

OCTOBER 30, 2013

FREE NEWSWEEKLY

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2 | current affairs

4 | politics

6 | business

7 | innovation

9 | education

10 | living

15 | agenda

#304

Erkenningsnummer P708816

End to port expansion?

The auditor to the Council of State recommends that Antwerp's long-awaited plans be scrapped

► 4

Let there be light

New app debuted at Milk, Inc concert puts the power of the light show in the hands of fans

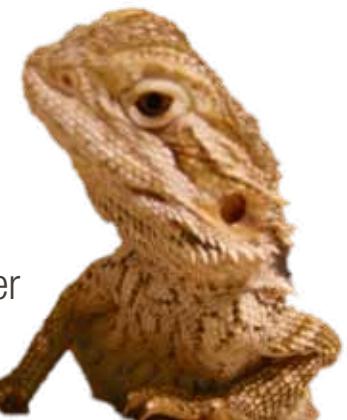
► 7



Reptile rescue

A unique facility in West Flanders takes in lizards, snakes and other abandoned exotics

► 11



All in the mind

City that pioneered modern attitude to mental illness hosts a challenging exhibition

Ian Mundell

The city of Geel has long been a place where people with mental illness have been treated in an enlightened way. That makes it the ideal setting for a new exhibition exploring the interaction between establishment art and that created by "outsiders" such as psychiatric patients.

The art exhibition *Middle Gate Geel* tackles some big issues – psychiatry, magic, myth and religion – in a city with a history that has been shaped to some degree by all four forces. But it is also a very personal project for curator Jan Hoet, who grew up in Geel and went on to become the founding director of SMAK, Ghent's Museum for Contemporary Art. "I lived there until I was 12 years old," he says. "My father was a psychiatrist, and he was also an art collector. This was the world I was born into."

Geel's association with mental illness begins with Saint Dymphna. According to legend, she was the daughter of a pagan Irish king and his Christian queen. When the queen died, the king went mad with grief and proposed marriage to his daughter, who bore a striking resemblance to her mother. Dymphna and her confessor fled to Europe, eventually settling in Geel. This was where the king found them. He ordered servants to kill the priest, but he beheaded Dymphna himself.

Thanks to this legend and reports of miracles linked to Dymphna's relics, Geel became a place of pilgrimage in the middle ages for those afflicted by mental illness. This meant

► continued on page 5

Brussels Ring expansion approved

Flemish government okays plan to add lanes to the traffic-heavy motorway

Alan Hope

The government of Flanders has given the green light to increase the number of lanes on the Brussels Ring Road. The goal of the plan is to allow through vehicles to flow more smoothly as traffic needing local access exit the Ring.

The plans cover two zones: the Zaventem zone from the junction with the E40 in the direction of Leuven to the junction with the E19 in the direction of Mechelen; and the North zone from the junction with the E40 towards Ghent up to and including the Vilvoorde viaduct.

Work on the Zaventem zone will start in 2016 at a cost of €98 million and create three lanes in both directions for through traffic, and two lanes for local traffic. No date has yet been set for work on the North zone, which will cost €230 million. On the section between the E40 and A12, there will be an extra two lanes for local traffic; on the

A12 to E19 section will be one extra lane. As the Ring Road is entirely in Flanders, the Flemish region is shouldering the entire cost of the project.

According to the government, the split between through and local traffic will speed up movement, improve safety and ease pressure on local roads, often used by through traffic to avoid the worst delays on the Ring. The government has also promised extra investment in public transport and cycle infrastructure. According to Unizo, the Flemish organisation that represents the self-employed, the government's plans are "a step in the right direction towards more fluid traffic" but warned that the changes to the Ring must be accompanied by improvements in mobility elsewhere, including the extension of the use of rush-hour lanes.

Motoring organisation Touring called the plans "An absolutely



and quality of life of thousands of residents of Brussels and Brabant," members Hermes Sanctorum and Annemie Maes said.

Groen was joined in opposing the plans by various environmental and mobility groups, including Beter Bond Leefmilieu and the cyclists' organisation Fietsersbond. According to critics, the addition of extra lanes will add an additional 28 tonnes of fine particulates, 150 tonnes of nitrogen dioxide and 109,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year.

Rudi Vervoort, minister-president of the Brussels-Capital Region, said he was "surprised" by the sudden decision to go ahead with the plans and called for more dialogue between the two regions, as well as an inter-regional task force on mobility. Although the Ring is in Flanders, Brussels argues that the Capital Region will feel an enormous effect from the changes.

essential project that offers a solution to the acute problems of congestion, pollution and road safety, which confront thousands of road users every day."

Opposition party Groen supports a split between through and local traffic but opposes the construction of extra lanes. "A broadening of the Ring will damage the health

UN advisor questions Zwarde Piet tradition

The United Nations has distanced itself from the debate on whether Zwarde Piet, the helper of St Nicholas, or Sinterklaas in Dutch, is a racist representation, symbolising the days of slavery. In a statement last week, UN spokesman Xabier Celaya said the letter addressed to the Dutch government on the subject did not represent UN policy. The letter was sent by Verene Shepherd, chief rapporteur to the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent. However, Shepherd, a professor of social history in Jamaica, is an outside consultant to the UN, not an official.

Shepherd's accusations towards the Dutch government resulted in a firestorm of controversy in the last week across the Netherlands and Belgium as to the nature of Zwarde Piet. According to Jozef De Witte, director of the Belgian Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight Against Racism, the reactions have been exaggerated. He called for a "serene" debate on the question of folk traditions.

The question arises at regular intervals in the season leading up to 6 December, the saint's holy day when children across the Netherlands and Belgium receive gifts. In both countries, Sinterklaas is accompanied by a number of helpers called Zwarde Piet, dressed in costumes of Moorish pages, wearing curly afro wigs, sporting bright, red lips and with their faces painted black. The role of Zwarde Piet is to hand out sweets and gifts to good children and



to punish the naughty, usually, according to legend, by carrying them off in a sack to Spain. Critics say that the blackface worn by those in Zwarde Piet costume is a clear sign of racism. Supporters, who are far and away in the majority, argue that Piet is black from soot stains incurred when he goes down the chimney and that he represents an Arab dealer who helped the historical St Nicholas rescue children from the slave trade.

The matter has now come to the attention of the United Nations, after the Dutch government applied to have its Sinterklaas festivities included in the world cultural heritage register. "You can't claim to be world heritage and at the same time ignore a number of international norms like the UN treaty on racism," De Witte said, though he concluded that Zwarde Piet was not a symbol of intentional racism. "I don't think Zwarde Piet needs to worry about being taken off in handcuffs." AH

UK students take extensive battlefield tours

More than 1,000 schools in the UK have signed on to a plan to bring secondary school students to Flanders to visit the battlefields of the First World War during the centenary, which starts next year. According to the British Foreign Office, the £5.3 (€6.25) million plan has already attracted 1,097 secondary schools since launching just this summer. Each school will send one teacher and two students on a four-day tour of battlefield and other notable sites, such as Talbot House in Poperinge, where soldiers retired for rest and recuperation. They will also take part in joint commemoration ceremonies, the best-known of which is the Last Post, sounded nightly at the Menin Gate in Ypres (pictured).

Teachers and students who take part in the visits will share their experiences with the rest of the school. The First World War is part of

the new history curriculum for children aged 11 to 14. Pilot tours involving 25 schools have already taken place and have visited Tyne Cot Cemetery, In Flanders Fields museum, the Memorial Museum at Passchendaele, Talbot House and the Menin Gate. One teacher who has already made the trip is Harriet Salkeld of Park High School in London. "The experience was amazing



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THE WEEK IN FIGURES

50 hours

of community service ordered by the court for a couple accused of the theft of €100 that flew out of a stolen safe tossed out of a moving vehicle by robbers last spring in Zedegem, West Flanders

1,600

free meals to be handed out over the winter by 150 volunteers from the staff of the Brussels public transport authority MIVB to homeless people in Central Station

\$800,000

reward paid by the US to Antwerp police for their role in breaking up a drugs gang. The reward has since been claimed by the federal government

1,200 MW

of wind energy produced on Wednesday, 23 October, the equivalent of 13% of total consumption that day and a new production record

20,263

cases of domestic violence reported in 2012, 8% fewer than the year before and the first decrease in the figures in seven years

WEEK IN BRIEF

Nearly half of all seniors over 75 are in danger of malnourishment or are already not eating properly, according to a project carried out by the White-Yellow Cross in West Flanders. Nursing staff working in nine medical practices in the area of Bruges, the coast and Torhout found 11% of over-75s were malnourished, and 38% were in the danger zone. Among younger patients aged 65-74, the figures were 14% and 29%. The organisation will now extend the study to cover the whole province.

A field experiment on genetically modified poplar trees, organised by the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology, was given the green light this week by the Belgian Biosafety Advisory Council. One member of the Council, Professor Philippe Baret of the university of Louvain-la-Neuve, claimed the test poplars contain marker genes resistant to antibiotics, which are illegal in the EU. "We have received formal advice of approval, and the Flemish government has nothing to add," said environment minister Joke Schauvliege. The project requires the final agreement of the federal government.

A new rent guarantee system that comes into force in January will benefit both tenants and landlords, according to Flemish housing minister Freya Van den Bossche. The fund will be financed by property owners who pay €75 for each rental contract they have, in return for coverage in cases of tenants who default on rent. At the same time, tenants will be protected from eviction in cases where they are unable to pay their rent because of illness or unemployment. Last year more than 13,000 people in Flanders were threatened with eviction for non-payment of rent, according to the Association of Flemish Municipalities.

CBF Pyrotechnics, a fireworks manufacturer from Geraardsbergen, East Flanders, has won second

prize at a major fireworks festival in Liuyang in southern China, the birthplace of fireworks. The company, which won two gold medals last year at another festival in Shanghai, was taking part by invitation of the organisers.

The Free University of Brussels (VUB) is looking for volunteers to take part in a clinical trial to test the use of Ritalin – a drug usually used for the treatment of ADHD – on adults who stutter. For those whose stuttering continues into adulthood, there are few treatment options. The trial consists of a single dose of the drug, and the effects will then be evaluated.

► www.stotteraar.be

He may have presented thousands of cookery programmes on TV and sold hundreds of thousands of cookbooks in Flanders, but for the culinary guide *Gault & Millau*, Piet Huysentruyt was this week "discovery of the year". The Flemish chef known as SOS Piet left the airwaves earlier this year to concentrate on his restaurant in Les Vans, France. After closing it seven years ago, Huysentruyt reopened it in June with a new name, Likoké.

► www.likoké.be

The city of Genk will lose 100 civil servant jobs as a result of the loss of income caused by the closure of Ford Genk, mayor Wim Dries announced last week. However, the cuts will not involve redundancies; retiring personnel will not be replaced, he said. Ford Genk contributes €8 million in taxation to the city every year. "The worst is yet to come," Dries said. "Genk already has 13.5% unemployment, and we're heading for 19%." About 75% of the Ford workers who have already left the plant have other jobs, though among outside suppliers, that rate is 46%. This week marked exactly one year since the shock announcement that the factory would close in December 2014.

An English language test used by Flemish universities to discern which of their lecturers could continue to give lessons in English was not approved by the Association of Language Testers, the international authority in the field, according to the University of Leuven student magazine *Veto*. The test provoked controversy among academics after it appeared to show a poor overall result, with 10 to 20% of lecturers failing to pass.

Low-cost airline EasyJet will begin four flights a week from Brussels Airport to Bordeaux, on 30 March. The flights will directly compete with Ryanair, flying out of Charleroi on the same days. Meanwhile the British airline BMP Regional has announced twice-daily flights between Zaventem and Newcastle, also from March.

Registrations of Belgian students for the first year of Bachelor's or Master's studies at Maastricht University have increased by 28% compared to last year. In total, 17% more Belgians are studying at the university than in the 2012-2013 academic year. The Flemish rector of the university, Luc Soete, thinks that the increasing interest is due to the mostly English-language education and the problem-oriented method. The most popular study areas for Belgian students are International Business and European Law.

