zurich. The piece's title, like the performance itself, is derived from the Palestinian folk dance *dabke*. Although *Badke*'s 10 dancers start out on a traditional note, the choreography is gradually embellished with contemporary elements expressing Palestine's desire to join the world community. Later this year, *Badke* will be staged in Genk and Antwerp. **Georgio Valentino**



13-21 September, 20.30

KVS, Brussels

► www.kvs.be

MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

The House Taken Over: LOD Muziektheater presents this play about the rituals of a brother and a sister who never leave the house, directed by Katie Mitchell (in English with surtitles in Dutch and French)

SEP 11, 12 & 14 20.00-22.00 at deSingel, Desguinlei 25

► www.desingel.be

Brussels

Midday and Eternity (The Time Piece): The closing chapter of a trilogy by choreographer Eleanor Bauer, which follows *A Dance for the Newest Age (the triangle piece)* and *Tentative Assembly (the tent piece)*

SEP 19-21 20.30 at Kaaitheater, Sainctelette Square 20

► www.kaaitheater.be

FESTIVAL

Antwerp Open Air

As we wave goodbye to summer, we wave goodbye as well to the season's music festivals. Antwerp Open Air is one of your last chances to enjoy an entire day of music under sun and stars. But this is no Woodstock; Open Air is an electronic/dance music festival whose DJs spin until 4.00 the next morning. This sixth edition showcases dozens of DJs on four themed stages. The main stage is dedicated to house, techno and minimal. The Further Marquee stage is the place for urban sounds, from hip-hop to drum-and-bass to turntablism. Funky and world beats are accommodated under the Magiq Spiegeltent, and the Club Avenu stage is the place to see rising young performers, including the winners of the VI.be DJ contest. **GV**



14 September, 14.00 | Noordkasteel, Antwerp

► www.antwerpopenair.be

MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Binkom (Lubbeek)

Binkom Blues: Blues, rock and roots festival featuring The Perpetrators, Guy Forsyth Band, Deitra Farr, Hideaway, more

SEP 14 at Zaal Santro, Tiensesteenweg 61

► www.binkomblues.be

Brussels

Jaarmarkt Anderlecht: Annual market and folk festival dating back to 1825, featuring more than 500 stands spread over four kilometres, selling everything from flowers to cattle

SEP 12 9.00 at Dapperheidsplein

► www.anderlecht.be

Mol

Trezart: International street arts festival featuring theatre and circus performances for the whole family, plus optional lakeside camping

SEP 14-15 at Domein Zilvermeer, Zilvermeelaan 2

► www.trezart.be

VISUAL ARTS

Tales of Heroes

The month-long Design September invites both John Q Public and John Q Professional to over 100 design-related events across Brussels. One of these is the travelling exhibition *Tales of Heroes*, hosted in its current incarnation by Design Vlaanderen. The gallery is only the most recent of several international venues to house this collection of contemporary objects created by Flemish designers and infused with a sense of nostalgia and local character. The theme is a reaction against the homogenisation of design (and culture in general) in our increasingly "globalised" world. See it now before it moves on to Hong Kong and Zagreb. **GV**



Until 6 October | Design Vlaanderen, Brussels

► www.designvlaanderen.be

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Petrit Halilaj - Poisoned By Men in Need of Some Love:

Installation by the conceptual sculptor with a film that portrays the disintegrated state of the Natural History Museum in Kosovo and a series of sculptures of its animal remnants

Until JAN 5 2014 at WIELS, Van Volxemlaan 354

► www.wiels.org

Ghent

Rachel Harrison & Jordan Wolfson: Two New York artists show simultaneously, with sculptures and drawings by Harrison and animation and installations by Wolfson

Until JAN 5 at SMAK, Nicolaas De Liemaekereplein 2

► www.smak.be

Meise

Als zaadjes spreken konden (If Seeds Could Talk): Interactive exhibition by artist-in-residence Sandrine de Borman about the fascinating world of seeds and fruits

Until NOV 24 at National Botanic Garden, Nieuwelaan 38

► www.botanicgarden.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Dag van de Landbouw

