

Ready to renovate

The Africa Museum is finally embarking on its massive renovation and extension project

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Field frenzy

Two young farmers emerge victorious from the Belgian ploughing championships

► 6



Flanders wins in China

Numerous agreements were made and contracts closed during an economic visit last week

► 7



The stage is set

The iconic but abandoned American Theatre could become a cultural hotspot

Tom Peeters

During the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels, the biggest overseas stars were booked to play in the state-of-the-art theatre that was part of the American Pavilion (pictured above). After it was converted into a television studio by the Flemish public broadcaster, the impressive building lost its public function. Now, under the impetus of Brussels' Ancienne Belgique concert hall, the American Theatre could be restored to its former glory.

Vanuit het Amerikaans Theater, or From the American Theatre: These four words have a prominent place in Flanders' collective memory. Almost all major

television shows broadcast in Flanders between 1960 and 2012 were recorded here. And popular hosts such as Tony Corsari, Jan Theys, Luc Appermont and Bart Peeters always used to refer to the building in which they presented their popular programmes such as *100,000 of Niets*, *De Wies Andersen Show* and *De Droomfabriek*.

It was here that children's friends Nonkel Bob and Tante Terry once interviewed this new hip band from the UK, The Rolling Stones, for their teenage show *Tienerklanken*; the Verreth brothers gave their legendary one and only performance as television hosts in *Pak De Poen, de show van 1 miljoen*; and controversial selections for the Eurovision Song Contest were made in *Canzonissima* and *Eurosong*.

"This is why the theatre still has a wide public appeal in Flanders, but is almost unknown in Brussels and Wallonia," explains Marc Vrebos, technical director of concert hall Ancienne Belgique (AB), who's leading a tour through the marvellous building in the shadow of the Atomium.

Since the VRT had to leave the building last year, it has sat empty. But AB wants to turn it into a cultural beacon in one of Brussels' top tourist areas.

The theatre was designed by the American architect Edward Durell Stone, who in the 1930s built the Radio City Music Hall and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Wandering around the abandoned corridors and rooms of the circular American Theatre (one of its nicknames was hula hoop), it's

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Giel

A 15-year-old from Sint-Laureins, East Flanders, made the headlines of every Flemish newspaper and TV station over the last week because he wants to move away from home. You might think that most teenagers want to move away from home, but Giel is a bit different.

The young man is a devout Buddhist, having been introduced to the religion by his mother. His intention is to travel to the Jonang Takten Phuntsok Choeling monastery in Sanjauli, India, to become a monk.

He'd change his name to Lobsang Nyima, which means "warm-hearted son", and spend the next 15 years in the foothills of the Himalayas, near the border with Tibet, praying, studying, seeking enlightenment. At the end of his training, he says, he would return to Flanders to teach here.

But the law intervened. As *Flanders Today* went to press, Giel was at home in Sint-Laureins, his flight to India missed on the orders of the prosecutor's office in Ghent.

The story of Giel and his unusual

teenage dream came to the attention of TV station VTM, which had a camera crew follow him around for two days for broadcast last week on *Telefacts*. That brought his travel plans to the attention of his uncle, who contacted a lawyer and lodged an objection to Giel's being allowed to travel, alleging he was under the influence of his mother who was seeking to raise funds for a "shadowy, semi-religious" Buddhist organisation. That appeared to be a vain attempt when a youth magistrate ruled last week that there was no legal objection to his departure. "When I came up in front of the magistrate, I was nervous," said Giel. "I'm very happy with the decision and also very relieved." The prosecutor's office, however, lodged an appeal against the magistrate's decision, suspending it. Giel must now remain in Flanders pending a further investigation into the circumstances of his monastic life. "I hope I'll be able to leave soon," he responded, stoically.



FLANDERS TODAY

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VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

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News in brief

Unions representing **hospital and rest home staff** under the federal health care regime have announced the intention to strike on 8 October, after talks on pay and conditions broke down. The two sides are unable to reach agreement over matters such as the right to early retirement, holiday entitlements and special conditions for long-term night-shift workers. About 100,000 staff are part of the strike call, but unions said the impact on patients would be limited.

Film editor Nico Leunen was awarded the **Flemish Culture Prize for film** last weekend during the Ensors ceremony in Ostend. The lecturer at Ghent's Fine Arts Academy is a greatly in-demand editor and has worked on more than 50 films, including *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, *The Invader*, *Turquoise* and *Khadak*. The first in that list was the big winner at the Ensors, the Flemish film awards, taking home eight statuettes, including Best Editing for Leunen, Best Film, Best Director (Felix van Groeningen) and Best Actress (Veerle Baetens). Wim Willaert won the Ensor for Best Actor for his role in *Offline*.

The Belgian government signed a secret agreement in 2010 with the US government to renew the **nuclear weapons stockpiled at the Kleine-Brogel** military base in Limburg, according to Hans Kristensen, director of the US Nuclear Information Project. The new weapons, he said, are to replace the B-61 bombs stored at Kleine-Brogel. N-VA and S.P.A. MPs have called for the government to allow a debate on the issue.

After an absence of a decade, **horse-drawn carriages** will once more ply their trade on half-hour tours of the centre of Brussels for a fare of €39, according to Marion Lemesre, the city's alderwoman for trade.

The operator has two new Victoria coaches, which stick to pedestrian streets. Tours start and end on the Grote Markt.

The eminent **kidney specialist Yves Vanrenterghem** has died suddenly, the Leuven University Hospital announced. He was 65. Professor Vanrenterghem specialised throughout his career in treatments to prevent the rejection of transplanted kidneys, while, as chief of staff, he turned the kidney transplant service into the country's largest. He held a number of international posts and published more than 340 papers.

Flemish heritage minister Geert Bourgeois has approved €140,000 in financing for the conservancy organisation **Natuurpunt to create an inventory of the heritage property** under its control. Natuurpunt will also catalogue the requirements for managing the properties and look for partnerships and sponsors. It will also begin a pilot management project for the Walem Fort in Mechelen and Fort 7 in Wilrijk, part of a 19th-century ring of fortifications around Antwerp.

At least 30 schools in Flanders are using **fingerprint scans to register the presence of pupils**, according to one of the companies that supplies the technology. Schools prefer the scans to the old-fashioned register because it is more effective at keeping track of pupils for the purposes of accounting for pre- and after-school supervision. But the practice has been criticised by parents and privacy advocates, and a pilot project in Ghent was abandoned last week.

A man who carried out a **base jump from the tower of Antwerp cathedral** in August

could be charged over the incident, the city's prosecutor's office said. Base jumping – with a parachute from a fixed installation like a building, antenna, bridge or cliff – is not illegal in Belgium, but it is an offence to climb the cathedral tower without permission. The jumper, Johan Vervoort from Herentals, reached the top in a lift used by construction workers.

The Brussels-Capital Region has extended a pilot project that **allows cyclists to turn right at red lights**. The junctions concerned, which will increase from eight to 75, are all equipped with cycle lanes or bus lanes and will be equipped with special road signs in red, white and yellow, the road safety institute said.

Police in Zeebrugge are investigating a mass theft last week that saw **374 Mercedes in the port area robbed** of keys and airbags. The thieves gained access to the cars by drilling holes in the bodywork, leading to damage worth €1,000 per car. Police sources said the number of thefts of car parts was on the increase, while thefts of cars fell last year for the fourth year in a row.

The city council of Destelbergen, East Flanders, has admitted **selling personal information** supplied by residents applying for a building permit to private companies in return for payment. The city promised to change its policy after the practice was condemned by the Privacy Council.

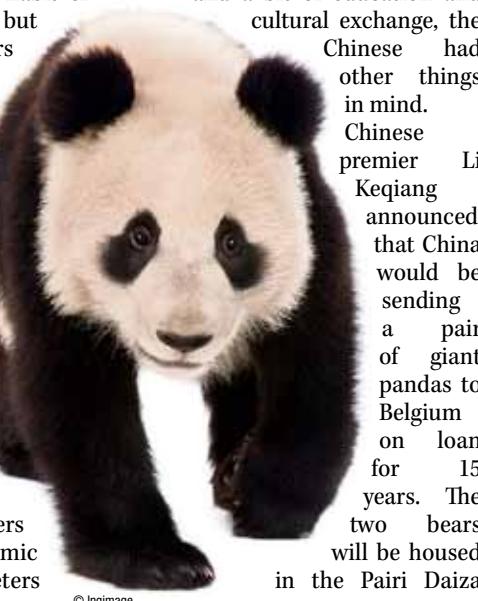
A tram operator who **derailed the coast tram at Nieuwpoort** in 2011 has been fined €1,200. The accident led to 31 people being treated for injuries. The court heard that the driver had approached a tight bend at at least 30 km/h where the limit was 20 km/h.

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Pandamonium

The panda: one of nature's cutest creations. Large and fuzzy and somewhat dozy, with a cuddlesome look and the endearing habit of eating almost nothing but bamboo. It also prefers not to engage in sexual activity. What possible damage could a panda ever do? Well, if you're to judge by the headlines at the end of last week, two pandas are on the verge of breaking apart the fragile construct that is Belgium. It happened thus: Both prime minister Elio Di Rupo and Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters were part of an economic visit to China. While Peeters



(see p7) is usually content to return with contracts for Flemish businesses, inward investment and a bit of education and cultural exchange, the Chinese had other things in mind. Chinese premier Li Keqiang announced that China would be sending a pair of giant pandas to Belgium on loan for 15 years. The two bears will be housed in the Pairi Daiza nature park in Bruggelette, a stone's throw from the city of Mons in Wallonia.

The announcement shocked many in the animal care industry: Pairi Daiza is a commercial concern, while Antwerp Zoo is the country's major zoological institution, supported by public funds. Di Rupo was accused of favouritism in sending the pandas – and the huge income their presence is certain to generate – to his home region. According to the world's press, the row has created a "punch-up" (Reuters) which "aggravates Belgian tensions" (*The Guardian*). As Flanders Today went to press, Belgium was still in one piece, with Peeters announcing he expected Di Rupo to "provide an explanation" for his decision. As far as Di Rupo is concerned, the pandas simply "symbolise the excellent relations between Belgium and China."

The stage is set

Extensive renovations required before World's Fair venue can rise again

► continued from page 1



Inside the American Pavilion back in 1958 during the World's Fair in Brussels

easy to see its potential. But it's also crystal clear why the building needs major and expensive renovations. "One of the biggest architectural challenges is to make the place sustainable, so the operating costs can come down," explains Vrebos. "If you took an infrared picture from the sky, you would see one big red spot. The energy and maintenance costs are gigantic, which is why the VRT moved out."

The AB wants to preserve as heritage the circular structure and the theatre, "but all the other spaces should be reformatted depending on their new purpose. The heating and ventilation infrastructure has to be completely modernised." As does the roof, the foundation, the electricity, the emergency exits and the basement, which has groundwater problems.

The estimated costs have not yet been made public. AB is presenting its business plan to the regional and federal authorities to see if the project has any chance of succeeding. "Informal contacts were always very positive," Vrebos says. "Hopefully this is not going to change when our plans become more tangible. We should know more by the end of the year or early 2014."

