

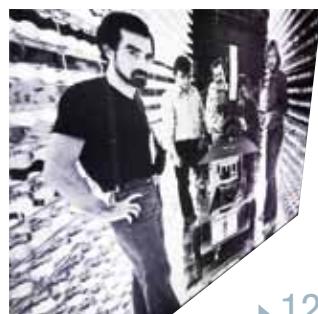
More social loans

The Flemish government has committed €100 million more to low-interest loans

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Film Fest Forty

Flanders' largest film festival celebrates 40 years amid conspiracies, leaks and Martin Scorsese



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New look for FT

Flanders Today is launching a new website, e-news and apps! Check the back page for info



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On the road again

Flemish business owners trek through Central Asia in the footsteps of ancient flax traders

Alan Hope

As we reported back in July, a group of business owners from Flanders is making its way along the old Silk Road through the deserts of Central Asia, in search of new experiences and an exchange of ideas. We caught up with them along the way to find out what they have learned and what they still hope to achieve.

In two weeks' time, a group of Flemish business owners will come to the end of a journey of a lifetime – a 15,000-kilometre trek by jeep along the Silk Road, in the direction once taken by Flanders' flax and linen traders, from Mechelen to Chengdu in China's Sichuan province.

The group set off in May, when there were 18 of them, seen off

in Mechelen by Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters. They finished the first leg of the trip at Almaty in Kazakhstan in late June and came home, sitting out the gruelling Central Asian summer. Ten of them set off again a few weeks ago. Bob Elsen, managing director of Mechelen-based travel company Joker, is one of the brains behind the project. His company had just marked its 30th anniversary and opened a ViaVia travel cafe in Chengdu.

"I love to travel. I never had to think twice about the fantastic idea of travelling 15,000 kilometres from ViaVia Mechelen to ViaVia Chengdu in a jeep in 80 days," he says. "Of course there was also the magical attraction of the Silk Road, where goods, ideas and even philosophies have been traded since time immemorial, as great civilisations rose and fell."

The 66-year-old confirms that "making the idea into a reality wasn't easy. I organised my first tour in 1968 for my fellow economics students: the bus to Moscow and back home via Sweden. The Silk Road is about the same calibre. There are wild stories going around about the regions of the Caucasus, Central Asia and western China. Putting those areas under the cultural and economic microscope with a group of driven business people was sure to produce fireworks, and that was a story I wasn't going to miss."

When asked why he would make this challenging trip, Dirk Vyncke, the project's other founder, told me about a speech he made in May when the group were in Turkey. "This is not a trade mission, and we are not just tourists or adventurers," he said. "We have come here to listen to you and exchange ideas on

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FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Dries Van Noten

Perhaps it's a sign of increasing consumer confidence that gold shows every sign of being the new black, but the reception given to Flemish fashion designer Dries Van Noten at last week's Paris Fashion Week, following on from New York, London and Milan, gave the brief illusion that the sun was coming out from behind a cloud. Van Noten's collection was dripping with gold, but don't think Russian billionaire's bath-taps gold – think antique Florentine gold. Think Russian icon gold. Think Gustav Klimt. Critics went wild, and sales are expected to match the praise.

Van Noten was born in 1958 in Antwerp, the third generation in a family of tailors who had already made the name Van Noten notable in the city. His grandfather restyled second-hand clothes in the difficult years of the interbellum by turning worn fabrics inside out and pioneered ready-to-wear. His father opened stores that championed Italian designers, while his mother ran a clothes shop and collected antique lace.

Young Dries went to Jesuit school, but his future seemed mapped out for him as his father took him to collections across Europe. At 18, he started studies at the fashion department of the Royal Academy

of Fine Arts in Antwerp – which he would later help make famous. It was at the academy that he made contact with the other five designers who would eventually make up the phenomenon known as the Antwerp Six. Van Noten, Walter Van Beirendonck, Dirk Van Saene, Dirk Bikkembergs, Ann Demeulemeester and Marina Yee, all graduates of the fashion department, travelled together to show at the London Fashion Fair in 1986 and wowed the critics, putting Antwerp on the map of international fashion fame and making the academy's fashion department one of the world's most prestigious. The fortunes of the six designers have varied since, but Van Noten has gone from strength to strength, with stores in Paris, Singapore, Kuwait, Qatar, Dubai, Hong Kong and Tokyo.

"As one of the Antwerp Six, he put Belgian fashion on the map in the 1980s and is still today one of the most prominent Belgian designers in both artistic and economic terms," said Karen Van Godtsenhoven, curator at Antwerp's Fashion Museum, which shares accommodation with the fashion department's premises on Nationalestraat – a pin-cushion's throw from Van Noten's flagship store.

FLANDERS TODAY

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Hans De Loore

News in brief

China was behind the recent **cyber-attacks on the Belgian prime minister's office** and the ministry of foreign affairs, according to a report from the intelligence services. The office of state security said it would continue monitoring the activities of the Chinese closely. The government has not yet issued a response to the report.

The Christian workers' movement **ACW failed to pay about €2.4 million** in tax on income in 2010 of €8 million from the former Dexia bank, according to the special fiscal inspection service. The ACW used the income to pay staff members via a subsidiary, which the inspectors contested. The organisation has one month to provide answers to the inspectors' complaints.

Culture minister Joke Schauvliege has announced **€8.12 million in museum subsidies** for the period 2014-2018. The funding covers 21 Flemish museums and three co-operation projects that involve raising the international profile of local art collections.

Flemish public transport authority **De Lijn has begun issuing Mobib cards** – travel passes containing an electronic chip – to the over-65s in Flanders. The cards cost €5 and allow seniors free travel on all De Lijn buses and trams. Seniors without a Mobib card have to pay the regular fare.

The rail authority NMBS said it would closely study a ruling issued last week by the European Court of Justice that says that **rail companies are obliged to compensate passengers** for delays of an hour or more, even in cases where these are the result of circumstances beyond the company's control, such as weather conditions. The ruling was issued in a case concerning the Austrian rail authority, but its

provisions apply across the EU.

Three men accused of killing three members of a family during a home-jacking in Wemmel in 2010 have been **found guilty by a court** in Brussels. Two of the suspects were each sentenced to 29 years, while a third man, who never entered the house, received 20 years. The killers had demanded the keys to a Mercedes parked in the driveway, but, during an argument, shots were fired.

Environment minister Joke Schauvliege has approved funding of €50,000 each for four projects that bring **more green space into cities**. From a field of 20, the projects chosen are in Vorselaar, Antwerp province, Veurne in West Flanders, Maldegem in East Flanders and Rotselaar in Flemish Brabant. They include park renovation, green spaces in town centres and the integration of sports facilities.

Patients at the Sint-Elisabeth hospital in Herentals, Antwerp province, will be issued with a GPS-enabled badge **allowing staff to keep track of their location** at all times. The system will allow outpatients to wait for their appointments elsewhere than in the waiting room, while patients undergoing various treatments can be tracked throughout the hospital. The new system will also include a screen showing the actual waiting times for patients with appointments.

Dany Ilegems has been made the **new editor of the weekly magazine Humo**, replacing Karel Degraeve, who was standing in temporarily after the departure of Wouter Van Driessche. Ilegems is best known as an investigative journalist responsible for a number of major scoops in the 1990s. He has been involved in several new or relaunch

ventures, including *MaoMagazine*, *Feeling* and *Goedele*. He is the sixth editor to head up the ailing weekly since 2010.

Antwerp Tourism & Conventions and Visit Flanders are inviting members of the public to participate in a **contest to win a trip to the fashion city**, including meals in top restaurants and a meet-and-greet with well-known designers. Entrants have to create a fashion mood-board with an Antwerp twist using only Instagram images.

► www.tinyurl.com/antwerpFashion

The University of Hasselt is ready to take on the job of **offering more courses, particularly in medicine and the sciences**, rector Luc De Schepper said in a speech opening the academic year. According to figures released last week, 38% fewer young people from Limburg graduate from higher education than in other provinces, leading to what De Schepper called "a brain drain".

Finance minister Philippe Muyters last weekend launched a smartphone app to help buyers and sellers in the second-hand car market **calculate registration tax**. The app is a result of concerns from motoring organisation VAB that most buyers of used cars have no idea how much BIV – the one-off tax paid when putting a car on the road – they will be charged. Muyters said he was also looking at making the BIV rate mandatory in advertisements. The BIV VKB app is available free from Google Play and Apple's App Store.

Authorities at Brussels Airport have given the go-ahead for **10,000 fans to go onto the tarmac** on 1 October to wave out the Red Devils football team as they fly to Zagreb for the decisive World Cup qualifier against Croatia.

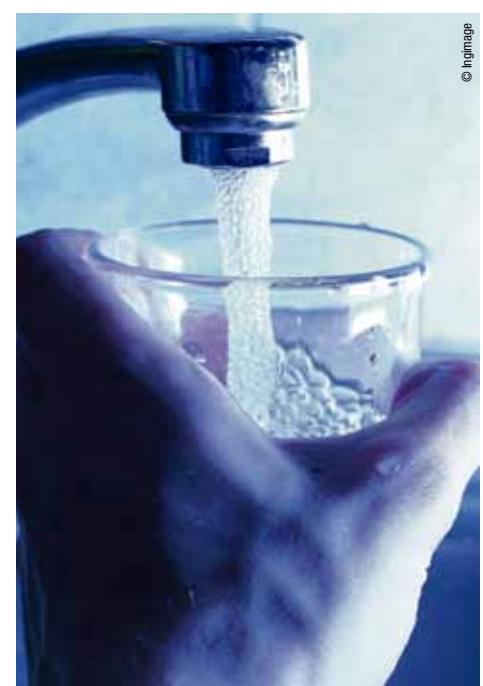
OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

The waterfront

Last week, Ghent's city council achieved a nearly unheard of unanimous decision when it approved a proposal by councillor Matthias Storme (N-VA) to promote the provision of free tap water for customers in restaurants and pubs. The food service industry here, Storme argues, is too worried they might lose a sale if a customer gets a free glass of water instead of having to pay for the bottled stuff. He appears not to be wrong on that count. "Anyone who offers free water will find a way to make the customer pay all the same," promised a spokesperson for the sector federation, Horeca Vlaanderen. "Free is an illusion."