A 19-year-old from Lede in East Flanders who had been missing since 3 October was found dead in a nature area near his home last week. Wijnand Görtz went missing after leaving some friends at school in Brakel and was later seen in Ghent. Police and volunteers using dogs and a helicopter carried out an intensive search after his car was found in Lede, but the body was found in another area. The cause of death appears to be suicide, but still needs to be confirmed by an autopsy.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



© Lise Willaert/VRT

Stijn Van de Voorde

He's made his name as a DJ on Studio Brussel, became associated with Flanders' rich programme of festivals by giving away tickets on his show and took part in stunts to raise money for the beneficiaries of the annual fund-raising extravaganza Music for Life. There's not much literature in his background, which makes the pressure even greater as he prepares next week to front the latest attempt – and very possibly the last attempt – to bring out a decent books programme on Flemish TV.

Books programmes, to be fair, are not exactly tailor-made for television. Reading is internal, and the reader static and sedentary. Listening to someone talk about a book they read is about as exciting as the recounting of last night's dream. The great exception to the rule that books make lousy TV is *Apostrophes*, the weekly programme on French TV fronted by Bernard Pivot.

The trouble is, Pivot actually put a curse on TV books programmes simply by being so good, and in the absence of a similar personality – impressively learned and well-read yet at the same time eternally curious and enthusiastic – TV channels like

Canvas, the highbrow division of the public broadcaster VRT, have been forced to try out alternative formulas. The last of these, *Iets met boeken* (Something About Books) was presented by Jan Leyers, pop star, TV documentary maker and writer, but it failed to ignite the readers of Flanders.

Van de Voorde's show is called *Man over boek*. "There will be writers talking about their work," he told *De Standaard*, "but also people who have never written a book." Other features include *De Collega's*, in which two writers of different genres talk to each other, and *Mieke en Maaike's Roadshow*, in which actresses Mieke Dobbels and Maaike Cafmeyer recount erotic episodes from world literature.

"You have to present your content in such a way that's it's also entertaining," Van de Voorde explained. "There's no greater art than to offer something to the public that's well-made. I'm happy to watch a programme that has something serious, but also from time to time something that makes you laugh."

Man over boek begins on Canvas on 5 November at 22.00

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

At ease

So many young people are dropping out of the army that the situation can best be described as "spectacularly bad," according to the chief of defence staff, General Gérard Van Caelenbergh. "We're losing almost half of our young officers during their training," he said. "Half of our young soldiers are also dropping out. We're recruiting in a difficult market. The police and fire service pay better."

In the old days, the general must dream to himself, the problem would be easily solved. Drum up some youth from the local villages, give them a pitchfork or an adze and send them off to fight for the local feudal lord. Such remedies are no longer appropriate in times when young people don't need to defend their homeland against

invaders. Today's potential recruits have not only human rights, they also have a reasonable expectation of work-life balance.

"In fighting units, the day starts with a cross-country run," continues the general. "For soldiers who live far away – they have to do their running closer to home so that they only need to drive to their barracks once the rush hour is over. So we're thinking of ways to make teleworking and home-study possible."

That's right. Remember the old poster: What if they held a war and nobody came? That slogan has now, slightly adapted, become fact: what if they held a war, and nobody got there on time because the bus was running late? Imagine if French troops under Napoleon



© Wikimedia Commons

had realised that calling the battle Waterloo was a plot by the cunning Duke of Wellington, and that the nearest train station is in fact at Braine l'Alleud. History might have turned out so differently.

FLANDERS TODAY

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Auditor calls for government's port plans to be scrapped

The Council of State must now rule on the extension of the port of Antwerp

Alan Hope

The government's plans for the extension of the port of Antwerp are hanging in the balance after last week's recommendation by the Auditor of the Council of State that the entire plan should be scrapped.

The auditor was giving his opinion in a case brought by the activist group Doel2020. His advice is not binding on the final decision of the Council of State, but it is almost always followed.

Doel (*pictured*) is a village on the left bank of the Scheldt, across the provincial border from Antwerp in East Flanders. Its continued existence has been under threat from port expansion since the 1960s; in the meantime, several other villages have been



© Wikipedia

depopulated and demolished for port expansion.

Doel is down to 188 official residents, reinforced by activists and protesters occupying the village to prevent further demolition from taking place.

The Flemish government's Regional Planning Programme removes Doel's status as a residential area and sees it demolished to make way for the new Saeftinghe dock. The plan also sees the hamlets of Ouden Doel and Rapenburg disappearing and turns the northern Doel polder into a nature area. The nuclear power plant at Doel would remain. The full Council of State is now hearing statement from both sides, with a decision due in December. If the council were to follow the

auditor, the government would be forced to come up with a new plan taking the legal objections into account.

"As long as the procedure is under way, we do not wish to pre-empt any decision," said the Port Authority, pointing out that planned private investments will now be at risk because of "legal uncertainty".

"Doel2020 is delighted to see that our arguments were followed by the auditor," commented Jan Creve, spokesperson for the group. "We hope the Flemish government will now ... recognise the futility of this port expansion. Hundreds of people have been forced out of their homes for no reason."

Local authorities' budget shortfall twice as much as thought

The municipalities of Flanders have a total budget shortfall of €546 million – more than twice as much as previously thought, according to figures from the National Bank. Flemish budget minister Philippe Muyters immediately made it clear that he had no plans to provide automatic support for the municipalities from the region's coffers: "Everyone must take responsibility for themselves," he said. The federal and regional governments agreed last summer on a scheme for dividing budgetary responsibility for 2014, with the regions ready to finance any shortfall

in the municipalities. The problem now is not over the principle of financial aid, but the extent. Both Muyters and minister-president Kris Peeters disagreed with the original estimate of €260 million.

The Flemish parliament's finance committee will now pore over the National Bank's figures to find out how such a gap between estimate and reality could exist. "What methodology did they employ?" Muyters asked. "I have no doubt that the calculation itself is accurate, but did they take everything into account?" AH

Flemish businesses close deals in Angola

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters flew to Angola last week as part of a Belgian economic delegation. The aim of the mission was to boost local exports to Angola and help companies develop trading links with the emerging African country. Trade between Flanders and Africa is already following an upward trend, with exports from Flanders up 17% in 2012 compared to 2011. Angola plays an important role in the African economy as the second-largest oil exporting country (after Nigeria) and is one of the most important diamond producers in the world. Flanders, meanwhile, has a leading role in Belgium's trade with Angola, representing almost 93% of all trade.



Willy Versluyts, general manager of Brevisco, signs a trade agreement with Guiomar Antonio Dias of GEFI

With the help of Flanders Investment and Trade, some 67 Flemish companies took part in the trade mission. The main focus was on oil, gas and the diamond trade. Several deals have already been signed, including one involving

Ostend fishing specialist Brevisco and another with Belgacom subsidiary BICS. The Wijnegem-based construction company Frisomat has obtained the green light to build a 5,000-square-metre factory near the capital Luanda for TEC-DREAM-Technologia. Meanwhile, the Antwerp Port Authority has improved ties with Transnet, which manages seven commercial ports in Angola.

The most promising areas for foreign investment in Angola are infrastructure, agriculture and the service industry. Flanders Investment and Trade has opened a new office in Luanda to help develop further trade links. Derek Blyth

Politicians join Flemish Ironman on Leie bike ride

Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters and transport minister Hilde Crevits rode alongside triathlete Frederik Van Lierde, who recently won the Ironman World Championship in Hawaii, on a celebratory 40-kilometre bike ride along the river Leie. The tour last Saturday started in Van Lierde's home town of Menen in West Flanders, where locals lined up to get the athlete's autograph and see the cyclists on their way. Van Lierde has won several Ironman races, including Nice in 2012, though the Hawaii version is considered the most gruelling. The trio was joined on



Menen mayor Martine Fournier (left), Flemish transport minister Hilde Crevits (third from left) and Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters (second from right) join Ironman champ Frederik Van Lierde (centre) for a celebratory ride along the river Leie

the ride by Van Lierde's coach, Luc van Lierde, who has also twice won Ironman Hawaii, Menen mayor Martine Fournier and several friends and family of Van Lierde. "I am myself an amateur triathlete, so I have a huge amount of respect for the top titles Van Lierde has won," said Peeters. "We could have brought Frederik to Brussels, but we chose to go instead to Menen to do the bike ride with him." DB

Flanders extends South Africa science research programme

The Flemish Fund for Scientific Research (FWO) has renewed its agreement with the South African National Research Foundation to continue a joint scientific research programme. The bilateral agreement was signed in Johannesburg during Belgium's trade mission to Africa this week. The contract, worth €300,000 a year, focuses on fundamental research in exact applied social and human sciences. Because of its success, the FWO decided to renew the agreement for a further four years. "Our contacts with the South African National Research Foundation (NRF) have been very fruitful," said FWO secretary-general Elisabeth Monard. "We feel that they share the same passion for excellence and innovation as we have in Flanders. We are convinced that this co-operation will once again generate interesting and profound research results." Flemish innovation minister Ingrid Lieten was in Johannesburg for the signing of the agreement. "One of the most important principles in my scientific and innovation policy is to bring fundamental research closer to society," she said. "I have emphasised the importance of developing an international element to Flemish research. I am pleased that the means I have devoted to this policy have helped to turn the NRF into one of our strongest international partners." Minister Lieten also announced a new health-care week during the trip to South Africa. The joint venture, involving the Antwerp-based Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITG) and

the School of Public Health at the University of Western Cape in South Africa, will focus on the role of social innovation in improving public health care. The South African public health-care system is under severe pressure because of Aids and the spread of tuberculosis. The Flemish government plans to award research grants to local associations and municipalities that are adopting innovative approaches likely to improve the situation.

Lieten gave the example of small clinics that were being set up in South Africa to cut waiting times at hospitals by taking blood samples of Aids patients and administering drugs. "This showed how the community could become involved in organising its own health care," she said. DB

All in the mind

Exhibition tackles other big issues like magic, myth and religion

► continued from page 1

that the town's religious leaders had to think about how such people should be accommodated. Over time, this evolved into an enlightened form of care in the community, with patients lodging with families in the town rather than being locked up in institutions. Geel has become a model for the care and housing of the mentally handicapped and mentally ill, and it regularly receives visits from international healthcare workers keen to learn about its philosophy and methods.

Hoet's early contact with mental illness influenced his later work as a curator, and he became particularly interested in the relationship between art endorsed as art by the establishment and that made by "outsiders", such as psychiatric patients. "I've done exhibitions on this relationship several times before – in the Guislain Museum in Ghent, for instance – but I thought it would be even better to do it in the context of a city where this relationship is more evident," he explains. "The starting point was the context of Geel itself."

The exhibition sets out to examine the interaction between mythic art, created when magic and religion meet, outsider art and art as art. Rather than place work in one or other category, the intention is to draw out connections, affinities and parallels between the works. To do this, Hoet has presented each piece with very little supporting information.

"I put the exhibition together in such a way that you have difficulty seeing the difference between the art of outsiders and of noted artists. I did that to expand the way people look at the world."

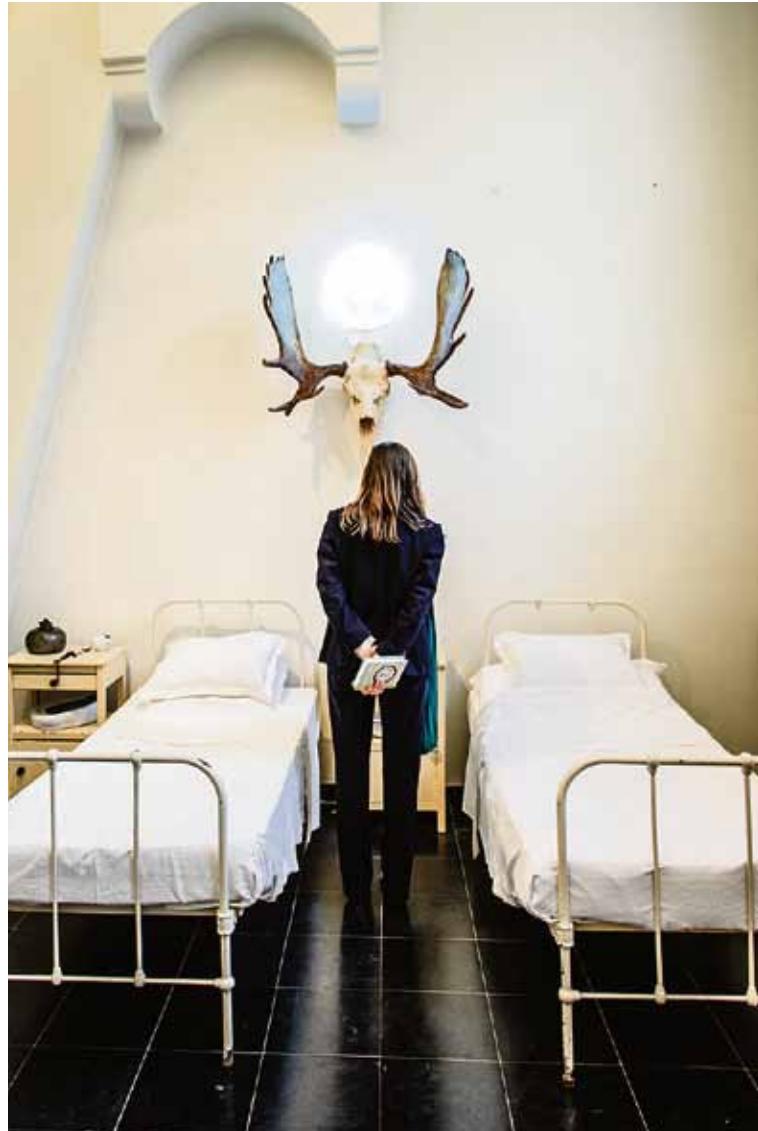
If that is frustrating, then his plan is working. "On your first approach, it seems to be a kind of chaos," he says. "Then you see the puzzle."