In the meantime, there's an agreement with the city of Brussels that they can use the building for one year (which is likely to be prolonged by another year). In that period, the federal authorities – still

the owner of the building after they bought it from the Americans for a symbolic \$1 – have agreed to not sell the premises to other parties. If the business plan is approved, a decision should be made about who is going to buy the building. "This can be the city but also another federal or regional institution," Vrebos explains. "If all goes well, a tender procedure follows, and four to five years later we can organise concerts again here."

"Here" is where we are standing now, in what is left of the multidisciplinary concert hall where Harry Belafonte, Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Duke Ellington and many others performed during Expo 58. But people also saw theatre, ballet and opera, a Leonard Bernstein musical and movie premieres.

The place used to have 1,150 seats but now only 200 remain, enough for a television audience. In the control room, we notice a schedule for *De Canvasscrack*, the summer quiz show on public television, dated 21 September, 2012 – probably when the last recording took place. The television monitors recall a time when flat screens were still a far-off dream.

"At first the intention was to dismantle the building after the World's Fair," Vrebos says. "But the authorities decided to rent it to the VRT, which back then was the BRT. The Belgian national broadcaster had just separated into a Flemish

and a French-speaking part, and the BRT was desperately seeking recording space after it had left the Flagey building. They needed more production space and fewer seats; now we want to extend the seated area again."

A feasibility study by the architecture office of Karel Lowette, former president of the AB, showed the potential to increase the number of seats to 1,200. "This could add value to all Brussels cultural institutes because most of their theatres don't have that much space." The AB, for instance, holds

GET TO KNOW THE AMERICAN THEATRE

If the American Theatre culture centre project gets the green light, the Ancienne Belgique will be responsible for the running of the theatre hall and the management of a newly created non-profit group that would also involve Brussels Expo, which encompasses all the attractions at the Heizel site.

"The theatre hall will be multidisciplinary, focusing not only on music but also on theatre and dance."



Brussels pop rock band BRNS play the American Theatre this weekend



After 50 years as a TV studio, a lot of work needs to be done to transform the American Theatre into a cultural centre

only 750 people seated. KVS, the Royal Flemish Theatre, has seating for just 500. Flagey's Studio 4 seats up to 860, while Kaaithetere around 700. All could benefit from a bigger performance space.

"The renovation of the American Theatre also fits with the other projects the city of Brussels has in mind for the Heizel area," says Vrebos, who points out the excellent location of the building – at the end of the A12 motorway and within walking distance of tram stop De Wand. "But one of the biggest advantages is the large inner courtyard. It has a diameter of 50 metres, so it's perfect for small-scale festivals and business events." The entire original American Pavilion, including the courtyard,

it. I've seen that Solvay can build such a structure," he says, already daydreaming about the future possibilities.

Even back in 1958, this pavilion was all about progress. Witness the original shield that still surrounds a big part of the building. Now it looks retro-futuristic, but back then it was just a way to exhibit how innovative the Americans were. Visitors could see the first computers and robots. The highlight of the pavilion was Circarama, another circular building showcasing the newest 360-degree projection technologies of Walt Disney, on display outside the US for the first time. This building was dismantled after the World's Fair ended.

A quote from president Franklin

"The renovation also fits with the other projects the city has in mind for the area"

was covered by a 26 metre-high construction in steel, glass and plastic, but this was taken down right after the Expo. In a later phase of the renovation, Vrebos would like to see this courtyard covered again. "The building was made to support such a weight on top of

D Roosevelt on one of the walls reminds everyone before leaving the hoop what real progress is: "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have little."

Volta will create a workspace for young artists with the same cross-disciplinary basis," says the AB's Marc Vrebos. Moreover, they don't plan to limit the use of the space to Brussels-based or Flemish groups. "We see this as a Belgian project."

Vrebos says that the biggest challenge right now is to translate and sell this multidisciplinary idea about the American Theatre to the general public and the cultural market, and to make it a strong brand." This weekend Belgian and international bands are playing in the heart of the building, attempting to give history a new future. Vrebos: "It would be such a shame if some estate agent built apartments or offices here."

On Friday, 20 September, BRNS, MEAN and Le Colisée will be on stage, followed the next day by Wire, Múm, Wolf Eyes and Anna Von Hausswolff. Get tickets through the AB website

► www.abconcerts.be

Belgacom computers hacked

Malware suggests that a Middle East subsidiary was the target

Alan Hope

The federal prosecutor is investigating a break-in into the computer system of telecommunications giant Belgacom, the government has revealed. Prime minister Elio Di Rupo promised that "the appropriate steps will be taken if the break-in turns out to be a case of cyber-espionage".

According to Flemish daily *De Standaard*, Belgacom has been the victim of hackers since 2011, which came to light when the company employed Dutch security consultants to investigate. That probe revealed the presence of malware – computer programmes that are able to turn control of any



computer system over to outside forces. Belgacom filed a legal complaint against persons unknown last July.

The attack appears to have involved "the services of another country at a high level", according to the newspaper. Reports conjectured the involvement of America's National Security Agency (NSA), after top-secret documents released by whistle-blower Edward Snowden had revealed widespread spying by the agency both at home and abroad.

According to *De Standaard*, the attack was principally aimed at BICS, a Belgacom subsidiary, which is a major telecoms provider in Africa

and the Middle East. The paper reports that the sophistication of the method, as well as the financial cost of the hacking operation, point to the NSA, or at least to a service working in co-operation with them. According to Flemish security expert Eddy Willems, it is too soon to say whether the NSA is involved in the security breach.

"The break-in which was detected did not have sabotage as its aim, but the collection of strategic information," said federal government ministers in a joint statement. Belgacom insisted there was no evidence that the hacking compromised personal details of clients or posed a threat to its own services.

Stadium talks continue as Brussels bids to host Euro 2020

The federal government, together with the governments of the Flemish and Brussels regions, have signed an agreement in principle on the arrival of a new national stadium on the edge of Brussels in time for the European Football Championship in 2020.

The agreement was signed last week in time for the deadline imposed by international football organisation UEFA for countries bidding to host the championships. While the

principle is agreed, many issues remain to be tackled.

The question of whether the new stadium will include an athletics track, which both Flanders and Brussels want, is left open, awaiting the results of a feasibility study. An athletics track would require moveable stands, which would make the stadium more technically difficult to realise and hence more expensive.

The parties are in principle against

the use of public funds to build the stadium and support private financing. However, football club Anderlecht, which had been expected to contribute in return for using the stadium as its new homebase, prefers, according to general manager Herman Van Holsbeeck, to "wait and see how the case develops".

The new stadium will be located in Grimbergen, Flemish Brabant, which borders Brussels. According

to Flemish sport and planning minister Philippe Muyters, that means Dutch needs to be spoken by stadium staff. That's strongly opposed by other parties in the discussion, including Brussels minister-president Rudi Vervoort, who pointed out that the stadium will be a private concern and so fall outside of language laws. People working there will speak mainly English, he said.

Government looks to protect unzoned woodland

Flanders has 20,811 hectares of unzoned woodland – forest growing in areas where it is not under special protection – which is under threat of being felled at any time, the government's agency for nature and woodland ANB reports.

Flemish nature minister Joke Schauvliege has expressed the desire to offer better protection to the endangered woods – about one-ninth of the region's total of 178,000 hectares. Among the measures available is asking the ANB to be more strict when dealing with applications for removal of woodland. That would help avoid the kind of protests carried out by conservationists in the Lappersfort forest near Bruges over the course of more than eight years from 2001 to 2009. Lappersfort was eventually felled for development.

The decisions of ANB are not binding, so Schauvliege now intends to approach her colleague, urban

planning minister Philippe Muyters, for his co-operation. "To be certain of keeping this valuable woodland alive, I'll explain to him the need to maintain green areas as much as possible," she said.



Unzoned forested areas are the concern of the Flemish nature ministry

Brussels hospital opens new cancer clinic

The Sint-Jan Hospital in central Brussels unveiled its new cancer clinic last week, which brings together all of the hospital's expertise in the area in one place. The clinic will group together 12 expert teams covering a wide range of disciplines, designed to "make the life of the patient easier," a hospital spokesperson said. Each patient will "receive individual treatment to the full extent of his or her needs." That includes psychological counselling, diet information, social assistance and even wellness and art therapy.

The clinic also takes a holistic approach to families, with spaces provided for family members, if needed. In addition, technical equipment will be installed in the clinic so that patients won't need to be transported to other parts of the hospital for scans or tests.



Sint-Jan's new clinic will bring all cancer treatments to one department

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

85km

€4.29 million

250kg

30%

96%

swum by a lone seal last week, found in the Zenne river after losing its way and swimming up the Scheldt and Rupel rivers from the sea. It was taken to Sea Life Blankenberge for later release

cost to public transport services De Lijn in Flanders last year as a result of fare-dodgers, who account for 3% of passengers. In Brussels, transport authority MIVB lost €11 million

of grapes stolen from a greenhouse in Overijse last week, the latest in a series of odd crop thefts in Flanders that also includes 250kg of potatoes and 100kg of onions from fields

more carbon particles inhaled by those who travel daily to work by car or bus/tram, than by those who stay at home, according to a study by the university of Hasselt

of programmes on the public broadcaster VRT are subtitled on teletext for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. For news and current affairs the percentage goes up to 99%

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Who wants the 16?

"The 16" refers to the address Wetstraat 16, the prime minister's office, as well as the function of prime minister itself. One would think that the 16 was the most coveted of political posts, but that is not the case in Flanders. No-one, so it seems, wants the 16.

In days of yore, this was not an issue. For decades, the Christian-democrats were the largest political force in Flanders, with 30% or more of the vote. Hence, the leader of the Christian-democrats (Wilfried Martens, Jean-Luc Dehaene...) became prime minister, with a federal coalition including either liberals or socialists.

This changed in 1999, when the Christian-democrats had to give up their number one position in Flanders. As the liberals came into power, their leader, Guy Verhofstadt, took up office in the 16. In 2007, Verhofstadt (Open VLD) and Yves Leterme (CD&V) fought out "a battle for the 16" – unusual, as ours is not a presidential system. Even Johan Vande Lanotte, of the relatively small socialist SPA, called himself a candidate for the 16 at the time.

With the 2014 federal elections looming, it's becoming increasingly clear that the 16 is not such a hot ticket anymore. Kris Peeters, leader of the Christian-democrats and Flanders' most popular politician, is "not interested". In this country, a prime minister does not have more power than a minister-president, he says.

Also, Peeters' party stands at no more than 17% in the polls, a lot less than N-VA, which is expected to get around 30%. Why then should CD&V take up the office, knowing that it can lead to a reduced popularity?

So all eyes are now on N-VA and its leader, Bart De Wever. As Flanders' (and Belgium's) largest party, they are expected to claim the 16. De Wever, however, is not interested either. He is reluctant to break his promise to stay in Antwerp, where he is mayor. Moreover, he does not believe in "the Belgian construction".