"We won't be doing it," the owner of Café René, a Belgo-French restaurant in the centre of Ghent, reported in *De Morgen*. "In France you get free tapwater, but you pay €5 for a cola. Our cola costs €2.10. If you want water, you have to pay for it. How else am I going to pay my staff?" According to Storme, free tap water is not only hospitable, the actual H2O itself is healthier than bottled water and has a daintier environmental footprint. As far as Stéphanie Lippens, who runs a brasserie in the central Sint-Baafsplein, is concerned, customers won't be impressed. They'll continue to order bottled water "because they think it tastes better," she forecast.



On the road again

Journey of a lifetime is not just tourism or trade mission

► continued from page 1

how we can prepare a better future for our children and grandchildren. The world is, more than ever, a global village, where we all are interconnected and dependent on each other."

Vyncke thinks that we have to find a better system for global trade and relations, and "the answer cannot be found in the books. It is time for responsible global citizens around the world to listen respectfully to each other, to learn from each other, and to think up new solutions."

For Lutgart Dusar, the reason was personal: "It was a question of now or never. Most participants have a story, and they're all different: on the verge of retirement, changing or selling the business, children entering the family business, the appeal of unknown Eurasia, the magic of the Silk Road. What we shared is that we had no clear idea of how it was going to be."

New forms of trade

The second leg, she explained, will take the route designated in the Chinese government's New Silk Road policy, which aims to open up ancient commercial routes to new forms of trade with Central Asia. At the beginning of September, the group set out from Almaty, heading for Chengdu, where they plan to arrive on 16 October, pulling up in the futuristic tower complex by architect Stephen Voll, where ViaVia Chengdu is located.

Dusar describes the Silk Road as "a stretch of shifting, unmarked paths across massive expanses of deserts and mountains – not a real road at any point or time. The main defining features are best seen from the air – converging valleys, desert oases and river chasms among towering mountain peaks."

Silk, she says, wasn't the only product traded on these routes: "Paper had a far greater impact on human history than silk." During the periods when the Chinese stationed troops in Central Asia – primarily during the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) and the Tang (618-907 CE) – trade boomed. When they did not, trade declined.

Chinese investment

China is reconstructing the ancient trade routes by means of enormous investment in infrastructure works: a network of roads, electric grids, high-speed trains, oil and gas pipelines and assorted commercial ventures along a channel leading from Central Asia to China's east coast. The end-point, Chengdu, is also the pivot of the new Southern Silk Road, and the Chinese government's policy to strengthen trade relations with Myanmar, Bangladesh and India. The participants are travelling in four Toyota Hilux vehicles, organised by tour operator WEI-TU (Greatways), based in Chengdu.

Now that they are nearing the end of the journey, they have more of a chance to reflect. Elsen: "The road I've been following for decades now as a traveller still calls to me. The desire



to go places, the freedom of driving yourself, the amazement of meeting new people, which are far better than I ever could have imagined. My geographical knowledge of the region has been spruced up. We covered seven countries and 10,000 kilometres between Turkey and Kazakhstan, taking a cargo ship over the Caspian Sea."

Now, he says, "every country has its own story: the perfect road network in Turkey, even through the mountain passes; the Bulvar mall in Baku in Azerbaijan, a cross between Paris and Dubai, full of beautiful, self-assured Azeris; the dazzling city of Ashgabat in Turkmenistan, where not only are the buildings and monuments in Carrara marble, but the cars are all white, too."

For Dusar, an important realisation was "the strength and unpredictability of the region. Money is no problem, quality higher education is. The rich are sending their offspring abroad, to well-known American and European universities. Business-wise, the abundance of natural resources and cheap labour are helping forge an economy. But educational standards



© Photo: vlasroute

Making their way along the road to Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan (top); The Bronze Age site at Merv in Turkmenistan (above)

Kyrgyzstan – for those who have a job – is €150. In some regions, 50% of young men emigrate to Russia as

to live there," he says. Nevertheless, the first half of the trip was a learning experience in itself, even for someone who lives in the region.

"The trip definitely offered some new insights," he says. "Traveling to a country you have read about before but never visited is always illuminating. That was the case for me when we travelled into Turkmenistan, the most closed country in Central Asia. I was expecting a population terrified of speaking to foreigners, but instead

I found openness and hospitality everywhere we went. There were many other revelations, of course, but this sort of encounter is the reason why I travel."

Vyncke adds: "We wanted to come

into contact with our peers so we could listen to what they had to say. Sadly, the language is still a barrier in Central Asia and China, but that's changing fast, and a good guide can make all the difference. To really succeed in global business, you have to first listen with an open mind, respect the other and make friends. As the Chinese say: first friendship, then business. It's been a real eye-opener; a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

The project's website contains links to reports and blogs as well as many photographs

"Where there was once a blank spot on my atlas of personal knowledge, now every country has its own story"

are lagging behind."

There is also, she says, a serious generation gap. "The young generation growing up after the implosion of the USSR is hard-working, creative, curious, risk-taking. And poor: very, very poor. The average monthly salary in

migrant workers – jeopardising their identities and their self-esteem."

Steven Hermans isn't taking part in the second leg, but he travelled from Mechelen to Almaty, where he now lives with his Kazakh wife – "restrictive immigration policies in Belgium made it difficult for us

Professors fail English tests

Those who refused the test will not be allowed to teach in English

Alan Hope

About one in five professors at Flemish universities failed to pass a test that measured their English-language skills. Lecturers who failed the test, administered by the Flemish government, will still be able to give classes in English this academic year and will be given the time to improve their English skills, according to Flemish MP Fientje Moerman.

The test was given to 3,000 university lecturers and professors, with the worst scores coming from the Free University of Brussels (VUB) at a failure rate of 20%. Hasselt teachers had a failure rate of between 15 and 20%, Ghent 14% and Antwerp 13%. The university of Leuven did best, with only one in 10 failing. Across the region, 107 professors refused to take the test: They will not be allowed to



continue teaching in English. The universities defended their professors, many of whom have given lectures in English for years without

negative comments. "These people are among the top in their field," said Kristiaan Versluys, director of education at the University of Ghent.

"They include potential Nobel Prize winners. They publish in English language journals and speak at international conferences. And now this comes along."

As *Flanders Today* went to press, education minister Pascal Smet had not yet commented on the issue. In related news, Paul De Knop, rector of the VUB, called for more lessons in more languages. Speaking at the opening of the academic year, he said he would like to see students able to follow at least one course in French, English or another language and was awaiting the reactions of the university's faculties to his suggestion.

"Not only will the language abilities of the Flemish in Brussels be improved," he said, "they will also have more chance on the international labour market."

Red Star Line Museum opens to crowds and queues

Nearly 2,000 people attended the opening day of the new Red Star Line museum in Antwerp, which celebrates the history of the shipping line that transported European emigrants to the New World between 1873 and 1934 (see *cover story last week*). Another 6,000 visitors enjoyed a fireworks spectacle in the skies outside, above the very turn in the river where the line's ships used to start their journey.

The museum is open daily except Monday, but the management has warned that the expected numbers in the early stages are so high that reservation of tickets for a particular time is strongly advised. Only 90 visitors are allowed entry every half

hour, with priority for those who have reserved, and the wait could last for hours at busy times, the museum said.

► www.redstarline.be



Lighter sentences for GMO potato protesters

A group of 11 activists who took part in a demonstration against genetically modified crops in Wetteren last year, which led to clashes with police, have received shorter sentences at the end of a re-trial in Dendermonde.

Ten of the activists received suspended sentences of three months, while the man viewed by the court as the ring-leader was sentenced to six months suspended. Each of the accused also received a fine of €550.

The group are accused of causing criminal damage at the field trial in Wetteren, East Flanders, where scientists were growing a field of genetically modified potatoes. The activists claimed that not enough

is known about the effects of GM organisms, and they should not be permitted to be grown on open land. In an earlier trial in February, which the activists boycotted following the judge's decision not to admit some video evidence, two people were sentenced to eight months each, two to six months and the rest to six months suspended.

In addition to the prison sentences,

the group will also have to pay damages amounting to €25,000

to the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology, the University of Ghent and the Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research, which were organising the trial.

Concern over deportation of young Afghan

The lawyer of a 21-year-old Afghan man threatened with deportation has denied claims that Navid Sharifi is on the run from a court case against him. Last Saturday, Sharifi was due to board a plane to Afghanistan after his application for asylum was turned down. He failed to turn up for the flight, after supporters had announced he would continue to resist deportation.

Sharifi was born in Afghanistan but left as a toddler and has not returned since, he says. He has been in Belgium

since 2008 and now lives in Waregem, West Flanders, where he is employed as a plumber.

Flemish newspapers provide conflicting reports, with *Het Laatste Nieuws* writing that Sharifi fled Iran in 2008 after being involved in a vendetta between two families, in which he seriously injured another man. *Het Nieuwsblad*, meanwhile, reported that an official at the asylum department claims that Sharifi has visited Afghanistan more recently than he claims and does have family

with whom he can stay. Political pressure mounted on federal migration minister Maggie De Block to use her discretionary power to grant Sharifi a *kinderpardon* – an exception to the rules based on asylum seekers being in the country since they were minors. Socialist party SPA and Groen have both

pressed De Block to use the measure, while N-VA has called for a discussion on *kinderpardon* in general. Speaking on Sunday on the VRT, De Block said when she took the post,

she was requested to introduce a "coherent" policy; now, the same people are asking her to "make a special case" for one applicant.

Elsewhere, about 60 people were arrested after clashes at a demonstration in Brussels by Afghan asylum-seekers protesting at being deported back to their country. Also in Brussels, about 150 Afghans were ejected by police from an office building they were occupying in Troonstraat. They later moved to the Holy Cross church in Elsene.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

5

new candidates for training in the priesthood in Flanders this year, from Bruges, Mechelen-Brussels and Antwerp. The bishoprics of Ghent and Hasselt have none. There are currently 21 priests in training in the region

60%

of students failed to pass their first year at one of the five Flemish universities in 2012, at a cost to the government of €100 million. The University of Antwerp was the exception with a pass rate of nearly 63%

54.6%

Flemish people are happy in their jobs, according to the latest report from the social-economic council for Flanders. Positive work factors included training opportunities and little psychological fatigue

16

people died on and beside railway lines in 2012, while the total number of accidents involving pedestrians, cyclists and motorists rose to 52, said Infrabel at the launch of a new safety campaign

1 in 3

workers in Belgium find their jobs too physically taxing to foresee continuing until the legal pension age, according to a survey by human resources consultancy Securex

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

That Belgian feeling

Patriotism feels foreign to most Belgians. Many reasons have been offered for this, but the most prominent is the language divide. With Dutch and French speakers watching different TV programmes, reading different newspapers and having trouble simply understanding each other, it is hard to feel like one people.