The puzzle is clearest in de Halle, the cultural centre on Geel's market square. The artworks are exhibited in a series of rooms much as they would be in a conventional gallery, with the exception of one or two pieces that are on the ceiling (this is an exhibition where it pays to look up).

Some of the work is easy to place.



Curator Jan Hoet, who grew up in Geel and was the founding director of SMAK, Ghent's Museum for Contemporary Art



There are African totems and a church gargoyle, which clearly come from the mythic end of the spectrum. Then there are works by Pablo Picasso (*pictured above right*), Paul Klee and René Magritte (*pictured on cover*), clearly from the art establishment. And in the world of outsider art, Adolf Wölfli and Augustin Lesage are iconic names in the concept of *art brut*.

But most of the other works do not give up their origins so easily. While it may be impossible to stop trying to put them into neat categories, the trick is to pause long enough simply to look at them. That's when the connections start to fall into place, and where Hoet has provided a helping hand. For example, "The Fallen Angel" by French symbolist painter Odilon Redon is placed opposite a head of Buddha from Thailand, drawing out their common relationship with the infinite. And Günther Uecker's "Structure", a pattern of nails driven into a board, stands above a Congolese totem bristling with a more varied selection of iron.

Then there is the contrast of "The Old Man" by French painter Eugène Leroy and "The Head of John the Baptist on a Golden Dish" by Dutchman Siebe Wiemer Glastra. Both are portraits executed in deeply layered oil paint, yet one has the feeling of carefully considered

technique, while the other seems to come from a compulsive working of the material.

Throughout the selection the obsessive detail and symmetry that is one of the hallmarks of outsider art finds echoes in the

is a little hard to put it out of your mind. Learning that "Snake" by the late Flemish artist Hugo Debaere is made from wire mesh, rubber and elephant dung hardly helps.

At the other end of the aisle, Jan Fabre's "The Problem of Sisyphus" stands bathed in a pool of light: Three turtles pushing a huge marble brain along the ground. Meanwhile, Dutch artist Maria Roosen has arranged brightly coloured glass cubes around the feet of the reliquary said to contain the remains of Saint Dymphna's sarcophagus. Their rounded edges suggest giant, half-sucked boiled sweets, like the naive tributes of children.

The nearby Gasthuis began life as a hostel for pilgrims, before becoming the city's principal hospital. Now a museum, its collection describes the life of the nuns who used to run the hospital and the broader context of psychiatric care in the city.

Just as the mentally ill are integrated

“People who are not involved in the art world have been touched by the work and the context in which I’ve put it”

more conventional painting, as does a sense of sexual obsession and an apparent urge to shape, mask or obscure faces. Is one kind of art feeding into another, or is there an element of the outsider in all artists?

Finally, there are works whose power seems unconnected with who produced them and why. My own favourite is an untitled, undated painting on newspaper by French artist Michel Nedjar, which shows a face, or perhaps a skull, in colours that speak of rust, blood and bone. At two other locations, *Middle Gate* goes back to the beginning of Geel's story. In Saint Dymphna's church, the art is placed discretely, although once you register that there is a large serpent hanging over the altar, it

into the community, so the *Middle Gate* art has been integrated with the installations of the museum. And just as the selection at de Halle challenges notions about art, so this part of *Middle Gate* destabilises accepted notions of the museum and the civic history it presents.

Sometimes the infiltration is so subtle that you risk missing individual works completely, such as Wim Delvoye's Delft-pattern circular saw blades propped up in a dresser in the kitchen. The same goes for fellow

Flemish artist Stanislas Lahaut's "Disappear", an unlit neon sign that lies on top of a large silver reliquary in the Saint Dymphna room. Not even the museum's glass cabinets are sacred.

At other times, the intrusion is brash and comic, such as François-Marie Banier's huge black-and-white photograph of a pair of Goths that graces the mother superior's room. Then there is the sick room, which features Enrique Martí's "Angelica" and "Alberto": heavily tattooed, naked life-size mannequins armed with combat knives. Here, as elsewhere, the show may be too much for those of a nervous disposition or young children, although when I visited, the families of Geel seemed to be taking it all in their stride.

The final stop in the exhibition is Kunsthuis Yellow Art, near the present psychiatric centre. Formerly Hoet's family home, it is now an art centre where patients and artists can collaborate. If anything, the tone of the art becomes darker here, and for the first time acquires a hint of distress and confinement.

Los Angeles artist Jon Pylypchuk, the artist-in-residence, has a visceral feeling for materials, for example in the aptly named "I Have Reduced You To Juice and Bones," while Jean-Pierre Raynaud's "Psycho-Object Tower of Babel" recalls the kind of institution to which Geel is meant to be an alternative. Venture into the attic, and things become distinctly nightmarish.

Even with its challenging approach and sometimes transgressive notions, Hoet says that reactions to *Middle Gate Geel* have been positive. "To my surprise, many people who are not involved in the art world have been touched directly by the combination of the work and the context in which I've put it. They understand straight away."

Until 22 December

Across Geel
► www.dewerft.be

WEEK IN
BUSINESS

Food ▶ Heinz

Unions at Heinz's production facility in Turnhout expressed concern in light of the news that fast-food chain McDonald's will no longer be ordering ketchup from the company. The plant, which employs 145 people, ships 45% of its ketchup production to McDonald's. The burger chain cancelled the contract when Bernardo Hees, former CEO of Burger King, took over the helm of Heinz in June.

Logistics
▶ Katoen Natie

The Antwerp-based logistical services provider has opened a new €35 million warehouse complex in Tallinn, Estonia, in a move designed to create a bridgehead for a later advance on Russia. Goods shipped to Tallinn on behalf of Katoen Natie's clients will then be moved by road and rail to Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

Shipping
▶ Port of Antwerp

The port of Antwerp saw 143 million tonnes of freight in the first nine months of the year, an increase of 3% on the same period in 2012, the Port Authority reported. The increase was largely a result of 32% growth in bulk liquid goods, including chemicals, crude oil and petroleum derivatives.

Supermarkets
▶ Colruyt

Supermarket chain Colruyt is launching a home delivery service for its non-food brands DreamLand and ColliShop. Deliveries will be made at a date and time selected by the client, and payments can be made by bank card, credit card or bank transfer.

Telecoms
▶ Belgacom

The federal parliament's infrastructure committee has called on the parliament to order an external audit into a possible conflict of interest relating to the sale of a building owned by Belgacom to a company of which CEO Didier Bellens is a director. The board of Belgacom previously carried out an internal investigation that found no fault with the transaction.

Telecoms ▶ Telenet

The Mechelen-based media company gained a net 32,000 new clients in the third quarter for its "triple-play" packages offering internet, telephone and television – the largest growth since 2009. Earnings were up in the quarter by 12% to €410 million.

Mediahuis joint venture approved

Authorities are allowing the merger of Flanders' biggest media outlets

Alan Hope

Mediahuis, the joint venture combining the newspapers of Corelio, including *De Standaard*, *Het Nieuwsblad* and *Flanders Today*, and Concentra, including *Gazet van Antwerpen* and *Het Belang van Limburg*, has been approved by the federal competition authorities, following concessions by the partners. Those include a pledge to maintain all titles in operation for a minimum of five years, with an independent editorial team for each.

"All of our titles will have a complete team of journalists and correspondents, directed by their own editor," Corelio said in a statement. Each editorial floor will have a full-time chief editor responsible for each title, as well as an editorialist, chief sub and political or regional editor. In the case of the



Gazet van Antwerpen, Mediahuis is committed to maintaining full coverage of the Antwerp area for both readers and advertisers.

In the joint venture, Corelio holds 62% and Concentra 38%. According to Corelio CEO Luc Missorten, the increase in scale offered by the

move is "absolutely necessary for the brands to remain competitive in today's rapidly changing and increasingly international media market." Mediahuis will be officially inaugurated on 1 November, with the first board meeting on 6 November, Corelio said.

Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten said she was pleased at the decision but "concerned" about the future of editorial quality and diversity. "It is in the interests of readers and of the papers themselves that the titles retain full editorial independence from each other," she said. The Flemish Association of Journalists warned that the fusion would result in cuts in staffing of the various titles and lead to "an impoverishment" of news reporting in Flanders.

Next decade will see 10,000 more jobs at Brussels Airport

Brussels Airport expects to have as many as 10,000 job vacancies over the next 10 years, according to CEO Arnaud Feist, speaking this week at the opening of the new Brussels Airport House. The House, on the fourth floor of the passenger terminal at Zaventem, will gather together in one place all information on jobs, training and mobility in and around the airport.

The House is a joint effort of the Flemish training and employment agency VDAB and their Brussels counterpart Actiris in an effort to attract more people from Brussels to work in and around the airport in Zaventem. Brussels has the highest unemployment rate in Belgium, and the airport, Feist said, offered

numerous positions for lower-skilled workers.

Despite the number of vacancies on offer, the airport has trouble finding people to fill them, Feist said. Many applicants are hindered by language requirements, night-time hours or the lack of public transport outside of normal commuter periods. Brussels Airport currently offers 60,000 jobs, 20,000 of them on site. Along with the two employment agencies, the new Brussels Airport House involves the co-operation of the Flemish chamber of commerce Voka, public transport authority De Lijn and Airport Academy, as well as regional and provincial authorities. AH

Ghent port opens visitor centre

Flemish transport minister Hilde Crevits officially opened the new visitors centre for the port of Ghent last week. The centre is located on the Rigakai north of the city centre.

The new facility is intended to form a single meeting place for the 15,000 visits to the port every year by companies, organisations, schools and foreign embassies. The centre, a striking construction in glass and wood, includes a main auditorium for more than 100 people and a terrace looking out over the harbour's main dock. The location is "a symbolic place because this is the frontier between the city and the contemporary port," said port affairs alderman



Matthias De Clercq, who also chairs the port authority. "This is a visiting card for the port and an important addition to the port infrastructure," Crevits said. The centre cost €2 million to construct. AH

Brussels Airlines to serve meals by De Karmeliet chef

Starting next week, business class passengers on long-haul flights with Brussels Airlines will be able to enjoy dishes prepared by the three-Michelin star kitchen of Bruges restaurant De Karmeliet. The airline said the move would strengthen its position as an ambassador of Belgium.

"We will work with renowned Belgian star chefs who will create an entire menu based on local specialities from their province to show our passengers the best their region has to offer," explained VP for customer experience Anne Tricot. De Karmeliet chef Geert Van Hecke is the first. Born in 1956, he studied at the famed hotel school

Ter Duinen in Koksijde before going on to work for top French chef Alain Chapel. He opened De Karmeliet in Bruges in 1983, on the site of a former convent. The restaurant won its first Michelin star in 1985; the second came in 1989 and the third in 1996. The restaurant is one of only three in Belgium with three stars, all of them in Flanders.