As prime minister, De Wever would have to make that construction work, though, which is at odds with everything he stands for. N-VA simply does not want to govern Belgium, a paradox that escapes many of its voters. So, in spite of his dwindling popularity on both sides of the language divide, the current prime minister, Elio Di Rupo (PS), has the best chance at getting the 16 again. If he wants it, that is.

“Better late than never”

The Africa museum in Tervuren presents its plans for a long-delayed makeover

Alan Hope

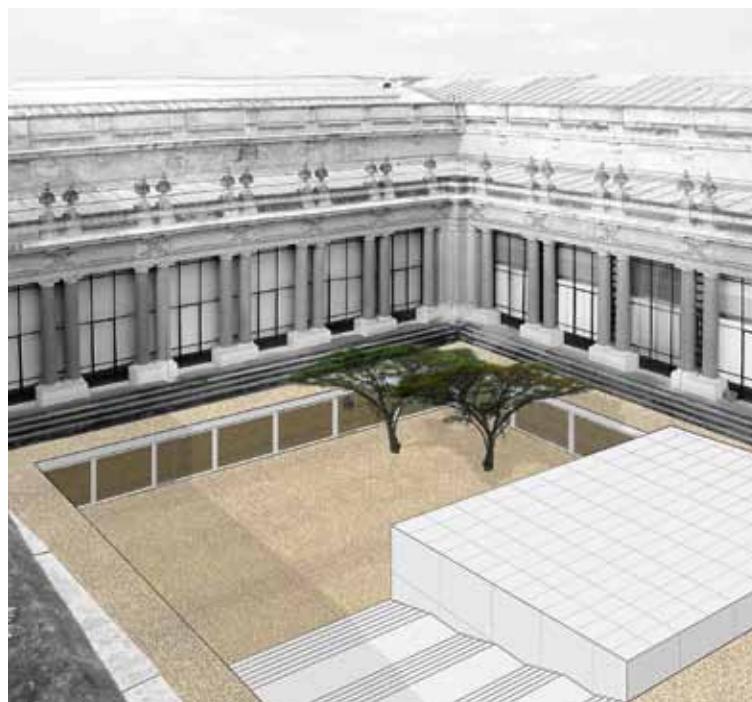
It's common enough to find a renovation project running past its projected deadline. It's less common to come across one that takes years to even get started. But that's been the case for the Royal Museum for Central Africa (KMMA) in Tervuren. The decision to renovate and expand the museum and grounds was originally taken in 2006. Last month, the plans were presented. The museum will close and the works will begin in November.

Back in 2010, the museum's director, Guido Gryseels, explained the problem on Radio 2: "The museum hasn't changed since 1957. The permanent installations are still a reflection of Belgium's vision of Africa from before 1960. The infrastructure is absolutely not suitable for contemporary requirements. There are no conference or meeting rooms and

at the federal Buildings Agency, speaking at the official presentation of the project. The agency is providing €17 million in financing, or 10% of its investment budget over the three-year period. "Patience is a virtue," he said, addressing Gryseels, "but we may have put your patience to the test. Therefore I am proud to be able to present these plans here today."

The KMMA began its life in 1897 as the Palace of the Colonies, built by King Leopold II for the Brussels International Exposition on what was still his private domain in Tervuren. The building we see today was designed in 1904 as a permanent museum and scientific institute and was opened in 1910, a year after Leopold's death.

The museum's collection is breathtakingly huge: What visitors see is but 5% of what they have. That includes more than 10 million



centre.

"We're often referred to as the last colonial museum in the world," Gryseels said. "For a great many Belgian children, a visit to this museum is their first encounter with Africa. So we need our museum to meet the needs of the 21st century. To maintain the unique atmosphere, we'll be holding on to the old display cases, supplemented by a new modular system. We're currently working out a whole new scenography and timeline, with four main themes: Central African society, history, resources and landscape/biodiversity. The aim is to turn the last colonial museum into a contemporary museum of African art."

During the closure, the museum's scientific work will continue, with staff rehoused in the research centre elsewhere in the park. Most of the museum's other staff will be found positions elsewhere until the reopening. Much of the collection, meanwhile, will take off for other parts of the world.

"There was a lot of demand for our collection, at home and overseas," Gryseels said. "Next year part of the collection will be in Ostend and Charleroi. The famous elephant will be temporarily rehoused in Bozar." The work of school groups – an important part of the museum's function – will carry on with the help of Bozar, the BELvue museum and the Museum for Natural Sciences, all in Brussels.

Items from KMMA's collection will also be featured at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Neuberger Museum of Art in New York, the New Orleans Museum of Art and the Musée Dapper in Paris.

► www.africamuseum.be

VBS Sabatini ©



Drawings for the new inner courtyard of the museum and the entrance to the new pavilion, which will house the shop and restaurant

very few audio-visual resources." At that time, the plan was for the museum to close in the summer of 2012 for 18 months for renovations under the supervision of architect Stephane Beel. Delayed for more than a year, the plan now is for the museum to close in November and re-open in the second half of 2016 – a closure twice as long as originally planned. The cost of the operation remains fixed at €66.5 million, of which €51 million goes to building costs.

"Better late than never," was the conclusion of Servais Verherstraeten, secretary of state

zoological specimens, among them six million insects. There are 8,000 musical instruments, 2,500 hours of recordings of African music, half a million films and photographs and 56,000 wood samples.

The plans drawn up by Beel and his associates include a new tower to house the museum's records, which includes the complete archives of Henry Morton Stanley (of "Dr Livingston, I presume" fame). The main building, which affords a magnificent panorama of Tervuren Park, will be entirely given over to exhibitions: The shop and restaurant will move

to a new reception pavilion between the main building and the Kolonienpaleis, linked to the main museum by an underground passage. The Kolonienpaleis will become a congress and media

Handbook tackles radicalisation

The mayors of Antwerp, Vilvoorde, Mechelen and Maaseik last week launched a guide to identifying and countering the radicalisation of young people. The guide, supported by Flemish integration minister Geert Bourgeois, is an effort to stop the flow of young men leaving their homes in Flanders to travel to Syria to fight against the government regime there. According to rough estimates, between 80 and 100 Muslim youths have made their way from Flanders to Syria, although some have already returned.

The four cities account for the majority of the young men known to have travelled to Syria. The guide, available online to download, is aimed at educators, police services,



From left: Mayors of Vilvoorde (Hans Bonte), Antwerp (Bart De Wever), Mechelen (Bart Somers) and Maaseik (Jan Creemers, not pictured) co-operated on the new guide

youth clubs and welfare agencies, and offers advice on how to recognise when radicalisation is taking place, what to do to stop it and where to look for help. In Vilvoorde, for example, the city council has already appointed a senior civil servant to deal with questions related to the issue.

Last week it was revealed that Vilvoorde man Houssien Elouassaki, the leader of Sharia4Belgium in Syria, was reported to have been killed in fighting there in early August.

AH

► www.integratiebeleid.be

New culture decree proposed

Diversity, entrepreneurship and the removal of boundaries between disciplines were three of the highlights of the proposed new culture decree, presented last week by the Flemish parliament and by veteran culture specialist Bart Caron of Groen (pictured), who took part in the deliberations with the majority.

The decree is meant to replace the existing document, produced in 2004, which governs how subsidies are to be dealt out to cultural organisations and institutions. In recent years, several problems have emerged that are now addressed in the new decree.

Among the major changes are the removal of boundaries between disciplines, so that the criteria for subsidy rest not on whether the organisation produces theatre or music but on matters of development, production, public participation and reflection. A pool of more than 100 people from both inside and outside the cultural sector have been asked to give their reactions to the decree.

Diversity is also key: as much in the employment of staff and the engagement of performers as in themes and the audiences



targeted. The document is expected to be approved by the Flemish parliament soon and go on to form the basis of the new government's culture policy after the elections next May. AH

Outstanding in their field

Farmers battle it out to be named the country's finest ploughman

Toon Lambrechts

Earlier this month, in a field in the furthest reaches of West Flanders, a special competition took place. In Watou, on the French border, two dozen farmers and their tractors competed for the title of Belgium's best ploughman. Top placers will go on to represent the country on the international stage at the European Championships and the World Cup. Competitor Jens De Backer is cautious when I ask him how he got on. "I wasn't first, but I certainly wasn't last," he smiles. Behind him lies a freshly ploughed field, the result of a few hours' work. Fourth place at a provincial match in East Flanders earned him a ticket to the national championship. "I do it for fun," he says. "I don't have any special equipment or anything like most others here. My plough comes straight from the field."

De Backer is one of 23 who competed earlier this month for the title of Belgium's best ploughman. The competition is open to farmers of all ages, but as it's sponsored by an organisation for young farmers, that's mostly who it attracts.

Watou is in the farthest corner of Flanders, the landscape a patchwork of corn, beet and wheat fields. A sturdy wind blows over the wide open spaces. It's an ideal location for this kind of competition, in other words.

Each participant is assigned his own numbered plot. It's not a nice neat square but a trapezium to make it more difficult: It's precision that counts, not speed. The concentration is almost palpable, and soon the air is full of the smell



Ready to rumble: The Belgian Ploughing Championship took place earlier this month in West Flanders

of freshly tilled earth and the sound of murmuring engines.

From the sidelines, the public comments on the competitor's work. The vast majority of them are farmers themselves and talk about the ploughmen and their efforts in terms that are incomprehensible to any outsider (the West Flemish dialect also doesn't help). A little further on, events are far less serious. On a makeshift racecourse, some farmers test their agility with the tractor, in challenges including balancing on a swinging bridge. Meanwhile, the wheat stubble has

been largely tilled over and the jury walks from plot to plot. To the untrained eye, every piece looks the same, but the jury knows better, explains Hugo Verhoeven. Himself once a competitive ploughman, Verhoeven is chair of the Belgian Ploughing Committee. He shows me a list of the 20 or so categories on which the participants are assessed.

"Many factors play a role. Is the furrow straight and even, does the ploughman manage to cover all the stubble, does he remain inside the lines of his plot and so on. We judge

everything while he is at work, and we also award points for the general look of the field afterwards."

Is Flanders particularly rich in ploughing talent? "We certainly can't complain," says Verhoeven. "Today we've even had a former world champion on the field here. Next year it's our turn to host the European Championship, and the best ploughmen today will represent our country."

Ploughing competitions have been around for a long time, he explains, but there have been some changes over the years. "Most participants

have special competition ploughs, which they assemble themselves, and there's a lot of technical knowledge involved. The same is true in other sports: You wouldn't enter a Formula 1 race with a normal car."

By the end of the afternoon, there is no more wheat stubble to see. The jury has finished its task and has chosen a winner in each category, based on the kind of plough used: Niels Marien and Tom Smits, both of Antwerp province, walk away with the titles.

The competition in Watou is organised by Groene Kring (Green Circle), the association for young farmers and horticulturists. "Ploughing is an agricultural activity, but it's also a technique that you have to learn," says Ellen Vos, Groene Kring's co-ordinator, "so it's ideal to hold a contest around it. For us, it is also a way to promote ploughing and the technology behind it."