Another reason often cited is that, through the centuries, this land has been conquered by so many foreign rulers that our identity has become diffused. Belgium, artificially created in the 19th century, is no closer to us than, say, the Roman or Habsburg Empires.

Historians refute this theory, but the truth remains that, outside of Brussels, enthusiasm about or pride in Belgium can be hard to find.

Recently though, there have been signs of a renewed *belgitude*, sparked mostly by the successes of the national football team and its articulate captain, Vincent Kompany. Everyone loves a winner, of course. Last weekend saw another demonstration of national pride brought on by a celebrity: the (French-speaking) singer Stromae, exceptional in that he is popular both with Dutch and French speakers.

At a concert for the holiday of the French Community, Stromae addressed his Brussels audience in Dutch (although he called it Flemish, a mistake many French speakers make). "In Brussels, we speak both French and Flemish, don't we?" he said, cheered on by thousands of teens.

Both Kompany and Stromae are "new Belgians". Having a migration background makes it easier for them to leave traditional divides behind. They are popular proponents of a new, multicultural reality that has yet to be translated politically.

This would seem to be at odds with the popularity of N-VA, the Flemish nationalists. But to the Flemish people, it isn't. The degree to which they feel Belgian or Flemish may vary, but most of the time they feel like both. Few people see any contradiction in cheering on the Red Devils on the soccer pitch and the N-VA in the political arena.

Notable exceptions are... N-VA politicians. Party president Bart De Wever seemed rather uncomfortable welcoming the royal couple to Antwerp last week, while Jan Peumans (N-VA), the chair of the Flemish Parliament, claims to be completely unmoved by the football team's successes. What did he say about their latest victory? "Too bad the Scottish lost."

Loan rangers

Belgium's oldest pawn shop is not quite what you might expect

Alan Hope

On Ghislainstraat deep in the Marollen neighbourhood of Brussels, on a slope from the Justice Palace down to where the North-South rail link emerges from underground, stands Belgium's oldest financial institution. The Berg van Barmhartigheid is approaching 400 years of age, but as *Flanders Today* discovered, it's still going strong.

Berg van Barmhartigheid means "mountain of piety", from the Latin *mons pietatis*. The first was set up in Italy in the 15th century, when, in an effort to combat usury, the Franciscans created their own institution, making loans against the security of personal belongings at a low rate of interest. The idea was transported to the Spanish Netherlands – what is now Belgium – where Archduke Albert gave it his blessing in 1618.

The name might translate into English as "pawn shop", but the Berg has little in common with the images conjured by that term. Past the stately and somewhat intimidating exterior giving on to a leafy square, the interior is modern and comfortable, like a small-town branch of a bank, with 10 windows for transactions, abundant potted plants and seating.

The idea, explains director-general Etienne Lambert, was to make the place as welcoming as possible for people who are likely to be in pretty dire financial straits and would probably rather be almost anywhere else.

Only one left

"We conduct about 600 transactions a day," Lambert says, which includes pledging, paying interest and reclaiming property. The Berg made about 28,500 loans in 2012, around 23,500 of them repaid with interest. The total value of the loans came to €9.44 million.

The average value of items brought in for sales – or pledges – was between €160 and €170 from 1990 to 2002, then started to climb steadily, touching €300 in 2011 and €317 in 2012. At any given moment, the Berg contains pledges worth around €25 million in total.

Over time, similar operations, all under state control, emerged all over Flanders. Those in Bruges, Ghent and Kortrijk closed in the 1920s, while Antwerp remained open until 1946. "Now only Brussels remains," Lambert explains. "It takes a certain number of transactions to be able to finance our activities and cover our costs, and there just wasn't enough business to support more than one Berg. However, people come from all over. Only 40% of our customers come from Brussels; the rest are from other regions and even other countries."

It works like this: A member of the public brings in an item – known as a pledge – they hope will get them a loan. It's examined by desk staff, who then offer a sum. The customer can refuse the offer, accept it in full or take only what he or she needs. They have six months to pay back the loan with interest. "The interest calculated on an annual basis (APR) is 6.5%," Lambert says. "If your bank account goes into overdraft, the charge is something like 13% APR."

Auction

After six months you have the option of paying back the loan and interest, paying the interest only and allowing the loan to continue for another six months, or doing nothing, at which point your pledge will be put up for sale. Pledges are only sold by auction. "We're not allowed to sell privately to individuals," explains Lambert. "The auctions provide only one-third of our income; the rest comes from interest paid on loans. When we auction off a pledge, we take back the money the person borrowed – the capital – and the interest owed, and the difference left over from the auction price goes back to the person who made the pledge. So there's no possibility of profit for us: The auctions allow us to cover our costs for pledges that are not redeemed."

Under a law of 1848, the Berg has a monopoly on lending on pledge. "We're part of the administration of Brussels City, but we're obliged to be self-financing," Lambert says. "Our costs have all to be covered by interest charged and by the income from auctions. That's the law." The board, chaired by the mayor of Brussels, consists of four other



© Photos: Dieter Nelms



directors: two from the social aid agency OCMW and two from the city council.

Lambert takes me to the stockroom for "diverse objects" – 98% of the pledges are jewellery and watches – and we go to the fourth floor, through a chain of security locks, to a long room filled with metal shelving. They contain everything from bronzes – like a bust of a laughing boy pledged for €600 and a rearing horse worth €750 – to porcelain and crystal, to musical instruments of every sort, including a new-looking alto sax pledged for only €75 and a violin for the same amount. Further on there are comic books waiting for the special auction in November, and further still, empty bicycle racks, which will be filled starting this month.

People put up all sorts of items as pledges. Have there been any surprises? "It works both ways," Lambert says. "We get people who come in with what they think is a

precious piece of jewellery that turns out to be worthless. But we've also had people get pleasant surprises.

There was a man once who had emptied a house out after someone died, and he found a huge painting in the attic. He brought it here in his

to borrow €50; that's not a problem. Our offer is the ceiling, but you can also borrow less."

As to what kind of people come in to borrow money, Lambert isn't commenting. "We don't ask questions. The only thing we look

"He thought he'd be lucky to get €25; he walked away with half a million"



old VW van with the rain running in. He thought he might be lucky to get €25 for it; he walked away with half a million."

The Berg doesn't have a maximum amount that they'll loan. "Everything depends on the resale value of the pledge," explains Lambert. "But there's nothing stopping a customer from taking less than the entire value. You might come in with a Patek Philippe watch and only need

at is the pledge; we don't pry into what someone's situation might be. That's their business. We have to be discreet and show people a bit of respect."

The Berg holds regular public auctions; the next one is on 8 October

► www.bergvanbarmhartigheid.be

IN BELGIUM PEOPLE USED TO STARE AT HER BARE LEGS



IRENE BOBELIJN,
A RED STAR LINE PASSENGER
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Extra funding for social loans

Nearly 80% of residents are eligible for the low-interest loans

Alan Hope

The government of Flanders will increase the amount of funding available for social loans for housing by €100 million next year, after demand saw the budget for this year run out of money early.

Social loans for home purchases are available from the Flemish Housing Fund (VWF) and the Flemish Agency for Social Housing (VMSW) for anyone unable to obtain credit from normal banks. The loans are offered at low interest and are available in amounts up to 100% of the value of the property. About 80% of people in Flanders are eligible, with only the top 20% of incomes excluded.

"Now that the banks are becoming even more reluctant to approve mortgages, the demand for social loans is growing," said Flemish housing minister Freya Van den



Bossche (pictured) last week. "That proves they are responding to a very real need. Every year they help thousands of Flemish families to

realise their dream of owning their own home – even if the bank does not approve."

Social home loans have indeed seen

constant and massive growth: from 3,038 loans for a total of €351.6 million in 2006 to an estimated 4,741 this year, for a value of €700 million – an increase of nearly 100%. Next year's fund of €814,429 is expected to finance about 5,500 loans.

Also last week, Van den Bossche responded to calls from think-tank Argus for insulation subsidies to be scrapped because, Argus claims, they help to widen the gap between rich and poor. "Nothing could be further from my mind than scrapping the premiums," she said. "On the contrary, there will soon be a new, increased roof insulation subsidy for owners who rent their property at a reasonable rate." In the last five years, more than 272,000 households have received a subsidy for insulation, which also considerably reduces energy bills.

New rail chief won't give up other jobs

Jo Cornu, the newly appointed CEO of the restructured rail authority NMBS, has again encountered controversy by refusing to divest himself of a number of other directorships once he takes up the new position.

Cornu holds board positions at Belgacom, Agfa-Gevaert and KBC, which in total brought in remuneration of €232,000 in 2012. According to Cornu, the three boards require his attendance on 21 occasions a year in total. However, the Belgacom board alone met 17 times last year. Cornu has given up a seat on the board of wind energy producer Electrawinds because that work was "too intensive", he said.

Critics argue the additional responsibilities are not compatible with the task of CEO of the NMBS, which demands all of Cornu's attention. Stefaan Van Hecke, leader of Groen in the federal parliament, said both workers and passengers "deserve a full-time rail boss. Especially given that the new head of the railways is not familiar with



the rail industry. The government nominated someone without an objective selection procedure, and now it appears that person is not prepared to make himself available on a full-time basis."

Cornu has already obtained the go-ahead of federal minister for government enterprises Jean-Pascal Labille, who said the government had asked Cornu to give up his seat at Electrawinds but allowed the others to go ahead "provided priority was given at all times to the affairs of the NMBS." Cornu will be paid €290,000 a year for the NMBS job.

Mixed reaction to September Declaration

The Flemish government "set the right tone" with last week's September Declaration, delivered by minister-president Kris Peeters to the opening session of the Flemish parliament, according to Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed. "Among other things, the government plans to put more effort into the competition and employment agreements, the lowering of salary and energy costs and support for small businesses, at the same time as increasing investment opportunities and promising no new taxes for those doing business," said Karel Van Eetvelt, the organisation's director-general. "Now they just have to turn their words into action."