Van Hecke's selection for Brussels Airlines clients includes regional products such as smoked eel from Damme and North Sea grey shrimp, as well as a drinks menu including Brugse Tripel beer. AH

Peeters meets with Volvo Cars boss

The government of Flanders will provide financing of €2 million for training support to Volvo Cars Ghent, Kris Peeters has announced. Last week, the minister-president met Li Shifu, chairman of the Chinese Zhejiang Geely Holding Group, which owns Volvo.

Volvo plans training programmes worth €19 million in Ghent between now and 2015, while also investing €4 million in machinery and equipment. The €2 million training subsidy is conditional on Volvo maintaining employment in Ghent. Peeters also outlined the government's €1.16 billion programme to improve Flanders' competitiveness

on salary costs, employment, R&D and structural reduction of taxes on business. And he presented the government's plans for a strategic research centre for manufacturing industry, part of the SALK relaunch programme for Limburg province. From next year, the research centre will advise businesses on new developments in product and production technology, bringing together researchers from existing centres, like Flanders Drive, the mechatronics centre FMTC and the manufacturing arm of the technology research centre Sirris. AH

Market leader
Cartamundi starts card production in Japan

Cartamundi, one of the world's leading producers of playing cards, has announced a joint venture with Amada Printing of Japan, home of some of the world's most popular collectible cards. Under the terms of the 50-50 agreement, Amada will produce Cartamundi cards in Japan, at its factory near Tokyo. Cartamundi, based in Turnhout, produces conventional playing cards but also themed cards and collectible sets, the latter of which are usually linked to promotional events such as the release of a new movie. Past deals have included the production of cards for Disney, James Bond and Pixar films. The group employs 1,200 people worldwide and had turnover of €152 million in 2011.

Amada produces collectible cards, including tie-ins for the world's fourth largest toy manufacturer, Bandai, maker of Power Rangers and Pac-Man. Amada activities, which will become part of the joint venture, made sales last year of \$28 million (€20.3 million). Cartamundi now has production facilities in nine countries, including Germany, Brazil and the US. AH

A sea of fans and lights

Concert organisers and developers team up to create revolutionary app

Marc Maes

A ground-breaking app that takes the interaction between artists and fans to a whole new level was premiered in Flanders this month. A crowd of 23,000 witnessed the world premiere of the MilkLight app, which uses coloured light emitted by smartphones, at the Antwerp Sportpaleis concert venue. One in 10 audience members, which amounted to 2,500 people, used their smart devices during the show. According to Philip Van Gasse from developer JF Oceans, the effect was overwhelming. The application used a stroboscope effect – through the devices' flash LED – and five colours. Those using the app were evenly spread throughout the venue, he says, which "resulted in a nice visual effect".

"This was the first time a smartphone app has been so fully synchronous," says Jan Vereecke from concert promoter PSE Belgium. "Now it's time to fine-tune and perfect."

The free MilkLight app for smart devices was debuted during a concert by the Flemish electronic duo Milk Inc. The app allows those on stage to control light output from the smartphone, so the audience actually creates a light show that's in sync with the performance.

"Their concerts are always interactive," says Vereecke. The organisers put the stage in the middle of the venue, boosting audience participation, so "it was the ideal environment to test a new concept to enhance audience participation."

MilkLight – available for iOS and Android systems – was developed by JF Oceans, based in Kontich, Antwerp province. The company specialises in visual business intelligence. It will be available in app stores as Tifo 2 Me. In sports circles, "tifo" refers to the short dance routines or cheers fans perform in sync during sports events or games. "And that's exactly what the application does," says Van Gasse. "We developed an algorithm that



© Ivan Ruck

Fans use the Milklight app to light up Milk, Inc's recent concert in Antwerp

allows us to steer smartphones via inaudible sounds," he explains.

One of the biggest challenges in developing the app was the wireless infrastructure. Using Bluetooth or wifi to control, say, 100 devices was easy, but for a crowd of 20,000, the infrastructure became very expensive and unstable. "We found the solution by uniting different disciplines," says Van Gasse.

Vereecke plans to use the application during the upcoming Night of the Proms concerts in Antwerp and the Netherlands. The app will replace the traditional Proms lights, and the organisers are also considering lighting up the displays during specific performance passages. "The maximum effect is created when the venue's lights are out, as they are during Milk Inc's single 'Blackout,'" explains Vereecke, "but the idea is to also dim the stage lights and replace them with the audience's phones."

Both JF Oceans and PSE Belgium are keen to take

the technology to the next level and are looking beyond the world of just apps. They filmed a demo of the app's effect in Antwerp, which they will present to organisers and artists.

A next step could be to take the decoder component from the smartphone and incorporate it into merchandise. "Imagine having T-shirts or hoodies with LED lights flashing in sync during a concert," says Van Gasse. Vereecke sees opportunities in events such as next summer's football World Cup, with "tifosi", or fans, dressed in jerseys equipped with LED lights.

MilkLight was the result of a year's research and testing. Building a robust app that could operate interference-free and in very different circumstances was crucial. "In that aspect, the Milk Inc event really was a baptism by fire," Vereecke says. "It was a demanding live production, and I'm happy to say that the app withstood the test."

► www.tifo2me.com

As rates increase, new HIV prevention plan launched

Federal public health minister Laurette Onkelinx has launched a wide-ranging package of new measures to combat HIV in Belgium. Flanders' centre for sexual health Sensoa has welcomed the plan and hopes it will survive future budget cuts. "We will monitor the realisation of the plan step by step," says spokesperson Boris Cruyssaert, "and make sure that as many of the proposed measures get translated into real policy."

Although perception of HIV and Aids has radically changed over the past decade from a merciless killer to a more or less "controllable chronic disease", the best-known of all sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) continues to infect people and to drastically affect lives across the country.

Belgium has one of the highest HIV rates in the EU. Every day, three people in this country are infected with the virus, despite strong prevention efforts. "We have to go for zero," said Onkelinx, announcing the new plan earlier this month. Sandra Van den Eynde from Sensoa and Dirk Vogelaers from the Aids reference centre at Ghent University Hospital spoke at the press conference, as did Flemish health minister Jo Vandeurzen.

Sensoa said it was pleased to see that the plan bundles prevention efforts and charts out a new course for the future. "Central in the plan is the concept of combination prevention: the collective deployment of different prevention strategies that enforce each other," says Cruyssaert.



Princess Mathilde (left) and Flemish health minister Jo Vandeurzen (centre) at the launch of Belgium's new HIV prevention plan

The minister's plan zooms in on two population groups who are at higher risk of being exposed to the virus – immigrants and men who have sex with men. The plan avoids the term "homosexuals" because sexual preferences don't always neatly correlate with labels like "straight" or "gay". The plan consists of 58 concrete measures. Public health policy will, for instance, promote the use of condoms to an extent it hasn't before. But the measures for the establishment of a national screening policy make up the heart of the plan. The policy should ensure that everybody, regardless of financial, administrative or legal restrictions, can be screened and treated for HIV.

This national screening policy goes to the crux of the HIV and Aids problem in Belgium: for 42% of all HIV-positives, the diagnosis comes too late.

Those who aren't aware they have HIV – years can pass before the first Aids symptoms manifest themselves – can involuntarily transmit the virus when they have unprotected sex.

According to Cruyssaert, the prevention strategies combine biomedical, behavioural, societal and structural approaches. "On the behavioural side," he says, "we particularly welcome the initiation of new, specific campaigns aimed at high-risk groups to get tested on a regular basis."

One of the social prevention measures is the withdrawal of travel restrictions for people with HIV. Minister Onkelinx described those as "highly discriminating and entirely in opposition with human rights".

On the structural health policy level, the plan includes measures ensuring that HIV medication, like Aids inhibitors, are affordable and easily accessible to anyone needing them. "An important element here is the reimbursement of HIV tests and other STD tests and the possibility to take them quickly and anonymously," the Sensoa spokesperson says.

But plans are just that. With more budget restrictions in sight and a total of 58 measures divided over different political competences – federal and Flemish – realisation of the HIV plan is likely to be the real challenge. **Senne Starckx**

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Cholesterol med suppresses organ rejection

Researchers at the University of Leuven, in collaboration with Stanford University in the US, discovered that the common cholesterol-modifying drug atorvastatin can also prevent organ rejection in transplant patients. The researchers first detected 11 genes that cause the rejection of hearts, livers, kidneys and lungs, then identified medicine that affect these genes. After the American researchers proved the hypothesis in mice, the Leuven researchers analysed medical data of 2,500 patients who have undergone kidney transplants. Some of the patients also took atorvastatin to lower their cholesterol or for heart-related conditions. These patients had 30% less risk of rejection of a new kidney.

New software tracks genetic diseases

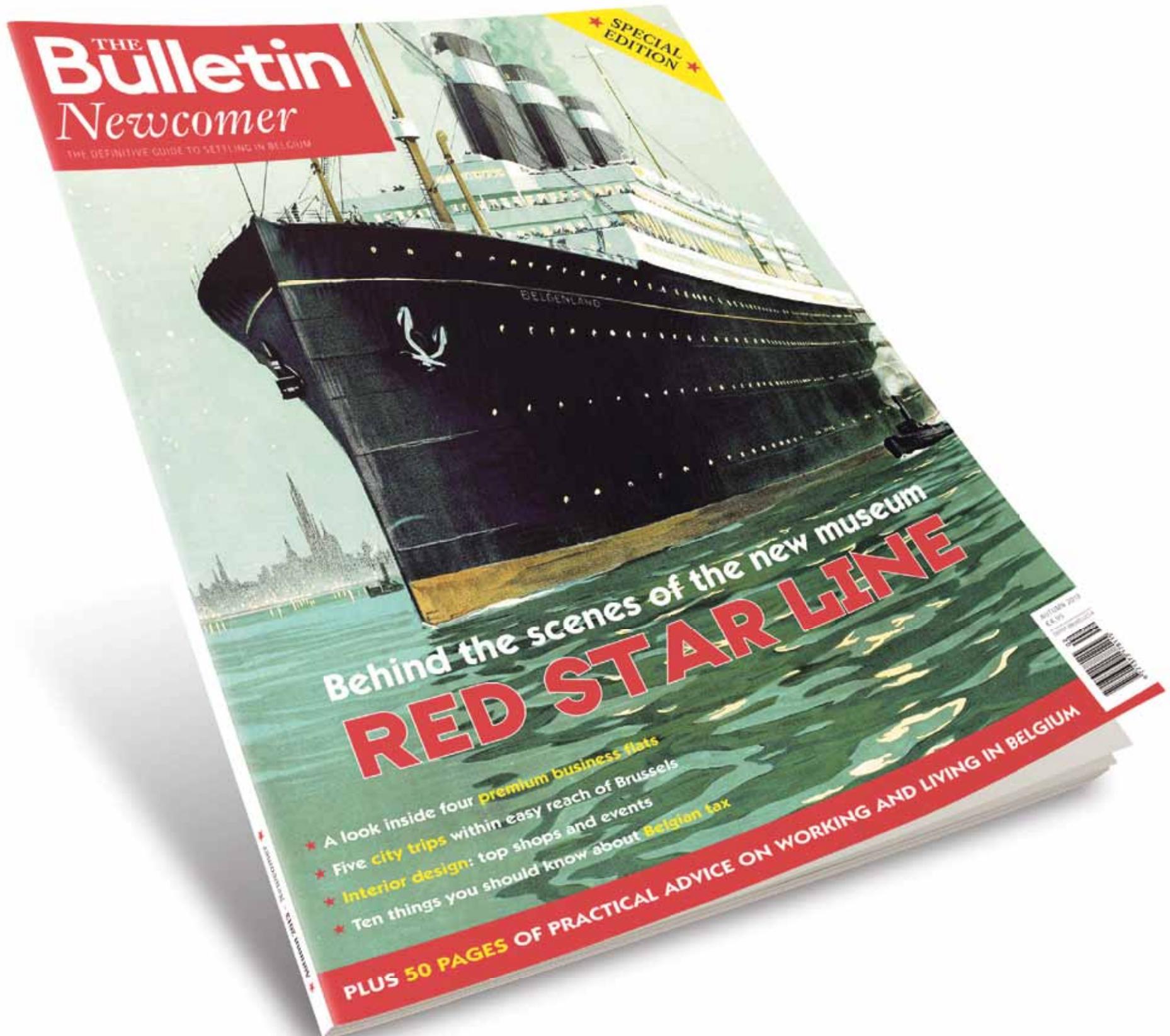
Researchers of the Ghent ICT research institute iMinds and the University of Leuven have developed new software that is 20 times more accurate than the current methods to detect genetic diseases. The artificial intelligence technology, called eXtasy, could mean a breakthrough in diagnosing hereditary diseases.

eXtasy makes a diagnosis on the basis of the gigantic amount of data or "big data" provided by deciphering the human genome. The genomes of two healthy people have about four million mutations, most of which are harmless. But a single malignant mutation can cause a genetic disorder. The software combines the complex data to determine how significant a certain mutation is for a specific disease. The data could consist of networks of interacting proteins and gradations of how harmful a mutation is for a specific protein.