The festive atmosphere today might hide the fact, but for young farmers, times are difficult. A farm requires a huge capital investment, and regulations are quite strict. Moreover, farmers have no control over the price of their products. It's almost exclusively a family business, with new start-ups almost non-existent.

"That's why the Groene Kring seeks to support young farmers as much as possible," says Vos. "By defending their interests and offering training – but also by bringing together young farmers."

Thoroughbred accord

New trade deal will see Flemish horses sold directly to China

Alan Hope

China will begin importing sought-after Flemish show horses this month, after a trade protocol was signed between China and Belgium during an economic mission in the country last week.

"This is an important step," said Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, who was on the mission. "We will arrange several exports in the near future, and I hope they will win a lot of competitions here." Peeters sealed the deal with China last April, together with federal agriculture minister Sabine Laruelle, and the formalities have now been completed, a spokesperson said.

Until now, China has only been able to import horses from Belgium via a third country, usually the Netherlands, Luxembourg or Germany. That hasn't, however, diminished the country's enthusiasm for local breeds, in particular the Belgian Warmblood Horse (BWP), a

thoroughbred registered with one of the two main studbooks.

The BWP, highly regarded for its performances in show-jumping and dressage, is unusual in not being based on a domestic breed. This is because before 1954 it was illegal in Belgium to breed saddle horses – a measure intended to protect the bloodlines of the Brabant draft horse.

The new open market between China and Flanders holds interesting prospects for breeders here, according to Rudi Eerdekkens, secretary-general of the BWP association, who accompanied Peeters on the mission. "China has no equine culture of its own," he said. "But owning your own horse there is a phenomenon on the increase. Having a horse has become a status symbol."

China's rapidly growing middle class has ensured a burgeoning market for



Kris Peeters took to the saddle last week during a trade mission to China

horses, he explained, and customers require their mounts to be "ready to ride", which the Flemish industry is capable of providing. The most recent figures come from 2008 and

show that the horse industry in Flanders counts 1,750 companies, employing 3,500 people and with a total turnover of €219 million. As well as meeting trade and

government officials on a number of other subjects (see facing page), Peeters visited the Equuleus International Riding Club in Beijing, where he took the time to get in the saddle himself; the minister-president is a practised rider, though he does so less often since he broke his hipbone in a fall in 2010.

"We've been buying mainly Belgian horses since 2004," Equuleus manager Michelle Wang told VRT News. "We've bought to date about 60 or 70 warmblood horses, and more than 40 of those came from Belgium."

Belgian horses, said rider Yang Fujun, "have a stable temperament. They're very easy to ride. Belgian horses have won many major international competitions."

According to the industry, the first direct exports from Flanders to China will take place before the end of the year.

Flanders reaps rewards in China

Agreements made between businesses and schools during economic visit

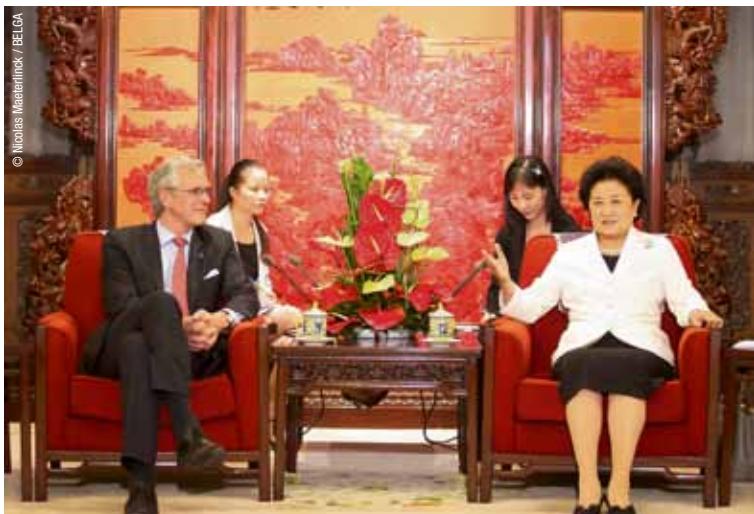
Alan Hope

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters has completed a four-day trade mission to China resulting in a number of successes for Flemish businesses and other institutions. Peeters was leading a trade delegation of business people and academics to the west of the country, which is currently the focus of a massive economic development effort by the Chinese government. Unusually for a visiting politician, Peeters was welcomed on his arrival in the Zhongnanhai, the seat of the Communist Party and the very centre of power in the country. He was also greeted by vice-premier Liu Yandong; previous Flemish leaders have always been received at the vice-minister level.

China's rapid economic growth was something to be jealous of, said Peeters, though he pointed out that "the political regime in China is of course very different. We pay the price for democracy, which slows everything down."

As well as inaugurating a new agreement for the export of Flemish saddle horses to China (see facing page), the mission also recorded success in several other areas.

• The University of Antwerp



Vice-premier Liu Yandong met with Kris Peeters in the Zhongnanhai, the seat of the Communist Party of China

will co-operate with Chongqing University on an educational exchange in transport and logistics. Antwerp will send professors to lecture in Chongqing, while students will also travel from China to Antwerp for lessons. Chongqing is a growing metropolis in the west of the country, which already has links with the port authority and the provincial administration.

• Students at Southwest Jiaotong University will be able to travel to

Ghent University, to study under a co-operation agreement signed by the two institutions during the mission; at the same time, the Free University of Brussels (VUB) will co-operate with several Chinese universities on exchanges for students studying contemporary art.

• Chinese and Flemish authorities continued talks on the introduction of a regular freight rail service linking Antwerp and China, according to

Luc Broos of Antwerp's provincial development agency. There is already a cargo service on the rail link that travels through Germany, Poland, the Ukraine, Russia and Mongolia before ending in Chongqing, but the plan is to extend the service to reach Chongqing on a daily basis. "The trip could be done in 14 days, compared to 40 days by ship," said Broos.

• The delegation also visited a factory run by Bekaert, the West Flemish steel wire producer, which has been present in China since 2008 in Shuangqiao, near Chongqing. The factory manufactures wires for use in car and truck tyres.

• EcoNation, the Ghent-based manufacturer of specially designed skylights, signed its biggest-ever contract during the visit. The company will install its LightCatcher skylight, which uses mirrors to allow the maximum entry and optimal distribution of sunlight, in up to 1.4 million square metres of premises over the course of the €4.5 million contract. In the first phase of the project, EcoNation will install 2,349 skylights in a 200,000 square-metre factory operated by leather goods manufacturer Kuka.

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Airlines ▶ Jetairfly

The Brussels-based carrier, specialised in charter flights, will launch a Brussels-Miami service from next spring.

Bio-tech

► ThromboGenics

The Leuven-based biotechnology firm has signed an agreement with the UK's Bicycle Therapeutics company to develop and market ophthalmic medicines to treat adult vision loss.

Facilities

► Veldeman

The facilities accommodation company, based in Bree, Limburg province, supplied 22,000 square metres of outdoor tents and tarpaulins for the G20 Leaders' Summit in Saint Petersburg earlier this month.

Food service ▶ Exki

The Brussels-based chain of eateries, specialised in fresh and organic foods, is opening its first outlet outside of Europe, in the Manhattan area of New York. The location is expected to open early next year.

Materials ▶ Umicore

The Brussels-based non-ferrous metals group has received the green light from the Chinese authorities to build a new zinc powder production unit in Changsha, the capital of the Hunan province.

Plastics ▶ Resilux

The PET bottles producer, based in Wetteren, East Flanders, has signed a five-year agreement with Procter&Gamble to supply Airopack containers, which dispense liquids, powders and gases without using aerosol cans.

Supermarkets

► Colruyt

The Halle-based discount supermarket chain has laid the first stone of a new 30,000 square-metre distribution centre in Lessines, Wallonia. The €80 million facility is expected to open in February of 2015. The company is also creating a Brussels-based strategic European alliance with Coop of Switzerland, the Italian Conad and the German Rewe.

Transport ▶ Antwerp

Antwerp provincial authorities are negotiating the creation of a rail freight service between Antwerp and the Chinese city of Chongqing, home of computer producing facilities of HP and Acer. The move would cut delivery times to the European market to 14 days compared to 40 for ship transport.

Strike at Brussels Airlines averted

Management and unions at Brussels Airlines have averted a strike announced last week by unions representing cabin crew, with an agreement reached on Monday. Brussels Airlines is faced with making savings of €110 million in order to return to profitability in 2014.

"We remain convinced that the choice for employment via a jobs guarantee for two years and an effort by all members of staff is the right one," said CEO Bernard Gustin in a statement. "That is better than a drastic reduction in our activities and our staff numbers."



© Milad A380/Wikimedia Commons

Unions argued that the measures proposed placed extra pressure on cabin crew, which in turn compromised safety.

Meanwhile, a work-to-rule by customs officers at air freight centre Brucargo led to losses of €9 million a day, according to chamber of commerce Voka Halle-Vilvoorde. Customs officers also worked to rule at the passenger terminal in Zaventem and in the port of Antwerp, in protest at a new salary system which scraps existing premiums for night and weekend work.

Criticism around bridge pension for Ford Genk workers

A decision by federal labour minister Monica De Coninck (SPA) to allow Ford Genk workers over the age of 52 to claim a bridging pension has led to criticism within the government.

The decision affects 1,772 workers at Ford who will have reached the age of 52 by the time the factory closes at the end of 2014, as well as some 100 employees in a similar situation at two local suppliers, who will also be affected by the closure. Critics point out that De Coninck's decision effectively declares that the workers are unemployable at 52 just at a time when the government is trying to convince people of the need to work longer.

Speaking on the VRT's weekend political programme *De zevende dag*, federal pensions minister

Alexander De Croo (Open VLD) said he would not have approved the bridge pension if he had been in De Coninck's position. Flemish labour minister Philippe Muyters countered that De Croo was "washing his hands of responsibility" since De Coninck was implementing a law brought into force with the help of De Croo's party.

Caroline Ven, director-general of the entrepreneurs' organisation VKW, said she was "disappointed" that the government had made an exception to their own new rules on bridging pensions, which should be available only from the age of 60 or after 40 years of work. The decision, she said, "went against the spirit of the government's reforms".

Trade unions, meanwhile, welcomed a "sensible decision".

Sportpaleis takes over Vorst Nationaal; Paleis 12 opens

The Sportpaleis Group is taking over the running of Vorst Nationaal in Brussels from its owners, Music Hall Group, the companies announced. Music Hall will now focus more on production and promotion, CEO Geert Allaert said.

Music Hall was at the centre of a controversy earlier in the year when its non-profit subsidiary MVV received a government subsidy of €850,000 for a single musical. Sportpaleis director Jan Van Esbroeck said he was "delighted"

that the company's expertise in venue management could now be applied to what he called "one of the most pleasant concert halls in Europe".