Once a year, dozens of farmers – most of them small and family-run – open their doors to consumers to show us where our food comes from. There are over 40 participants in this year's Agriculture Day from across Flanders, and even a few north of the border in the Netherlands. In this celebration of local agriculture, you'll find all the various fruits, vegetables, grains, plants, flowers and livestock that the regions produce. If you're in Brussels, make the short trek to Overijse to visit Flup and Pips Luppens' grape greenhouses and winery. The brothers (*pictured*) demonstrate how the world-famous varieties are cultivated, then how wine is matured in barrels in the cellar. Also on the agenda is a tour of Frank and Christel Vansimpson's watercress plantation in Limburg province and the Belfleurken greenhouses, where mini-azaleas are grown by the thousands, just outside Ghent. Chances are you'll find plenty of producers close to home. **GV**



15 September

Across Flanders

► www.dagvandelandbouw.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

A Taste of Greece: Citizen's movement Discovering Greek Products in Belgium and the Greek Community of Antwerp host this event featuring cooking demonstrations, workshops, activities for kids, tastings and Greek products, including cosmetics, olive oil and cheeses

SEP 14 at Grieks Huis, Vlasmarkt 28

► www.facebook.com/atasteofgreeceinantwerp

Boekhoute (East Flanders)

Girnaertfeesten: Annual shrimp festival in the tiny town known as the "fisherman's village without a port". Features concerts, go-karting, a folkloric parade, BBQ and more

SEP 20-22 in the town centre

► www.lecavzw.be/feest/girnaertfeesten

Poperinge

Lekker Westhoeks: Regional products market under a colourful collection of tents, plus a beer village, cooking demonstrations and tastings of West Flemish specialties, including *hoppepaté* (hop pâté), *kruydekoek* (gingerbread) and *hennepot* (chicken, veal and rabbit in a gelatine sauce)

SEP 14-15 on Grote Markt

► www.toerismeoperinge.be

Andy Furniere

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

La Marina

Veeweidekaai 65, Brussels

During the summer's Brussels Beach festival, the terraces and sand of the canal area is a favoured place to meet with friends. But did you know that there is a bar-restaurant at a calm spot next to the water where you can have a drink or enjoy a plate of seafood all year long?

Sure, the canal zone of Brussels is not adapted everywhere to the wishes of recreational cyclists or walking enthusiasts. But it gets better once you're outside the busy city centre, where the industry gradually blends into a more natural setting. Along the quays of the Brussels-Charleroi canal in Anderlecht, you'll notice how life slows down to a relaxed pace, especially on the cosy houseboats docked lazily at the Vaartdijk.

A little further on, you'll reach La Marina, with its large terrace on a stretch of grass between the trees. No factory in sight, no industrial noise to be heard.

Kids can play on the swing and slide, while petanque terrains await those who fancy a throw. In the weekends, you could try kayaking or rowing as well since the restaurant is situated in the same building as the water sports club Cercle des Régates de Bruxelles. That is apparent from the pictures in the La Marina; check out the club's trophies and other memorabilia in the hallway on the way to the toilets.



La Marina specialises in seafood but has many other dishes on the menu. Prices are democratic, with a *dagschotel* (daily platter) for €7 and mussels (from October) for €15.

But it's just as nice to simply sip a drink while watching the passers-by on foot, bike, in a kayak or at the helm of a boat. La Marina and its kitchen are open every day from 11.00 to 22.00.

► www.fbl.me/lamarina

BITE

't Boothuis ★★★★

People like to complain about the long winters, but history also shows us that Flanders is blessed with a number of crisp, sunny autumn days. When given the chance, I like to take full advantage of this "Indian Summer" from a seat on my favourite waterside terrace. 't Boothuis, headquarters of Beernem's watersport club, is located at the foot of a small yacht harbour in an alcove of the waterway between Ghent and Bruges.

About a decade ago, couple Frank Baert and Katrien Pauwels took over the old boat house canteen here and transformed it into an amiable restaurant with a stunning view and plenty of outdoor seating. Inside, the A-framed dining room, with its abundant wood panelling and long bar, gives the place a cosy chalet feel – the ideal spot to also warm up during those long winter months with, say, pancakes and hot chocolate. Try to visit now, though, because Frank knows how to work magic on the grill. His ribeye of Hereford beef is hands-down the best I've ever tasted: seared to perfection, with crispy fat trimming and a rosy centre. It comes with your choice of creamy homemade sauce (the classics: pepper, béarnaise, Provençal or mushroom), golden fries and a fresh salad of lettuce, watercress, radish, tomato, cucumber, grated carrot and a dollop of mayo.