Orchestra uses tablet to follow music scores

The musicians of the Leuven Alumni Orchestra no longer need to turn the pages of their music scores during concerts thanks to an innovative tablet computer programme. When the conductor points to a spot on his digital music score, which is displayed on a large console that looks like a huge tablet, the normal-sized tablets of musicians will scroll automatically to the same place. The new software is developed by SCORA, a company founded by Jan Rosseel, who is a trombonist in the orchestra. Rosseel received subsidies from the Flemish Agency for Innovation in Science and Technology to develop the programme. **Andy Furniere**

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A solution for African farmers

Antwerp students design a DIY cooling system to preserve produce

Andy Furniere

Every year, the US-based Biomimicry 3.8 Institute challenges students from around the world to come up with innovative solutions to real-world problems. This year, participating students were tasked with improving water access and management.

Two Antwerp students rose to the challenge with a new kind of evaporation cooling system. Arne Pauwels and Ellen Van Steen designed a cheap, user-friendly and solar-powered evaporation cooling system to keep fruit and vegetables fresh. Primarily targeted at small-scale African farmers, Wakati drastically reduces the water use of evaporation coolers from 350 litres to a maximum of five litres a week.

Pauwels and Van Steen are both Master's students from Antwerp University's product development programme, and with Wakati they have come second in this year's international Biomimicry Student Design Challenge.

Wakati is essentially a do-it-yourself kit to build a climate chamber for farmers. It uses only locally available materials and costs just \$10 (€7). This makes it five times cheaper than the evaporation coolers conventionally used.

According to 2013 estimates from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN, 45% of the world's annual fruit and vegetable production is affected by food loss and waste. This makes conserving fruit and vegetables in hot climates



The Wakati evaporation cooler is a cheap system that allows African farmers to keep fruit and veg fresh for longer in a hot climate

a vital element in the battle against famine and poverty.

The inspiration for Wakati came to Pauwels during a trip to Ethiopia, when he learned about the huge post-harvest losses that result from inadequate means of preservation and the lack of cheap solutions for the problem. And Ethiopia is by no means unique. Across Africa, many farmers lack refrigerators because they don't have money to buy one or for continuous access to electricity.

Evaporation coolers, which cool air through the evaporation of water, offer a solution in some cases. But aside from their extreme water use, they also pose hygiene problems and are prohibitively expensive, with prices starting at \$50 (€36).

Wakati means "time" in Swahili, and time is crucial to its functioning. The student-designed cooling system decreases vegetable and fruit loss to 20% and prolongs the shelf life by up to a week. The most expensive parts of Wakati are the solar panel and fan.

Last year, Pauwels established the non-profit company Wakati, and one of its first feats was testing the cooling system in Morocco. This isn't Pauwels' first success: Last year, he won the Belgian James Dyson Award for young design engineers with Baridi, a transportable climate chamber for African farmers.

► www.wakati.org

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Earlier promotion of maths, science needed

Many students develop a negative perception of mathematics, technology and science between the age of eight and 11. That is the main conclusion of a survey in 10 countries, presented during the SECURE education conference in Mechelen this week. SECURE, which stands for Science Education Curriculum Research, is an EU project that provides research data that assists policymakers and educators in improving their curricula in the so-called STEM studies (science, technology, engineering and maths).

Education experts at Mechelen recommended promotion of STEM studies earlier in schools through practical lessons and experiments. The survey also showed that students are most motivated by active study methods that go beyond books.

Erasmus exchange at all-time high

Figures released by Flemish education minister Pascal Smet show that a record 4,001 Flemish students in higher education participated in the Erasmus exchange programme in the academic year 2011-2012. That means that more than one in 10 students took part in the exchange programme, which sends students to study in foreign countries. Smet's goal is to have one in three students travelling abroad for part of their studies by 2020.

Students who take part in Erasmus come mostly from the social sciences, justice and business programmes, and the three most popular destinations are Spain, France and Germany. The government hopes to encourage more students from teaching, maths and health and welfare studies to take part.

Pakistan sends students to UHasselt

Pakistan's ministry of education will finance the studies of its students who register for Master's or PhD degrees in transportation, statistics and management at Hasselt University (UHasselt). To prevent a brain drain, the co-operation agreement also states that the graduates must return to their home country.

The driving force behind the collaboration, which is unique in Belgium, is professor Ansar Yasar of UHasselt's Institute for Mobility. Yasar, who has Pakistani roots, acquired his PhD in engineering in Leuven. "This deal offers Pakistani youngsters the ideal chance to excel in their later careers," he said. Twelve Pakistani students have already started this academic year at Hasselt thanks to the programme. **Andy Furniere**

American College to reopen for St Damien Project



Next year, the American College of the University of Leuven (KUL), which closed in 2010, will reopen as the new home of the St Damien Community and St Damien Project. The building will primarily provide accommodation to students and researchers from the United States who specialise in theology and religious studies, philosophy and canon law. The St Damien Project, which also includes a sabbatical and summer programme, will strengthen the historical links between Leuven and the US.

The American College was founded in 1857 by bishops from the US and was the first American seminary in Europe. The purpose was to train young Flemings for missionary activities in the US. Later, it became a hotspot for American seminarians who wanted to study at KUL.

Because the number of American guests steadily decreased, the seminary was closed three years ago. Until last year, KUL students and members of the Mater Dei religious community were still living in part of the building, located in Leuven's city centre, but it now stands empty.

Not for long, however. KUL is preparing the renovation of 141 student rooms, three studios and an apartment in the American College. About half of the accommodation is meant for American guests and for other special programmes, such as the co-operation with Mater Dei, with the rest available for all students and researchers at KUL.

In the Rector's Residence, a wing of the American College, 13 studios and an office space will be furnished. These living spaces are meant for those taking part in the new St Damien sabbatical

programme, which will start in 2015. Participants can stay for a maximum of one year at the American College and follow courses in their own study area or choose a number of other courses offered by KUL and the francophone Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL). The St Damien summer programme will also start at the American College in 2015. International professors will be able to take part in an academic programme during the summer months, with the focus on theology.

"The programme is named after Saint Damien of Molokai, because he personifies the strong ties between Leuven and the United States," says Lieven Boeve, dean of the faculty of theology and religious studies. Father Damien, the Flemish priest Jozef De Veuster, is venerated as a saint because of his care for people with leprosy on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. In the US Capitol, each state has a statue representing a famous resident, and Hawaii chose Father Damien. He is buried at the Saint Antonius church in Leuven, close to the American College.

The St Damien Project has been established by KUL and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in co-operation with the UCL and the Episcopal Conference of Belgium. **AF**

UGent students begin mentoring course

Ghent University (UGent) has launched a coaching and diversity course that teaches students skills needed to relate to people from different backgrounds. Students mentor first-years from different target groups and help them adapt to student life in Ghent as part of the programme. With the optional course, the university wants to integrate the expertise of the current mentoring projects into its curriculum.

Forty Bachelor and Master's students have already registered for the new course. In the current pilot phase, the course is only available to students in the faculties of literature, philosophy, law, engineering sciences, architecture, economics and business administration. From the next academic year, it will be open to students in all faculties.

Students will learn about concepts like coaching, intercultural communication, diversity and disability awareness. This knowledge should help prepare them to mentor 77 first-year university students from disadvantaged backgrounds – for instance, non-native Dutch speakers, those with a disability, students with atypical educational backgrounds such as vocational tracks and students from minority groups.

The mentors will guide the students around the campus, help them with study methods and just be there to listen when necessary. They are expected to reflect on their own learning experience and will be evaluated by their teachers.

The course is part of a wider strategic plan at GentU around Community Service Learning. This is an educational approach that encourages students to apply their academic knowledge and skills in a social context to increase their sense of civic engagement. **AF**



© Anja Avcamp

WEEK IN
ACTIVITIES

It's a good week for anyone planning to redecorate their house soon, with two lifestyle and home decor expos.

Woonestetika

It's the 35th edition of the biggest interior design fair in Flanders. Furniture, materials, workshops and professional advice. **1-4 & 8-11 November, Limburghal, Genk**

► www.woonestetika.com

Countryside

Lifestyle fair for stylish country living. (Think Ralph Lauren meets Martha Stewart.) Culinary and decorating demos from *Nest* magazine, travel, crafts, clothing, furniture, champagne bar. **31 October to 3 November, Flanders Expo, Ghent**

► www.countryside.be

Cyclocross season is well underway across Flanders! There are two big races this weekend.

Koppenbergcross

Five races starting at 10.00, including Women's at 13.45 and Elite (Men) at 15.00. **1 November, across Oudenaarde**

► www.koppenbergcross.be

Cyclocross Zonhoven

The Elite category races at 15.00, preceded by Beginners, Junior and Promising. **3 November, Terrein Molenheide, Zonhoven**

Finally, for the more culture-minded...

Opening of War & Trauma: Medical Care in WWI

Double exhibition in Ypres and Ghent focusing on the development of medical and psychiatric care on the battlefield and at home during the First World War. Military command and medical facilities were completely unprepared for the scale of human casualties. The exhibition in Ypres focuses on the organisation of general medical care at the front. Shellshock was first recognised and diagnosed during the First World War but was poorly understood. The Dr Guislain Museum, dedicated to the history of psychiatry, traces the development of psychiatric care for soldiers between 1914 and the present through 100 years of armed conflict. **1 November to 30 June, 2014, In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres and Dr Guislain Museum, Ghent**

► www.inflandersfields.be

Palace on the Meir

Starting on 3 November, visitors can tour the salons of the 18th-century mansion, once home to Napoleon and William of Orange, on Sundays, with a self-guided tour via brochure. Admission of €6 includes a praline. There is also a kids' brochure with a scavenger hunt.

► www.paleisopdemeir.be

Return to the wild

Nature agency aims to expand the valuable Grote Nete Wood

Toon Lambrechts

Tim Pauwels gets his boots from the back of the car. Not a bad idea, because it rained heavily yesterday and the waters of the river Grote Nete are high. We are in the Griesbroek, a nature reserve in Balen in Antwerp province. The small paths lead past several ponds and pools before we meet the Grote Nete, not so big in fact but still larger than the Kleine Nete. The rivers merge in Lier and continue their flow simply as the Nete. It's these rivers that have shaped the ecology and the landscape of the southern Kempen, an area that can roughly be defined as the northern areas of the provinces of Antwerp and Limburg.

A little further on lies a stretch of land that looks very inhospitable. The trees, mainly black alder, stand with their feet in the water, with their branches so intertwined that with the best will in the world, passing through seems impossible. This type of forest, carr, occurs on very wet soils and is what makes the Grote Nete valley so unique. Carr forests are very rare in Flanders, and in the rest of Europe, thanks to human interference in the watercourses. The water of the Grote Nete looks rusty brown due to the sand, which is high in iron oxide, explains Pauwels, co-ordinator of the Grote Nete Wood visitor centre. "Twenty years ago, the water quality of the Grote Nete, like everywhere in Flanders, was particularly bad, mainly through the release of excess manure. It was a time when slicks of foam floated on rivers that were almost dead.

"Because of this, the carr forests along the Grote Nete were left intact and have never been converted to



© Win Dickx

The Grote Nete valley is a mixed and valuable area of nature with good quality water and woods full of life

farmland. With the improvement of the water quality the woods have also recovered, and that's why we have so many of these types of habitat here. The water quality is currently very good here and the woods are full of life again."