The two companies will explore further projects, such as co-operation between Sportpaleis' newly renovated Congrestheater in Hasselt and Music Hall's Capitole theatre in Ghent and Stadsschouwburg in Antwerp. In related news, Brussels City mayor Freddy Thielemans and the region's

minister-president officially opened Paleis 12, a new multi-purpose concert and conference hall on the Heizel plateau with a modular capacity of between 2,500 and 18,000 seats.

The new hall is the first building in the Neo project, a massive – and massively contested – conference and leisure centre at Heizel. It fills a gap in the Brussels concert venue scene between Vorst Nationaal, with its capacity of 8,000, and the Koning Boudewijn stadium, which can

house 40,000.

Paleis 12 was previously part of Neo's exhibition spaces, but has now been transformed, at a cost to the city of €20 million, into a venue specifically for concerts. The opening concert was given by tribute band The Australian Pink Floyd. Acts programmed for later in the year include David Guetta, Mylène Farmer and Elton John.

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Come rain or shine

Belgium's RMI turns 100 this year, and these days it does more than just predict the weather

Senne Starckx

Like most of those in Europe, Belgium's Royal Meteorological Institute (RMI) has its roots in the national observatory. As technology rapidly improved towards the end of the 19th century, scientists, who would later call themselves meteorologists, were starting to investigate the lowest part of the sky – that inconstant, sub-lunar world where chaos rules over order.

The original motive of setting up a national meteorological office wasn't to inform the public whether they could expect showers or a sunny sky. The Belgian government saw the foundation of a met office as a necessity to keep early airplanes and zeppelins in the air and to better assist the military. So on 31 July, 1913, King Albert I signed the royal decree that split up the Royal Observatory of Belgium and gave birth to the RMI.

Only a year after the RMI began, the first weathermen had to give up, as the First World War broke out. Over the next four years, the Germans allowed no activity to be undertaken at the RMI; they had their own meteorologists to make forecasts for their army.

So the war threw a serious spanner in the RMI's development, and that of Belgian meteorology in general. In almost every other country involved in the war, the met office was heavily funded because of the strategic importance of a reliable weather forecast. After the war, the RMI, based in the Brussels district of Ukkel, began all over again.

Fortunately, in Jules Jaumotte, it had a director who didn't shirk. In 1919, Jaumotte – who was a pilot during the war and a pioneer in aerial photography – went to



To celebrate the RMI's 100th anniversary, bpost released these heat-sensitive stamps with a tree that changed to a season with the application of a bit of warmth

an international meteorological conference in Paris. There he met Vilhelm Bjerknes, a Norwegian meteorologist often considered the father of modern weather forecasting.

Jaumotte and Bjerknes became close friends, and the staff at the RMI became acquainted with the meteorological knowledge of the so-called Norwegian school; Bjerknes introduced now-familiar concepts like weather fronts, cold and warm air currents and depressions to the field of meteorology. By the mid-1920s, the Brussels met office had caught up with weather forecasters in the UK, France and the Netherlands.

Jaumotte also encouraged research among his staff. In 1927, thanks to his efforts, the RMI was already able to launch numerous weather balloons, each one equipped with a "meteorograph" – a device for recording temperature, air pressure and humidity. The balloons were pulled back and released again several times a day and delivered real-time information about the

spatial and temporal distribution of atmospheric currents above Belgian territory.

But the Second World War caused another setback. During the German invasion of Belgium, several air torpedoes struck the institute's hill in Ukkel, resulting in numerous casualties. Jaumotte was among the victims. Soon after the attack, the RMI was again taken over by the Germans. Just as in the First World War, the occupiers stole all the scientific equipment, meaning the RMI had to, once again, start over after the liberation.

This time, the UK's met office came to the aid of its Belgian colleagues. With help from the Royal Air Force, a ground station for radio measurements was installed in Ukkel. From then on, the RMI was able to measure nearly all the relevant atmospheric parameters by sending radio waves into the sky. This meant the immediate retirement of those pre-war weather balloons.

The 1950s and '60s brought intense

modernisation of the RMI's equipment. This was a time of unbridled technological progress, in which the World Expo came to Brussels (in 1958) and the Atomium was inaugurated. The RMI moved into its new offices (still on the hill in Ukkel), control rooms and research labs.

Early innovation

But the real eye-catcher during this period was a new human-sized machine in the heart of the control centre. Indeed, the Belgian met office was one of the first meteorological institutes in the world to have a weather computer. Thanks to this machine, the RMI made numerical weather forecasts every day – not only predicting that the next day would be warm, but also just *how* warm.

Furthermore, in 1969, Belgium was the first country in the world where aerial probes registered the amount of ozone in the lower layers of the atmosphere. As time went by, the RMI increasingly began to take on the extra task of monitoring the atmosphere – not just the weather.

The science of weather forecasting also kept improving in the decades that followed, culminating in 1997 with the launch of the ambitious ALADIN weather model. This allows the RMI to make very specific weather forecasts in every square kilometre of the country. And in 1999, more than 50 years after the institute had abandoned the weather balloon, RMI scientists took part in a balloon race around the world. From behind their computers, they piloted Swiss balloonist Bertrand Piccard in his Breitling Orbiter 3 around the world in 20 days.

► www.meteo.be

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

The nephrology department at Ghent University Hospital is the first in Europe to use a new kidney dialysis device to treat premature and newborn babies. With technical adjustments, current devices for adults and adolescents could work with a minimum 70ml of blood, but this is too much for a baby with only 250ml in its body. The new device, called Carpe Diem, only needs 30ml to work.

Thirteen of the 22 amphibian and reptile species in Flanders are in danger of disappearing from the region, according to the updated Red List, drawn up by the Flemish Research Institute for Nature and Forest and nature conservancy organisation Natuurpunt. In particular, the common spadefoot toad is threatened with extinction here, as the number of places where they were found has dropped by 90% in the last 30 years. The European tree frog is in the same danger zone, but recent protection measures are resulting in a growing population.

The student support agency of Antwerp's urban education network is the first to support pupils via a chat function. Social workers were trained at the Artevelde University College Ghent in the essentials of youngsters' chat language with its abbreviations, emoticons and English terms. There is a chat session every Wednesday, from 13.00 to 17.00.

► www.clbchat.be

The University of Leuven is in 77th place on the world's top 100 universities list, published annually by the British education company QS. The company compares about 800 education institutions worldwide on the basis of research, employment, education and international profile. KUL is the only Belgian school in the top 100, though all Flemish universities (except Hasselt) finish in the top 200. The universities from Flanders all moved up on the list, with Ghent making the most progress – from 148 to 122.

► www.qs.com

Only two out of 100 Flemish toddlers get sufficient exercise. That is the conclusion of research by Ghent University on the physical activity of 130 toddlers: 98% of them don't get three hours of exercise a day, as the international health standard advises. They appear to spend too much time on games, watching television and in the buggy. At Hasselt, the PXL University College has set up a research project to encourage physical exercise at kindergartens. Andy Furniere

MET TALKS

The RMI has been celebrating its 100th birthday all year, and this month it hosts a series of public lectures covering everything about the weather, climate-change science, the RMI's involvement in the Belgian polar base in Antarctica and more. The lectures (in Dutch) will be held in the auditorium of the Jubelpark Museum in Brussels on 29 September. Weathermen Frank Deboosere and David Dehennauw will also be there. On the morning of the conference, the RMI's Maarten Reyniers will talk about the hyper-modern weather radar in Jabbeke, West Flanders, which was installed on 2 July. This radar,

on a 46-metre-high tower, sees precipitation zones coming from 240 kilometres and will improve the rain and snow forecasts behind websites like buienradar.be.

"Real-time radar images of precipitation zones have become very popular over recent years," says Reyniers. "But few people know exactly how these radars work and how they manage to see the rain coming."

Places for the conference are limited; register via the link below by 20 September.

► www.tinyurl.com/rmiconference

WEATHER WATCHERS

Apart from the 200 people who earn their living at the RMI's office in Ukkel, the met office also relies on a dedicated team of 270 volunteers who take note of local weather anomalies every day. These volunteers live across the country and each has a miniature weather station in their gardens or on their balconies (pictured). At 20.00, they tell the control room in Ukkel how much rain or snow has fallen, what was the mean temperature, whether there were clouds... It takes about 10 minutes every evening. "But it also takes some discipline because weather reporting doesn't stop at weekends or on holidays," says Luc Debontridder, responsible for the



Become a weather watcher for the RMI

RMI's "intelligence service". The service is seeking new volunteers. "We're getting too few applications, particularly among younger people. That's why we're targeting amateur meteorologists. Those are people who are generally fascinated by the weather and are in most cases easy to persuade to help us out." To volunteer, visit the website and use the contact form.

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From dusk 'til dawn

Flanders' bats are under threat from disappearing habitats and image problems

Toon Lambrechts

No bat specialist goes out without a bat detector. David Gallens from Natuurpunt, our guide for tonight's bat walk, has his. The device, not much bigger than an oversized mobile phone, translates ultrasonic noise into sounds that the human ear can detect. With one click, the night silence is suddenly transformed into a symphony of hidden sounds.

The first noises come from insects, then a short series of nervous clicks reveals that dwarf bats are hunting somewhere nearby. A few moments later, the detector reveals another sound. This time it's a Daubenton's bat, explains Gallens. The fact that we can't hear the real sounds is actually a blessing because the noise of some species measures more than 100 decibels. In order not to be deafened by their own din, bats are able to close their ears in a fraction of a second.

As if there by invitation, a bat flies above the pond at the end of the walk, fluttering around above the water. Gallens draws our attention to a sound that can be heard even without the detector. Not all sounds bats make are ultrasonic: Social sounds, intended not for hunting but for communication, have a lower frequency and can be heard by humans. It's probably a cry meant to attract females; the mating season is in full swing.

The walk, on the grounds of the agricultural school in Melle, East Flanders, was part of last month's International Bat Night, an annual worldwide event that invites people to take part in night-time walks and talks to discover bats and their



Families go bat sighting (and get a little face paint) on the annual Night of the Bats

habitat. Events in Flanders are organised by nature conservation agency Natuurpunt, and this year, more than 6,000 people took part. Still, things are not going well for Flanders' bats, says Wout Willems, bat specialist at Natuurpunt. "Some species like the *pipistrelle*, which live close to us humans, are doing fine, but just about all the other species are threatened. They are a vulnerable population. Bats have only one young each year, so their numbers recover very slowly." The reasons for the bat's decline are familiar: loss of habitat, large-scale

agriculture, fewer wintering sites... "Half of the Flemish bat population is wintering in the old military forts around Antwerp," explains Willems. "But there are more and more plans being proposed to renovate the forts, which is very bad news for the bats because these wintering sites are irreplaceable."

Many people are concerned about the fate of the bat. Take Kris Boeckx and Hilde Mertens, for example, founders of a shelter for bats called De Laatvlieger, in Geel, Antwerp province. If an injured bat is found, they take care of it. Mertens shows

me a room at the back of the house. On the wall are six cages, each with a recovering bat inside. Further on is a bigger cage containing 20 orphaned bats, with some plastic cages where newcomers are quarantined. On the table are scales crawling with mealworms, which will soon be the bats' dinner.

