

## State of the region

Kris Peeters delivers the annual September Declaration, which stressed "investments that count"

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## Savoured, not smoked

One of very few women cigar sommeliers, Dominique Gyselinck opens a new shop in Ghent

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# All aboard

## From Antwerp to America: in the footsteps of migrants at the new Red Star Line museum

Sarah Crew

Setting sail for a new life across the Atlantic was the realisation of a dream for nearly two million migrants embarking on a Red Star Line ship in the port of Antwerp between 1873 and 1934. Some 100 years later, the opening of the Red Star Line museum in the shipping company's old warehouses is the realisation of yet another dream

The Red Star Line museum opens to the public this Saturday, 28 September, following its official inauguration by the king and queen in the presence of a host of local and foreign dignitaries. As the latest high-profile project regenerating the Eilandje district of Antwerp, it is expected to

attract 200,000 visitors a year. The city's mayor, Bart De Wever, calls it "a new Antwerp icon", with the renovated buildings telling the story of an international saga.

As one of the few migration museums in Europe, the Red Star Line is an important testimony to the mass movement of people from Europe to North America during a turbulent period in history. From the beginning of the 19th century to the outbreak of the Second World War, millions of people travelled through Antwerp on their way to the New World.

They included economic migrants from East and West Flanders, desperate to escape the agricultural crisis. While some were pioneers or fortune seekers, the majority originated from Eastern Europe, fleeing poverty, and later Jewish persecution

and the threat of war. Their passage was fleeting but had a profound and lasting impact on the city of Antwerp.

The migrant story was largely forgotten and the Rijnkaai site abandoned and falling into ruin when city authorities declared the red-brick shipping buildings a historical monument in 2001. They were given a new life when the city launched the €18 million Red Star Line project in 2005.

Sensitive renovation combined with contemporary additions and an interactive scenography have transformed the waterfront complex into a visually distinctive, strongly interactive, multi-layered museum.

Visitors are invited to retrace emigrants' footsteps throughout every stage of their journey, from a Warsaw ticket office to the



## FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



## Michèle Sioen

The concept of the glass ceiling is clear and concise, but you can't help feeling we've come an awfully long way when the announcement comes that a woman is the new head of one of the country's foremost boys' clubs.

The Federation of Belgian Enterprise (VBO) was set up in 1973, the fusion of two separate industry organisations. It's just one of several groups representing business owners, but it's probably the broadest, with a membership made up of 25,000 small businesses but also large, international companies.

VBO's departing chair, Pierre-Alain De Smedt, has a CV including Solvay, Bosch, Volkswagen and Renault. His predecessor, Thomas Leysen, is chair of Corelio, which publishes *De Standaard*, *Het Nieuwsblad* and *Flanders Today*.

Last week it was announced that the new chair of the organisation, starting in April, will be Michèle Sioen, the first woman to hold the post and one of the few female faces in top executive functions anywhere in Flanders. Sioen, 48, has until now been deputy chair, and prior to that was chair of Fedustria, the textile industry federation for Wallonia and Brussels. She's an independent director of Belgacom and car

dealer D'Ieteren

Sioen's roots are in West Flanders and that province's historic links with the textile industry. She's the CEO of Sioen Industries in the little town of Ardoos – but there's nothing little about the company. The family-owned Sioen is listed on the stock market, is one of the European market leaders in covers for trucks and protective work clothes and employs more than 4,500 people internationally. Sioen took over as the company's CEO from her late father in 2005 and has built a reputation as someone who invests in innovation, one of the areas where Europe can still compete with the low-wage economies. "As a company, you have to have the ambition to grow," she's been quoted. "If you don't, you land in a negative spiral."

At Fedustria, she's also been tasked with social negotiation. The VBO is one of the main bodies involved in labour negotiations in Belgium, together with the government and the trades unions. Sioen's first term of office will involve her in two important rounds of talks, one due to be concluded by the end of next year, and one by the end of 2016.

## News in brief

Last week, **three schools from South Africa** held a remembrance service at Tyne Cot military cemetery in Zonnebeke, West Flanders, in memory of three of their countrymen whose remains were discovered in September 2011. The three soldiers were members of the SA Scottish, part of the 1st South African infantry brigade, who had fallen in the Third Battle of Ypres in September 1917, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele. The three men were buried at Tyne Cot in July this year.

Planned **renovations in the Leopold II tunnel** in Brussels have been postponed to 2016 because of the complexity of the works, the regional government said. Five consortia have been shortlisted for the works, with the winner to be announced in 2015. Difficulties associated with closing the tunnel – the longest in the country and carrying 60,000 vehicles a day – mean works could last as long as four years.

Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege last week visited a school in Aalst to kick off a region-wide campaign to raise awareness of the importance of **recycling components of mobile phones**. According to the GoodPlanet foundation, which is organising the campaign, only 2% of phones are currently recycled, though the disposal of electronics can be harmful to the environment. "We've taken steps in recent years to change from a waste policy to a sustainable materials policy," Schauvliege said. "By better collection and sorting, waste materials can be turned into raw materials."

The public transport users' organisation TreinTramBus has supported a call for the **scrapping of the €4.44 supplement** levied on all rail users travelling to and from

Brussels Airport, used to pay for the Diabolo rail link. The airport management company argues the supplement is a disincentive to airline passengers to use public transport, a position TTB supports. At present, 53% of those flying out arrive by car and 26% by public transport.

The first minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, paid a visit to the First World War sites in Langemark-Poelkapelle last week to start the construction of a **new Welsh Memorial**. The monument was made possible by a public collection in Wales, which raised €36,000. The Welsh government then added an additional €30,000. The plot of land on which the monument will stand, measuring 30m x 40m, is a gift from the town of Langemark, West Flanders. The monument, made of Welsh stone and topped with a painted bronze dragon, will be unveiled next summer. About 40,000 Welsh soldiers fell in the fields of Flanders during the First World War.

The 15-year-old would-be **Buddhist monk Giel** (*Face of Flanders*, 18 September), who was prevented from travelling to a monastery in India by the Ghent prosecutor, has filed an appeal with the Cassation Court, alleging procedural errors in the case brought against his plans. Giel's travel to India was put on hold while social services investigate his situation at home.

Nieuwstraat in Brussels has held onto its position as the **capital's favourite shopping street**, with an average of just over 43,000 visitors every day, according to figures from the retail trade association Atrium. The recently renovated Elsenesteenweg comes second with 31,200 shoppers, followed by the pedestrianised Kleerkoperstraat in the centre, with 28,200.

A notice to strike issued last week by **emergency operators in East Flanders** has now spread to the rest of the country. The operators, who answer the emergency numbers 101 and 112, say their service is understaffed by as much as 50%, while the number of calls – and especially hoax calls – is on the increase. The official date for the start of action was 23 September, but the union ACOD asked members to postpone any action until after talks planned for 26 September.

The former gendarmerie barracks opposite the Free University of Brussels (VUB) could be **transformed into a new student village**, following a decision by the federal government last week to sell off about 1,000 buildings owned by the former service, which was absorbed into the federal police in 2001. The sell-off will raise some €35 million.

Starting next year, shoppers will be able to use Bancontact cards to pay for **purchases costing less than €25** without the need for a pin code. Currently, small payments can be made using the Proton function, but that is due to disappear at the end of 2014. The new function, unlike Proton, will not require the card to be recharged.

The 19 municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region are appealing a ruling that **declared the tax on GSM masts illegal**. The court agreed that the tax was discriminatory against telecommunications companies and said the masts were a matter of public interest, now that virtually everyone uses mobile phones. The municipalities, however, argue that the constitution allows them fiscal autonomy. The matter is also of urgent financial importance to the municipalities: the total tax concerned amounts to about €60 million.

Alan Hope

## FLANDERS TODAY

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## OFFSIDE

## Little rascals

It's a topsy-turvy world, all right, when a football hooligan at last week's match in Lisbon between Benfica and Anderlecht turns out to be a Brussels police officer. And even more so when a couple of young hooligans involved in fisticuffs in a Flemish school turn out to be three-year-olds.

The mother of the slightly younger child claims he was set upon by the older child. The school, located in Genk, is remaining impartial. "The teacher and the co-ordinator brought both children in immediately and reprimanded them for their behaviour," the school said in a statement. "The injured child was cared for, and the parents informed, as was the Centre for Pupil Support. This is the normal procedure for our school." The parent argues that the school is "minimalising" the dispute by refusing a dialogue and issuing only

a brief statement. Her child was bitten three times, she told VRT News, and had his hair pulled out. Photos taken shortly after the incident appear to support these claims.

The mother has now, on the advice of her family doctor, filed a report with the police. Much to the chagrin of Willy Bombeek, spokesman for the Catholic education network. "Can children be allowed to play freely on the playground?" he asked. "Sometimes children fight. That's normal behaviour for young children. They're learning to get along with each other

and setting limits."

"I know that children sometimes have fights on the playground," the mother said. "But this has gone a lot further. The worst part is that the school's head is playing down this aggression and hasn't even taken the trouble to talk to me."



© Ingimage



# All aboard

## Unlike in German ports, passengers in Antwerp weren't separated from the city's residents

► continued from page 1

challenge of starting a new life in the US or Canada. All of the eight themed areas contain personal testimonies that reinforce this human perspective.

Exhibits include photographs, original documents such as passenger lists, publicity posters painting colourful and romanticised images of the Red Star experience, and original objects, many loaned by descendants of passengers.

The journey starts in the oldest building, dating from 1894, where emigrants' personal belongings were disinfected. Acting as a confrontation between the local and global story, it also contains a metal globe-like structure that beams a constant stream of evocative images. A timeline shows how the Red Star Line experience fits into the history of world migration.

### Primary port

While an estimated 200,000 Belgians travelled aboard one of the Red Star Line's fleet, the majority of passengers originated from Germany and later eastern Europe and Russia. Tickets usually included the train journey to Antwerp, accommodation in the city and the onward journey after arrival in North America. Due to its extensive train connections, Antwerp was one of the primary ports for migrants from these countries.