The presence of unique carr forests led to Europe coming up with support. Through the Life project that supports conservation and nature development in Europe, Flemish conservation agency Natuurpunt and its partners get funds to join up the valley's fragmented wild areas of forest. But its ambition reaches further: It should be possible to go beyond the area of the valley and create a nature area of 1,200 hectares, spanning the municipalities of Balen, Mol, Meerhout, Geel and Ham, under the name Grote Nete Wood.

Further on we find ourselves suddenly in a totally different landscape: another nature reserve,

the Belse Heide in the municipality of Geel. It's full of oak interspersed with spruce; autumn is at its best here. After a short walk through the forest we arrive at a spot that looks like a desert, with sand dunes that are moved naturally by the wind through the landscape. This is how the area must have looked in a distant past.

After a brief walk we come to a very uncommon sight for a nature reserve: A rather large piece of forest has been cut, and only the stumps of the trees remain. Here the planted forest has been cleared to make way for more natural moorland. "That was not easily accepted by the public," says Pauwels. "Even for me it was a shock when I saw it for the first time. But look, there are already rare plants germinated from seeds that may have been lying underground for decades."

The Grote Nete valley is a very valuable area for nature, a mix of

habitats such as alluvial carr forests, heath, sand dunes, grassland and marsh. Rare animals such as the black woodpecker and the kingfisher are at home here. "Our hope is that the otter and the beaver will return; these animals are the symbol of our project. Already a beaver has been seen around here," says Pauwels.

It's just a taste of what is to come. Natuurpunt has ambitious plans for the region, says Stefan Versweyveld, head of the agency's projects department. "Natuurpunt and its predecessors have been active in this area for 20 years. We manage a lot of nature reserves, but these are still very fragmented. It's quite a long valley, so we looked for a joint project. Eventually, there will be a continuous area where you can walk for two full days in the wild.

"As important as the new nature, though, is involving people in this story. We want to show that it is possible, even in a densely populated region like Flanders, to create large natural areas where there is room for both man and nature. The Nete runs through several villages, but the residents often don't know it well enough. We can certainly be proud of our nature here in the Kempen." The Life project runs for six years, but there's no need to wait that long: Already there is a series of walks through the various nature reserves, including three "Wild Walks", a foretaste of what is coming. The visitor centre in Meerhout is a good starting point, but throughout the region there are walks, cycle routes and bridleways. Wild Flanders awaits you.

► www.natuurpunt.be

Robyn Boyle

BITE

Vol-au-vent

As if chunks of chicken, meatballs and mushrooms worked into a thick, creamy sauce weren't dreamy enough, this dish puts it all into the centre of a light and fluffy puff pastry. While the French name, meaning "windblown", calls to mind something dainty and weightless, vol-au-vent is about as rich and heavy as they come. It's a real Flemish classic, for which grandmothers across the region have been perfecting their recipe for years. Here's one that I recommend, just one of many ways to create this oh-so-perfect dish to keep you warm during the cold winter months.

Ingredients (4 people)

1 kg whole chicken
200 g minced beef/pork
4 pre-made puff pastries
200 g mushrooms
2 carrots
2 onions
2 large leeks
120 g butter (sauce) + a pat of butter
150 g flour
Juice of 1/2 a lemon
2 eggs
1 dl cream
Salt, pepper
Dried thyme, bay leaves
Bread crumbs
Fresh parsley (optional)

Preparation

Chicken stock: Roughly chop the carrots, onions and leeks and toss them into a large, deep pot together with the whole raw chicken, a few sprigs of thyme and a couple of bay leaves. Add about 2 litres of water to cover, and allow to cook on a medium fire for at least two hours, or until the meat is falling off the bones. Remove the chicken and set aside to cool. Strain the stock to remove all the vegetables and allow it to further reduce to 1 litre.

*Tip: If time allows, set the stock in the refrigerator overnight. A layer of fat will accumulate on top, which you can then easily remove and throw away if you prefer to cook with a lighter stock.

Meatballs: Use your hands to mix the minced meat and eggs with enough bread crumbs to keep the meatballs intact. Season with salt and pepper, and then roll the meat mixture into small balls. Cook the balls for a few minutes in the strained stock over a medium heat.

Cut the mushrooms into quarters. Melt a pat of butter in a pan and cook the mushrooms until soft. Set aside.

Carefully pick all the meat from the carcass of the chicken, and shred into small pieces.

Sauce: Make a roux for the sauce using 120 g of butter and 150 g of flour. Cook over a medium heat, whisking vigorously all the while. Slowly

pour in the chicken stock, while continuing to whisk into a thick yet fluid sauce. Bind with cream until you reach the desired consistency. Add the prepared mushrooms, chicken and meatballs to the sauce. Sprinkle in some fresh lemon juice, mix well and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Puff pastries: Use a knife to gently hollow out the pre-made pastries, but keep the top. Warm them in the oven until golden brown and slightly crispy. Fill until overflowing with the creamy sauce, and then replace the "top". Garnish with fresh chopped parsley, if desired.

Vol-au-vent goes best with (hand-cut) fries and (homemade) mayo.



Scales force

New rescue centre is a haven for Flanders' lizards, snakes, geckos, turtles, crocodiles and more

Denzil Walton

There's an unfortunate growing trend in Flanders to abandon exotic reptiles that were once beloved pets. A new rescue centre set up by a reptile fan aims to take in escaped and unwanted animals, care for them and find them new homes.

How often do you think the emergency services in Flanders are called out to catch an exotic snake or other reptile that has either escaped from captivity or been dumped in the wild? Once a year? Once a month? In West Flanders alone, it happens every week. During September, a 1.2-metre boa constrictor was found up a tree in Ypres and a red corn snake in an apartment building in Veurne.

Then there is the iguana found in a park in Hasselt, the bearded dragon caught skulking in the dunes near Ostend and the box of 18 half-starved lizards and geckos left outside the front gate of Antwerp Zoo.

It's a big problem throughout Flanders. In Tervuren park, just outside Brussels, the lakes have a growing number of large terrapins and turtles. They were probably bought as pets when they were cute, brightly coloured babies the size of a €2 coin. But by the time they'd grown to be mature carnivorous adults the size of a dinner plate, their cuteness was long gone. Dumping them in the local pond may give them freedom and a ready food supply, but it causes havoc among the local wildlife. Naturalists have recorded examples of ponds stripped of wildlife by just two or three terrapins, which devour fish, newts, ducklings and moorhens.

These are just some of the examples of the growing trend to abandon exotic reptiles. Usually it's the job of the local fire brigade to capture them. But having caught them, then what?

One solution is to take them to Flanders' first Reptile Rescue Centre, in Houtave, a small village between Bruges and Ostend. The centre officially opened the last weekend of September. Located in a converted barn on an abandoned chicken farm, the Reptile Rescue Centre is equipped with all sorts of vivariums and aquariums where staff can care for more than 400 reptiles.

The centre is the idea of Mario Goes, an avid reptile fan. "One of my first memories as a child is being taken to Antwerp Zoo and standing transfixed in the reptile house for hours, staring at the amazing snakes and lizards there," he says. One of his first pets was a fire-bellied toad, and in 2001 he got the opportunity to turn his hobby into a profession by working at a local reptile zoo. A few years later, Goes began to realise that the number of unwanted exotic reptiles being brought into the zoo was escalating – and the zoo



© Courtesy SOS Reptiel

Two central bearded dragon babies are looked after at the reptile centre, where they are fed, sheltered and – hopefully – found new owners

simply didn't have enough space to house them. It was the beginning of a dream to open his own reptile rescue centre.

It has been a long and difficult process; obtaining the official paperwork was especially challenging. "Belgium had no reptile rescue centres or shelters so no regulations or laws existed covering them. We spent more

materials to create a building with a low environmental impact. Goes was helped by a team of eight volunteers who now help to run the centre. Each holds a qualification in handling and caring for animals. Goes himself runs the show, while still working part-time at the reptile zoo. "We have a licence to house up to 430 animals," he explains. "Each cage is specially constructed and

frequently invited to local schools to talk to children about their work and give instructions on how to care for pet reptiles. And of course they take some of their residents with them. "It's always fun to introduce a python or a corn snake to a classroom of 10-year-olds," says Goes. "Our educational sessions in schools are extremely valuable, as they give us the opportunity to convey the great responsibility involved in looking after a reptile."

The centre also gives instructional sessions to fire brigades on the best way to catch and handle reptiles, some of which can be dangerous. So after the reptiles have been rescued and in some cases restored to full health, what happens to them? Every animal entering the centre is micro-chipped, so they can always be identified and tracked. They are then offered up for adoption, but potential owners are carefully screened and then monitored afterwards. "We have a strict adoption protocol," says Goes. "We then make ourselves available to give support and advice to the new owner."

The centre is careful to convey that it is not against people buying and keeping reptiles. They realise that a lot of people who keep reptiles

“One of my first memories as a child is being taken to Antwerp Zoo and standing transfixed in the reptile house for hours”

than a year talking to various government departments before we were eventually given the green light for our venture." A location was found and various fundraising events were held to pull together the money necessary to convert the premises into a suitable centre. The centre is impressive, but not in a high-tech way. With funds limited, full use has been made of recycled wood, glass and other

very carefully sealed and locked – to prevent reptiles escaping as well as thieves getting in."

The centre already hosts 150 animals, from terrapins, turtles, crocodiles and alligators to Asiatic rock pythons, albino reticulated pythons, crested geckos, bearded dragons, water dragons and an Argentinian tegu.

An important role played by the centre is education. The team is



as pets are very conscientious and often keep them in excellent conditions, as good as in any zoo. But Goes is keen to see proper registration of reptile-owners and their pets, intensive education so they know how best to look after their animals, and a comprehensive tracking system.

The Reptile Rescue Centre is open on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday from 10.00-17.00, at Oostendsesteenweg 90, Houtave.

► www.sosreptiel.be

THE Bulletin

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Imagining a life

Exhibition of mystery boy's alternative life, dreamed up by Flemish poets

Rebecca Benoot

Little is really known of Kaspar Hauser, the 19th-century boy who turned up in a German city claiming to have spent his childhood in a cellar. A group of Flemish writers have spent the past four years reimagining his life, and the result is a wide-ranging new exhibition in Antwerp's Letterenhuis.

In the autumn of 2009, Flemish poets Annemarie Estor and Lies Van Gasse decided to create a story by sending each other letters, usually consisting of a drawing and a verse revolving around the mysterious historical figure Kaspar Hauser. Gradually a multimedia epic was born, and four years later the fruit of their labour has been turned into a book and a tantalising exhibition in Antwerp.

Estor, from a small town in Limburg, has won the prestigious Herman de Coninck prize for poetry twice, in 2011 for her debut *Vuurdoorn me* (literally, Firethorn Me) and again this year for her collection *De oksels van de bok* (The Armpits of the Goat). Sint-Niklaas native Van Gasse, meanwhile, is a poet and a visual artist, frequently illustrating her own poetry collections, such as *Wenteling* (Rotation), which was released this year.

The poets were introduced by their publisher in 2009, as they were both working with language as well as images. They hit it off and immediately began the Hauser project.

“Everyone brought their own voice, making Hauser experience things we never dreamed of

Hauser turned up in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1828. Nobody knew where he had come from and, though he was 16, he had the mental capacity of a six-year-old. He eventually learned to speak and claimed to have spent his entire life in a darkened cell, but his origin and the cause of his premature death in 1833 at age 21 remain a mystery today.

Hauser inspired the two Flemish poets to create an alternative history: What if Hauser left the house one day. Where would he go? What would he want? And more importantly, who is he? This is what Estor and Van Gasse try to explore. “In 2009, the theme of Poetry Day was boundaries,” Van Gasse

explains, “and we wanted to work with the fine line between words and images and the concept of someone stepping into the world and broadening their horizon, by learning a language, for example. We started off quite morbidly with the idea of children like Natascha Kampusch, the Austrian girl who grew up in a basement and had to learn everything from scratch after her escape. Then Annemarie came up with the idea of Hauser’s story, because it’s further in the past, so we could adapt it more.”

They initially planned to send one another postcards for 12 weeks, during which time the story would unfold, but it ended up becoming four years. “We adapted the plot quite radically,” explains Estor. “We began with the historical figure of Hauser, but we gave him a different journey and a Facebook profile. There are some overlapping themes, like his search for his parents, but that’s about it. In our version, for instance, he also ends up in a mythical world.”