"In Flanders there are only two shelters for bats," says Boeckx. "It is truly pioneering work; all our knowledge on how to run the place comes from England. They are much further ahead when it comes to bat shelters."



A recovering bat is fed milk at Kris Boeckx and Hilde Mertens' shelter in Geel

He points to a thick book on the table, the Bat Rescue Manual. "Most bats are turned in by people who find them or sometimes by the bird shelters," continues Mertens. "Some animals stay here only a few days, others end up being here almost a year. If they are strong enough to fly again, we let them loose in the place where they were found. It takes a lot of work, especially with a group of baby bats. Every day they need to be given their milk with a pipette." Boeckx's passion for bats began after he took a course on being a nature guide, but it took hold of the whole family, and now De Laatvlieger is a family business. But Boeckx remains realistic. "This shelter will not save the bats as a species, but it helps to improve the animal's image." And that's really needed because that image still works against them. In stories, they usually find themselves cast as the villain, and the old fear that bats nest in people's hair stubbornly remains. Mertens laughs: "Once we got a call from someone who begged us to save him from the bats in his home. He told us that his family was wearing shower caps for a week for fear that they would fly into their hair."

Lock and quays

Antwerp celebrates the Freedom treaty as Flanders' ports invite visitors to explore

Marc Maes

This weekend the Port of Antwerp will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the "Freedom of the Scheldt" treaty, which opened up the river to international shipping again after being blocked since the 16th century. It's Antwerp's angle to Vlaamse Havendag, or Flemish Port Day, which offers a unique opportunity to pay a visit to the city's Deurganck lock but also explore all the region's ports.

On Saturday, 21 September, the treaty will be celebrated with a huge maritime parade. Some 150 vessels will make their way down the river in front of the city centre. One of the participating vessels is the Brabo floating crane, which will be carrying a container with Antverpia, the personification of the city, on board.

The grand finale will be staged at the Bonaparte dock, near the MAS



museum, with a massive sound and light display. The Kattendijk dock is the place to visit historical ships and the exhibition *Nooit meer dicht* (No Longer Closed) on the historical perspective of the opening of the Scheldt.

The Deurganck lock, meanwhile, will be open to the public for the very first time. Measuring 500 x 68 metres, this masterpiece of maritime infrastructure is the biggest lock in the world. "During a two-hour guided visit, experts

will talk about the construction of the lock," says Annik Dirkx, spokesperson of the Antwerp Port Authority.

In addition, two port terminal operators on the Deurganck dock will open up their gates: The international port operator PSA and Dubai Port World "will offer a wide range of activities and display new technology," continues Dirkx.

"Visitors will be able to witness the loading and unloading of the ships and get to see DP World's automatic stacking cranes."

The Antwerp leg of the event also includes a behind-the-scenes

exhibition at the Lillo port centre and a guided tour of the Groot Rietveld, the biggest reed bed in Flanders.

Dirkx advises visitors to use the free transport to get between sites. Shuttle buses go between the MAS Museum, Lillo and the Deurganck site, while on the left bank, buses leave from Ter Vesten cultural centre in Beveren.

This is the third edition of Flemish Port Day, organised by Flanders Port Area. At the ports of Zeebrugge, Ostend, Ghent and Antwerp, visitors can learn about the ports' activities and the people who work there.

22 SEPTEMBER

Antwerp, Ghent, Zeebrugge & Ostend

► www.vlaamsehavendag.be

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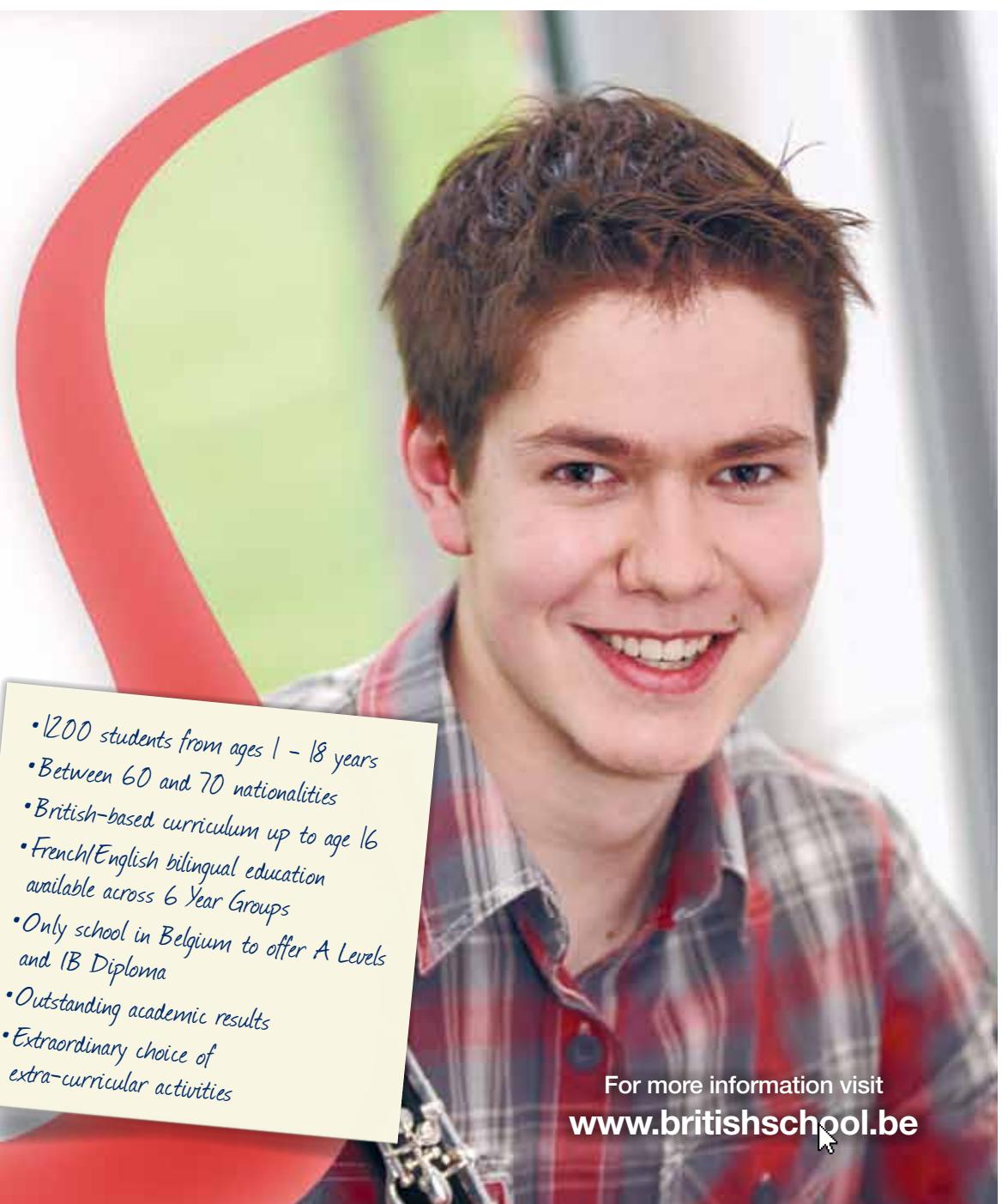
“

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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Being Borgman

Jan Bijvoet creeps inside the skin of a mysterious rogue in new Dutch film

Lisa Bradshaw

The prolific stage actor Jan Bijvoet left the theatre four years ago. Not because he was tired of it – quite the contrary. The 47-year-old had devoted so much time to theatre for so many decades that he walked away simply to see what else life had to offer.

Since then, the Flemish actor has chosen a few film and TV roles quite carefully. This week cinema-goers are going to find themselves grateful that he accepted the role of Camiel Borgman.

Borgman, written and directed by Dutchman Alex van Warmerdam (*Waiter*, *The Last Days of Emma Blank*), is a film that tests the boundaries of realism, as a stranger and his evil band of cohorts wreak havoc on an upper-class suburban family. It's long on symbolism and legend, and Bijvoet is remarkable as the calmly malevolent title character.

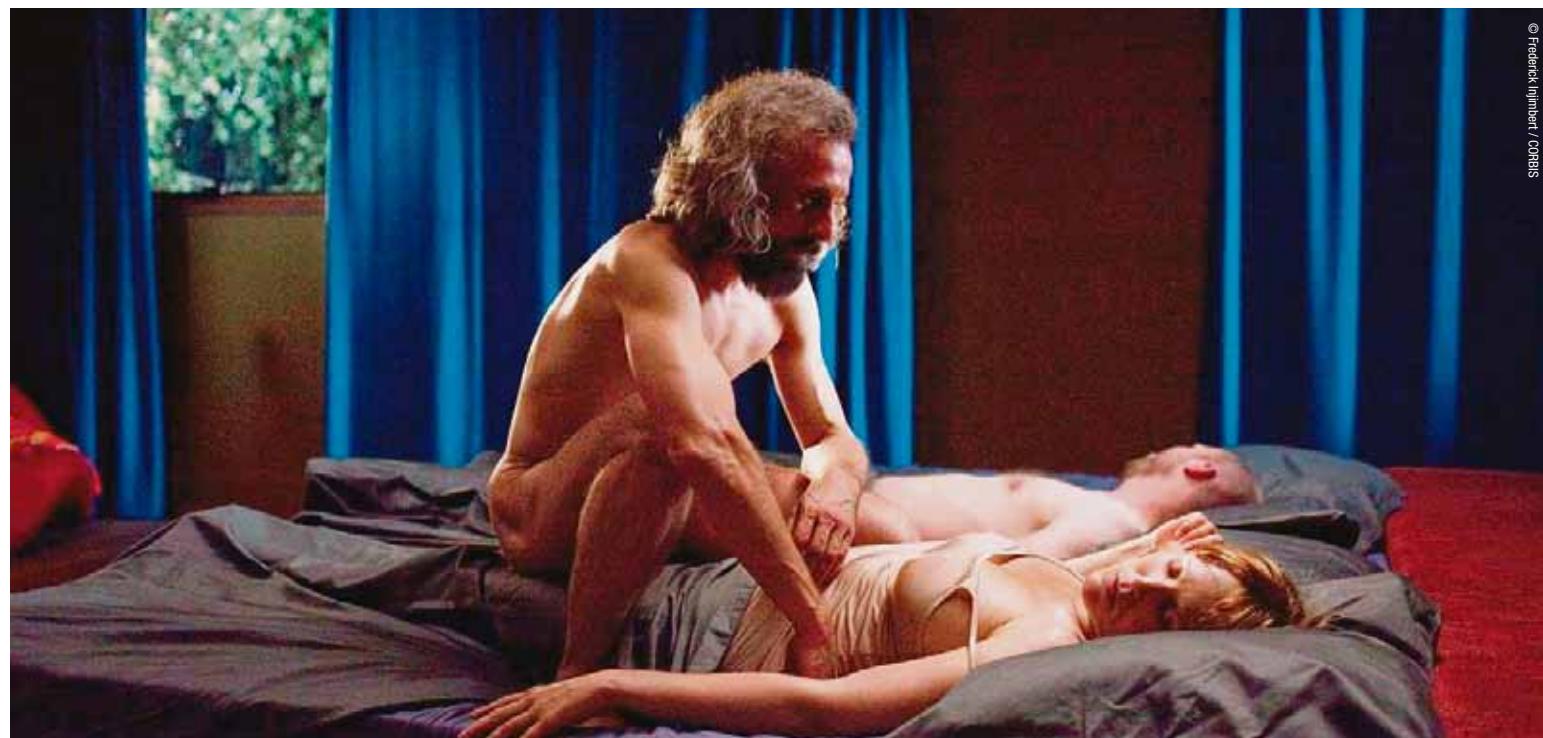
Bijvoet says he didn't hesitate in accepting the part – his first leading film role.