As reported last week, Peeters took the opportunity of his last such declaration of the present legislature – regional elections take place in May 2014 – to list his government's achievements, while promising to maintain or increase investment on research and development, school building,

care infrastructure, sewers, heritage, sports facilities, social housing and mobility.

"These are investments that improve the lives of ordinary people," Peeters told the assembly. "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."

The Flemish chamber of commerce, Voka, was less enthusiastic. "His declaration talked more about actions in the past and had little to say about commitments for the coming months," commented managing director Jo Lipeer. "We were looking forward to more action in the last year before the elections, in particular regarding major infrastructure projects and reform of education."

Brussels brings an end to "sorrow tax"

The Brussels Capital-Region has introduced a new law that exempts the surviving partner of a marriage from paying death duties on the family home, in what the region's budget minister Guy Vanhengel described as "a true social measure".

At present, when someone dies, the surviving spouse is liable for death duties on his or her property, including half of the value of their home. In some cases, particularly in the case of older people, Vanhengel said, this can place the survivor in financial difficulties and even force the sale of the home to pay the duties. The system is sometimes

referred to as "the sorrow tax".

Flanders removed that provision in 2007, but Brussels argued its budget did not allow the duties to be scrapped before now. Earlier this year, the Brussels government estimated its income from that source at €20 million a year; that estimate has now gone down to €10 million. Vanhengel has been able to make the move, he said, thanks to a €6 million surplus expected in the region's budget for 2014.

The measure needs to be cleared by the Brussels parliament before coming into force on 1 January.

Millionaire pays fine in lieu of prison sentence

A Ghent property developer who pretended to be unemployed in order to collect almost €40,000 in benefits will not serve an 18-month sentence imposed for the fraud. Didier De Witte, 66, agreed with the prosecutor's office to pay a fine of €33,000 instead, and his prison sentence has been commuted. Over the course of four years, De Witte claimed monthly benefits of €830 as a job-seeking head of family. In reality, he was one of the city's most successful property developers,

specialising in hotels. In the time period concerned, he built hotels in Aalst, Ghent and Brussels. His system was only discovered when it emerged that he was domiciled in the Dominican Republic, where he continues to live.

In 2011 he was sentenced to 18 months, fined €27,500 and forced to repay the total of €39,487 claimed illegally. The prison term has now been suspended as the fine is increased to €33,000.

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Banking ▶ KBC

Flanders' largest financial institution has sold its German affiliate KBC Deutschland to a group of investors, led by the Teacher Retirement System of Texas and Apollo Global Management. The deal will free up €100 million of capital for KBC.

Biotech ▶ AbbVie

US pharmaceutical firm AbbVie, a spin off from Abbott, has signed two licensing agreements with local biotechnology companies. The first, with Ghent-based Ablynx, is worth \$175 million to distribute a polyarthrite rheumatism treatment, and the second, with Mechelen-based Galapagos, is focused on cystic fibrosis therapy for up to \$360 million.

Dredging ▶ Deme

Antwerp-based holding company Ackermans & van Haaren (AvH) has gained control of world-leading dredging company Deme by acquiring 60% of Brussels building group CFE, which owns half of Deme. The move includes the payment of €138 million to France's Vinci group, CFE's previous owner.

Insurance ▶ Delta Lloyd

The Dutch Delta Lloyd financial services is to take over the Antwerp-based ZA Verzekering insurance company as part of its development on the local market.

Media ▶ Alfacam

Antwerp-based Alfacam, which went bankrupt this year, has found a buyer for some of its assets. The French Euro Media Group will acquire the high-definition technical equipment, while AED Rent of Vilvoorde is buying the company's property assets.

Property ▶ Quares

The Antwerp-based property group will launch on the Brussels stock market this year in search of up to €70 million of fresh capital. The company, with affiliates in France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, is expected to use part of the proceeds to develop its city centre shopping mall investment activities.

Retail ▶ Lego

The Danish Lego group inaugurated its first store in Belgium in the renovated Wijnegem shopping centre, near Antwerp, last week.

Trucks ▶ Volvo

The Volvo Trucks assembly unit in Ghent may benefit from the restructuring of its Swedish parent company with the transfer of two production lines from Gothenburg. A final decision is not expected before early next year.

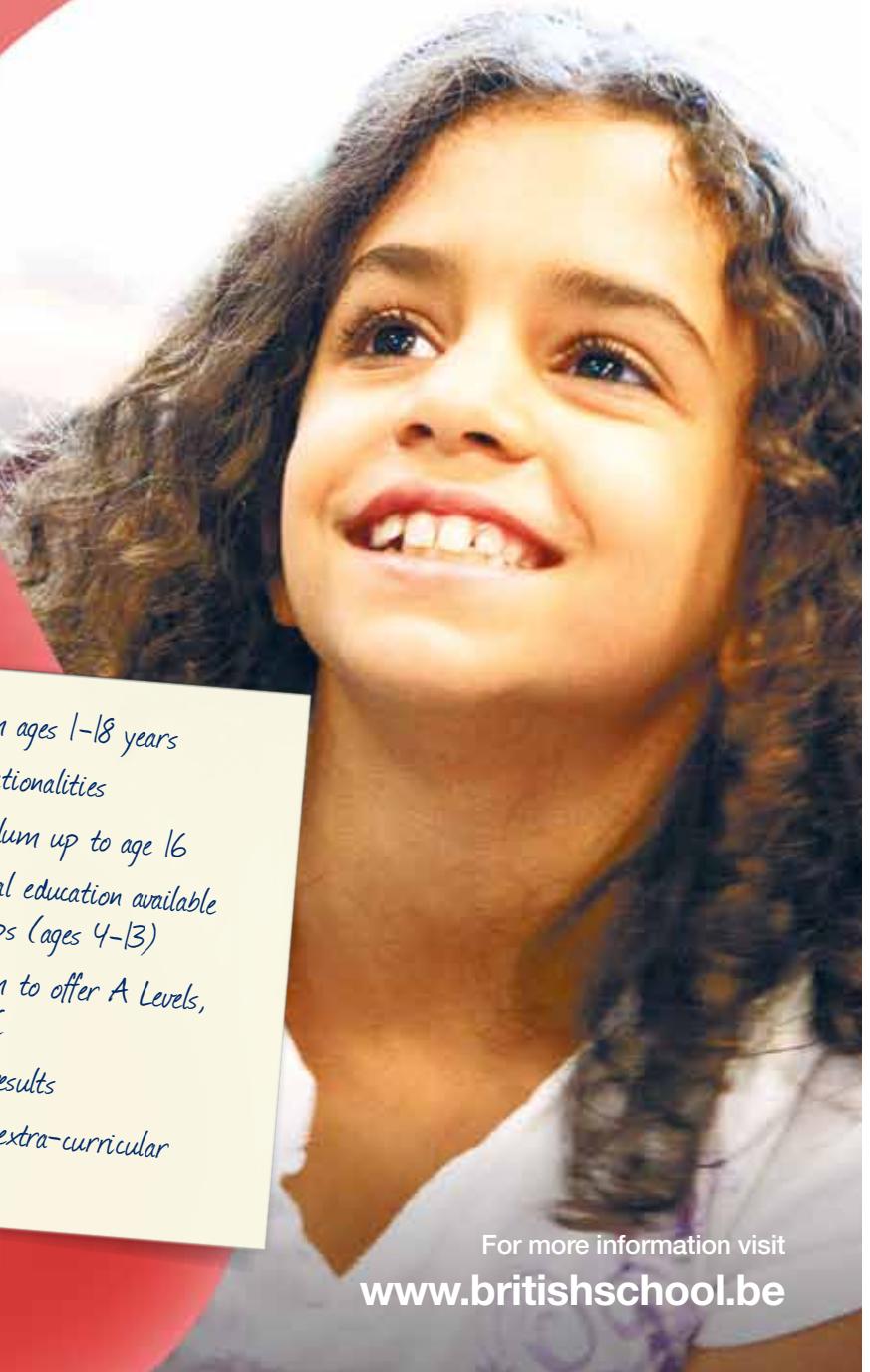
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A maze of history

Loppem Castle provides insights into religious nostalgia and political breakthroughs

Andy Furniere

Loppem: Some might dismiss it as just another Flemish castle, but they would be mistaken because it offers some unique surprises. Such as its maze, where paradise awaits if you find the right path. There's also the features that hark back to the brief period when the castle was the seat of the federal government.

One hundred and fifty years ago, Baron Charles van Caloen and his wife, Countess Savina de Gourcy Serainchamps, first made their entrance into their summer home at Loppem. For the rest of the year, they lived in the centre of Bruges, about six kilometres away.

As I follow in their footsteps on this autumn afternoon, I am lucky enough to be guided by Isabelle van Caloen, who is in fact a member of the noble dynasty through marriage. She leads the management of the castle on behalf of the Foundation Jean van Caloen. When the doors open, I have the feeling I am walking into a medieval church instead of a home. "Both the outside and the interior of the castle are entirely created in the neo-Gothic style that exudes the religious atmosphere of the middle ages," explains van Caloen. "The first owners, Charles and Savina, were extremely pious Christians."

Thanks to the foundation, established in 1952 by the family, the homogenous style has been exquisitely preserved.

Supernatural

All around on the walls of the entrance hall hang paintings and sculptures, often related to the family history or with a Biblical theme. The somewhat bizarre antlers on top of the chandeliers also have a religious purpose, although it's more obscure, according to my guide: "The antlers were believed to have supernatural powers."

© Andy Furniere



Loppem Castle in the northern part of West Flanders

A figure that looks out of place is the stuffed grizzly bear in a corner of the hall. It doesn't have any special powers, apparently, but it does have a story to tell: He was the first grizzly

staircase with carved panels in oak, we literally and figuratively reach higher spheres when peering inside the chapel of the castle. The stained-glass windows, which represent the

I have the feeling that I'm walking into a medieval church instead of a home

imported from America on behalf of Antwerp Zoo.