While it's hard for me to understand why anyone would order anything but the ribeye, some members of my family are visibly enjoying their orders of shrimp croquettes,



scampi and sole fillet. Admittedly, the croquettes are nicely crunchy and bursting with little pink shrimp, the hefty fillets of sole are pan-fried and golden brown, and the scampis are big and juicy.

Katrien comes by often to make sure we never go without a thing, and she brings it all with a genuine smile. We're so enticed to stay a little longer, we order a round of coffees with dessert: scrumptious warm apple pie with vanilla ice cream, and a *dame blanche* (ice cream sundae with melted chocolate and – in this case – billows of whipped cream).

The bill comes to a more than reasonable €20 per person, or around €30 for us steak-lovers.

► www.tboothuis.com

Tip for the weekend:

This Saturday, 14 September, combine a visit to 't Boothuis with a lively spectacle on the water: The O'Neill Belgian Wakeboarding Championship kicks off at 15.00, with finals around 17.00. The event features a string of wakeboarders, zipping up and down the canal behind speed boats while manoeuvring around various obstacles and showing off their skills in the form of jumps, spins and other exciting tricks.

► www.bwsv.be

► Oude Vaartstraat 7a, Beernem (West Flanders); 050.82.29.68

⌚ 11.00-23.00 Tue-Sun (April-October);
11.00-23.00 Thurs-Sun (November-February)

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TALKING DUTCH

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Facebook friend

Derek Blyth

Most of us will never meet a spy. Even if we did, we probably wouldn't know we had. We expect spies to be secretive, just as we expect them to drive an Aston Martin, drink a Martini shaken but not stirred and know how to kill an enemy agent with a single shoelace.

But Belgian spies appear to be different, according to recent reports in the Flemish press. *Belgische spionnen makkelijk online te vinden* – Belgian spies are easy to find online, said the headline in *De Standaard*. It appears that our spies have been revealing their identities on social media sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

It is not that simple of course. (It never is with spies.) *De Staatsveiligheid wil en kan niet bevestigen of de personen die opduiken, werkelijk op de loonlijst staan* – the state security department will not and cannot confirm that the people who say they are spies are actually spies. But if they are spies (and not bored teenagers), then they are taking a big risk.

Volgens de top van de inlichtingendienst maken de medewerkers zich zo te gemakkelijk tot doelwit van kwaadwillenden – the head of state security has said that his colleagues are making themselves too easy targets for those with nefarious intentions. He doesn't name the villains, but we know who he means – those beautiful but ruthless agents who lure innocent Belgian spies into bed.

