

Belgacom boss fired

Didier Bellens has been relieved of his telecoms CEO duties by the federal government



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Elia's big bang

The electricity grid manager wants to connect eight windfarms and bring the power of the sea inland

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The Americans are coming

US beermakers tour local breweries to see if their "Belgian style" brews really add up

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© Lieve Blancquaert

Welcome to the world

Ghent photographer's journey traces the culture of childbirth around the globe

Sarah Crew

From Kuwait to Greenland to India and back to Belgium, photojournalist Lieve Blancquaert has captured the reality of giving birth, exploring how a child's future is intertwined with the circumstances of its very first breath. A book, exhibition and TV series are the fruits of her labour.

A 19-year-old Indian woman is silently and painfully giving birth, alone in a dirty and dark delivery room, while her mother waits in anguish outside. After her son is born, Apurna Tanti is moved to an overcrowded ward

where women recovering from childbirth share 10 beds. Ghent photojournalist Lieve Blancquaert is there too, witnessing and recording one of the 364,500 births that take place around the world every day.

Birth Day, a TV series about Blancquaert's two-year project, is now showing on Eén. It follows the publication of a book of the same name, which includes 400 of the 5,000 photos she took on her travels. They are accompanied by moving stories of the people and places she encountered. She also provides a pertinent reminder of mortality rates for women and children – figures that remain too high and will

fail to reach 2015 millennium development goal targets. Her images, many of them large-format, are on show at the ING Cultural Centre in Brussels until 5 January.

After such a monumental and personal undertaking, Blancquaert admitted that it was strange to see her work on show. "It is stressful that it now belongs to the public and no longer to me," she says. "Luckily, the reactions have been positive."

One of the next episodes of the TV series broadcasts Blancquaert's visit to the poverty-stricken rural area of West Bengal where Tanti lives. Sundarbans in the Ganges Delta is

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Crowds gather for Armistice

Thousands in Flanders and Brussels mark the anniversary of the end of the First World War

Derek Blyth

More than 1,000 people gathered under the Menin Gate in Ypres on 11 November for the annual ceremony to mark the end of the First World War. The event this year – one of the largest ever – was organised by the Last Post Association along with Ypres city council and the Belgian and British armed forces.

The guests included the Duke of Edinburgh, husband of Britain's Queen Elizabeth, Belgium's Prince Laurent, Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters and federal defence minister Pieter De Crem. The ceremony began with the laying of wreaths at the monumental gate, which commemorates the nearly 55,000 missing soldiers who died in

the Ypres Salient, and ended with the dropping of thousands of poppies. Peeters called for a one-minute silence during the ceremony.

Students from more than 70 Belgian schools were there this year as part of a project called The Gathering of the Soil. They walked under the gate carrying 70 sandbags filled with soil collected from former battlefields around Ypres. The soil will be taken to London and scattered later this month in a new Flanders Fields Memorial Garden near Buckingham Palace.

The memorial garden has been created by the Flemish government in memory of all the soldiers who died in Flanders. The aim is to create "a symbol of hope, peace,

reconciliation and international brotherhood," according to a spokesperson.

About 500 people attended a ceremony in Brussels at the Congress Column in the centre of the city. After the traditional 21-gun salute in nearby Warande Park, King Filip laid a wreath on the Grave of the Unknown Soldier at the foot of the Congress Column. In Diksmuide, West Flanders, 750 people attended the annual IJzer Pilgrimage at the IJzer Tower and Paxpoort, or Gate of Peace, monuments on the IJzer river. The Flemish government has drawn up a major programme of events running from 2014 to 2018 to mark the 100th anniversary of the First World War.



From left: Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, Britain's Prince Philip and Belgium's Prince Laurent attend the Last Post ceremony in Ypres on Armistice Day

Annual incomes on the rise in Flanders

Net incomes are on the increase across Belgium, according to figures released last week by the federal economy ministry. The national average was €16,106 in 2011, 3.3% higher than in 2010.

The figures are based on the net taxable income declared by residents and so do not measure overall wealth, including savings, investments or property.