How did you come to be offered the lead in *Borgman*?

I met Annet Malherbe, who is the wife of the director and the casting agent of the film, when I did a theatre performance with her some years ago. Alex [the director] and I have also known each other for a few years now. So they offered me an audition. I think they liked my look and perhaps my demeanour; they thought it was right for the role.

Were you drawn to the part immediately?

I knew that if Alex asked me to do it, I would say yes – even without having read the script. I first saw his theatre plays when I was 19, and I've seen his films, and I find them fascinating. I am totally into the worlds he makes. I feel we are on the same wavelength in the kind of work we like to do. And then when I did read the script, it was even better than I had imagined.



Jan Bijvoet as the dreaded Borgman and at the film's world premiere in Cannes (right)

What did you like about it?

Alex's dialogue and scene descriptions illustrate a huge imagination. You always feel that there are a few layers underneath those actions. When I read something, I like to feel like my imagination has been turned on. This is Alex's first priority. He doesn't want to explain anything, he just wants to evoke your thoughts and emotions. If he feels that a line is offering an explanation, he'll cut it out again. That's how he builds his stories. He's a bit like David Lynch that way. The characters will say perfectly normal things, but in a context that makes it very strange.

Despite the director being Dutch and the film being shot in the Netherlands, a lot of the cast is Flemish.

The entire art department on the film was Flemish, too. Alex has some kind of affinity with the Flemish mentality and with Flemish actors. He's also worked with Flemish theatre companies. In the

end, though, he doesn't care if they are Dutch or Flemish. He wants the best person for the part.

Borgman is a mysterious character who arrives out of nowhere to manipulate this family in more and more nefarious ways. Is he real? A symbol for something? Do you know who or what Borgman is? No, and I didn't ask, either. It was important to just step into the fantasy and feel it without having to think something specific. I never wanted to have an opinion. Of course he is some kind of devil, some kind of criminal. But you could also say some he's some kind of Christ. He's a player, a joker. He's also a human being, but he isn't. When I read the script, that's what I liked.

I felt there was a sense of guilt in the character of wife and mother Marina at their middle-class, privileged existence. It's like she wants to be punished.

Yes, as if Borgman is her personal demon. In the middle ages, when a woman got pregnant out of wedlock, it was often said that an incubus came to her while she was sleeping. Borgman does this in the film; he's naked, and he leans over Marina and influences her dreams. That's part of where Alex got his inspiration, from these kinds of myths. But of course that's all conjecture, because Alex never told me!

What are you working on now?

I'm working on a new Flemish TV series called *Cordon*, which is about a deadly virus that gets released in Antwerp. They quarantine the entire area, and for everyone inside, it's the law of the jungle. Koen De Bouw and I play brothers who escape from a prison in all the chaos and take hostages in a supermarket. It will air early next year, I think.

Do you find that TV and film offer an outlet that the stage doesn't?

I never liked playing in television series or movies, in front of



a camera; you have to wait for hours, shoot out of order chronologically and then get into character immediately. When I see it afterwards, it almost never satisfies me artistically. But I had the chance to work with Felix Van Groeningen in *The Broken Circle Breakdown* and with Alex, so now I feel perhaps there's a bit of an outlet for me there, when I have faith in the filmmakers.

FILM REVIEW ★★★★

Borgman

After being rooted out of his underground cavern where he appears to live with other homeless men, the shaggy Borgman (Jan Bijvoet, see interview) shows up at the door of a chic, ultra-modern home, insisting that he is familiar with wife and mother Marina. Her brute of a husband (Flemish actor Jeroen Perceval) gives him a violent beating before slamming the door.

Marina (Dutch actress Hadewych Minis, pictured) feels bad about this, so when she later finds Borgman hiding in the garage, she gives him a bath, a hot meal and a bed in the family's garden shed. And then the fun begins.

Borgman starts to infiltrate the home, with its Danish nanny and three perfectly blonde

children, working on Marina's guilt – which goes way beyond her husband's bullishness. Although Borgman's presence makes her nervous, she cannot bear for him to leave and takes part in an elaborate plan to employ him as the gardener. Borgman has several colleagues who eliminate with cruel efficiency any outside interference in their domination of Marina's household.

On a purely symbolic level, *Borgman*, by Dutch director Alex van Warmerdam (*The Last Days of Emma Blank*), is extremely successful in introducing phantasmic characters bent on destruction into a seemingly normal reality. Is it a free-for-all revenge fantasy of the servant classes? Is Marina's privileged guilt conjuring up

demons? Warmerdam isn't offering any explanations, but you don't really need any. *Borgman* loses its way towards the end, with unnecessary scenes that seem more interested in looking cool and quirky than in furthering the action and do much to interrupt the tension. This time would have been better spent early in the film building up Marina's relationship with Borgman before seeing her fall so completely under the pushy stranger's spell.

Still, *Borgman* is a film that is more than the sum of its parts. In the end, you'll leave the cinema satisfied, not because you understood it all, but because it was a heck of weird, wired ride. **LB**



Connecting nature and stopping time

In Between

Tom Peeters

Paradise is within our reach, but we've almost forgotten that... I read that in the press release of *In Between: Inner and Outer Landscapes*, the new exhibition and experience trail in and around Gaasbeek Castle and the Groenenberg estate. But I didn't take it too seriously until I got there and actually felt the meaning behind the statement as I strolled around the opulently decorated historical rooms of the brick castle, the nearby museum garden – a real Garden of Eden – and spacious woodlands.

More than 30 contemporary artists, local and international, have started a conversation with nature here, offering an antidote to our hectic lifestyles.

I am lucky, as the weather is excellent and I have plenty of time. Time is all you need here. In return, you get silence, introspection and harmony. Ghent-based curator Joris Capenberghs has selected artists with a healthy appetite for the moment and the crossroads where art and

nature meet. The tour starts in the castle with a video by Flemish artist Michaël Borremans. In almost every room, an artist is interacting with the environment inside, often making references to the world outside. You can only read the subtle word sculptures by Fred Eerdekkens, made out of wrinkled copper wire, when the light falls on them, revealing the text on the wall behind. You can recognise mountains, meanwhile, in the installation made of marble and grains of rice by German artist Wolfgang Laib.

The links between the artists' works and nature often have a mystical or even spiritual quality. Take "Montcanus", an installation by German artist Angela Glajcar. Opposite a weaving loom, she meticulously rips apart white glass fibre into wafer-thin threads and eventually gathers them into something translucent that's seemingly floating in the space but still looks a bit like a hammock. Don't



"Rivers and Tides" by British environmental sculptor Andy Goldsworthy

try to use it as one: The calmness the artist is striving for is reached at a mental level. To see "Aqua Verticalis" by Ghent

artist Johan Opstael, you first need to find the St Gertrude Chapel. It takes a while, descending through the woods. Four vertical screens obliterate your view of the altar, showing a video of moving water. Each one is different. "It's my way to visualise emotions and stay in the moment," Opstael explains. He selected the material from 190 hours of recordings made of water from his boat. By showing the water vertically where you would expect it to be horizontal, he makes a direct connection to the real spring underneath the chapel.

One of the trail's hidden treasures is the museum garden. It's not just the two sculptures by Flemish artist Koenraad Tinell and the five piles of Eucalyptus branches (in the greenhouse) by the English artist Aeneas Wilder that seek our attention here, it's also the infinite sorts of apples, pears, berries, grapes, lettuce, cabbage and more. For the first time, I felt what Eve must have felt in her Eden. It's worth a trip to Gaasbeek for this experience alone.

Until 3 November

| Gaasbeek Castle, Kasteelstraat 40, Gaasbeek (Flemish Brabant)

| ► www.kasteelvangaasbeek.be

FESTIVAL

Bozar Electronic Arts Festival

For the second year, Bozar devotes three days to electronic culture. It's a pity headliner Moderat had to cancel their album release show (because Sascha Ring was injured in a motorcycle accident), though the accompanying Berlin duo Modeselektor will still take the stage. An exclusive grand piano show illustrates the intelligent dance music of London producer and keyboardist Jon Hopkins, and techno pioneer Juan Atkins presents his new Borderland project with Moritz Van Oswald.

With audio-visual installations, performances and workshops, the festival offers more than just state-of-the-art beats. Witness Québec's ELEKTRA festival and its digital installations, the Flemish research institute iMinds' display of new digital sculptures by Koen Vanmechelen and sound installations created by the AXO platform. The festival is free on the opening night. TP



26-28 September

| Bozar, Brussels

| ► www.bozar.be

MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Dames Draaien (Women Shoot): Film festival featuring the work of female directors, with a versatile selection of documentaries, animation and features, plus forgotten classics

SEP 26-29 at Botanique, Koningsstraat 236

► www.damesdraaien.be

Folklorissimo: Folklore festival celebrating Brussels heritage, with numerous organisations coming together for demonstrations, tastings, sport, folk dancing, puppet theatre and more

SEP 21-22 10.00-20.00 at Grote Markt

► <http://tinyurl.com/folklorissimo>

CONCERT

Franz Ferdinand

GET TICKETS NOW



When I saw this Scottish quartet make their Belgian stage debut in Brussels concert hall Botanique nearly a decade ago, they were more than up for it. Their short, agitated rock songs – "Michael", "The Dark Of The Matinée", "This Fire", "Take Me Out" – sounded like the next big thing, though they were using exactly the same ingredients as post-punk bands such as Gang Of Four and Wire. But sung in a neat suit by frontman Alex Kapranos, they soon became the talk of the town. The band immediately received an invitation for Rock Werchter, where their tight set in the marquee catapulted them to main stage stardom. A second album coped with the great expectations, but then Franz Ferdinand lost it. The arrogance of fame and fortune, some of their colleagues said. Fortunately, the crowd that witnessed their performance this summer at Pukkelpop felt a renewed sense of ambition and welcomed new material from their fourth album *Right Thoughts, Right Words, Right Action*. Perhaps it's putting them on the, euhm, right track again. TP

7 March, 20.00 | Vorst Nationaal (Club), Brussels | ► www.vorstnational.be

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

TrixTrax: An all-Belgian line up at Trix, including Montevideo, Leaf House, Alpha Whale and Phanques