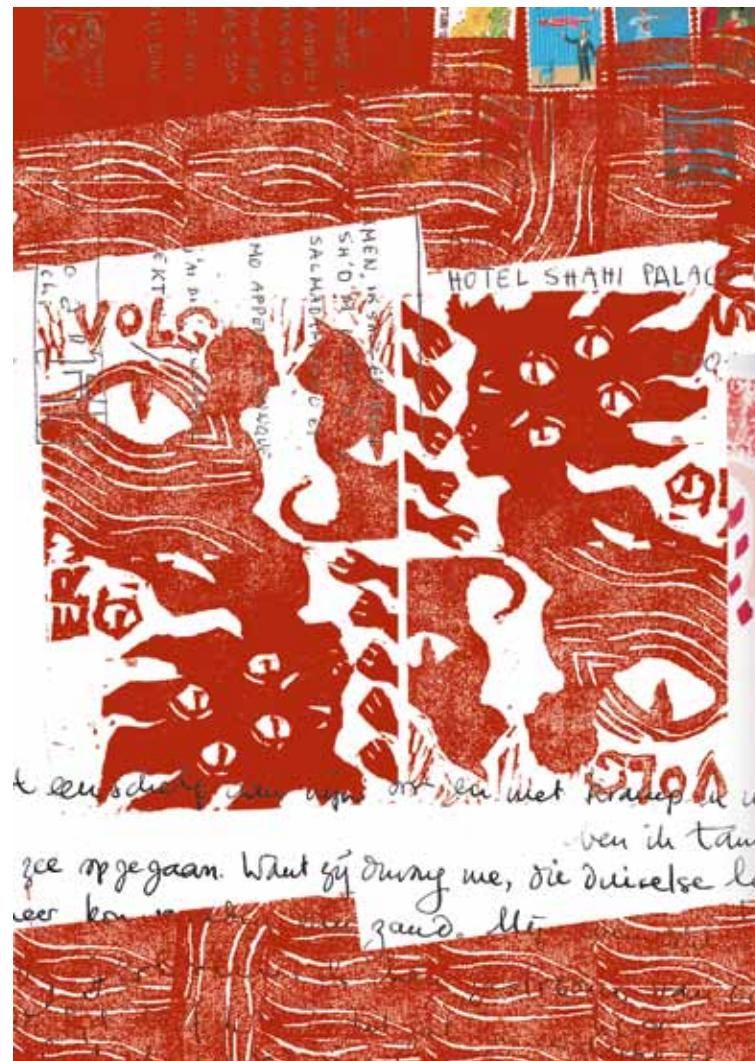
The story developed quite organically, but in 2010 they were stuck and decided to create a contest through the cultural website Cobra.be to find someone who could fill the shoes of Hauser’s father. That added Peter Mangel Schots to the mix. “When we introduced the father figure, we had to create a more defined plot,” says Van Gasse. “The first year was totally random, but when you start writing with three you need a little more structure.”

Estor adds: “We wanted someone with a clear voice, who could guide the character and create interaction because, as the story commences, Hauser starts to get annoyed with his father. The result was a twist that neither Peter nor we invented.” Mangel Schots isn’t the only contributing author: Joris Gerits, Michaël Vandebrijl and Michaël Brijs also took on notable roles.

“It was fun collaborating with so many people because writing is a very solitary process,” says Estor. “Everyone brought their own voice, making Hauser experience things we never dreamed of,” Van Gasse adds.

But the collaboration isn’t the only aspect that makes this project unique. Besides countless verses that each author had to continue – quite an educational process, according to Estor – Van Gasse and Estor also sent each other postcards, drawings and artefacts from all over the globe during the four-year period.

“The images tell a vital part of the story; you can’t have one without the other,” explains Estor.



© Images: Annemarie Estor & Lies Van Gasse



Two Flemish poets created postcards, letters and other objects to tell the story of a mysterious boy from 19th-century Germany

Van Gasse: “Further along the line, we also started sending each other large or strange objects, the stranger the better.” Everything went through the post, making it quite a nerve-racking ordeal at times.

The Hauser story has become a true multimedia epic filled with verse, illustration, reader participation, movie clips and even a website chronicling the evolution of the story. It is accompanied by an exhibition in the Letterenhuis literary museum in Antwerp, which displays countless drawings, postcards and artefacts that the two poets sent each other during the course of the narrative, beautifully illustrating the genesis of the plot. There’s also a reconstruction of the

poets’ workspace, and visitors have the opportunity to become part of the plot by writing their own letter to Hauser. The project may be finished, but Estor and van Gasse clearly aren’t ready to let Hauser go just yet.

In the exhibition, you’ll find a selection of the multitude of objects and drawings that illustrate the tale, but, if you are interested in the bigger picture, the accompanying book is worth a look as it contains all the images as well as the texts that originated from their correspondence, resulting in the harrowing new history of Hauser.

All text in the exhibition and accompanying book is in Dutch

Hauser.Expo: A Multimedia Epic

Letterenhuis

Minderbroedersstraat 22, Antwerp

► www.letterenhuis.be

Until
15 December

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Writer Thomas Blondeau dies at 35

Flemish author and journalist Thomas Blondeau died on 20 October of a ruptured aorta. The 35-year-old wrote widely in the Flemish and Dutch press, including *De Morgen*, *De Standaard* and *NRC Handelsblad*. Blondeau was born in Poperinge, West Flanders, but moved to the Netherlands to study in 1998 and lived in Amsterdam. His third novel *Het West-Vlaams versierhandboek* (The West Flanders Seduction Handbook) was published in September.

“We can hardly grasp that he’s not there any longer,” his publisher said in a statement. “We have lost a very dear and very warm human being, an extraordinarily talented author.”

► www.thomasblondeau.com

Crowd-funding platform for books

A new platform has been created that allows the public to financially support the conservation of old books and other literary projects. The idea came from Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege and is being managed by the Flemish Heritage Library and the Flemish Fund for Letters.

Boekensteun (Support Books) allows the public to fund a project of their choice. Ten projects are already on the platform, including the conservation of a medieval Latin Bible and an interactive children’s book for tablet computers. “Crowdfunding is not only a way to obtain funding for engaging new books,” said Schauvliege, “it also works to engage people, to bring them together to share a common interest.”

► www.boekensteun.be

Flanders Heritage Library wins Culture Award

Flanders Heritage Library has won the annual Flemish Community Award for Cultural Heritage. Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege handed over the award at a ceremony last week in Bruges. The award is worth €12,500.

The Antwerp-based Flanders Heritage Library was established in 2008 as a network of six libraries: the heritage library in Antwerp, the Bruges public library, the provincial library of Limburg and the university libraries of Antwerp, Ghent and Leuven. The jury praised the small intermediary organisation for tearing down the walls between different conservation institutions.

Last year, the Flanders Heritage Library launched the portal site Flandrica, with digitised material, from literary works to old cookbooks.

► www.vlaamse-erfgoedbibliotheek.be

A dangerous liaison

Atmospheric new film by Flemish director concerns an ambiguous relationship

Ian Mundell

There are many ways that a film can grab your attention. Early in *I'm the Same, I'm an Other*, by Flemish director Caroline Strubbe, a man places a small girl into the boot of a car. She doesn't struggle, just looks steadily back through one eye, smudged with make-up. Then he closes the boot, gently but firmly.

It's a confusing situation, somewhere between an escape and a kidnapping. Even Strubbe admits to a frisson at this moment. "I still have this claustrophobic feeling when she goes into the trunk. I also feel this ambiguity, this possibility that this man is going to do something with her, even though I know how it ends." If you saw Strubbe's 2009 debut, *Lost Persons Area*, you will know the situation that Tessa and Szabolcs are fleeing, but the back-story is not essential. What's important is that the situation was bad enough to send them into hiding. They take a ferry from Flanders to England, driving until they end up in a down-at-heel seaside town. Then, in the confines of a rented apartment, they test the boundaries of their relationship.

There are people who will argue that the relationship between an 11-year-old girl and an adult man is not an appropriate place for ambiguity, uncertainty and exploration, but Strubbe sees it as a situation of primal significance. "As young girls, we have this fantasy. We don't want it to happen in reality, but in our thoughts, from 11 to 14, we have this desire to sleep with an older man, who is a father figure."

Their situation also provides a space to consider adult relationships and the pressure of being in a couple. "She wants to play all the roles for him: doing the dishes, cleaning up, being beautiful, making nice things, being funny, being seductive. That's a lot! It's impossible. So from another point of view, it's not only about a little girl, it's also about the roles we play as men and women and how men deal with this."

While Szabolcs appears to have all the power in this situation, he often



Director Caroline Strubbe (left) with the two stars of *I'm the Same, I'm an Other*, Kimke Desart and Zoltán Miklós Hajdu

seems as much a prisoner as Tessa. He is tortured by the ambiguity of his feelings, and it is Tessa who holds the key. "Even though she is little, she finds a way to change him," Strubbe says. "Unconsciously, out of a need to survive, but it happens."

This explains the film's title, taken from a poem by Gianluca Manzi that was made famous by the celebrated jazz trumpeter Chet Baker. "Through meeting someone, you change, even if you are still the same," Strubbe explains.

Her approach to film-making is very open, responding to the locations and the way the actors choose to explore their characters. With Kimke Desart, the Flemish actress who plays Tessa, this involved watching while she experimented around the set or interacted with Zoltán Miklós Hajdu, who plays Szabolcs. "Her contribution is herself. She understands immediately what it is about. We don't discuss it."

More planning went into Tessa's obsessive collecting and creation of strange totemic objects. In

Lost Persons Area most of these objects were scavenged from the environment, but here they come from the more circumscribed space

of the apartment, and even her own body. "If you have nothing, you start to collect," explains Strubbe. "Then you have something concrete, you

really have it." The idea that Tessa should do this was part of Strubbe's original plan for the films, but their actual appearance is inspired by the work of Finnish artist Anu Tuominen. "By chance I went to a gallery and all the objects that I described in my script were there," she recalls.

Tuominen agreed to share some of her pieces, which were used as models for the objects that Tessa creates in the two films. But when the artist belatedly read the script, she found a deeper connection with the character. "What I described was how she started to make art, in isolation and out of a certain kind of loneliness," Strubbe says.

Lost Persons Area and *I'm the Same, I'm an Other* were conceived as the first two parts of a trilogy, and now Strubbe will begin to write part three. The broad idea is that it will explore a meeting between Tessa and Szabolcs several years after the denouement of the present film, but exactly what that will involve remains to be seen. "In making these two films, I've changed," she says, "so maybe the characters will change as well."

FILM REVIEW

I'm the Same, I'm an Other

A guy and a girl on the run. They drive. They hide out in an obscure foreign town. Thrown together, their relationship changes. This could be a conventional road movie or a film noir, but for the fact that Szabolcs is in his 30s and Tessa only 11.

This constantly puts the viewer off-balance, yet there is sufficient ambiguity in the situation that you don't reject it out of hand. It is intriguing. You never really know what Tessa and Szabolcs (Kimke Desart and Zoltán Miklós Hajdu) mean to one another for the simple



reason that they do not know either. The drama comes from watching them test the limits of this relationship, with no pattern to follow and a lingering fear that they are on the edge of something dark and dangerous. This virtually wordless process plays out in the way they live together in the confines of a small apartment and

in Tessa's obsessive collecting. This central section is remarkably atmospheric, contrasting the closely observed world of the apartment with the windswept emptiness of the town outside. It seems to be a place outside time, yet it also feels like a mirror image of the Flanders they have left behind, just a blink away from reality.

It would be easy to characterise this as a film in which nothing happens for much of the time, yet even at its most existential it makes compelling viewing. In contrast to its predecessor, the frustratingly open-ended *Lost Persons Area*, it has a conclusion dramatic enough for any of the genres suggested by its beginning.

Adult cultural education plan launched

The Flemish government has approved a new policy document aimed at promoting adult education in the areas of arts and culture. The document, titled *Continuing Growing in Culture*, was developed by culture minister Joke Schauvliege and equal opportunities minister Pascal Smet to encourage those over 18 to learn more about their environment through, for example, tours, workshops and classes. The ministers launched a similar joint policy (*Growing in Culture*) for those under 18 in 2012. The goal

of the new document is to propose ways to make a continued education through cultural initiatives for adults more accessible, particularly for groups that are traditionally excluded from cultural society. "Learning about and through culture happens all the time and everywhere: at home, when going out, while you're watching TV or surfing the internet," reads the joint statement. "This concept focuses on initiatives wherein people consciously choose to learn by taking a course, for instance, a workshop or a tour." The document

mentions several opportunities for residents to take part in learning experiences, including exploring local heritage and arts organisations, joining amateur theatre groups and signing up for art classes.