On arrival in Antwerp, travellers would be met by someone from the shipping line or one of the many hotels and boarding houses that catered specifically to each nationality. From 1905, they alighted at the new Central Station. The magnificent building was the first of many impressive sights in the prosperous Antwerp.

Witness accounts note bountiful shop window displays and surprise at seeing dog carts delivering milk. Swindlers were also on hand, ready to prey on new arrivals and separate them from their tickets or cash.

### Port painter

It was a different story in the German ports of Hamburg and Bremen, which separated its emigrants from the city and its residents. One of the many city residents fascinated by the sight of this large movement of people from other lands, was artist Eugene Van Mieghem, whose parents owned a waterfront café opposite the Red Star Line in Montevideostraat. A selection of his drawings, sketches and paintings are on show in the museum, offering an evocative insight into the working life of the harbour.

In 1921, the shipping company erected an additional building when American health regulations required all third-class emigrants to be checked for cholera, typhus and trachoma, as well as their overall ability to work. If passengers failed their medical on arrival, the return fare was paid by the shipping line.

In the same spot where the showers used to be, visitors can see images



Passengers on the deck of the Red Star Line circa 1910 (above); the new museum is extremely interactive in its telling of emigrants' experiences (top); architects designed the museum's tower to resemble its long-gone smokestack (right)



of emigrants washing themselves. This was a supervised, hour-long ordeal in 38°C water and utilising hot vinegar and benzene. Their clothes were also taken and disinfected.

For the medical exam, meanwhile, women stripped to the waist, while men dropped their trousers to be checked for venereal disease. Every member of the family needed a clean bill of health, which resulted in some heart-rending stories.

Ukrainian Morris Moel, now 100 years old, recalls how his mother and siblings were finally able to join their father in the United States in 1921. It had already been difficult crossing the border into Poland; then in Antwerp doctors delayed their departure so that one of his brothers could be treated for an eye disease. Once at Ellis Island in New York, it was found that sister Ita was suffering from the infectious condition. Their mother had to choose between returning to Antwerp with her daughter or sending her back alone.

She chose the latter, and Ita was looked after by a Jewish relief organisation in Antwerp. A year later, she sailed for New York, only to be rejected on the same grounds. Finally in 1927, on her 14th birthday, she was reunited with her family.

Visitors to the museum are invited to climb a gangplank that leads to a re-enactment of life on board. This was a tale of two halves after the company's flagship Belgenland II was launched in 1923 with three segregated classes. While the 10-day Atlantic voyage was an unpleasant

experience for third-class or steerage passengers, the many luxuries of life in first class underline the divisions in society that were mirrored at sea. Fine silverware, porcelain, menu cards and photos of carefree girls in bathing costumes contrast with the images of long-skirted and head-scarved migrant women. After the First World War, the costly Belgenland was re-branded as a cruise ship, pitched at the American bourgeois and Flemish businessmen such as Leo Baekeland. The Ghent chemist turned plastic magnate made many transatlantic crossings when developing his Bakelite invention.

For migrants, though, arrival at Ellis Island meant another gruelling round of medical and administrative procedures. About 2% of migrants were rejected. From the cage-like barriers of this final examination stage, the museum shows what the future held for immigrants. Some Flemings farmed rural areas, while others worked in Detroit's growing automobile industry. Wages may have been higher than in Europe, but life was hard and some eventually returned to the old continent.

One child passenger who was to succeed was composer Irving Berlin, originally from Belarus. His family, who will be present at the official opening, have loaned his rare transposing piano to the museum and will be present at the opening. Albert Einstein was another well-known name; a letter he penned on Red Star Line stationery announcing his resignation from the Prussian

Academy of Sciences is on view.

The final section brings the visitor to the present day. Stories by current immigrants in Antwerp show the continuing role of migration in the city. The contemporary theme is reinforced in a video installation by Flemish artist Hans Op de Beeck. The final space, The Warehouse, is an archive facility with a database of some 100,000 files on Belgians who left for North and South America. The public is invited to leave personal migration stories, too.

As a migration project, the new Red Star Line museum mirrors the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York, where many of the Red Star Line's passengers disembarked. Both were designed by American

architecture firm Beyer Blinder Belle.

The architects were responsible for the final stage of this migration journey. Symbolically replacing the smokestack that was demolished in 1936, they constructed another vertical beacon, this time suggestive of a ship's prow. Climb the steps to the top for a panoramic view that includes Central Station, from where emigrants arrived, and the bend in the River Scheldt from where they departed.

*A Smartphone application and brochures are available at the Red Star Line museum for non-Dutch speakers. Access to the tower, museum shop, café and temporary exhibitions is free*

## GRAND OPENING 28 SEPTEMBER

### Red Star Line Museum

Montevideostraat 3, Antwerp

► [www.redstarline.org](http://www.redstarline.org)

## RED STAR LINE FACT FILE

- The company was a joint venture by an American businessman and two Antwerp investors
- In local dialect the distinctive ships were called "star boats"
- The majority of passengers travelled in third class, paying an equivalent of €550 in 1895 and €2,400 by 1924
- Some 30 million people in North America can trace their family lineage to the Red Star Line



# Peeters delivers September Declaration to parliament

## Annual address sums up government's achievements

Alan Hope

Flanders will emerge from the economic crisis of the last six years as one of the strongest regions in Europe, minister-president Kris Peeters told the Flemish parliament this week, noting that this administration had made "successful investments in difficult times". Peeters was speaking as part of the September Declaration, the "state of the union" address made annually to parliament, as it prepares to begin a new session. With regional elections due to take place in May 2014, this was the last opportunity for him to list the successes of this administration. Peeters quoted a number of statistics to illustrate his government's achievements:

- 21,072 responses to requests for care for the handicapped
- 18,379 extra places in day-care centres
- 6,500 new beds in residential care homes
- 110,000 people learning Dutch as a second language
- 1,850km of cycle paths laid or renewed
- 5,637 applications for school renovations approved

"These are investments that count, colleagues,"

said Peeters. "These are investments that improve the lives of ordinary people ... But as long as one child or one senior or one handicapped person is on a waiting list, our ambitions must remain higher. As long as strong companies have to close their doors, we cannot be satisfied. As long as hard-working people are losing their jobs, this Flemish government will not rest on its laurels."

To begin the final stage, he said, the government offers a balanced budget, which involves savings but places no new burdens on workers or businesses. "The investment in research and development, school building, care infrastructure, sewers, heritage, sports facilities, social housing and mobility will remain at their current levels or even increase. The agreements worked out in education and the social sector will be implemented without cuts."

With the promise of an end to the crisis in sight, improved consumer confidence, record exports and the promise of 1.1% growth in 2014, Peeters said, the government was ready to proceed to the achievement of its mission of becoming one of the top five strongest economies in the EU.



## €10 million for elderly care innovations

Innovation minister Ingrid Lieten announced €10 million in funding for a new system of innovating in care for the elderly, as well as for the first four projects approved after a call for ideas made last year. The minister also issued a second call via the Institute for Innovation through Science and Technology for projects for the next round of funding.

The new "test-lab" project for elderly

care aims to bring together all of those who are active in the area – the health-care sector, home help and businesses and innovators, all of whom would provide information on what is needed and ideas on how results might be achieved.

"Elderly people make it clear that they want to remain longer in their homes, with more social contact," Lieten said. "One of the major challenges ... in the

decades to come will be to tackle the growing problem of loneliness among seniors. This test-lab will be dedicated to improving the quality of life of older people by allowing them to fully take part in society and to have a broad variety of social contacts."

The four projects funded in the first round include creating "care neighbourhoods" in Brussels and Antwerp to support both the elderly

and their carers; Ageing in Place in the Aalst area, which makes housing and home-care more affordable; a project in Leuven to develop integrated treatment products and processes for those requiring complex care; and the Living and Care Lab in the Kempen area, which helps improve social participation.

► [www.iwt.be/subsidies/proeftuinzorg](http://www.iwt.be/subsidies/proeftuinzorg)

## Leaked documents point to Britain's GCHQ in Belgacom hacking

Not the US National Security Agency but the British intelligence service's GCHQ was behind the hacking of Belgacom's computers, according to documents leaked by Edward Snowden, published last week in the German magazine *Der Spiegel*. The British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) provides signals intelligence and information from a massive listening centre based in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.

According to the documents, the operation was code-named Socialist and aimed to "gain access to Belgacom routers" from which GCHQ (*pictured*) would undertake "operations against targets roaming using smartphones". GCHQ is believed to have lured Belgacom workers onto websites that infected their computers with malware that provided access for GCHQ.

Another purpose of the cyber-attack seems



likely to have been access to BICS, a Belgacom subsidiary that operates phone and internet traffic for customers in Africa and the Middle East. The British government has so far declined to respond to the allegations.

Meanwhile, Belgacom chair Michel Moll resigned in the last days of his term of office after it was revealed that he has been a strategic consultant since 2010 for the Chinese technology company Huawei. The company has a reputation for involvement in espionage. Moll denied any involvement in espionage or conflict of interest. He was replaced this week by former federal justice minister Stefaan De Clerck, and his seat on the company's board will be reassigned.

It was further reported that the foreign affairs ministry, the prime minister's office and even the news agency Belga have been the victims of hacking: Belga from China, the others from an unknown source. The attacks all used the malware technique. This week prime minister Elio Di Rupo said that the government would be allocating additional budget resources in 2014 to improving cyber-security.

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

**€42.9 million**

in investment and aid granted by the Flemish government to Ford Europe, which the government is now reclaiming in light of Ford Genk's closure. Ford has refused to repay the aid

**1,420**

jobs in the Antwerp city administration to disappear by 2019, the council announced. Forced redundancies will be avoided as far as possible, said mayor Bart De Wever

**2/3**

journeys are made by car in Flanders, even for distances of less than three kilometres. Flemings also take the car for one in four journeys of less than one kilometre

**42%**

of graduates of Dutch-speaking schools of Brussels are tri-lingual, compared to 82% in 2001, according to sociologist Rudi Janssens of the Free University of Brussels (VUB)

**€7 billion**

reduction in taxation required to get the economy back on its feet, according to Unizo director-general Karel Van Eetvelt

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### The godfather

"Bart De Wever is a pub strategist." In other words, the N-VA president eagerly discusses matters on which he is no expert. Vice-prime minister Johan Vande Lanotte believes that the nationalist N-VA, Flanders' biggest political force, will inevitably disappoint a large part of its voters. With this quote, Johan Vande Lanotte kicked his socialist party into election mode.