SEP 26 19.00 at Trix, Noordersingel 28

► www.trixonline.be

Brussels

Barbarossa: The red-bearded Londoner James Mathé enchants with folk melodies, embarking on electronic territory while keeping true to his romantic roots

SEP 22 20.00 at Botanique, Koningsstraat 236

► www.botanique.be

Ghent

Neeka: Intimate concert by the husky-voiced American folk and roots musician

SEP 19 20.15 at De Cultuurloft, Tentoontstellingslaan 147

► www.decultuurloft.be

FAMILY

Als zaadjes spreken konden

As the artist in residence, Sandrine de Borman staged the exhibition *Groene omzwervingen* (Green Wanderings), a magnificent display of objects made of delicate paper and flora, in 2011 at the National Botanic Garden. Now, in *Als zaadjes spreken konden* (If Seeds Could Talk), she focusses on the fundaments of all things green: seeds. They are displayed here in all shapes and sizes, playfully presented in mini gardens and complete with facts and stories attached to them. You will learn how seeds germinate and travel, why some of them are healing and how to play Awari, an African game based on their wondrous qualities. Although this exhibition is good for the whole family any day, on 30 and 31 October, special Family Days feature even more activities. **TP**



Until 24 November

National Botanic Garden of Belgium, Meise

► www.plantentuinmeise.be

MORE FAMILY ACTIVITIES THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

Havendag: Third annual Flemish Port Day (see p11 for details)
SEP 22 10.00-17.00 at ports in Antwerp, Ghent, Ostend and Zeebrugge

► www.vlaamsehavendag.be

Brussels

Robbedoes (Spirou): The story of one of the emblematic characters of the European comic strip, in honour of his 75th anniversary
Until OCT 6 at Belgian Comic Strip Center, Zandstraat 20

► www.stripmuseum.be

Koksijde

Zeeziek (Seasick): A mock hospital room illustrating the different stages of seasickness and the power of the sea
Until NOV 17 at National Fishery Museum of Oostduinkerke, Pastoor Schmitzstraat 5

► www.visserijmuseum.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Car-Free Sunday

Car-Free Sunday is the apotheosis of the European Week of Mobility, which ends this Sunday. As a result, from 9.00 to 19.00, cars are not allowed in the 19 municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region. Eleven of them take part in *De Dorpen*, giving city centres a village feel by organising small-scale, green events. Pimp your bike or skateboard, enjoy a workshop about ecology or mobility, or just take a nap in one of the lounge chairs on the temporary city lawn. Pedestrians and cyclists in other cities can also reclaim their streets. Antwerp and Bruges had theirs last weekend, but this Sunday in Ghent, for instance, you can enjoy a "tweed and vintage" bike ride or visit a car-sharing salon and a *deelfeest* (sharing festival). **TP**



22 September | Brussels and other cities | ► www.weekvandemobiliteit.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

arcFAM (Franco-Anglo-Magyar) Benefit: Charity event to support the education of disadvantaged young musicians and artists of Romani origin, featuring a fashion show and classical and jazz concerts by the Snétberger Music Talent Centre in Hungary

SEP 23 19.15 at International School of Brussels, Kattenberg 19

► www.arcfam.be

MusikOmetro: The underground corridors and stations of the Brussels metro form the backdrop for a series of spontaneous concerts

SEP 21 14.00-17.00 throughout Brussels' metros

► www.musikometro.be

Peter Terrin: Moroccan-Dutch journalist Abdelkader Benali interviews the prize-winning Flemish novelist about his favourite authors (in Dutch; free but reservation required)

SEP 24 20.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23

► www.bozar.be

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Books & Beats, Brussels

Opening Weekend Kortrijkse Schouwburg

20 September

As long as the music's right, it doesn't really matter who's spinning it. So instead of queuing to get into parties with a fabulous DJ line-up, how about a free night out in the company of a Flemish newsreader or an actor ... behind the decks!

When reading the evening news on national television, Canvas correspondent Lieven Verstraeten always looks so serious. So it might come as a surprise that he's actually a passionate DJ, too. No house or techno, though; instead he chooses lively samba beats.

As his alter-ego DJ Satanic Samba (*pictured*), Verstraeten will play this Friday at Books & Beats, the weekly after-work (or after-school) concept at the newly opened Munt punt library and info centre. If you think a party at a library sounds a tad boring, just know that Munt punt spent the last four years renovating and is now the trendiest library in the country.

The party kicks off at 16.00 in the Agora entrance hall and is entirely free of charge. Last beats at around 22.00, the perfect time to decide whether you're heading home or on to the next party.

► www.muntpunt.be



Opbrouck is also the artistic director of NTGent, and the company will take the stage the very next night in the Schouwburg with its new production *Rood*, staring ... Opbrouck.

On Friday, Opbrouck will be assisted by regular party DJ Jim Tonic. If after this free night out you've got the feeling you could have done a better job, return to Schouwburgplein the next day and bring your own records (42 rpm). A Kortrijk-based DJ collective will be there to spin 'em for you and keep you dancing all night long.

► www.schouwburgkortrijk.be

On the same day but in a different city, Flemish actor Wim Opbrouck will treat visitors at Kortrijkse Schouwburg's opening weekend to his interpretation of classic party songs. Why Opbrouck? The comedy actor of such films as *Man zkt vrouw* and *Frits en Freddy* was born and raised just down the road in Harelbeke and still lives in the area.

BITE

Mussels season

"Every month with a letter 'r' in it." If you've lived in Flanders for a while, you have probably heard this adage to remind you of when mussels are in season. But it's not as simple as that, it seems, with mussel season often beginning as early as July and lasting only into the first week of April.

The reason it's not so clear-cut is simple: the molluscs, most of which come to us from the Zeeland province in the Netherlands, need time to reach a desired size and maturity, which is dependent on a number of factors, not the least of which is the region's notoriously unpredictable weather. And although they are commercially available from July, mussels are only truly at their best from September on. To enjoy them, you could look up one of a multitude of quality mussels restaurants across Flanders or stay put because mussels are incredibly simple to make at home. Below is a standard recipe for mussels. All ingredients are interchangeable and amounts approximate. The idea is to steam the mussels open and infuse them with flavour. You'll also end up with loads of tasty tender veg at the bottom of the pot.

Ingredients (serves two):

2 kilos fresh mussels
2 white onions
5 garlic cloves (to taste)
3 carrots
1 leek
3 celery stalks and leaves
Salt and pepper
Packet of mussel herbs (optional)

As a general rule, count on about one kilo mussels per person. The shells weigh a lot more than the meat inside!

First, rinse the mussels three or four times in cold water, letting them soak for a couple of minutes to remove sand and silt. The shells that aren't already open should open slightly under water. Scrape off any barnacles attached to the shells.

There is a persistent myth that you have to throw away mussels that don't open at all. That's not true, they're just harder to open when you eat them and require the use of a knife.



Meanwhile, throw all the bite-size chopped vegetables into a large pot with a little water (or white wine) at the bottom and set on a low to medium fire. The last thing to do is add the mussels, as they generally only take a few minutes to cook, depending on their size. Once the veggies have softened, add the mussels to the pot, turn up the fire to high and sprinkle with salt and pepper (and mussel herbs for added seasoning). Cover and bring to a boil. Pick up the pot a few times and give it a good shake.

Once the mussels are all open and their flesh is firm but still juicy, place the whole steaming pot on the table and serve with fresh, preferably hand-cut, fries and homemade mayo. The colour of the mussels can vary from pale yellow to orange, but the colour does not say anything about the quality. However, be on the lookout for bad mussels and throw out any that look shrivelled.

Mussels pair best with a crisp, dry white wine, but go equally well with a pint of cold lager.

TALKING SPORTS

Volleying through a purple patch

Sport can be a fickle mistress, driving fans to despair. But sometimes it drops love bombs, and this is one such moment. Just a fortnight ago, this column celebrated Belgium reaching their first ever European Hockey Championships final. Now the women's volleyball side have snatched a bronze medal at their European Championships, just weeks after the men won the European Volleyball League. And did we mention that in football, the Red Devils are now ranked sixth in the world by Fifa?

Volleyball rarely features in the sports pages, not least because Belgium has won precisely zero prizes in any major event. But this seems to be changing quite spectacularly.

The annual European Volleyball League this year culminated in a final four tournament in the Turkish town of Marmaris in July, where the Belgian men's side stormed to their first ever title. The success was driven by Flemish stars like Bram Van den Dries, the 24-year-old named the tournament's most valuable player; Matthias Valkiers, named best setter; and Stijn Dejonckheere, named best in his position of libero.

Not to be outdone, the women, the Yellow Tigers, followed suit last weekend. Until now, their international record was mostly one of "did not qualify", but at last week's European Championships in Germany and Switzerland, they beat France (twice), Italy and Switzerland to reach the semi-finals. Their route to the final was then blocked by Germany, who



eked out a 3-2 win in Berlin, but – after a victory over Serbia in the third-place match – they proudly claimed their bronze medals. Flemish players were again the backbone of the side, with Lise Van Hecke (pictured) named the tournament's best scorer. Meanwhile, as the Red Devils inch ever closer to qualifying for next year's World Cup in Brazil, they

have now reached a jaw-dropping sixth place in the Fifa rankings. Not only do they sit above the likes of Brazil and the Netherlands, the distance between them and Italy and Colombia – in fourth and fifth place respectively – is tantalisingly close. For Flemish fans, this is dizzying and worth celebrating while it lasts.

Leo Cendrowicz

The last word...

Four wheels bad

"Young people today are seeing more and more the downside of driving: the traffic jams, the accidents, the price and so on."

Eddy Klynen, director of the Flemish Traffic Science Foundation, on the 17% fall in the numbers of young people taking driving lessons

Mouse grouse

"Attractions closed, warmed-over food, shows cancelled ... it can't go on like this."

A Brussels man has collected signatures on a petition complaining of the deterioration of Disneyland Paris

First-timer

"I'm not afraid to get my hands dirty." Federal finance minister Koen Geens will stand in next year's elections, the first time he has done so

Stuff of life

"About 3% of the population gives blood, while 70% have need of blood at some point in their lives. That's why we're constantly appealing for people to donate."

Nele De Vos of the Flemish Red Cross, which is inviting blood donors to help replenish stocks

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

After years of waiting, the time has finally come: The new Red Star Line museum is opening in Antwerp. Located inside historical buildings on the edge of the Scheldt, it's the latest in the cultural redevelopment of the port area and offers a view on the fascinating history of the ships that took immigrants from across Europe to America, right from this location

Business

When's the last time you saw a woman smoking a cigar? In Knokke and Ghent, you will not only find Dominique Gyselinck smoking cigars, you'll find her importing them, selling them and offering expert advice. The businesswoman is the only female cigar sommelier in the country

Arts

Snapping photos in Bruges isn't exactly an unlikely pastime, but a new tour is taking advantage of tourists' love of capturing images of the historical city by combining photography with seeing the sights. We talk to the Canadian behind Photo Tour Brugge