The ministers also want to encourage the professionals involved in cultural education to work together to create a "rich cultural education landscape". They also want to see more cultural educational projects taking place in Flanders' libraries. **Derek Blyth**



The fairest of all book fairs

Boekenbeurs

31 October to 11 November | Antwerp Expo► www.boekenbeurs.be

November, that time of year when the leaves are falling, a crisp breeze fills the air, and the Boekenbeurs is back in town. The 77th edition of Flanders' beloved literary event will return to Antwerp Expo, turning it once again into a picture perfect paradise for those who like books and the authors who write them. As the biggest book fair in the Low Countries (approximately 20,000 square metres), it will house 90 booths from a wide array of publishers and book shops, offering not just the best in contemporary works, both fiction and non, but also in technology: The E-Pavilion has expanded, offering the latest advancements in digital reading.

Besides indulging in some much needed autumnal retail therapy of the bookish variety, you can also catch a performance by local rock band Sir Yes Sir, attend a reading (or take your kid to one) or take part in an inspiring workshop. This year's themes, which should surely get the conversations flowing, are sustainability, the Far East, the First World War, the brain and, last but not least, love and other inconveniences. There will also be several events for youngsters, like the Young Adult Book Convention, attended by the internationally renowned American young adult author Lauren Kate (*Fallen*). More than 800 Flemish and international authors and illustrators



will be joining the fun, and some will be interviewed, including the British mystery-writing duo sensation Nicci French, British thriller writer RJ Ellory, South African crime writer Deon Meyer, British comedian and writer of satire Ruby Wax and British romance novelist (and socialite) Santa Montefiore. Other authors, like Flemish greats Tom Lanoye, Pieter

Aspe and Dimitri Verhulst, will be there to sign books and simply make your acquaintance. I've saved the best for last: There will be an attempt to beat the Seattle Public Library's book domino chain reaction. So don that autumn jacket and head over to Antwerp; your new fictional friend may be just a (train) ride away. **Rebecca Benoot**

PERFORMANCE

Het wijde land

Until 3 November | Bourla, Antwerp | ► www.toneelhuis.be

Antwerp theatre companies STAN and Olympique Dramatique join forces to stage this Dutch-language adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's tragicomedy *The Vast Domain*. The early 20th-century Austrian playwright was lauded by no less an authority than Sigmund Freud for his psychological perspicacity, and the plot here, revolving as it does around a man's obsession with another man's wife, mines all manner of emotional depths. It would seem that beneath a thin veneer of civilization we are indeed all animals. After its opening run in Antwerp, the production races across Flanders and the Netherlands on a 24-date marathon tour that will barely finish up in time for Christmas. **Georgio Valentino**



VISUAL ARTS

Michiel Coxcie: The Flemish Raphael

31 October-23 February | M Museum, Leuven► www.mleuven.be

Sixteenth-century Europe suffered no shortage of master painters, but few were as successful in their day and as neglected in ours as Michiel Coxcie. The Mechelen-born artist spent a decade perfecting his art in Rome before returning home to put his stamp on altarpieces, stained-glass windows and tapestries across Flanders and the Netherlands. These works earned him the nickname "The Flemish Raphael" and the lofty position of court painter to Charles V. Ironically, Coxcie's legend was eclipsed by those he heavily influenced. So artists, like Peter Paul Rubens, remain household names, but their master was forgotten. Until now. **GV**



Free Tickets!

Email editorial@flanderstoday.eu with "Coxcie tickets" in the subject line by Monday, 4 November, for a chance to win a pair of tickets to the exhibition. Winners will be notified the same day.

FAIR

Countryside+

Until 3 November | Flanders Expo, Ghent► www.countryside.be

We all dream at one time or another of getting away from it all and living the simple, wholesome life that must exist somewhere in fly-over country. If you'd like to go from dream to reality, the annual Countryside+ is your fair. Organisers are expecting some 40,000 city slickers to mosey on down this year. Dozens of

vendors will be there to greet them with a smorgasbord of all things rustic, from home decor to garden furniture to cracker-barrel crockery to travel kit to farmer's overalls. If you need more, there's also delicious, down-home cooking to be had. **GV**



Concert

Brussels

Mark Lanegan: The husky-voiced American folk rock musician performs acoustic together with London's multi-instrumentalist Duke Garwood

31 October 20.15 at Flagey, Heilig-Kruisplein 1

► www.flagey.be

Music Festival

Avelgem (West Flanders)

Accordion Festival: Festival honouring one of the most celebratory instruments: the accordion, with free concerts by Brussels group Jaune Toujours and Ghent group Broes, among others

2-3 November at GC Spikkerelle and in cafés across Avelgem

► www.avelgem.be/accordeonfestival

Event

Across Flanders

Ecobouwers Open Door: Opportunity to visit ecologically friendly homes, with an eye for sustainability and organic materials, featuring more than 150 inspiring buildings

1-11 November across Flanders

► www.ecobouwers.be/opendeur

Brussels

International Model Car Swap Meet: First edition of the event for model car enthusiasts and collectors, featuring hard-to-find automobilia and model cars of 200 exhibitors from Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Germany and the UK

3 November 10.00-14.00 at Autoworld, Jubelpark

► www.autoworld.be

Film

Bruges

Razor Reel: Annual fantastic film festival featuring the Belgian premiere of opening film *App* by Dutch director Bobby Boermans, plus a range of 40 sci fi, horror and fantasy features, a multitude of shorts, a Young Blood competition for debuting filmmakers, the European fantastic shorts competition and Q&A sessions with international guests

Until 2 November at Ciné Liberty, Kuipersstraat 23

► www.rrfff.be

Fair

Brussels

Japan Expo Belgium: Third edition of the fair covering all aspects of Japanese culture, from its entertainment and cuisine to sports, fashion and more

1-3 November at Tour & Taxis, Havenlaan 86

► www.japan-expo.be

FILM

Filem'on

Until 3 November | Across Brussels | ► www.filemon.be

Brussels' International Children's Film Festival turns seven this year, which is about the median age of its target audience. The week-long family film binge features more than 80 screenings at nine venues. The offerings cover all cinematic styles, genres and formats, and many of them are in harmony with this year's theme: fairy tales. The film programme is complemented by a host of other events, including a filmmaking workshop. And don't miss the pupils from Laken's Leidstar elementary school performing live soundtracks in front of some of the early 20th century's most whimsical silent shorts. In partnership with the Europaia biennale, which focuses on art and culture from India, festival organisers have hand-picked a selection of family films from the subcontinent. **GV**



Talking Dutch

Building site chic

Derek Blyth

You might have noticed a new trend in Flanders. Or rather a lot of old trends that have reappeared all of a sudden. The past is hip.

The Flemish newspapers were full of it last weekend. In its weekly magazine, *De Morgen* called it *bouwwerf chic* – building site chic. *Onaf is het nieuwe af* – unfinished is the new finished, wrote style guru Iris De Feijter. *Kapotte muren, afbladderende verf en gehavende deuren zijn overal: in winkels, bars en restaurants* – crumbling walls, peeling paint and battered doors are everywhere: in shops, bars and restaurants.

Over at *De Standaard*, the story was the same. *Perfectie is passé* – perfection is passé, read the headline in the lifestyle section. *We zetten ons af tegen de strakke interieurs die jarenlang de norm geweest zijn* – we are now turning away from the perfect interiors that have long been the norm, said trend-watcher Nicolas Block.

Yes, junk is in. There's no need to go to Ikea any longer. The stuff you need to show you are on trend is probably at this moment gathering dust in your grandmother's attic.

The lifestyle team at *De Standaard* tracked down five Flemish trendsetters who had dug out old family stuff to use again. A young mother had discovered a yellow



1950s pram that suited her baby perfectly. And a Ghent restaurant owner spoke lyrically about finding a set of crystal glasses that had once belonged to his aunt's mother-in-law. I immediately thought of our basement. I used to think it was a mess. Now I can take friends down there to admire our building site chic. As long as they watch out for the loose cables. But it's not that simple, of course. *Niet alles wat brutaal is, is ook mooi* – not everything that is brutal is beautiful, says interior architect Jeanpierre Detaeye. There is a fine distinction, in other words, between something that is not finished because the builders have gone off leaving a horrible mess in the basement and something that is meant to be not

finished. As the Ghent architect Jo Taillieu told *DM*: *Wij horen vaak dat mensen onze realisaties "niet af" vinden. Maar wij vinden ze juist meer dan af* – We often hear people say that our creations are "not finished". But we actually think that they are more than finished.

There is a reason why dilapidated has become chic. It's the economy, of course. *Onze maatschappij is in verval, dus onze huizen zijn dat ook* – our society is collapsing, so our houses are also collapsing. Oh well. I guess we can just sink into our old threadbare vintage armchairs and pour out a glass of Elixir d'Anvers, which used to be the favourite tipple of Flemish grandmothers but is now, of course, the hip thing to drink.

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



SoS_nm [@sos_nm](#)

I Love Techno #Belgium ANNIE MAC Sat Nov 9th <http://www.ilovetechno.be> #Flanders Expo Ghent



Visit Flanders [@VisitFlanders](#)

The official Flanders Fields Facebook page – commemorating The Great War – is now up www.facebook.com/FlandersFields1418 #WWI #GreatWar



FITLondon [@FITLondon](#)

Centho Chocolates from #Flanders win gold for 'Salin' #praline at #London Chocolate Week. Next stop: World Finals!



Fans of Flanders [@fansofflanders](#)

Traditional #ChristmasTree in #Brussels Grote Markt this year! No more electric tower [@visitbrussels](#) [@BrusselsLife](#)



Visit Leuven

Next week, opening of the exhibition 'Coxcie, the Flemish Raphael', in #MM. M van Museum Leuven. But, he already arrived at the railway station of #Leuven



Brussels

Family activities, festival, zombie parade, museums, crazy parties, shopping, bars... your full guide for a perfect Halloween in Brussels! [visitbrussels.be](#)

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Poll

A woman in Flanders is facing a fine for throwing some private mail away in a public bin. Do you agree she should be fined?

a. Yes, the rule exists to ensure that public bins aren't full of garbage from private residences

0%

b. No, the law is silly. Authorities should be glad when people use bins and don't throw their garbage in the street

71%

c. No, although I believe in the law, it was too small an amount of waste to exact a fine

29%

So, readers of *Flanders Today* are a bunch of scofflaws! Not a single one of you thinks the woman fined €250 for throwing some of her mail from home into a public bin should have to pay up. In the end, the Herentals city council recanted, so our readers get their way. The power of the press

in action. A majority of you thought the law was silly, and indeed it's the silliness of a lot of these regulations that has led to calls for a reform of the fines system. Everyone agrees municipal fines are a useful instrument when it comes to cases of actual nuisance,

but this case – like the case of the student caught eating a sandwich on the steps of a church, or the deliverymen in Hasselt who shuffle packages along the pavement instead of carrying them – doesn't necessarily fit that description.

THE LAST WORD

Valuable antiques

"Over-50s are a bonus for any company."

Federal labour minister Monica De Coninck, age 57k

Standing down

"Thank you; without you I would never have been able to do any of this."

Comedian Alex Agnew said goodbye to his stand-up career – for a time anyway – with a sold-out show at Antwerp's Sportpaleis

Doctor's orders

"Even if you don't really feel ill, you're better off staying home. Employees who have a cold are less productive, and they infect their colleagues. Going into work regardless is not brave, it's selfish." The government's flu tsar, Marc Van Ranst, has views on workers who soldier on through illness

Role model

"Kaat Debo is the leading lady of a new fashion generation. She has helped make it possible for fashion museums across the world to reinvent themselves."

American *Vogue* magazine had nothing but praise for the director of the Antwerp Fashion Museum

Next week's question:

An education conference has called for action to inspire kids aged eight to 11 to study maths and sciences. Is this a good idea?

Log on to the *Flanders Today* website and vote at this link: www.tinyurl.com/FTpollstem