The residents of Sint-Martens-Latem in East Flanders have the highest average annual net income – €24,278 – in the country. Flanders in general has a higher average net income than the other two regions – €17,146 compared to €15,277 in Wallonia and €12,885 in Brussels. Sint-Martens-Latem is the richest municipality, followed by nearby De Pinte (€23,066); Keerbergen in Flemish Brabant; Oud-Heverlee, also in Flemish Brabant; and Lasne in Walloon Brabant.



The poorest municipalities can be found in Brussels: Sint-Joost-Ten-Node (€8,047), Sint-Jans-Molenbeek (€9,746) and Schaarbeek (€10,857). In Flanders, meanwhile, the poorest municipality is Mesen in West Flanders on €12,438. [Alan Hope](#)

Charities appeal for Philippines relief

The Belgian first aid and support team B-Fast arrived last week in Tacloban in the Philippines, one of the areas hardest hit by typhoon Haiyan. The 30-strong B-Fast team was one of the first relief agencies to arrive in the area and immediately set about organising an electricity supply. The team has since constructed a field hospital, while others organised food and water for survivors.

A consortium of NGOs has launched an account number for donations for disaster relief for the victims of the typhoon. Caritas International, Handicap International, Oxfam Solidariteit, Unicef België and Doctors of the World have adopted the campaign name Haiyan 21-21, and donations can be made to BE17 0000 0000 2121. Both the Red Cross and Doctors without Borders have their own appeals

and account numbers. The UN has launched an aid campaign of €224 million. "It is not yet clear how much effort will be asked of the Belgian divisions," said consortium chair Erik Todts. "But people are very willing to donate for natural disasters because they feel directly concerned. For flooding in Pakistan in the summer of 2010, we collected more than €7 million, but for Syria 12-12, only just over €3 million."

At least one Belgian, 53-year-old Alex Cordero, died in the disaster. Cordero lived and worked in Tacloban with his wife and their two children. According to the foreign affairs ministry, no information is yet available on the condition of some 25 other Belgians living in the area. [AH](#)

▶ [www.b-fast.be](#)

Positive report for government plan for Oosterweel from independent panel

The Flemish government's preferred option for the Oosterweel connection on the Antwerp Ring has been voted the best of three alternatives by an independent panel on the basis of mobility.

The Oosterweel connection is a plan to ease traffic congestion in Antwerp by completing the Ring, allowing traffic – mainly freight – to pass from the port area in the west to the Netherlands and Germany via the north. At present that traffic has to travel via the south and east, where it adds to traffic to France, as well as traffic from Brussels to the Netherlands.

The panel was considering three plans for their effects on the environment: the Oosterweel option preferred by

the government, a slight variation on that plan called Oosterweel-North, and the Meccano route put forward by the Antwerp community action groups StRaten-Generaal and Ademloos.

The government's plan scored highest of the three in terms of mobility. The Meccano proposal scored best, however, when it came to living conditions for the communities affected.

The full Environmental Effects Report from the panel will be sent to some 25 advisory bodies for their comments and criticisms, with a view to preparing a definitive version by January. Based on that report, the government will make a choice among the three options. [AH](#)

Lessons for pupils on the dangers of social media

The federal Privacy Commission is starting a series of lessons to teach primary school students how to surf safely on the internet. Youngsters learn that they should always think twice before sharing personal data, like their address or GSM number.

Although social media such as Facebook are meant for those 13 years and older, many children enter social network sites at a younger age. Therefore, the lessons are being targeted at students in the final year of primary school as well as the first year of secondary school.

The project is currently being tested at a primary school in Kruishoutem, East Flanders. It includes a theatre performance called *Net op 't Net* (Just on the Net), which finds youngsters in a youth group talking about their experiences on the internet. [Andy Furniere](#)

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

1,110

Fines handed out last year by De Lijn for disrespectful behaviour on its trams and buses. The authority has launched a campaign to encourage polite behaviour, including keeping feet off the seats and waiting for people to exit transport before getting on

€2.3 million

approved by heritage minister Geert Bourgeois for the third phase of restoration of Ghent University's Book Tower. The building by Henry Van de Velde is considered a treasure of mid-20th-century architecture

0.5%

of tourist to Bruges are from India, a figure the city's tourist service hopes to improve with a visit to the subcontinent next year, just at the moment when Bruges will be the backdrop for the shooting of a Bollywood film