In the "blue" living room downstairs, you can feel the presence of Guido Gezelle. The Flemish poet and priest was a close friend of Charles van Caloen and regularly visited the family. His portrait stands on an easel in the room, and he also wrote the captions, in old Flemish verse, under the frescos on the walls. The frescos represent medieval scenes related to Flemish nobility and the crusades.

After mounting the impressive

patron saints of Charles, Savina and their children, are remarkable. The two sons of the first owners, Albert and Ernest, were still teenagers when they designed what is still a major attraction for families: one of Belgium's few garden mazes. In 1876 the two brothers drew up the plans for the 65 x 25 metre maze, a fifth of a hectare in size, in the castle park. However, they might have had a helping hand from their tutor, Abbot Van der Meersch. The maze constitutes about 1.5 kilometres of hedges, forming a

confusing puzzle of corridors that may remind film lovers of a particular horror movie featuring a crazed Jack Nicholson. But the reward at the end of the quest is worth the effort. The tree in the middle of the maze symbolises the Christian paradise, which can only be reached after a search on and off the right path of life.

Loppem Castle breathes not only religious but also political history, as members of the van Caloen family held the post of mayor of Loppem for almost 120 years between 1815 and 1970. By far the most illustrious episode in the castle's history was from 24 October to 25 November 1918, at the end of the First World War.

For a month, it became the headquarters of the army and the seat of the government of the newly liberated Belgian state. King Albert I lived in the castle with his wife, Queen Elisabeth, and their three children. The "Loppem government", which

included socialists for the first time, introduced, among other things, universal male suffrage.

The king welcomed several distinguished guests at the castle, like the French president Poincaré and Prince Yorihito of Japan. After Albert I's departure, the King of England and his two sons were received at Loppem as well. Two commemorative plates at the castle are lasting proof of the visits of these foreign guests.

But the royal presence lingers on in more than plates. The room occupied by King Albert I and Queen Elisabeth has been restored to its 1918 condition on the basis of old documents and photographs. On display are several objects that belonged to the king, such as a painting by the Flemish artist Jef Van de Fackere, which he received during the artist's stay there. You can also judge the painting skills of Queen Elisabeth, as the room features a work she created: a view of Laken Castle's park in Brussels.

On the first floor of Loppem, meanwhile, there is also a little museum with a selection of the art that was primarily collected by Jean van Caloen and his son Roland. Jean, who lived from 1884 to 1972, spent much of his time buying paintings, sculptures, books, drawings, engravings and decorative works of art. Among the highlights are engravings by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, including a series on the cardinal sins.

Roland van Caloen, who is in his 90s now, was a true globetrotter in his younger years. In a separate exhibition, you can follow the tracks of his travels all over the world through the often exotic works of art that he brought back home and the pictures he took. From Cambodia, he imported a Vishnu sculpture that dates back to the 13th century.

► www.kasteelvanloppem.be



The castle's elegant dining room and the garden maze, symbolising the search for paradise



© Andy Furniere

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Crossing continents

The ambitious Europalia brings the complex patchwork of Indian culture to Europe

Georgio Valentino

There are few cultural events in Belgium as extensive as Europalia. Each edition of the biennial festival showcases the culture of just one partner country but, in an impressive display of artistic collaboration, it encompasses 450 events shared between 200 venues across the country and even in neighbouring regions.

The focus of this 24th edition of Europalia is India, and its centrepiece is the ambitious, Bozar-hosted exhibition *The Body in Indian Art*, curated by professor Naman P Ahuja of the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi.

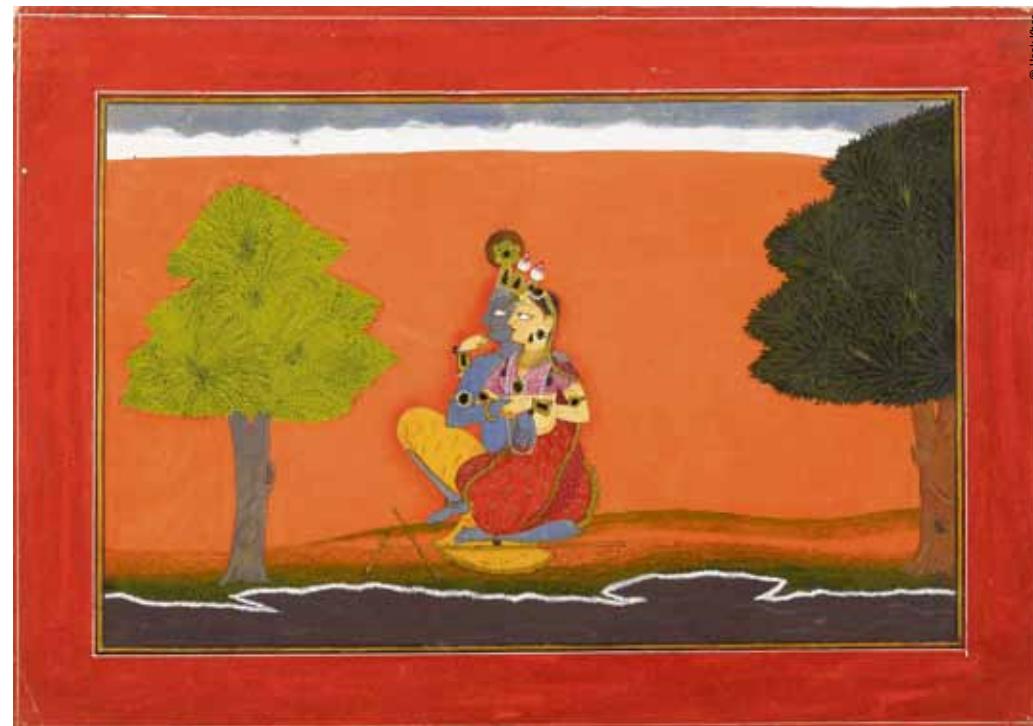
"This is the largest exhibition of Indian art outside India since 1982," the scholar enthuses, "and the second largest since 1848." With its eight themed galleries containing a full 250 works (borrowed from 50 museums, archaeological institutions and private collections), this certainly is an exhaustive survey of a single theme – the body – which helps us understand the broader religious, philosophical and social developments in India from antiquity to the present.

The perspective is as deep as it is wide. India is, after all, famously stratified by caste, each cultivating its own insular micro-culture. "We wanted to explore every part of Indian society," Ahuja explains. "Folk art is every bit as important as the ruling maharajas' art."

Relevant theme

In a sense, there is no quintessentially "Indian" art. In bridging the country's social, religious and regional divisions, Ahuja and his team present India as a complex patchwork of inter-related communities.

The body is particularly relevant given recent international media coverage of horrific sexual assaults in the country. Although the exhibition does not address these crimes directly (indeed, planning was well advanced by the time the first



An illustration of Radha and Krishna meeting on the banks of the Yamuna is part of *The Body in Indian Art*; Flemish photographer Max Pinckers explored Mumbai for his series, part of the *Indomania* exhibition



© Max Pinckers

reports surfaced), its curator doesn't shy away from the discussion. "We shouldn't sweep this under the rug," Ahuja says, "but it must be handled delicately. The physical

audacity in these works, a concern which anticipates the experiments of our own contemporary avant-garde. Indian artists, inspired by Hindu philosophy, have for centuries

"The modern observer expects classical Indian art to be a feast for the senses – and it is"

body has unfortunately always been a target of violence – not just in India but everywhere. It's important to know that everyone – the courts, the media and all of Indian society – are behind the victims."

Moving from politics to aesthetics, the modern observer expects classical Indian art to be a feast for the senses – and it is. *The Body in Indian Art* is brimming with bold colours, remarkable figures, fine ornamentation and rhythmic patterns. But there is also a surprising amount of conceptual

endeavoured to visually represent nothingness. They also explore synesthesia, the visual expression of our four other senses, long before similar concerns led European modernists down the path of abstract art. The Indian tradition handles the concept in its own way, remaining firmly figurative but nonetheless suggestive. So important is the link between the musical experience and its visual interpretation that Ahuja presents these works with live musical accompaniment.

This grand exhibition has a doppelganger lurking in Bozar's opposite wing. If *The Body in Indian Art* showed us the flesh-and-blood India, *Indomania* reflects the (mis)perceptions of a distant land imagined by centuries of European intermediaries, from Rembrandt to the Beatles and beyond.

As sweeping as its sister exhibition, *Indomania* includes paintings, drawings, sculptures, texts, textiles, jewellery, photographs, films and music created by Western artists in the thrall of fascination, fear, hubris or any of those in combination. *Indomania* is not merely a retrospective. The exhibition asks whether our contemporary

perceptions of India are still informed by yesterday's chimeras. In keeping with this ongoing inquiry, two contemporary Flemish artists were dispatched to India to develop new works. Video artist Hans Op de Beeck lost himself in the quiet ruins of the Vijayanagara Empire, while photographer Max Pinckers explored the bustling metropolis of Mumbai. Both return to Brussels to present the fruits of their labour in the context of *Indomania*.

There is, of course, much, much more to Europalia. The programme includes dozens more exhibitions, plus music, dance, theatre, literature and film. This is the closest you'll get to India without a plane ticket.

4 OCTOBER TO 26 JANUARY

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EUROPALIA HIGHLIGHTS

Uday Prakash • 24 October, 22.00

Leuven University's six-week India Focus series features lectures by and discussions with a dozen Indian authors, among them Renaissance man Uday Prakash. The topic of Prakash's lecture is modernity in Indian literature, an issue that the poet, novelist, critic, filmmaker and journalist has been negotiating for 40 years. It's also the theme of his most recent volume, *The Walls of Delhi*, which, although published just last year, has already inspired the award-winning feature film *Mohandas*.

Et maintenant on va où? On va ensemble • 22-23 & 28 October

Contemporary Flemish choreographer Yentl de Werdt collaborates with Indian music

ensemble the Ionah Trio in a cultural and artistic crossover developed specifically for Europalia. Three musicians perform live on traditional instruments while three dancers turn tones into movement. The piece will be performed, appropriately enough, three times in three cities: Leuven (30CC), Genk (C-Mine) and Antwerp (Fakkelteater).