SPA is not in the best of positions for the 2014 elections, after which a centre-right coalition, with N-VA joined by CD&V and Open VLD, seems the most likely. This would be quite a blow for the Flemish socialists, who have been in power since 1988 (with a short break between 2007 and 2011). SPA has never been very large – its results mostly averaging between 15 and 20% – but it has always had an important life line: its French-speaking counterpart, prime minister Elio Di Rupo's PS, which is much stronger. However, the PS, too, is under threat, as N-VA sees it as the major obstacle to the reforms it wants.

Having been in power for so long also makes it hard for SPA to stand out. It has other unwanted side effects, too. Vande Lanotte in particular has a reputation for being a major power broker. This became even more obvious last week when the newly appointed railway chief, Jo Cornu, seemed to come straight out of the vice-prime minister's little black book.

Before Cornu, no less than three other candidates for the same job had Vande Lanotte's stamp of approval, leading parting NMBS chief Marc Descheemaeker to say that "if ever a film is made about the NMBS, Vande Lanotte's part should be played by Marlon Brando," referring to the American actor who played the title role in *The Godfather*.

With no politicians of the stature of De Wever and Kris Peeters (CD&V), SPA has to make a difference with its proposals. Minister Freya Van den Bossche did so when she proposed a reform of the "home bonus", the popular tax relief that makes home ownership possible for many (but not all). SPA also strongly rejected the idea of "mini-jobs" of the German kind.

Meanwhile, Antwerp's city council is shutting down socialist achievements, such as school trips to the coast and the countryside. That might even be an opportunity to SPA, as it bluntly demonstrates the political choices at stake. Still, it remains unclear if the socialists can regain the sympathy of the working classes it defends.



# Our woman in Havana

## Cigar sommelier opens second branch of exclusive shop in Ghent

Alan Hope

Earlier this year, a very exclusive shop opened in Ghent – not a fashion house or diamond dealer but La Casa del Habano, which trades exclusively in Cuban cigars. It's the third branch to open in Flanders and the second to be run by Dominique Gyselinck, a certificated cigar sommelier and the only woman in the world to operate two Casa del Habano shops. The Knokke shop has been open for 11 years. The toniest of Flanders' coastal resorts is an obvious location for such a select business, but Ghent seems much more unlikely. It turns out there's a good reason. "I was born and brought up in Ghent," explains Gyselinck, as we relax in the smokers' lounge behind the store, kitted out in leather furniture and a coffee table with a glass panel stuffed with the bands from thousands of cigars. "And then the city's main cigar shop closed down three years ago, and I said to myself, time to go home. We're very happy with the way things have been going so far, though the shop is still very new. We're pretty much on the tourist trail, so we get a lot of tourists. And the people of Ghent are happy that there's a cigar specialist once more."

### Equal opportunity

Cigars must be one of the last bastions of male territory, and it's rare to even see a woman smoking one, let alone becoming an expert in the field. "About 15 years ago, I went into a cigar shop in Brussels. I saw all those beautiful cigars lying there, and I said, 'I want to try that for myself'. So I went home to my now husband with a selection and told him: We're going to try some cigars! I'm sure he thought at first there was



Dominique Gyselinck, a certificated cigar sommelier and committed cigar smoker

something wrong with me. However, it went very well, and I went back for more several times. Gradually my interest grew and I increased my understanding of the business, until one day I announced: I'm going to open a cigar shop." Sounds simple, but there is a

huge barrier of sexist thinking to overcome. "If I light a cigar, I can guarantee you that the people around will be staring at me, even friends, even at private events when you'd think people would behave differently," she says. "Just recently I was in Brussels and I was sitting at

a terrace on the Zavel with a friend who works for *Elle* magazine. She's also a smoker. We sat there, both of us with a coffee, and we were both smoking a little cigar. The passers-by were practically walking into the furniture, they were so surprised to see two women smoking cigars. Our society claims to be free and that women have all the freedom of men, but in fact the reality is something else. It's an enormous obstacle for other women." Cigars face obstacles, too: There's an air of privilege surrounding the product, and people hate the smell. In addition, it's tough to find an indoor location to even smoke a cigar. "Yes, it's no longer acceptable," sighs Gyselinck. "And you have to

kitted out with a glass-walled section running the full length of the shop that's in fact a walk-in humidor with computer-controlled temperature and humidity. The shop sells about 140 different cigars, all Cuban, of every size and format. Gyselinck also sells accessories like humidors, cutters, lighters and cases, as well as a small selection of spirits like Mombasa gin, Cuban rum and Scotch single malt. The sense of exclusivity is important in marketing such a luxury product; however, while it's possible to spend €40 on a single cigar, there are also more democratic options. "Cigars are much more accessible to a lot more people these days than ever before," says Gyselinck. "But

"If you smoke while you're anxious, you'll wreck the cigar in no time and have completely missed the point of the thing"

stop drinking, and no more lying in the sun. Meat is not good to eat, and neither is fish. Scrap everything, and then there's nothing left but to wait to die." Surely she exaggerates. "Look: A cigar is not smoked, it's savoured, and I'll continue to insist on that. It's nothing like a cigarette, which is smoked until it's finished. With a cigar, you have to be at rest, and you're going to be looking for a particular flavour profile in the cigar. You're obliged to be relaxed; if you start smoking while you're anxious, you'll wreck the cigar in no time, and you'll have completely missed the point of the thing." The Casa shop in Ghent is an expensive affair, situated in the shadow of Sint-Baaf's cathedral,

still people have an outdated view of the cigar as something for a bank director, the rich man in his top hat with a fat cigar. That's not the way things are any more. But yes, you have people who come in who don't have any interest at all in the taste and quality: They just have to have a Cohiba because they want to stroll with it down the street so everyone can see." Real cigar fans, she says, don't care about the brand. "What happens in your mouth is what's important. Everyone's different, and everyone has a different sort of experience. There are cigars here for €2.50 that some find are worth more than a cigar for €40."

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

# Knickers to homophobia

## Brussels designer makes fashion statement with political pants

Katrien Lindemans

A collection of boxer shorts with Russian prints and a calendar featuring sexy men wearing them: That's how Brussels designer Kristof Buntinx reacted to Russia's passage of an anti-gay law last summer. The boxer shorts are available now, and the calendar will be released this weekend at a party in Brussels. "The latest videos of tortured gay teens in Russia left me feeling disgusted," says Buntinx. "I've always wanted to design an underwear collection, and as I love Russian gymnasts, it made sense to combine both and make my collection about Russian gay propaganda." Buntinx's underwear collection is

not his first political statement. Earlier this year, he created pink T-shirts reading "God Save the Queens" as a reaction to the mayor of Antwerp's decision to introduce a dress code for civil servants. "It's my way to draw attention to these problems," he says. "We should make the most of our freedom of expression, while we still have it." Reactions to Buntinx's collection have been positive, with press coverage as far afield as Australia and the US. "People ask me if the money raised will go to a project helping gay teens in Russia," Buntinx adds. "But as it's all very small-scale, there isn't any profit yet. That's why I'm planning a



crowdfunding project, and I'm also looking for investors to help this venture grow." The collection features 17 designs, from a Russian medal of honour to a print of a hammer and sickle in rainbow colours. For the calendar, Buntinx found his models via social media, and photographer Herman Van Gestel took the shots. The calendar will be digitally printed, in Russian, English, Dutch, Spanish, French and German. "Everybody's welcome at the launch party on 28 September at the Dominican in Brussels," says Buntinx. "Except Vladimir Putin."

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



THE WEEK  
IN BUSINESS

## Apparel

## ► Stradivarius

Spain's Inditex apparel group, owner of brands such as Zara and Massimo Dutti, has launched its Stradivarius online shopping brand locally. The group has no plans to open shops at present.

## Banking ► Dexia

The Belgo-French Dexia holding group, saddled with billions of unpaid loans and propped up with public funding, is negotiating the sale of its Dexia Asset Management affiliate with the UK-based FinEx. Another offer, from Swiss operator Bucephale, is also said to be under consideration.

## Distribution ► Colruyt

The Halle-based supermarket chain has created Solucious to merge its two distribution affiliates Collivery, home-delivering to private clients, and Foodinvest, servicing the horeca sectors.

## Food service

## ► Gate Gourmet

The Swiss aircraft catering company Gategroup has sold its Brussels Airport-based affiliate Gate Gourmet to LSG Sky Chefs, a subsidiary of Germany's Lufthansa airline.

## Legal services ► PwC

The local affiliate of the global audit and consulting group has founded Law Square to offer legal services to its clients. According to the firm, 70% of its customers are foreign companies that need legal help locally.

## Metals ► Viohalco

The leading Greek metals group Viohalco-Hellenic Copper and Aluminium is transferring its headquarters from Athens to Brussels and will seek a listing on the Brussels stock exchange. The move is linked to the company's difficulties in securing adequate financing for its activities in Greece.

## Retail

## ► Christian Louboutin

The maker of designer shoes, known for painting the soles red, plans to open an outlet in the Zavel area of central Brussels before the end of the year.

## Shipping ► Exmar

The Antwerp-based shipping and gas transport company has signed an agreement with the Antwerp Port Authority to build a Liquefied Natural Gas stocking ship to be berthed in the port. Exmar seeks to develop its activities in the sector worldwide, with the Antwerp project in operation from 2015.