€30,000

raised by a fashion show organised by Brussels charity Spullenhulp, which featured 29 creations by designers using only the second-hand clothes donated to the organisation

346 million

cubic metres of water used by families and businesses in 2012 in Flanders, a reduction of 12.5% compared to the record year of 2007 when the region used 390 million cubic metres

WEEK IN BRIEF

The Flemish social and economic council SERV has criticised the government's performance in putting **people of immigrant origins to work**. In its equal opportunities and diversity plan for 2014, the government sets a target of 4% of immigrants in its own civil service. According to population figures, SERV said, immigrants of working age made up 9.1% of the population in 2008, and the number is sure to have risen since then. The council suggests a target of 10%.

The Centre for the Prevention of Suicide has a new telephone number – 1813 – Flemish welfare minister Jo Vandeurzen announced. The free number is intended to simplify contact between service providers and those who need them and is part of the government's plan to reduce suicides by 20% by 2020. A new online platform has also been launched. The number for Tele-Onthaal – 106 – remains available for help with other personal problems.

► www.zelfmoord1813.be

Pilots for Brussels Airlines have **announced industrial action**, following an unsuccessful attempt to resolve differences with management. The company, pilot representatives say, has failed to meet engagements made in their own plan Beyond 2012-2013, in particular regarding holidays and seasonal contracts.

A boy of 15 from Sint-Laureins in East Flanders has taken off for India to **attend a Buddhist seminary** with a view to becoming a monk. The boy, identified only as Giel, had been ordered to report to an observation centre in Eeklo, after the public prosecutor filed suit against his departure at the request of a relative. The case eventually went back to youth court, which determined that Giel's departure was voluntary, and they would no longer intervene. "It's a dream come

true," he said on his departure at Brussels Airport.

The Nieuwstraat in Brussels and the Meir in Antwerp have tied for first place as the **most expensive shopping streets** in the country, according to estate agents Cushman & Wakefield, with rents of €1,800 per square metre. On a world ranking the two streets would share 34th place. Louizalaan in Brussels comes third on €1,700, followed by Veldstraat in Ghent and Steenstraat in Bruges.

Wouter Beke has been reappointed as **president of the Flemish Christian Democrat party** CD&V for the coming three years. Beke received 98.7% of votes cast in an election in which he stood unopposed. The vote puts him in a strong position to lead the party in the 2014 Flemish, federal and European elections. "I want to make CD&V a people's party that sets the agenda once more," he said in an interview on Radio 1.

Désiré Collen, the 70-year-old founder of the bio-pharmaceutical company Thrombogenics, has been awarded a **Lifetime Achievement Award** by the Belgian-American chamber of commerce for scientific and commercial achievements. Dr Collen was born in Sint-Truiden, Limburg province, and educated at the University of Leuven, where he worked as a physician, becoming professor of molecular and vascular biology in 2002. The company was a spin-off from his work on cardiovascular disease and the prevention of blood clots and has brought the university hundreds of millions of euros in licence income.

Opponents of genetically modified organisms held a protest this week in Ghent outside a symposium organised to celebrate the 30th anniversary of plant biotechnology in Flanders. Flanders has one of the most dynamic biotechnology industries in Europe, but critics

at the demonstration, organised by Field Liberation Movement, accused the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) of being part of an industry intent only on profits.

Unions representing staff of **De Lijn** have filed an intention to strike, with actions possible after 29 November. Unions are angry that commitments in the sectoral accord for 2013-2014 are not being respected – in particular, the promise of a payment of €7.2 million by the Flemish government, which has since been cut by nearly €1.3 million, affecting the budget of the company's social fund. Details of any action will follow a meeting between the two sides on 28 November.

Flemish **fishermen have complained about an agreement** reached in Vietnam by Flemish minister Hilde Crevits last week that nominates Zeebrugge as the port of entry for the country's exports of pangasius fish to the whole of Europe. The deal is "good for Zeebrugge and good for jobs" and will not affect the competitive position of local fishermen, according to Johan Van de Steene of the fish auction market. "The pangasius fillets are destined for the entire European market, and so will not compete with the sale of fresh North Sea fish," explained Zeebrugge port spokesperson Joachim Coens.