100 Years of Indian Cinema • 8 October to 26 January

This year marks the centenary of India's film industry, and cinemas are celebrating in a big way. For the duration of Europalia, Leuven's Cinema ZED, Brussels' Cinematek and Flagey, Antwerp's Cinema Zuid and Utopolis Turnhout are hosting special screenings of Indian films past and present. You'll see

early features, Bollywood blockbusters that have made Indian cinema a global force and lesser-known, indie films. The series kicks off on 8 October at Flagey with an avant-premiere of the film *Ugly*, introduced by the director Anurag Kashyap.



Director Anurag Kashyap will be on hand to discuss his new film *Ugly* at Flagey

The Curious Little Elephant • 26 October to 17 November

Europalia is not just for grown-ups. Brussels' Peruchet Theatre puts on a whimsical puppet show for the kids, who have surely been dying to know why the elephant has a trunk. The tale is adapted from Rudyard Kipling's short story "The Elephant Child". Kipling himself was born in Bombay (now Mumbai) to British parents and, although arguably an imperialist, is considered the most "Indian" of 19th-century British authors. Admission also includes an exhibition of Indian puppets and marionettes from the International Marionette Museum collection.

Watching them watching us

The Ghent Film Festival takes its cue from daily headlines of spying, hacking and leaks

Ian Mundell

Flanders' biggest film festival celebrates its 40th anniversary in a programme packed with espionage, American cinema and Martin Scorsese.

This year the Ghent Film Festival is riding a wave of public interest in surveillance, secrets and conspiracy. "The festival is about cinema, of course, but I always like it when some films or programmes have a strong link to political or social issues," says Patrick Duynslaegher, the festival's artistic director. "It shows the part that cinema is still playing in shaping things and making people aware of what is happening in the world."

The theme began innocently enough, with the idea that the festival should mark the 50th anniversary of John F Kennedy's assassination, which falls on 22 November. So there will be a modest cycle of classic films on the theme of presidential assassination, including Oliver Stone's *JFK*, John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* and Alan J Pakula's *The Parallax View*.

But as the rest of the festival programme started to take shape, further films touching on conspiracy and American paranoia, past and present, came to the fore. Clearly something was in the air.

The festival opens with *The Fifth Estate*, an account of how WikiLeaks obtained and made public a vast collection of classified US government documents. Directed by Bill Condon (*Dreamgirls*), it stars Benedict Cumberbatch as the organisation's controversial founder, Julian Assange. "There will be a lot of buzz around the film because of what is happening in the world," says Duynslaegher, "and now WikiLeaks is protesting against the film again. So other people are doing our publicity for us."

A more obscure addition to the theme is American director Shane Carruth's *Upstream Color*, which explores notions of mind and body control, possibly by shadowy government forces. This complex film has divided critics and audiences with its daring (or pretentious) aesthetic approach.

Cold war paranoia is explored in the series *Americans*, which screens in the festival's TV strand, Out of the Box. It tells the story of two KGB officers posing as a married couple in Washington DC during the 1980s. Finally, coming back to Kennedy, there is *Parkland*, which dramatises events at the hospital where the president was taken after the shooting. This screening will be followed by a panel discussion on American paranoia with journalists and specialists in US affairs.

The festival marks its 40th edition this year, although relatively little fuss is being made. "We mainly just wanted to stage another festival and look to the future," Duynslaegher explains.

The festival's present to itself relates to its status as an international gathering for composers of film music, with 40 composers each invited to write a minute of music especially for the occasion. Contributors range from Gabriel Yared and Angelo Badalamenti to local talent such as Jef Neve and Wim Mertens. Their miniatures will be woven together by the festival's music director, Flemish composer Dirk Brossé, into Ghent's own soundtrack, which will be performed live on 16 October.

In a more oblique way, the festival is marking its anniversary with a focus on director Martin Scorsese, whose breakthrough *Mean Streets* was made a year before the festival was born. "In a way, his career and the career of the festival run in parallel," says Duynslaegher. He is also Ghent's kind of director. "Even if Martin Scorsese has worked for all the major studios, he is still in spirit a kind of independent voice in American cinema."

On top of that, Scorsese has worked tirelessly to promote film culture through documentaries on American and Italian cinema and by setting up foundations to restore forgotten films.

There will be an exhibition of artefacts and images celebrating Scorsese's career, which runs at the Caermersklooster until 26 January. This has been compiled by the Deutsche Kinemathek from Scorsese's private collection, as well as the collections of actor Robert De Niro and screenwriter Paul Schrader. Throughout the exhibition period there will be retrospectives of Scorsese films at venues in Ghent, Antwerp, Kortrijk and Brussels.

During the festival itself new prints of *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver* will be shown, while the concert Scoring for Scorsese will revisit his collaborations with composers such as Bernard Herrmann, Elmer Bernstein, Howard Shore and Peter Gabriel. Meanwhile, the annual competition for young European composers this year sets the task of re-scoring Scorsese's 1967 short *The Big Shave*. This was the director's first film to get international recognition – at the Knokke festival of experimental film. Another local connection.

But will Marty be there in person? "We are still hoping to get Martin Scorsese for the opening of the exhibition," says Duynslaegher, "but we have no confirmation. And we know that he is a very busy man. But we do have confirmation that Paul Schrader, who was the screenwriter on *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull* and *The Last Temptation of Christ*, will be there for our Scorsese tribute."

Schrader's new film *The Canyons* is also due to screen at the festival, along with a host of new American films as part of a special focus on American cinema. Big-star vehicles include sailing drama *All Is Lost* with Robert Redford and Steven Soderbergh's Liberace biopic *Behind the Candelabra*, with Michael Douglas and Matt Damon, which will close the festival. Actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt (*Inception*, *The Dark Knight Rises*) is the festival's special guest; he's presenting his directing debut *Don Jon*, in which he stars as a sex addict trying to recover for the woman of his dreams.

Other highlights from the independent side of the industry include *Carrie*, the remake of Brian De Palma's shocker by Kimberly Peirce (*Boys Don't Cry*), and *Go For Sisters*, the latest from veteran director John Sayles. Also, don't miss Eliza Hittman's *It Felt Like Love*, a touching and stylish coming of age story that is probably the best film you've never heard of at the festival.

American films from international directors to watch out for include Mexican filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity*, starring George Clooney and Sandra Bullock as astronauts adrift in space, and crime drama *Blood Ties* by French director Guillaume Canet, which has a small role for Flanders' own Matthias Schoenaerts. In world cinema, there is new work from Chinese director Jia Zhang-Ke (*Still Life*), Polish director Andrzej Wajda (*Sweet Rush*), Japan's Hirokazu Koreeda (*I Wish*) and Jafar Panahi of Iran (*Offside*). And in Out of the Box, look out for David Mamet's *Phil Spector*, with Al Pacino and Helen Mirren, and Stephen Frears' *Muhammad Ali's Greatest Fight*.

8-19 OCTOBER

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► www.filmfestival.be

FLANDERS GETS PERSONAL

Last year the Ghent Film Festival opened with a big local splash with *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, Felix Van Groeningen's inspired combination bluegrass music and family heartbreak that has just been selected as Belgium's candidate for the foreign-language Oscar. This year another side of the Flemish film industry is on show, with three features from directors relatively new to the big screen.

"These are films with a personal voice and a personal style," says Patrick Duynslaegher, the festival's artistic director. "It's cinema that is more fragile, that in these days of crisis in art house cinemas has more and more difficulty getting released. But we hope the festival can play a role in giving these films a showcase and finding an audience that responds to them."

The festival's official competition includes *I Am The Same, I Am Another*, the second feature from Caroline Strubbe. It continues the story begun in 2009's *Lost Persons Area*, with the pre-adolescent Tessa fleeing her troubled family home with Szabolcs, a Hungarian engineer who worked for her father. They do their best to disappear, renting a holiday apartment in a run-down English seaside resort. In this enclosed space, they test the limits of their relationship.

In addition to conventional screenings, you can also see the film with a live soundtrack improvised by John Butcher on saxophone, Albert Markos on cello and Sophie Angel on piano.

82 Days in April by Bart Van den Bempt begins



Escape into landscape in new Flemish film *Drift*

with a Flemish couple in their 50s travelling to Turkey, where their son died while backpacking. The father becomes obsessed with following his son's final journey, while the mother resists.

And *Drift* is a tale of grief and lost love, in which a man tries to escape a painful reality by disappearing into the landscape. The film is a collaboration between artist Dirk Hendrikx and filmmaker Benny Vandendriessche, who have built a story around a recurring figure in Hendrikx's work, a wanderer who creates private rituals.

In addition to films from Flemish directors, the festival also wants to showcase foreign productions that were made in Belgium. This includes opening film *The Fifth Estate*, much of which was shot here, and BBC historical drama *The White Queen*, which was shot in Bruges and Ghent. The series will have a marathon 10-hour screening in the festival's TV strand.





From top: The story of WikiLeaks in festival opener *The Fifth Estate*; American actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt (right) will be in Ghent to introduce his directorial debut *Don Jon*; an exhibition dedicated to Martin Scorsese will run into next year

White out

Brussels' Nuit Blanche invites you to get your art on all night long

Georgio Valentino

For 12 years, Nuit Blanche has provided a nocturnal platform for the capital's contemporary arts scene. The concept is simple: Take one night and fill it from dusk to dawn with as much art as it'll hold. There are few fast criteria. You'll find performances, projections, installations and everything in between.

Nuit Blanche artists share only a common appreciation of public space and its creative potential. Local character is evident in the projects sprung from collaborations with neighbourhood residents. Other installations make spectators active participants in the works.

The much-anticipated (and entirely free) all-nighter showcases works in 28 locations, all of them within walking distance of each other. While the inaugural edition was a sprawling, city-wide party (much like its inspiration Nuit Blanche Paris), the powers-that-be now concentrate on a host neighbourhood. So this year's festivities unfold between the Zavel and the Marollen. It's an odd couple for sure as these neighbouring districts share little apart from a postal code. The former is home to upscale art galleries, chic restaurants and a quiet antiques market, while the latter's narrow streets are home to winos and the bustling Brussels flea market. Neither is without its charm, of course, but the fact is that the Zavel and the Marollen are two radically different animals.

The nerve centre of Nuit Blanche 2013 is a pop-up village on Poelaertplein, where the lofty Zavel descends rather precipitously (hence Brussels' only public elevator) into the depths of the Marollen. If nothing else, this spot, in the shadow of the monstrous Justice Palace, is easy to find. The garish crowned dome atop Brussels' most conspicuous landmark is visible across both the Marollen and Zavel. Let this be your beacon to the night's meeting point, open-air bar, food vendors and obligatory DJ booth.