# €3.2 million for science and maths projects

## Initiatives bridge the gap between the classroom and workplace

Alan Hope

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters has announced funding of €3.2 million for "bridging" projects related to the government's action plan for the promotion of STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The projects selected create a "bridge" between the classroom and the workplace, with links formed between schools and businesses; the projects will reach 50,000 to 70,000 – mainly students but also teachers and business owners. The goal is to stimulate enterprise among young people in education, from pre-school to university. The government hopes that the STEM action plan

makes up the region's shortfall in the numbers of qualified workers in technical, engineering and scientific posts by 2020.

The 15 projects involve the universities of Leuven, Ghent and Brussels, as well as university colleges across Flanders. They include 12-year-olds building their own Lego robots; screening STEM students for enterprise talent; helping teachers and school administrators with awareness of enterprise; vacation workshops aimed at encouraging girls to study STEM subjects; and boot camps for the various disciplines involved in games development.



## Grid wins animation producer of the year

The Ghent-based special effects production house Grid Animation has been named European Animation Producer of the Year by the industry event Cartoon Forum in Toulouse. Grid was set up in 1995 by Jan Goossen and Mark Mertens, specialising in 3D, visual effects, character animation and editing. Along with programmes aimed at children such as *Bumba* and *Kabouter Plop*, Grid has also worked on drama series like *Code 37*, *Flikken* and *Métal Hurlant Chronicles* (pictured) and feature films like *Vermist* and *Groenten uit Balen*.



"We have to thank the great enthusiasm of all of our colleagues for this prize," Goossen said. "It's also thanks to the trust placed in us by our partners, co-producers, broadcasters and distributors, and to the support of the Flemish Audiovisual Fund and Screen Flanders."

## Members of Fortis board face possible court action

The main executives involved in the collapse of Fortis Bank in 2008 are expected to find out this week who, if anyone, will face charges for misleading shareholders in the run-up to the collapse. A number of executives, including former CEO Jean-Paul Votron and former chairman Maurice Lippens, have been accused by the public prosecutor. Last weekend, Flemish daily *De Tijd* published leaked emails from Lippens to other members of the board, in which he holds a more sombre view of the bank's situation from the position he was taking in public, in the hope of attracting

new and existing shareholders to take part in a capital increase. Most of those shareholders who did take part went on to lose their investment when Fortis collapsed, and their representatives also sent summonses this week to former executives in connection with a civil suit on the same matter. Yves Leterme, who was prime minister at the time of the collapse, said at the weekend that "the masks will fall and the truth will be revealed". Leterme declined to comment on the content of the Lippens mails, as legal proceedings are under way.

## Leak from radioactive barrels "not dangerous"

A yellowish substance found on about 40 barrels of nuclear waste at the Belgoprocess treatment plant in Dessel, Antwerp province, poses no danger to the environment or the public, according to the plant's managers.

The substance was found inside the concrete bunkers where the low-level radioactive waste is stocked. The waste comes from the nuclear power plant at Doel on the

left bank of the River Scheldt near Antwerp. Inside the barrels, the waste is enclosed in concrete, and a preliminary examination suggested that the substance is the result of a reaction between silica and an alkali, and was probably caused by gravel in the concrete mix.

However Electabel, which owns the waste, said it would work with the national institute for radioactive waste and enriched fissile material

(Niras) to confirm the origin of the leak.

Kristof Calvo, nuclear specialist for Groen, said the leak would have "enormous financial and technical consequences" for the future. "It is clear that the way such barrels are treated is just not working," he told VRT radio. "As far as the stocking of radioactive waste is concerned, only the best is good enough. These barrels have been in place now for

20 years, and they're supposed to last for 100 years."

Walter Bogaerts, a former director of Belgoprocess and now a lecturer, said there was "an urgent need for extra research" into the cause of the leaks before the government goes ahead with its plan to store low-level waste above ground in Limburg, in specially-constructed mounds made of concrete.

## Consumer confidence continues to rise

Belgium's confidence index continued its five-month upward movement in September with a jump from -12 points to -7 points, the National Bank reported. For Flanders alone, the figure is higher still, at -3 points.

"Consumer confidence in Flanders is at its highest since October 2011," minister-president Kris Peeters commented. "We're gradually

coming out of the crisis."

The increase in confidence was recorded over the economy as a whole and over the respondents' personal financial situation. Only on the prospect for employment was there a slight negative movement recorded. The current level of consumer confidence as a whole is in line with the long-term average for the last 20 years.

## Electrawinds' Jo Cornu appointed new rail boss

Frank Van Massenhove, the senior civil servant recently appointed CEO of the rail authority NMBS, will not be taking up the post for medical reasons, he announced last week. Instead, the job will be filled by Jo Cornu, former boss of Alcatel and once voted ICT Personality of the Year by the Flemish magazine *Data News*.

Van Massenhove was seen as the key figure in breaking a political stalemate that had seen a number of top jobs in government enterprises, including Belgacom, the National Lottery and the financial industry regulator FMSA, remain blocked while the coalition parties jostled for places. He was considered an innovative manager, able to take the NMBS through the structural reforms it faces.

The appointment of his replacement was the cause of some controversy last week. Cornu is chair of the



green energy company Electrawinds, which operates the offshore wind turbine park, of great importance to federal North Sea minister Johan Vande Lanotte. Critics of the appointment accuse the minister of a lack of transparency in lining up a successor to Van Massenhove before his decision to withdraw was made public.



# Conflicting diagnoses

## Two new tools screen for sleeping sickness in Africa

Andy Furniere

Calling on its expertise in battling sleeping sickness, Antwerp's Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) has played a major role in the development of a rapid diagnostic test for the disease. The cheap and user-friendly tool is being launched in several countries in West and Central Africa, with the focus on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where the disease is most prevalent. The ITM supplies the parasite antigens that are used by South Korean company Standard Diagnostics to manufacture SD Bioline HAT, a rapid test for sleeping sickness. This deadly parasitic disease, transmitted by tsetse flies, occurs in 36 sub-Saharan countries. With the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics in Geneva and with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, among others, the new test is being distributed in West and Central Africa. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 98% of people with sleeping sickness were contaminated in this region, with the other 2% contracting the East African variant. In the past 10 years, more than 70% of reported cases occurred in the DRC. The symptoms are not specific to this disease, which makes it difficult to diagnose. In the first phase, infected people typically suffer from fever, while patients in the second phase display a range of psychotic signs that lead to stigmatisation by their families and communities. Damage caused in the neurological phase is often irreversible, and the disease is almost invariably fatal if left untreated. At the beginning of the 1980s, the



People in Bandundu Province, DRC, get tested for sleeping sickness

WHO asked the ITM to create a test for large-scale screening of populations at risk in villages, resulting in the Catt test, which has been used for about 15 years. The advantages of SD Bioline HAT over Catt is that it doesn't require specialised equipment or electricity, can be stored at room temperature and offers an individual screening instead of a diagnosis of multiple blood samples. The tools, which resemble pregnancy tests, are very simple to use and health workers need only minimal training. All people need to do is apply blood from a finger prick to a test strip and after 15 minutes, the colour pattern will show if they are infected or not. Notwithstanding these improvements, Philippe Büscher, head of the ITM's parasite diagnostics unit, is not happy with its launch and suggests that there has been insufficient research into the tool's effectiveness. "The first evaluations

on about 150 patients showed that the SD Bioline HAT tests scored considerably worse than the Catt tests in detecting the infection," he says. After modifications and a recent re-evaluation, "the SD Bioline HAT test shows a similar effectiveness to the Catt test," he continues, "but this time, it was only tested on 47 patients, which can result in a distortion of the results." These figures were presented during a meeting of the International Scientific Council for Trypanosomiasis Research and Control earlier this month in Khartoum, Sudan. Besides his doubts about the validity of the new test, Büscher also believes that the ITM has already developed a better alternative with Walloon company Coris BioConcept. With support from the European Commission, the ITM co-ordinates the research network NIDIAG, which battles overlooked infectious diseases.

One of the results of this collaborative project is the HAT Sero-K-SeT. This is a similar rapid test to SD Bioline HAT, but the evaluation has been more positive. According to Büscher, the HAT Sero-K-SeT successfully detects the infection in more than 98% of cases, a slightly higher score than both the Catt and optimised SD Bioline HAT tests. The tool has been tested on 134 patients in the DRC. As part of the NIDIAG network, the ITM is also developing the revolutionary HAT Sero-Strip kit, which would consist of 25 detection strips in a tube. These kits would make it possible to transport many more tests to remote rural areas. The ITM hopes to replace the parasite antigens used in the tests with molecules created in the lab, such as recombinant DNA molecules and synthetic peptides. "These would be easier and cheaper to produce, and we also wouldn't need lab animals any more," explains Büscher. Still, not discounting the importance of diagnostic tools, the essential challenge is to eliminate sleeping sickness by 2030 – a deadline set by the WHO. According to the WHO, the disease was detected in 7,197 people last year. In 1998, 40,000 cases were reported, but it estimates that 300,000 cases were undiagnosed and therefore untreated. "The use of insecticides in agriculture has already exterminated the tsetse fly in many areas," says Büscher. "In a few years, we may also have better and safer drugs that we could even give to patients who are not 100% certain to be infected, without causing side effects such as diabetes."

## THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Researchers connected to the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) identified the protein called FMRP as an important **cause of breast cancer spreading to other parts** of the body. FMRP's role in the brain is well known, where its absence leads to Fragile X Syndrome, the most prevalent form of inherited intellectual disability. Previous studies also suggested that patients with the syndrome had a lower risk of cancer, but little was known about the molecular events that lead to this beneficial effect.

Scientists of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) and Ghent University found that most terminally ill **patients are transferred very late to palliative care**. Half of the patients with a chronic and progressive lung disease receive palliative care for less than 10 days before they die. Half of patients with heart failure are transferred 12 days before their death and patients with dementia 14 days. The investigation was carried out by the research group Care for the End of Life, supported by the government of Flanders.

Ghent University student restaurant Sint-Jansvest will only serve one non-vegetarian meal a day. This **almost completely vegetarian student restaurant** is a first for a Flemish university. UGent plans to expand its expertise in the art of veggie cooking in order to influence the quality and quantity of the vegetarian meals in all its restaurants.