Brussels public transport authority MIVB has sent out specifications for the **automation of the metro network**, the authority said. MIVB is looking for a supplier of 90 new trains for metro lines 1 and 5, which, by 2020, will be serviced by a mixture of classic trains and new automatic driverless trains. The two sets of specifications concern the trains and the signalling equipment for the new lines. With automation, capacity on the two lines will be doubled, with trains able to run at intervals of only two minutes by 2019. A fully automated service by 2023 will see trains running at 90 second intervals.



OFFSIDE

Fare's fair

Many a Fleming found themselves indulging last week in a bit of what the Germans call *schadenfreude* – the enjoyment of someone else's misfortune.

A 25-year-old man from Hasselt faces fines totalling €76,000. Because it was for chronic fare dodging, it was difficult for train commuters to shed a tear. The young man is accused of riding the train 367 times between 2006 and 2011 without once paying for it.

The news emerged because the man now plans to contest the fines in court. His mother died recently, according to reports, and he now lives in her house, which understandably enough he doesn't want to have to sell just to pay back the NMBS.

Fare dodging is a problem for everyone because those who do pay have to cough up even more because of those who don't. In 2012 alone, there were more than half a million incidents of fare dodging – 6.4% more than the year before.

Anyone caught taking the train without paying is liable to an immediate fine of €12.50 on top of the ticket price, unless you're taking the train from a station with no ticket sales. Don't have the cash on you? Then you'll get a C170, which means you have 14 days to pay the ticket price plus fine, now increased to €60. Leave it longer, and the fine goes up to €200.

Before you know it, you're selling the house. Be warned.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Sepideh Sedaghatnia

Last week Sepideh Sedaghatnia, known familiarly as Sepi, was named Sommelier of the Year for 2013 by the new Gault&Millau guide for the Benelux. After 13 years in Flanders, she's achieved one of the highest accolades of a profession that doesn't even exist in her homeland.

Her native Iran bans the sale of alcohol, but when she was growing up her father would make his own wine in the cellar. Perhaps the memory inspired her when she took a particular interest in the wine served during a holiday job here years ago. To the disappointment of her parents – she abandoned plans to study chemistry and go into the petrochemicals industry, instead following wine courses and working in various hotels.

When chef Viki Geunes advertised for a sommelier for his restaurant 't Zilte – formerly in Mol but relocated in 2001 to the top of the MAS museum in Antwerp – Sedaghatnia decided to apply. By then, she had not only completed training at hotel school, with a specialisation in drinks, she also had a qualification from the prestigious Université du Vin in Suze-la-Rousse in the south of France.

She got the job, but, as the 30-year-old explained to regional broadcaster ATV, some customers can't quite get it into

their heads. "Some guests look shocked when I hand them the wine list, and they ask to speak to the sommelier," she said. "Then I have to explain politely that it's me. They are surprised – I see it in their faces – but then once we talk, it's all OK."

Geunes, who runs the restaurant with his wife Viviane Plaquet, did well all around in the

“Guests are surprised that I'm the sommelier

new Gault&Millau guide. His restaurant was awarded 18 points out of a possible 20 – an excellent score.

"You feel immediately when a person is ready to invest in themselves," Geunes said of Sedaghatnia, after she won the award, "and a person like that is of enormous value to a business; you should cherish them. She's continually setting the bar higher for herself."

FLANDERS TODAY



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5TH
COLUMN

Anja Otte

Renewed confidence

N-VA has often been the subject of this column. Not because of some fascination by the author, but because of a fascination by the whole of Belgian politics.

Over 30% of the votes seemed something of the past, when the Christian-democrats were the "party of the people". That a relatively new party could achieve these results in this day and age left all other parties dumbstruck for a while. Their fascination with N-VA made it impossible for the others to stand out.

That all three traditional parties – Christian-democrats, socialists, liberals – are part of a federal government under a French-speaking prime minister with whom they find it hard to identify made it even more difficult. And that between the three of them they have no majority in the federal parliament only shows the dire state they are in.

However, in recent weeks, at least two of them have shown some renewed confidence, presenting new party programmes for the 2014 elections.