It's also your point of entry to several major site-specific installations, one tackling the Justice Palace itself. The city's arts collective LAb[au] takes advantage of the interminable renovations that have swathed the building in scaffolding for years. They propose an



The Blast Dance, described as "a joyous, collective and human response to all the disasters we hear about", will take place on the Zavel during Nuit Blanche

alternative façade called "(k)NIT". They're not pitching it with just some blueprint or mock-up, no, they've outlined their design on a scale as colossal as the Justice Palace, using giant luminous filaments strung across the length, breadth and height of the courthouse. Another of Poelaertplein's installations, "M.O.B.A. (Master of Black Art)", is similarly ambitious. Ask any tourist, and they'll tell you that this square offers the best panorama of Brussels: You've got an unobstructed view as far as the Koekelberg Basilica and Atomium on the other side of town. For the duration of Nuit Blanche, members of COSTIK and Solo Cink will obstruct that view with giant cellophane tableaux anchored on the rooftop of a nearby school. Like vintage Hollywood's matte paintings, "M.O.B.A." modifies the entire cityscape by superimposing its own surreal elements, in this case a truly urban graffiti.

From here you can climb down to the Marollen, where French digital artist Judith Darmont leads her audience in a creepy outdoor promenade that includes encounters with ghostly projections. These are the same grungy streets where American performance artist Brian Lobel and his Belgian counterpart Isabelle Bats "cruise" for art all night. Or you can opt for the more genteel Zavel, where Belgian choreographer Marie Martinez and her team of 30 dancers take over Brussels' Royal Conservatory and young musicians fill the Miniemens church with the sounds of John Cage and Erik Satie until the wee hours of the morning.

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

The 80 metre-long artwork "The Sequence", which has stood outside the Flemish parliament in Brussels since 2008, will be dismantled next year, the parliament's speaker confirmed. The work by Flemish artist Arne Quinze, composed of thousands of orange planks forming a canopy over the street, was erected in 2008 for the first Festival of Politics and was meant to stand for five years.

The Broken Circle Breakdown, director Felix Van Groeningen's version of the stage play by Johan Heldenbergh and Mieke Dobbels, is Belgium's entry for the 2013 Academy Awards, the Flemish Audiovisual Fund announced. "I am very excited the film has gained such recognition and trust," the director said. "I think the film deserves it." Among its growing international prizes are the Grand Prize and the Public Prize of the Québec City Film Festival, won last weekend.

The independent cinema *Cartoon's in Antwerp* has declared bankruptcy. The cinema has been in financial difficulties since the death of a former benefactor, who lived in the Netherlands. Located in the historic city centre, *Cartoon's* opened in 1978 and specialises in European films and art-house productions. The administrator is seeking a possible buyer.

Three productions by Flemish public broadcaster VRT won international awards last week. The 2012 municipal election coverage and web platform *De vragende partij* won the Prix Italia for interactive productions, after it achieved 897,000 web visitors and nearly 12,000 public contributions. The VRT series *Quiz me quick* also received a special mention from the Prix Italia jury. Meanwhile, the drama series *Wolven* was named best Flemish series by BVN, the TV broadcaster for Dutch speakers abroad.

The Saint-Cyr house, a treasure of Art Nouveau architecture that has stood abandoned on Ambiorixsquare in Brussels for years, has been sold to an undisclosed buyer. The house was bought by the Immo Movast agency in Antwerp in 2006 but put on the market in 2011 after blaming Brussels City for administrative delays that held up renovations. The original selling price of €1.5 million dropped last year to €1.2 million. The final price was also not disclosed.

5 OCTOBER, FROM 19.00

Across Brussels

► www.nuitblanchebrussels.be

Fashionable giants add to Antwerp skyline

If you've been in Antwerp over the last month, you'll probably have seen one or more of the pieces that make up *Antwerp Icons*, one of the Fashion Museum's contributions to Happy Birthday Dear Academie. The months-long celebration marks the Royal Academy of Antwerp's 350th birthday, with special recognition going to its legendary Fashion Department.

For *Antwerp Icons*, 12 famous designers who graduated from the department – including Ann Demeulemeester, Maison Martin

Margiela and Peter Pilotto – chose one of their favourite designs from their own collections. Designer Dirk Van Saene then created bodysuits for models based on each design. Photographer Ronald Stoops took the photos, which have been blown up to giant size, mounted on stacked shipping containers and placed in strategic locations around town. You can't miss them.

Lisa Bradshaw



Neighbours in a global village

AmATORSKI: Deleting Borders

Tom Peeters

Though they're formally a pop group, AmATORSKI never took the obvious steps to stardom. Yes, in 2010, the band members took the stage at the final of Humo's Rock Rally, Flanders' most influential rock contest. But their path has been far more complex than other rock bands, with only one album out since then. With the project Deleting Borders, they are again crossing borders only to erase them.

"Borders between the audience and the artist, between art disciplines, between online and offline experiences, between countries and nations," they claim in the press release for the event. In short, they wanted Deleting Borders to be an art and multimedia project where music, visual art and web art merge, like neighbours in a global village.

Their music has always had a visual quality. Take their captivating song "Soldiers", where the fragile, wavering delivery of the Ghent-based singer Inne Eysermans intertwines with electronic rhythms. Or take the melancholic "Come Home", which was inspired by the love letters her grandparents sent to each other during the Second World War.

Just how visual their music is was proven during a theatre tour in which they created a new soundtrack for a 1928 avant-garde movie, and more recently when they wrote the score for a documentary series and a Dutch feature film. "By



result of the project, created this year in deSingel, will tour Brussels and Flanders this week.

On the website deletingborders.com, everyone can personalise an AmATORSKI song by uploading their own photos from Facebook. "You will hear samples, and an abstract image is shaped, taking into account the colour palette of your photo," explains Eysermans. "This allows you to create a unique pattern of sounds and a personalised song. During the Deleting Borders, tour we will play existing music, but it will be supported visually by data provided by our online visitors."

So the band members question the borders imposed by the traditional music industry,

challenging them artistically and even in terms of business. "With 85,000 visitors from all over the world, you could say our mission to at least delete the borders of countries was successful.

But at the same time we encountered the power of the internet and social network sites as a promotional tool."

Integrating the internet in the creation process and the management was from the start the intention of Hilke Ros, the band's bass player and manager. "It just suits our DIY attitude and our ideas about the world," says Eysermans. "Furthermore, the idea of deleting borders will also influence the story we tell on our new album, which we started working on this summer."

5-12 October | Across Brussels and Flanders | www.deletingborders.com

CONCERT

James Blunt

It's been eight years since British pop singer James Blunt rocketed to superstardom with his debut album *Back to Bedlam* and its hit single "You're Beautiful". Indeed, one can hardly read the song title without involuntarily recalling Blunt's voice spilling from some supermarket or shopping mall's loudspeaker. Time will tell if his fourth album, *Moon Landing*, due out this month, will see the same success. One thing is certain: brisk ticket sales are certain for the singer's concert in Brussels next spring. So if you want to go, best to buy soon. **Georgio Valentino**



GET TICKETS NOW

2 April 2014, 20.00
Vorst Nationaal, Brussels

www.vorstnationaal.be

CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Boris Giltburg: A piano recital by the winner of this year's Queen Elisabeth Competition. The Israeli-Russian musician performs Rachmaninov, Prokofiev and Ravel
OCT 9 20.00 at Royal Brussels Conservatory, Regentschapsstraat 30
www.bozar.be

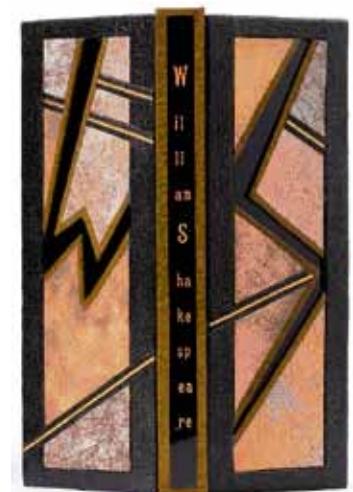
Zoersel (Antwerp province)

An Pierlé: The veteran Flemish singer-songwriter presents her new album *Strange Days* in an old church in a small town, where the mood is just so
OCT 11 20.30 at De Kapel, Handelslei 167
www.zoersel.be

VISUAL ARTS

Shakespeare Bound

There's William Shakespeare who, although universally respected, is hardly read without the stern encouragement of a headmaster. And there's the art of bookbinding, always a bit of an insider's game but, with the advent of digital publishing, insiders are getting awfully thin on the ground. Thank London's International Bookbinding Competition for bringing these two niche tastes together for a little special attention. Thirty bookbinders from all over the world participated by crafting their own editions of the seminal Elizabethan playwright's works. After the competition, these submissions were catalogued and exhibited first in London and now in Brussels. Next stops are Estonia, Czech Republic and Germany. **GV**



Until 5 January

Bibliotheca Wittockiana, Brussels

www.wittockiana.org

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Arne Quinze: Chaos in Motion: The Flemish sculptor is best known for massive public installations; this exhibition is a behind-the-scenes look at his creative process
OCT 4-DEC 14 at At the Gallery, Leopoldstraat 57
www.attthegallery.be

Ghent

MK c'urliionis: Dreaming of Lithuania: Celebrate Lithuania's presidency of the EU Council by viewing more than 100 paintings by the fin-de-siècle painter
Until DEC 15 at Museum of Fine Arts, Fernand Scribedreef 1
www.mskgent.be

Ostend

Hugo Claus: Omdat ik geen beeld ben (Because I'm Not an Image): Retrospective of drawings and paintings by the late Claus, much better known as a novelist and playwright
Until JAN 5 at Mu.ZEE, Romestraat 11
www.muzee.be

FESTIVAL

Work Hard / Play Hard

Last season Brussels' contemporary arts complex Beursschouwburg introduced the focus programme, an extended multidisciplinary festival organised around a single theme. The first focus of the new season is (appropriately enough, after a lazy summer and an even lazier half-decade of crisis) Work Hard / Play Hard. Office culture, stuffed suits, corporate poetry and post-capitalism are all explored through a variety of media.