Together with the Dutch University of Utrecht, the University of Leuven is launching a transnational two-year **academic degree in literary translation**. It is the first two-year programme at Master's level in which the theory of the subject is taught together with research on the profession. In Flanders, the programme consists of one year of studies in general translation, followed by a postgraduate year in literary translation. The programme has been founded with financial support of the Dutch Language Union.

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

More than one-quarter (28%) of secondary students in Antwerp **leave school without a diploma**, a number that far exceeds the Flemish average of 14%, according to a survey by the Centre for Study and School Careers. In Brussels (27%) and Ghent (22%), the situation is also very problematic. Because of the increased risk of poverty, academics propose a graduation duty, connected to the right to unemployment benefits, or obligatory training on the labour market. **AF**

## Q&A

**Anne Paduart of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) won the Gustave Magnel Prize for best scientific research on sustainable construction**

**What issues did your PhD thesis tackle?**  
A lot of techniques are currently being developed to reduce energy consumption, but not many researchers are looking for ways to limit the construction and demolition waste generated at building sites. Since the increasing consumption of materials causes serious environmental problems, I designed strategies to facilitate future renovations of buildings. I focused on social housing from the 1970s because this infrastructure urgently needs renovating, and this approach allowed me to work on large-scale projects.

**What is your philosophy of construction?**  
The way I see it, a building should be assembled with construction

parts that you can easily reuse for a different purpose. In a sustainable construction system, part of a wall could also become a furniture component like a table top. If a couple have a baby, for instance, rearranging certain adjacent structures would make it possible for them to create more space without tearing down walls. This dynamic method not only has ecological advantages, it also adds variety to uniform buildings and lowers the cost of building renovations later on.

**Will these ideas lead to mainstream construction techniques?**  
I'm working on a new project with the Transform research group at the architectural engineering department of the VUB. For the platform Brussels Retrofit XL,

we are creating prototypes of reusable components. We need to make sure that the parts are in accordance with current rules –



for example, fire safety regulations – and that they answer the practical needs of architects and construction companies. We are negotiating partnerships with Belgian and international enterprises. Another goal is to set up transnational projects with the help of EU institutions.

**How much is the Gustave Magnel Prize worth?**  
I received €10,000 from the co-operative company Seco, the Technical Control Bureau for Construction, which organises the award every four years. Although I have a few ideas, I haven't yet decided how to spend the prize money.

► [www.vub.ac.be/arch](http://www.vub.ac.be/arch)



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# Bruges through a lens

Specialist tours give a new perspective on oft-photographed sites

Diana Goodwin

A generation ago, photography was the domain of the professional or serious enthusiast willing to invest considerable money in equipment and even more time in learning how to use it. Today, the advent of camera phones and the affordability of digital cameras means that everyone is getting in on the fun.

The downside to this explosion in digital image-making is that no matter where you go, there are half a dozen other people brandishing a camera at the very scene you're trying to photograph. It can be a bit disheartening to realise that hundreds of other tourists have the exact same shot of Manneken Pis, the Eiffel Tower or Mont Blanc that you just took.

Andy McSweeney is here to help. The Canadian photographer gives daily photo tours in his adopted home town of Bruges, offering a unique combination of guided tour and photography.

McSweeney came up with the idea after giving informal tours of Bruges to visiting friends and helping some of those same friends with their cameras and photography skills. He realised that similar tours already existed in cities like New York, London and Amsterdam, but no such tour was being done in Bruges. He's never taken a photo tour himself, so he's not influenced by anyone else's concept or style.

He started the tours thinking that he would show visiting photographers the best sites for taking pictures, with an emphasis on visual interest and good lighting conditions. However, he soon found himself being peppered with questions. Tour participants wanted – and needed – help with their photography, whether it was a question of how to compose a shot or what settings to use on the camera. He says, "Pretty quickly, the learning side of things became part of the tour."

McSweeney is a self-taught photographer who picked up



© Photos Andy McSweeney

a camera during his travels in Australia and found that he had a natural gift for making interesting pictures. He calls his style "street photography", meaning that he takes pictures of scenery and people as he finds them. This kind of photography serves the travel photographer well, as it involves spontaneity and a documentary approach.

At 10.00 one grey Tuesday morning, I stood at the designated meeting point in front of the Basilica of the Holy Blood, camera in hand, ready to join one of his tours. By choosing the morning tour, I'd hoped to be part of a small group – and as luck would have it, I was the only participant. I found myself with my own private tour guide and photography coach. McSweeney's personal style is informal yet highly focused. Tall, energetic and a natural talker, he quickly introduced himself and his approach to photography, using a tablet computer to show examples of his work. He asked me about my photography experience and about



Canadian Andy McSweeney helps budding photographers capture Bruges at its best, like in this photo of one of the city's bridges

what I wanted to achieve during the tour. Over the next couple of hours we visited nine or 10 sites and I took about 80 pictures.

At each stop on the tour, McSweeney suggested a subject and then encouraged me to find different ways to photograph it. He pushed me to look beyond the obvious

composition or frame and to get more creative. At the same time, he was a fountain of technical knowledge, offering practical tips on how to operate my SLR and which settings to use. I learned more about my camera on this tour than I had in the previous months of fiddling with it on my own.

McSweeney offers three tours a day, every day. Each one has a slightly different focus, covering different sites in the city centre and taking advantage of the best light at that time of day. Although I felt that I knew Bruges pretty well, he showed me a few photogenic spots that I had never discovered on my own. For those who wish to replicate my one-on-one experience, he also offers private tours.

Next month, he is hosting the Worldwide Photo Walk in Bruges for the second year in a row. Now in its sixth year, this international event is the brainchild of Scott Kelby, an American photographer, author and Photoshop guru. On 5 October, photographers around the world will gather together in various cities to walk, take pictures and socialise.

About 25 people participated in the Worldwide Photo Walk in Bruges last year; despite some inclement weather, they photographed sites in the historic centre for about three hours before retiring to a cafe. Most of the participants were locals but at least one foreign photographer who happened to be in Bruges that day joined the group.

"It's more of a social thing than a workshop," explains McSweeney. It's foremost an opportunity for photographers, who normally work solo, to meet each other, share their passion and (in McSweeney's words) "geek out" on photography talk. This year, he plans to guide the walkers to different sites in Bruges so that repeat participants can expect to find new subjects for their lens.

Other Photo Walks are planned for Brussels, Antwerp and Sint-Truiden this year. Participation is free and registration is via the Worldwide Photo Walk website. There's an optional photography contest, with winners selected from each city and a Grand Prize winner selected by Kelby.

► [www.phototourbrugge.com](http://www.phototourbrugge.com)  
► [worldwidephotowalk.com](http://worldwidephotowalk.com)

## Metro5 project puts neighbourhood faces in the metro

When commuters make use of Brussels' metro, they move from place to place without seeing anything of what is lying over their heads above ground. The project Metro5: Moving People, Moving Stories is meant to change that. Spearheaded by the city's transport minister Brigitte Grouwels, the project also wants to point to the power of diversity and its positive aspects in a multicultural city.

It focuses on metro line 5, the longest one in the city. It connects Herrmann-Debroux in the south-east to Erasmus in the south-west. Students from the Brussels University College (HUB) and Sint-Lukas University College worked



Luc Gees of Sint-Lukas photographs a resident for the project Metro5

together to collect stories from the people who live near the line. The stories have been published in free newspapers that you can find in displays in all the stations along the line.

"This project shows that the MIVB is more than just transport, it's a part of life, a piece of the city, and we're proud of that," says MIVB adjunct CEO Kris Lauwers.

Metro line 5 crosses through the municipalities of Oudergem, Etterbeek, Brussels City, Molenbeek and Anderlecht. Every week, the residents living near two of the line's 28 metro stations will be featured. Readers can also find out about interesting walking and cycle routes

in the neighbourhoods, encouraging them to step out of the metro and see what's up those stairs. The newspapers will also be available in community centres, tourist offices and other public places.

There will be free bike tours, organised by Cactus&Co, a non-profit that tries to get more people to explore Brussels by bike. There is a free mobile app (for Android) with more information.

Social and cultural activities are also planned in and around metro line 5. For more information and to share your thoughts, visit the event's Facebook page. Els Mertens

► [www.facebook.com/metro5be](http://www.facebook.com/metro5be)



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# Mother's pride

Duo photography project documents a girl's journey to adulthood

Sabine Clappaert

The retrospective of Flemish mother-and-daughter artist duo Memymom is sure to ruffle a few feathers during its premiere exhibition at De Brakke Grond in Amsterdam this week. Images of a young Lisa De Boeck, photographed by her mother, Marilène Coolens, between 1990 and 2003 form the centre of the intimate retrospective.

The cross-generational collaboration between the Flemish mother and daughter, which continues today, began with what the pair describe as a "hangover from the past". Coolens began taking the photos that now make up *The Umbilical Vein* when her daughter was just five and continued until she turned 18. Images of a nine-year old De Boeck sitting on a bed in a Pucci blouse and high heels, others of her pouting seductively at the camera à la Marilyn Monroe or posing as Catwoman, capture the transformation of a child into a young woman. The photographs will leave few people cold. They taunt viewers, who find themselves wanting to give

And you find this in tiny details, such as a faint trail of spaghetti sauce in the corner of Catwoman's mouth. Some viewers appreciate the way in which the work plays with the concepts of identity, family and growing up, but others – often mothers who have daughters – question the way in which Coolens portrays her daughter.

De Boeck, now 28 and a photographer and video artist in her own right, is quick to counter the allegation of inappropriateness: "I was like a cat who knew exactly what to do to get food: I knew what I had to do to make my mum pick up her camera," she says. "I loved being in front of the camera. I would find a scarf, put on her lipstick or high heels..." Coolens says that the collaboration with her daughter has always been very intuitive. "It's also the reason we named the retrospective *The Umbilical Vein*," adds De Boeck. "There is no connection more fundamental – or invisible to others – between a mother and her child than the umbilical vein."