Last week was CD&V's turn. Wouter Beke, re-elected as party president with a stunning 98% of the vote, vowed to make CD&V "the people's party" once more. The Christian-democrats, which includes Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, promotes a "positive confederalism" (read: N-VA's version is negative) rather than "a hidden urge to separate". At its congress, CD&V produced long "to-do lists" for both the Flemish and federal governments. The party wants to keep the housing bonus (tax benefits to promote home ownership) but focus more on renovation and energy measures. All children should receive the same child bonus, it says, regardless of their family's income. CD&V also claims the next minister of education, a matter "too important to leave it to anyone else".

Earlier this month, Open VLD announced its own propositions. Party president Gwendolyn Rutten, too, has an air of confidence about her. The void left by Guy Verhofstadt and the in-fighting that followed seem forgotten now. Instead, there is a *Toekomstverklaring* ("declaration for the future"). Its first sentence – "We live in great times" – demonstrates Open VLD's radical optimism. The liberals demand less taxes, less government and more political participation, albeit in new ways.

Both parties have been troubled by N-VA. CD&V is frustrated at having lost its dominant position to the nationalists; Open VLD feels its economic views have been "hijacked". Shaking off N-VA's shadow might just be the first step towards future successes.

Government sacks Belgacom boss

CEO of state-owned telecoms concern has courted controversy for years

Derek Blyth

Belgacom, Belgium's state-owned telecommunications company, has installed an interim CEO to replace Didier Bellens, who was dismissed by prime minister Elio di Rupo last Friday evening after he made a series of negative comments. "Repeated criticism and incidents have irrevocably undermined the confidence of the Belgian government in Didier Bellens," the prime minister told the press.

The government, which retains a 53.3% share in the company, held off announcing its decision until after European stock exchanges had closed for the weekend to avoid a sudden plunge in the company's shares.

Belgacom's Chief Financial Officer Ray Stewart and Chair Stefaan De Clerck have been put in charge of the company until a new CEO is appointed. De Clerck said he thought that a list of candidates could be drawn up within a few weeks.

Bellens, who had led the company for 10 years, was recently accused of a conflict of interest in a property deal in which he headed a company involved in buying a Belgacom office building on the Zavel in



Didier Bellens was let go after 10 years as the top man at Belgacom

Brussels. Vice prime minister Laurette Onkelinx said recently that Bellens is "addicted to money" to the point that it could be considered "an illness". Controversy is nothing new to the telecoms CEO: In 2009, he was suspected of insider trading, while earlier this year he was criticised for his outburst of cursing in a public statement regarding the lack of 4G network services in Brussels.

But Bellens, who earned €2.14 million last year in salary and bonuses, seems to have made his

fatal error of judgement last week in a speech at a Brussels business club when he compared prime minister Di Rupo to "a little child who comes to get his Sinterklaas present" every year when dividends are paid out. Bellens added to the injury by describing the Belgian government as "Belgacom's most difficult shareholder".

The government was reluctant to fire Bellens, 58, as it would be forced to award him an enormous severance payment. But Di Rupo said last Friday that the government did not intend to provide the so-called "golden handshake" since Bellens was fired due to "a serious breach of confidence" and "an accumulation of serious errors". Analysts expect Bellens to attempt legal measures to secure his severance package.

Bellens' position became increasingly threatened last week as he lost the support of all the main political parties. "I don't want to leave," he said in an interview with *De Standaard*. "I have always fought for the interests of the company." Belgacom's investors said that Bellens had run the company effectively, while unions voiced their support for their boss.

Government approves new framework for water quality

The government of Flanders has approved a bill to provide a new framework for the production and delivery of drinking water. "This framework will allow our drinking water companies to better control the quality and provision of supplies," said environment minister Joke Schauvliege and public health minister Jo Vandeurzen in a joint statement.

Flanders has a well-developed drinking water network of nearly 62,000 kilometres of pipes, with a reservoir capacity of 912,000 cubic metres. The quality of drinking water is very high, and shortages occur rarely. In 2011, the latest year for which figures are available, more than 11,000 inspections were carried out

across the whole network. The new framework requires water suppliers to develop a strategic plan "from source to tap", which includes risk evaluation and prevention. It also obliges them to draw up long-term supply and delivery plans to guarantee sufficient safe drinking water for future generations.