In the old days, they would smile across a hotel lobby. Now they just

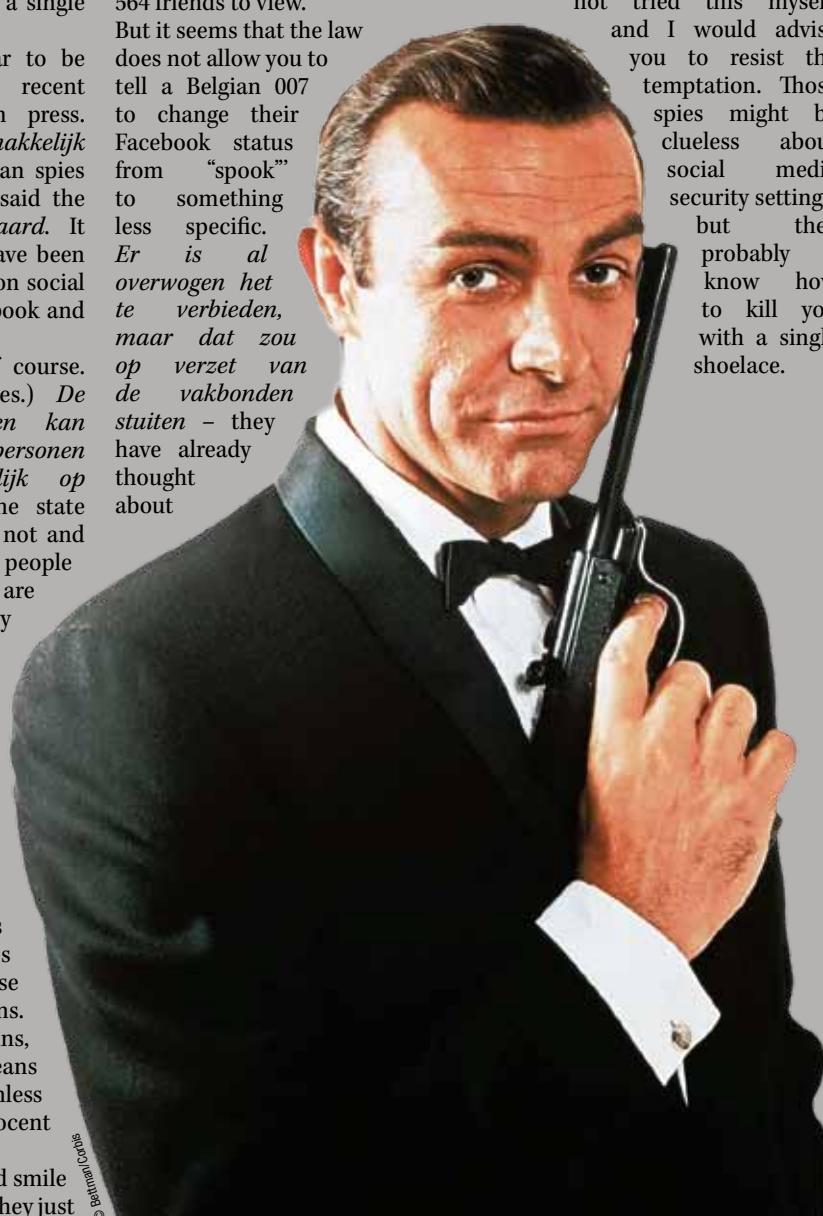
click "like".

You might have thought it would be easy for the head of security to tell secret agents that they have to keep their jobs secret. Or at least stop them posting the information on their Facebook profile for their 564 friends to view.

But it seems that the law does not allow you to tell a Belgian 007 to change their Facebook status from "spook" to something less specific. *Er is al overwogen het te verbieden, maar dat zou op verzet van de vakbonden stuiten* – they have already thought about

forbidding it, but that would be opposed by the trade unions.

According to the press reports, you can now track down Belgian secret service agents simply by typing "Staatsveiligheid" into the LinkedIn search engine. I have not tried this myself, and I would advise you to resist the temptation. Those spies might be clueless about social media security settings, but they probably know how to kill you with a single shoelace.



The last word...

Patriotic

"In 20 minutes, all the kilts were gone. Someone even went off with a whole box. Who knows what he plans to do with them."

Sponsor Belgacom handed out kilts in the Belgian flag colours to fans who travelled to Glasgow for last week's World Cup qualifier against Scotland, which the Red Devils won 2-0

And the winner is...

"I'm going to propose to the council that they change the name of the prizes. The last thing I want to do is throw money away on a war with the Oscars people."

Niko Geldhof, alderman in Ostend for tourism, on a possible lawsuit over the town's Terr-Oskars awards for restaurants

Closing arguments

"Please don't send me to Belgium. I have a hotel and a business to run. And above all, my cows are about to give birth."

Evert d C failed to convince a judge in Amsterdam not to extradite him to Belgium in connection with the so-called castle murder case

All in the family

"If Prince Laurent can help to clarify matters by giving a DNA sample, it is quite plausible he might agree to such a request."

A lawyer for Prince Laurent on a possible future court case brought by Delphine Boel (see p2)

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

The American Theatre at Heizel in Brussels has sat empty since the Flemish public broadcaster VRT had to move out last year when it gave up trying to keep up with the building's structural problems. Now the concert hall AB is leading the charge to renovate and use the building – the American pavilion from the 1958 World's Fair – as a new cultural centre

News

It's two years behind schedule, but the renovations to the massive Africa Museum in Tervuren are about to begin. We'll tell you what took so long, how long it will be closed and just what it will look like when it re-opens

Business

Perhaps you've noticed a lot of unlikely competitions lately – a mobile phone throw, a fireworks contest, writing the best music for a carpark. Not wanting to turn our backs on current trends, we sent a correspondent to West Flanders for Belgian championship ploughing