To De Boeck, the implicit bond with her mother is fundamental in the strength of the images. "It was a game I could only play in the safety

"Now that I'm grown up, I realise how privileged I am to have such an intuitive bond with my mother"

them a comfortable place within an understandable context. But a nagging question remains: Are they a statement on the sexualisation of girls, or do they simply add to that imagery? Or are they about something else altogether?

According to the duo, they found inspiration for the characters De Boeck portrays in their experience of the 1990s, the decade during which most of the photos were taken: pop culture, fashion, pedestrians on the streets of Brussels.

De Boeck usually seems quite serious in the photos, often almost unhappy. But Coolens encourages you to look closer to find a child's daily reality.

of my mother's presence. She gave me the freedom to play without misunderstanding the characters I was playing, and she did it without saying a word. Now that I'm grown up, I realise how privileged I am to have such an intuitive bond with her – both as a daughter and later also as an artist. Even today, our bond as artists is fluent and spontaneous. And the same things still inspire us: places, people, especially women. That's why the feminine is so often a theme in our work."

The retrospective, which was commissioned by De Brakke Grond's director, showcases 80 photos out of more than 1,000 taken over 13

## FLANDERS IN AMSTERDAM

Last week's opening of *The Umbilical Vein* in De Brakke Grond was a festive affair, introduced by Flemish visual artist Michaël Aerts and with live music by blues musician Roland Van Campenhout. It also marked the start of a crowdfunding initiative for a book based on the exhibition, for which best-selling author Saskia De Coster wrote a story.

Sounds like a big Flemish reunion, doesn't it? That's because De Brakke Grond is a Flemish cultural centre in Amsterdam. With a

name (The Brackish Ground) inspired by the swampland that dominated the area in the middle ages, the centre opened in 1981, the culmination of 10 years of planning after the then Flemish and Dutch ministers of culture agreed to investigate new forms of collaboration.

Today, the centre showcases the best in Flemish theatre, dance, music, visual arts and film. West Fleming Piet Menu, who served as a programmer at the cultural centre from 2002-2007, became its director early last year.



Lisa De Boeck, photographed by her mother, Marilène Coolens, in "Elle et son Pucci" (top), "Looking at Ruud" (above left) and "I'm an Old Woman Now" (above right)

years. It is interesting to see the changes in the photographs as the years progress – not only in a young De Boeck growing up, but also in the changing dynamic of the collaboration between mother and daughter.

"When Lisa was very young, the photos were more spontaneous and playful; they were less directed than those in which she is 15 and wanted to have her own say about how the photos were taken. You can see that in the images," explains Coolens. "The way in which she chose to play with the camera – on her own terms – is perhaps most visible in the photos 'I'm an Old Woman Now', in which she longingly pouts at the camera, and 'The Misfit', taken a few moments later, in which she decides to act grumpy and cantankerous."

De Boeck laughs: "I find it fascinating to see myself in those early photos.

I don't remember posing for those first photos, so it's really interesting to look back as an adult on my childhood."

The last photo in the *Umbilical Vein* series was taken just after Lisa turned 18. Called "La Veuve Joyeuse" (The Merry Widow), it shows Lisa in a long black coat, a black ostrich feather in her hair, gazing pensively off into the distance.

So Why did the duo stop the project just as Lisa turned 18? "My dad had died the year before," says De Boeck.

"The last picture was a way for us to process that loss. Of course it doesn't solve anything, but it does confront the beautiful brutality of life."

Coolens and De Boeck continue to collaborate. In the last decade, they have worked on more than 10 projects together. Their recent work continues to push the boundaries of emotional aesthetics, stopping just short of the erotic. "We create dark fairy tales and invent mysteries in which anything your mind conjures up could happen," says De Boeck.

UNTIL 3 NOVEMBER

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





# THE Bulletin

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# The twelfth man

## Antwerp artist and fans of KV Mechelen create an unusual composition

Ian Mundell

For this year's edition of Contour, Mechelen's biennial exhibition of the moving image, Danish curator Jacob Fabricius invited artists to explore one of three sites of social interaction in the city: a church, a prison or a football club. Despite having no previous interest in the game, Dutch artist Paul Hendrikse found himself drawn to what he saw at KV Mechelen.

"I went to a couple of matches, and I started thinking that the football stadium was quite interesting, especially in a Belgian context," recalls Hendrikse. "A club like Mechelen has a very strong and connected group of people around it; much stronger than the whole construct of Belgium. I thought it might be interesting to look at that common identity and how it functions."

His research led him to the concept of the 12th man, which argues that support from the stands is so important to a football team's performance that it can be like having an extra player on the pitch. This struck a chord with Hendrikse, whose previous work has involved individuals with opaque or ambiguous identities.

"I thought it was interesting to work from the reality of these fans, boil it down to a generic figure and see what its sphere of action is," he says. Deciding which approach to use was relatively simple. "For me it quite quickly became performative, because the fan is voice and gesture."



KV Mechelen supporter Klaas assists artist Paul Hendrikse in giving a rhythm to cheering crowds

He returned to KV Mechelen and recorded the crowd. From the sound of the crowd, he selected elements that had unusual or intriguing developments and asked composer Rudi Fisherlehner to set them down in musical notation. In this way the chants, calls and other sounds were condensed down into a single line, some of it abstract but with fragments of language still present. "From there, we started constructing a piece," Hendrikse explains. "We tried different elements together. Some worked, some didn't. It may not seem very composed, but in fact it is hyper-composed." The next step was to perform the composition. "I wanted to bring this 12th man, which is a generic thing, back to one person."

He toyed with the idea of performing it himself but instead decided to return to the source, recruiting three supporters – Else, Klaas and Guy – who could read music and agreed to interpret the score. They were put into a studio and filmed performing the sounds and gestures of the 12th man.

"They have a certain set of ideas on how you support your team," says Hendrikse. "I told them: just perform it the first time how you think it should be done. Sometimes it was very technical, sometimes it was immediately very fan-like."

From these starting points, Hendrikse asked for variations, but throughout the process he was struck by how much room there was for different interpretations of

what was on the page. "I thought the margins would not be so big, but then it happens before your eyes, and you see that the margins are actually rather wide," he says. "I only half foresaw that it would become all about performing: How do you put yourself on the spot and how do you then act in this situation. That becomes rather personal."

The resulting video installation, "The Twelfth Man", contains sequences of each performer standing before a music stand, following the score and performing the calls, whoops, whistles and claps that originally came from the KV Mechelen stands. Sometimes this sounds like an abstract, avant-garde vocal performance, but then something subtly changes, and you get the strongest sensation of a botched pass or a shot at goal somewhere outside the pool of light that isolates each performer.

Hendrikse splits his time between Berlin and Antwerp, where he teaches at the M HKA museum of modern art. He is currently working on a sound installation for a pedestrian tunnel in Antwerp, continuing a series of works that explore the identity of Cameroonian poet Louis-Marie Pouka-M'Bague. But he also has plans for a further piece based on his research at KV Mechelen, this time drawing on a catalogue of 120 gestures that he was able to identify in the stands. Isolated and taken out of context, they take on new performative qualities. "It becomes something between yoga and karate," he says.

## CONTOUR 2013

Contour has changed, and not for the better. Previous editions of Mechelen's biennial exhibition scattered images and installations throughout the city, sending visitors on a mystery tour of encounters with artists in sometimes quirky locations. This year it concentrates the artists in a dedicated exhibition space at the Hof van Busleyden, with only a few making a second appearance at other venues.

If you still want something of the old-style Contour, then head for the Church of Our-Lady-Across-the-Dyle, where 10 well-placed pieces make their own statements yet still interact with the large Gothic building. "Lucas" by Pablo Pijnappel places a loudspeaker inside a confessional, so that the story of a tourist searching for a toilet in Buenos Aires murmurs through the grille to where the priest would sit. Meanwhile in a side chapel, readings from crime fiction echo off the stone, accompanied by projected fragments of literary theory in Alejandro Cesarco's "The Reader".

Then there is "Family Effects", in which young relatives of the artist Edgardo Aragón Díaz are filmed

acting out stories from the family's history. Shown on a TV screen that stands among seats in the aisle, these often violent scenes feel like moving *ex-votos*, the sandy light of Mexico blending eerily with the stone of the church.

Contour's other locations are much less successful. Mechelen prison is only accessible on selected Sundays in September, for a performance piece that requires prior booking. And at the KV Mechelen stadium the art has been confined to the car park rather than allowed through the door.

There are also problems with the central location. Some 25 works have been crammed into a dark, freezing cold, concrete vault that has been dug out under the Hof van Busleyden as a new exhibition space (Contour is the first to use it). You could argue that this allows a concentrated consideration of the exhibition themes of leisure, discipline and punishment, but the result is cacophony, with some of the louder pieces dominating the space. It is simply impossible to concentrate on the quieter work or follow those with extended narratives.

You won't want to spend too much time in here, so cut to the



Flemish choreographer Lisbeth Gruwez worked with American artist Liz Magic Laser on a reprise of prison flicks

chase. Highlights include Paul Hendrikse's "The Twelfth Man" and Josef Dabernig's "Wisla", both of which deal with performance and football.

The best work inspired by the prison space is "Prison Score" by American artist Liz Magic Laser.

She asked Flemish choreographer Lisbeth Gruwez to develop a piece that reprises iconic gestures from Hollywood prison movies. A video of Gruwez performing in Mechelen prison plays roughly in sync with the original movie fragments.

## UNTIL 3 NOVEMBER

### Across Mechelen

► [www.contour2013.be](http://www.contour2013.be)

## WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

A consortium of organisations from the film industry have launched a website for **streaming and downloading Flemish movies**. The site includes popular and art house films, documentaries, shorts and animation dating back to 1945. Most films cost €2.99, though very recent films are €3.49, and short films are €0.99 each. Subscriptions are also available, which offer a discount. "Flemish feature and documentary producers found it important to have one platform where Flemish film fans can find their favourite films in one click of the mouse," said producer Bart Van Langendonck at the launch earlier this month.