The programme's centrepiece is an exhibition of French artist (and former white-collar worker) Céline Berger's videos and installations. *Best Practices* marries the corporate strategies of Berger's former office-bound life and the artistic processes of her current profession; the two may not be as far removed as most artists fancy. German performance artist Martin Schick takes another approach, exploring alternatives to global capitalism in his absurdist theatre riff *Not My Piece* (pictured) and ironic corporate workshop-cum-installation *San Keller Learning Center*. **GV**



© Designer Bookbinders

4 October to 16 November

Beursschouwburg, Brussels | www.beursschouwburg.be

MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

Musica Divina: Local and international artists perform classical music in churches across the Kempen region

OCT 3-5 across Flanders

www.festivalmechelen.be

Antwerp

Day One Festival: This street-art festival focuses on graffiti, urban murals and hip-hop culture

OCT 2-6 at CC Luchtbal, Columbiastraat 110

www.streetartbelgium.com

Kortrijk

Buda Vista: Annual festival showcasing international contemporary art

OCT 3-6 at Budascoop, Kapucijnenvest 10

www.budakortrijk.be

FAIR

Fotofever

Photography is often as inaccessible to the average Joe as modernist painting. So photographer Cécile Schall decided to bring the art to the people with last year's inaugural edition of Fotofever. This year's fair is bigger and better, thanks to prestigious partners including Brussels' Bozar and Antwerp's FoMu. While Fotofever features Hungarian, Japanese, Moroccan, South American, Russian, Dutch, French and British photographers among its 300 participating artists, it also moves to Paris for a weekend in November (future editions are anticipated to travel as far as the United States and Asia). The weekend also sees panel discussions and lectures with industry professionals and an award ceremony for the Fotoprize contest, which was won by young Ghent-based photographer Saartje Van De Steene. **GV**



© Liu Bolin, *Hiding in the City* (2012) courtesy Galerie Paris-Beijing

4-6 October | Tour and Taxis, Brussels | www.tour-taxis.com

MORE FAIRS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Boekenfestijn: Over a million new books are on offer, most at discount prices, at Flanders' longest-lived travelling book fair. Most books are in Dutch, but there is a solid assortment of English and French fare as well

OCT 3-6 at Brussels Expo, Belgiëplein 1

www.boekenfestijn.com

Ghent

Bis: The 25th edition of Flanders' building fair matches you with professional contractors, brokers and property developers. DIY enthusiasts can cut the middlemen and buy materials direct from the source

OCT 5-13 at Flanders Expo, Maaltekouter 1

www.bisbeurs.be

Tervuren

BSB Car Boot Sale: You'll find second-hand clothes, books, electronics and children's toys at this regular rendezvous of the expat community

OCT 5 10.00 at British School of Brussels, Leuvensesteenweg 19

www.britishschool.be

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Neonsplash

5 October, Brussels

White T-shirts will be for sale on site, and lockers are available to store clean clothes and other sundries. Tickets are €15.50.

www.neonsplash.be

Play

4-5 October, Hasselt

If all you're really after is a good music line-up, Play might be more up your street. The two-day club festival in Hasselt's Muziekodroom is this weekend, with electronic music on Friday and guitars and pop on Saturday. Who and what to expect? Among others, jungle and London electronics by Dark Sky, house by the Limburg crew Way Back and beats by the 17-year-old Hucci from Brighton. That's all on Friday. The next day, four stages increase to five, and one of them will host Antwerp soul singer Coely. Brussels garage quartet Mountain Bike are coming, too, and so are Amsterdam punk band The Ex. Tickets are €9 in advance, €12 at the door.

www.playfestival.be



BITE

Baobab ★★★★

Fries and pizza and Flemish stew, oh my! While these are all great foods, sometimes you just long for something out of the ordinary. Especially when it's pouring rain in Bruges, and your belly is crying out for something healthy but hearty.

On one such evening, my partner and I are fortunate enough to stumble upon this little gem of a restaurant, not far from the centre yet seemingly miles away from the tourist crowds.

We shake off the cold as we enter the snug dining room. It's aglow with candles and hanging lamps that accentuate rustic burnt-orange and turquoise walls decked with elephant tapestries. Even the soulful music suggests that we've entered into a tiny corner of South Africa in West Flanders.

Owner Arne gets us laughing from the get-go with his unique panache and friendly nature. His wife Ann can be seen buzzing around in the open kitchen. The Flemish couple took inspiration for their business from their good South African friends, whom they visit regularly.

We order a carafe of the house red and, as expected, it's no ordinary house wine – smooth, balanced flavour and earthy undertones. I also order a warming pot of rooibos tea.

First up for the food: courgette and corn



© Robyn Boyle

beignets, or dough-like balls of the fried veg, which are exquisitely squishy and lay atop a fresh salsa of tomato, red onion, avocado and coriander. The other starter is chicken samosas, fried triangular pastries stuffed with curried chicken mince, our first

introduction to the melting pot of culinary influences that is the southern tip of Africa. When Arne brings my main of *bobotie* (many of the dishes bear their Afrikaans name), he explains that it is a traditional dish of lamb mince baked with fruits, seeds and nuts and topped with a creamy, golden egg mixture. So it's a bit like meatloaf, I gather, but then I'm hit with a flood of exciting tastes and textures, from sweet apricots and plump raisins to nutty pumpkin and sunflower seeds and spicy, savoury meat.

It's perfectly paired with a sweet-sour chutney and light salad. There's also a little pot of aromatic rice infused with bright yellow turmeric, cinnamon and raisins, which Arne refers to as *begrafenis rijst* because it is traditionally served after funerals.

My partner, meanwhile, is working his way down his *safarispies*, a giant brochette (about 350g) with alternating chunks of grilled ostrich and zebra. He already knew how sweet and tender ostrich meat can be, but the zebra is equally, if not more, so. Arne says if we like zebra, we ought to come back some time when he has *springbok*, or antelope, as it's one of the softest meats there is. The brochette comes with a little bit of home, but with a South African twist: sweet potato fries.

Dessert seems overindulgent at this point, but we are curious about the traditional cake called *Topsy Tert* and the *crème brûlée*, so we order one of each with two decaf coffees. The fluffy cake arrives at our table smelling just as delicious as it tastes – buttery and nutty, made from dates and pecans drenched in brandy. My *crème brûlée* is thick and eggy, reminiscent of Flemish *advocaat* but then accentuated with amarula, a creamy South African liqueur, bits of fresh vanilla and a caramelised crust.

Such a nice experience as this is worthy of its €100 price tag

► www.bistro-baobab.be

- Philipstockstraat 27, Bruges; 050.33.14.08
- ⌚ 12.00-14.00 & 18.30-22.30 Tue-Fri & Sun; 18.30-22.30 Sat
- € Mains: €20-€40
- ⓘ High-quality South African cuisine with surprising flavour combinations

TALKING SPORTS

Back where they belong

They are so close, they can almost hear the samba and taste the beach cocktails. They know all about the barefoot scruffs doing keepy-uppy on the sands of Ipanema, and how the playful rhythms of the waves seem to seep into the country's magnificent football culture. Yes, the Red Devils are within reach of next year's World Cup in Brazil.

Next week, the Belgian team travel to Zagreb to face Croatia in their penultimate qualifier, followed four days later by a home game against Wales at the King Boudewijn stadium in Brussels. A single point from those two fixtures should assure them automatic qualification: a remarkable achievement. The Red Devils are finally delivering on the promise that their young talents have so long hinted at. Marc Wilmots, who only took charge of the team in May last year, has been an inspirational coach, teaching the unpolished squad that priceless skill of a winning mentality. The players always had the talent, but Wilmots has given them that killer instinct.

Wilmots, a former Belgian captain and midfield dynamo with Sint-Truiden and Mechelen, understood how to get the best out of his

emerging stars. For example, he put Chelsea's unsettled Kevin De Bruyne on the right wing, a change that delivered four assists and three goals. He has ensured that, despite their egos, the likes of Manchester United's Marouane Fellaini, Chelsea's Eden Hazard, Aston Villa's Christian Benteke and Porto's Steven Defour all support each other at the front. In defence, captain Vincent Kompany, Thomas Vermaelen and Jan Vertonghen have built an impenetrable wall that other sides can only envy. Part of this has been due to the Belgian football association's "development vision" for football in schools, in practice for 10 years, with constant adaptations based on feedback from teachers, youth coaches and clubs. This policy means there are further players in the wings, like Zakaria Bakkali, a 17-year-old of Moroccan descent at PSV Eindhoven who made waves in August when he became the youngest player to score a hat-trick in the Dutch league, and Manchester United starlet Adnan Januzaj, born in Brussels 18 years ago to Kosovar-Albanian parents. These are indeed fine times for Belgian football. And the best could be yet to come.



Marc Wilmots (centre) celebrates with fellow Red Devils after the team beat Serbia in a World Cup qualifier in Brussels in June

Leo Cendrowicz

The last word...

Royal flush

"Of course I feel a conflict between my personal conviction and my duty as mayor. This is more a day for duty."

Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever (N.VA) welcomed the new King and Queen to his city last week

Wisdom of the ancients

"For every problem, there are two solutions: mine and the wrong one."

Mayor of Leuven Louis Tobback has published a book of aphorisms titled *Ik ben God de vader niet* (I am not God the Father)

Food fight

"It was the world upside down. Students had to wait outside for a meal while the seniors took all the places."

From next week, canteens at the University of Hasselt will be open to students and staff only

Time trials

"If he can make the trains run on time, it doesn't much matter what he does in his spare time."

Socialist party chairman Bruno Tobback on the controversy surrounding new rail boss Jo Cornu (see business, p7)

Because change is good

Dear reader, we know how much you love Flanders Today.

"If only there were more of it," we hear you saying.

Now there is.

From 3 October, you can sign up for free, **daily e-news**: the day's headlines right to your in-box. We're continuing our **weekly e-newsletter**, too, but now you can personalise it to get just the topics you want.

Because you're busy people on the go, we are also launching **apps for mobile phones**: Now you can access Flanders Today whenever and wherever you want – every day.

And naturally, a **new website** is on the way, with loads of chances to comment, discuss and share the issues that are important to you. Stay tuned at www.flanderstoday.eu.