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

For the second year in a row, 53-year-old Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker was named **Dancer of the Year** in the yearbook of German dance magazine *Tanz*. The magazine cited the Flemish choreographer's *Partita nr. 2*, which she created and dances together with French choreographer Boris Charmatz. *Partita nr. 2*, which is based on the piece by Bach, premiered last May during Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels.

► [www.rosas.be](http://www.rosas.be)

Flemish top model Hannelore Knuts, who is based in New York, will join TV presenter Eva Daeleman to host a **new lifestyle programme** on Eén. The as yet-untitled programme will cover creative professionals in fashion, interior design, beauty and food. Other Flemish personalities, including TV chef Wim Ballieu, will also appear on the show alongside Daeleman. The programme is set to air in a few months.

Flemish singing duo **Clouseau have announced their comeback**, which follows a three-year period in which the brothers Koen and Kris Wauters took a break from live concerts. The pair will launch a 2014 tour on 1 April in Diest, followed by seven more shows across Flanders, including in Brussels' Ancienne Belgique. Tickets are on sale now. A new Clouseau CD is expected in November.

The first computer game developed with the support of the Flemish Game Fund has been released. **Bongobos, by the Antwerp studio GriN**, is an educational game for young children featuring animals and seasons in a forest. The Game Fund, which is managed by Flanders Audiovisual Fund, was launched in 2012 by media minister Ingrid Lieten and education minister Pascal Smet to support the development of educational as well as entertainment games.

► [www.vaf.be/gamefonds](http://www.vaf.be/gamefonds)



*A triumvirate celebration of Sergei Diaghilev*

# Diaghilev Unbound

Oonagh Duckworth

A hundred years on, the riotous commotion that the Ballets Russes' first performance of the *Rite of Spring* caused at the Champs Elysées Theatre still resounds. Vaslav Nijinsky's choreography and the novel tonality and discordance of Igor Stravinsky's music not only challenged audiences' perceptions of what ballet meant but have continued to influence and inspire choreographers and composers ever since.

Joining this year's worldwide commemorations of the seminal work's centenary, the Royal Ballet of Flanders opens its new season with a thematic programme called *Diaghilev Unbound*, celebrating the artistic genius and creative daring of the notorious impresario and founder of the Ballets Russes, Sergei Diaghilev. The triple bill opens with Glen Tetley's version of the *Rite of Spring*, originally staged for the Munich Ballet in 1974. Tetley, born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1926, was destined for a career

in medicine before he attended a performance of the American Ballet Theatre's production of *Romeo and Juliet*, which jolted him into realising his true vocation was dance.

He became an avid student of modern dance pioneer Hanya Holm, assisting her with staging Broadway musicals. He then worked with the Joffrey Ballet and later for Martha Graham's company.

Tetley's artful fusing of his multiple influences brought him much acclaim, as did his capacity to give emotional and physiological complexity to classical ballet characters. Tetley's *Rite of Spring* is set apart from most other versions, including the original, because a man dances the leading role of the sacrificial victim of the rite. The choreography remains one of the most thrilling and physically demanding pieces for male dancers.

Next comes *Faun* by Antwerp choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. The choreography focuses on the Faun's half-man-half-animal duality



and the sensual dynamic between male and female. Although highly charged erotically, with some of the movements directly inspired by the *Karma Sutra*, Cherkaoui explains that he "wanted to reveal the innocence and beauty inherent in the duo's encounter and the positive, powerful aspects of sexuality that are

so often either vilified or portrayed vulgarly in our culture".

As *Faun* was originally created for two outstanding dancers of Cherkaoui's own company, conveying this very contemporary work to ballet dancers has, according to Cherkaoui, involved stressing the "essence of the piece so that the dancers, who are used to

working in a different language, lose none of the meaning in translation."

Indeed, the musicality and finesse of the animal-like, undulating movements and the organic nature of the dancers' first coming together are more essential to the work than technical prowess. Cherkaoui's *Faun* also intersperses a specially commissioned score by Nitin Sawhney with that of Debussy. Cherkaoui's intention is that we listen in a new way to Debussy's very familiar music and that the Faun takes on a more universal identity.

Last on the programme is the world premiere of a work created especially for the ballet by Romanian choreographer Edward Clug. His version of *Les Noces* has taken inspiration from the not-so-long-obsolete Russian practice of arranged marriages between teenagers and their anxiety at having to undergo a public ritual while silently experiencing inner emotional turmoil.

**3-16 October** | Vlaamse Opera Ghent, Schouwburgstraat 3

**10-16 October** | Vlaamse Opera Antwerp, Frankrijklei 1 | [www.balletvlaanderen.be](http://www.balletvlaanderen.be)

## FESTIVAL

GET TICKETS NOW

### Doomsday

Summer is officially over and with it the festival season. Still there are kicks to be had, be they in the immediate wake of this past weekend's autumnal equinox or even on that shortest day of the year, the winter solstice. That is precisely when Antwerp's clubbing community celebrates the end of the world. The "alternative" dance music festival Doomsday brings together several electronic genres in four of Antwerp Expo's massive rooms. This second edition features international names like Hazard, Pendulum and veteran German minimal DJ Sven Väth. This last is a true analogue purist who has resisted the encroachment of CDs and laptops on the vinyl record's sovereign territory. Last month Doomsday organisers reportedly sold out a limited clutch of early bird passes, so get those regular tickets while you still can. **Georgio Valentino**



**21 December** | Antwerp Expo | [www.doomsday.be](http://www.doomsday.be)

## MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

### Antwerp

**Anthem Festival:** Free music festival featuring reggae, dance and dub on two stages  
**SEP 28 14.00 at De Coninckplein, De Coninckplein 25**

[www.permeke.org/nl/event/4355/anthem-events](http://www.permeke.org/nl/event/4355/anthem-events)

### Brussels

**Bozar Electronic Arts Festival:** Electronic culture at its finest, featuring top acts, audio-visual installations, workshops and digital creations

**SEP 26-28 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23**

[www.checkthis.com/beaf2013](http://www.checkthis.com/beaf2013)

**Fêtes Romanes:** Street theatre festival featuring more than 20 companies, plus exhibitions, workshops and more

**SEP 28-29 at CC Wolubilis, Paul-Henri Spaakplein 1**

[www.wolubilis.be](http://www.wolubilis.be)

## FILM



### Dames Draaien

Inspired by the 2010 Compostela Declaration, a collective statement calling for an end to gender bias in the boy's club that is the European audiovisual sector, the organisers of Dames Draaien put together an annual programme celebrating women's contributions to the field, here in Brussels and worldwide. Indeed, some of this year's cinema comes from as far afield as Iceland, India, Georgia and China. Some two dozen shorts, features and documentaries are screened across four days. Special events include q&a sessions with the directors, after-parties, a student film prize, a master class with Belgian producer Arlette Zylberberg and a retrospective of the work of late Swiss video pioneer Carole Roussopoulos. **GV**

**26-29 September** | Botanique, Brussels | [www.damesdraaien.be](http://www.damesdraaien.be)

## MORE FILM THIS WEEK

### Brussels

**Family Friendly Films:** Magical films for the whole family on occasional Sundays, including *The Polar Express*, Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* and *The Little Polar Bear 2*, plus a monthly cinematography workshop for kids

**Until FEB 2 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23**

[www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

**Animazaterdagen:** A series of animated films selected for a young audience on occasional Saturdays, followed by performances and workshops on animation techniques

**Until MAR 15 2014 at Flagey, Heilig Kruisplein**

[www.flagey.be](http://www.flagey.be)



VISUAL ARTS

Transformation

Gene Roddenberry was right, in a sense: space *is* the final frontier. No, De Markten's current exhibition doesn't follow the crew of the Starship Enterprise where no man has gone before, but rather explores the spaces in which we live and work every day. Six contemporary Flemish and international artists present new work that explores space from different angles. Swiss painter Niele Toroni provides the theoretical frame by applying French philosopher Roland Barthes' concept of the pure "zero degree" of expression. Flemish artist Gertjan Bisschop explores the abstract geometry of space. Paul Gees of East Flanders plays with two of the basic raw materials used to create and divide human space: wood and stone (*pictured*). Appropriately enough, this exhibition can't be contained by the space of the gallery, and encompasses installations in several Brussels metro stations (guided tour on 19 October). **GV**

Until 27 October | De Markten, Brussels  
► [www.demarkten.be](http://www.demarkten.be)



MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Bruges

**Guido & Cordelia:** Donated works that shed light on the relationship between influential Flemish writer and poet Guido Gezelle and his personal assistant Cordelia  
**Until JAN 19 at Gezellemuseum, Rolweg 64**  
► [www.museabrugge.be](http://www.museabrugge.be)

Brussels

**Sculpture After 1945:** A selection of sculpture that reflects important developments in the genre  
**Until MAR 9 at Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Museumstraat 9**  
► [www.fine-arts-museum.be](http://www.fine-arts-museum.be)

**Will Eisner:** From The Spirit to the Graphic Novel: A collection of documents that pay homage to one of the founders of the modern comic strip, American illustrator Will Eisner  
**Until MAR 2 at Belgian Comic Strip Center, Zandstraat 20**  
► [www.stripmuseum.be](http://www.stripmuseum.be)

Hingene (Antwerp province)

**Vrouwen met Stijl (Women with Style):** Work by four amateur painters of noble blood: Antonine de Mun, Duchess of Ursel, her grandmother Emilie, her mother Pauline and her daughter Henriëtte  
**Until NOV 24 at Kasteel d'Ursel, Wolfgang d'Urselstraat 9**  
► [www.kasteeldursel.be](http://www.kasteeldursel.be)

SPECIAL EVENT

Eilandfestival

Antwerp's Eilandje, once a busy port zone and now a trendy urban neighbourhood, is the site of the inaugural edition of the Eilandfestival. The event coincides with the grand opening of the Red Star Line Museum (see cover story) so the theme is what was on the mind of the passenger boats' emigrants: "The Pursuit of Happiness." Literature, performance and gastronomy are the festival's triple focus. Cult American author Donna Tartt presents her new novel *The Goldfinch*. Flemish musician and filmmaker Tom Barman (*pictured*) discusses his latest book and his grandfather, who was a captain on the Red Star Line. Dutch author Tommy Wieringa and others read from their work. Theatremaker Bart Van Nuffelen and his troupe MarHa!tentatief perform a special piece *Dinska Bronska* inspired by the Red Star Line's transatlantic crossing. Without forgetting the nosh: American burgers, Japanese yakitori, French wine and more. **GV**



28-29 September | 't Eilandje, Antwerp | ► [www.eilandfestival.be](http://www.eilandfestival.be)

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Bassevelde (East Flanders)

**Ezelsstoet (Donkey Parade):** Traditional parade in honour of the nickname *ezels* used to describe residents of Bassevelde, who used to bring the grain from their many windmills to Ghent by donkey  
**SEP 29 13.00 across Bassevelde**  
► [www.ezelsstoet.bassevelde.com](http://www.ezelsstoet.bassevelde.com)

Bruges

**Kookeet:** Culinary festival featuring star chef Geert Van Hecke of De Karmeliet and 29 more of Bruges' top chefs who give you the chance to taste their *hapjes* and watch cooking demonstrations  
**SEP 28 11.00-21.00 at 't Zand**  
► [www.bruggeplus.be](http://www.bruggeplus.be)

Brussels

**Career and Baby:** Discussion to address challenges facing working mothers, co-ordinated by Waterstones book store and Nina Peacock, author of *The Brussels Baby Book* (in English)  
**SEP 29 14.00 at Le Meridien Hotel, Europakruispunt 3**  
► [www.tinyurl.com/careerandbaby](http://www.tinyurl.com/careerandbaby)

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Derek Blyth

NTGent Cafe  
Sint-Baafsplein 17, Ghent

Most pubs in the centre of Ghent look as if they've been around for hundreds of years. One called Den Turk claims to date from as far back as 1228. That is seriously old. But what do you do if you have come to Ghent in search of the hip, young Flemish city you've heard so much about? You might head to the student quarter. Or you could do what I did one rainy afternoon and step inside the newly renovated NTGent cafe. They had just brought in the blackboard listing the lunch menu (€10) when I arrived, and there was not a bite of food left in the place. Not even a slice of that incredible chocolate cake made by Julie's House that every cool eatery in town seems to stock. So I just had a coffee. They serve an ethical Másalto brew in a little espresso cup. It was perfect except that there was no biscuit on the side. I must have lived in Belgium for too long because I have become abnormally addicted to those little *speculoos* biscuits that arrive automatically with a coffee. I almost consider it a basic human right to receive a biscuit. The lunch menu – when it's available – is very simple, while in the evening they serve tapas. They have some special teas as well as espresso coffee. The beer list is short but includes some good brews like De Koninck and La Chouffe. I sipped my mountain coffee and admired the new interior designed by Antwerp's B-architecten. The old lobby had become a bit of a mess over the years, but they got rid of all the clutter and created a stylish theatrical feel. The walls and ceilings are painted black and gold, like a stage set, with simple cartoon drawings by NTGent's talented artistic director Wim Opbrouck, who

also adds his little doodles to the theatre programme and website. The renovated cafe has definitely brought a touch of stylish modern design to the old heart of Ghent. And the coffee is good. So grumble about a missing biscuit? Not me.

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





BITE

Robyn Boyle

Riz d’Or ★★★★★

Some good friends of mine once spent a month exploring the rolling hills of Vietnam by scooter. All they could talk about upon their return was the delicious *pho* they had eaten there. *Pho* (pronounced “fuh”), the national dish of Vietnam, is essentially beef noodle soup. So I can hardly imagine what all the fuss is about, but I am determined to find out.

In Ghent I discover Riz d’Or, a restaurant that is very close to the city centre but tucked away just enough to keep it a local secret. The rather outdated façade and interior also help with that. The same couple have been at the helm here for the past 21 years, with the wife in the kitchen and her smiley husband running the floor.

My partner and I promptly order two bowls of *pho* for starters. They arrive in no time, steaming hot and filled to the brim with a clear stock, flat white noodles, thin strips of still-pink beef, bean sprouts and some spring onion as garnish. While neither of us is able to evaluate any *pho* for authenticity, we do know one thing: this tastes absolutely divine.

The broth looks deceptively plain and yet it is bursting with complex aromas, including cinnamon, star anise and cloves. It’s meaty and salty, making me want to slurp as much as I can with every swoop of my chopsticks. The beef, by now fully cooked through in the hot broth, is delicate and tender. The thick *al dente* rice noodles are pleasantly chewy, while the bean sprouts offer a nice bit of crunch.

I strongly consider ordering another bowl of *pho* instead of a main course but eventually give in to duck with mushrooms and bamboo shoots. My partner takes ribs (per usual), and they are excellent – thick and juicy, with a crispy glazing



and some bits of fried onion on top. They come with a pile of lettuce and shredded red and white cabbage.

My dish is also accompanied by a surprising amount of vegetables: fat, fragrant Chinese mushrooms, crunchy white onion and subtle, earthy bamboo shoots. They’re smothered in a lovely, savoury sauce along with the incredibly soft chunks of duck meat, skin and fat – left on for extra flavour. Normally in an Asian restaurant, I ask for a doggy bag, and there is plenty of food on the table, but these dishes are too good for there to be leftovers. We scrape our plates clean, as well as the bowl of sticky white rice, and wash it all down with glasses of rosé.

The bill comes to just €40, leading me to believe the décor’s not the only thing that hasn’t changed in more than 20 years.

- 📍 Sint-Michielsstraat 10, Ghent; 09.233.26.43
- 🕒 12.00-14.00 & 18.00-22.00 Sun-Tue & Thurs-Fri; 12.00-14.00 Wed; 18.00-22.00 Sat
- 💶 Mains: €10-€15
- 📖 Simple Vietnamese restaurant and one of the best places in Flanders to satiate a craving for *pho*

TALKING DUTCH

Derek Blyth

Maria is back

My heart sank when I read the headline – *Frituur Number One gesloten voor onbepaalde duur* – Frituur Number One closed for an indefinite period.

The story appeared some months ago in *Het Gazet van Antwerpen*. *Het nieuws sloeg in als een bom* – the news hit like a bomb, the newspaper said.

They were not exaggerating. Everyone in Antwerp knows Frituur Number One. It has been around since 1980 and has become as famous a landmark as the Cathedral spire. This is where you come on a cold winter night to order a large portion of twice-fried *frietjes* served with some strange chemical sauce and a pink plastic fork.

It was not a particularly lovely place. But that was, you could say, part of its charm. Here is how one customer described it on an internet review site – *Felle reclame, spelfouten op het bord, TL-balken, de geur van frituurolie en praatgraag mensen achter het toog. Hier is allemaal in orde!* – bright advertising, spelling mistakes on the menu, neon lights, the smell of cooking oil and chatty people behind the counter. Everything is just right!

It was perhaps not somewhere to go on a first date, but it was the perfect place to grab some quick calories after one too many glasses of Westmalle Tripel.

But it wasn’t just the shabby atmosphere that drew people here. It was the woman behind the counter, Maria. Her sharp tongue became so popular that her fans created a Facebook page in her honour called Maria of Frituur Number One. More than 7,000 people clicked the Like button. But without warning, the shutters came down on the 24-hour *frituur*, and Maria vanished from sight. No one could understand why the most successful *frietkot* in Antwerp would suddenly close. The owner refused to comment, leading



local newspapers to speculate about *het frietkotmysterie*.

But then a miracle happened. A few weeks ago, a headline appeared in *Het Nieuwsblad* – *Frituur Number One is weer open* – Frituur Number One is open again. It is now under new owners – *twee jonge vrouwen nemen de zaak over* – two young women have taken over the business.

More to the point – *Het vroegere personeel blijft aan de slag* – the old staff have been kept on. That meant Maria would be back! *Maria Vanlommel, waarschijnlijk de meest geliefde frituurbediende van Antwerpen en omstreken, blijft de avonddiensten verzorgen* – Maria Vanlommel, arguably the most popular *frietjes* server in Antwerp and around, will take care of the evening shift.

The only proper way to celebrate this news is to head down to Frituur Number One and order a portion of *frietten* served with some strange chemical sauce and a pink plastic fork. But don’t expect Maria to be polite. Some things never change.

The last word...

Royal send off

“If we agree, we will respect all safety regulations. And the rest of the airport’s operation must not be inconvenienced.”

A spokesman for Brussels Airport, faced with a request for 10,000 fans to be allowed onto the tarmac to wave off the Red Devils for their match against Croatia next month

Back to the drawing board

“It was interesting to try them out, but they’re just not strong enough.”

An attempt to come up with seagull-proof bin bags in Blankenberge produced disappointing results

Jeroen heads north

“You shouldn’t take the list too seriously. It says that *plezant* means the same as *leuk*, which the Dutch obviously know. You can see that the list is a joke from the cartoon of Jeroen and the *frietjes*.”

The Dutch edition of TV chef Jeroen Meus’ smash-hit book *Dagelijks kost* will include a glossary of cookery terms and Flemish idioms

Right side up

“We worked towards this for a year and a half. When, after 18 hours of tension and concentration, the ship stood perfectly straight, the relief was enormous.”

David Fieuw of Langemark-Poelkapelle was a member of the 11-strong team that righted the stricken cruise liner Costa Concordia off the coast of Italy last week

NEXT WEEK  
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Ever have a dream to take a road trip across Europe and into Asia? That’s what a slew of Flemish businesspeople are doing right now. The Vlasroute, or Flax Route, is taking them along the ancient Silk Road through Central Asia to China. We talk to the adventurers to find out why they’re doing it and how it’s going

Tourism

Did you know that there is a bona fide maze in Flanders, where you must negotiate paths bordered by leafy hedges to reach the middle and get back out again? Naturally, it’s next to a mysterious castle. We’ll tell you all about the property in Loppem, which is open to the public

Arts

Next month, the Flanders International Film Festival in Ghent celebrates four decades of movies, parties and concerts. American indie cinema is the focus this year, including a visit from actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt (*500 Days of Summer*), who will introduce his first film as director