"Our water supplies are under pressure from new sorts of pollution, including medicines and pesticides," commented Schauvliege. "Drinking water companies make intensive use of surface and ground water to ensure drinking water of high quality, but these supplies are not inexhaustible. There are challenges of quantity as well as quality." **Alan Hope**

Flemish government to explore crowdfunding for new business

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters will hold talks with federal finance minister Koen Geens on ways to adapt Belgium's finance regulations to take account of the rise of the phenomenon of crowdfunding. Peeters made the announcement last week during a study day devoted to the subject.

Crowdfunding refers to members of the public donating to a project they would like to see realised, sometimes with the possibility of a return on their investment. The most widely publicised crowdfunding success in Flanders was Sonic Angel, launched by musician Maurice Engelen (aka Praga Khan) and businessman Bart Becks to finance the musical careers of artists like Eurovision entrant Tom Dice. Sonic Angel fell apart, however, when the two split up.

More recently, the new online news site NewsMonkey raised more than double its goal of €100,000 in a matter of days. The Flemish culture ministry also recently launched a website to crowdfund restoration of books and other heritage projects.

The government has asked Enterprise Agency to provide information on crowdfunding through information sessions and workshops. As well as talks with Geens, Peeters will meet with entrepreneur associations to look into the creation of credit unions as another source of finance for businesses.

"Several crowdfunding initiatives already exist in Flanders, which is why we wanted to look at how we could ease the way towards that capital for those entrepreneurs who need it," Peeters said. **AH**

Kris Peeters meets with new US ambassador

Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters held his first official meeting last week with the new United States ambassador to Belgium, Denise Bauer. Bauer was appointed by US President Barack Obama in the summer to replace former ambassador Howard Gutman. Born in 1963, Bauer has worked as a TV producer and played an active role as a Democratic fundraiser and political manager in the Obama campaigns. During the meeting, Peeters discussed Flemish foreign policy and the current negotiations on a US-EU trade deal. He also talked about Flanders' plans to mark the 100th anniversary of the First World War.

Gutman was a popular ambassador who built up strong relations with Belgium and made a campaign out of visiting every single municipality in the country. The end of his four-year term was marred by an accusation from a member of staff of the US state department that he solicited underage prostitutes in Brussels.

Gutman strenuously denied the allegation, and a state department spokesperson said they were "baseless". Gutman retired in July but is under investigation. **DB**



Minister-president Kris Peeters discussed trade deals and First World War commemorations with US ambassador Denise Bauer

Yves Leterme's term at OECD extended

Former Belgian prime minister Yves Leterme will remain in his post as Deputy Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for a further two years. Leterme was appointed to the prestigious Paris-based organisation in 2011 and put in charge of a portfolio that included social affairs, education and entrepreneurship. Before joining the OECD, Leterme held a number of political posts in Belgium at every level of government. He started out with a seat on the council of his home town Ypres before becoming an MP in the House of Representatives. He then went on to serve as minister-president of Flanders, federal minister of foreign affairs and finally prime minister in 2008 and again from 2009-2011. A member of the Flemish Christian Democrat party CD&V, he remains a city councillor in Ypres. **DB**

Welcome to the world

Project is a reminder of mortality rates among women and children

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a group of isolated islands in one of the world's largest mangrove forests. In addition to the appalling and overpopulated hospitals, the difficulty and cost involved in even getting to medical facilities contributes to the soaring cases of infant and maternal mortality. For many women, traditional home births remain their only option. For every 100,000 women giving birth, 450 do not survive.

If a woman needs a caesarean, she has to travel to a larger hospital. Blancquaert visits one in a small town near Calcutta. Throughout her mission, she talks to doctors, midwives, patients and their families to photograph and recount the customs surrounding childbirth and the conditions in which it takes place. As a journalist and also a mother, her aim throughout is to observe, question and not judge. But this hospital, with its chaotic and inhumane treatment of patients, is a disconcerting experience.

Girls, many in a distressed state, await surgery dressed in gowns and wearing plasters stuck to their foreheads bearing their name and what operation they will undergo. Some are giving birth, others are

the world, and what kind of world will they grow up in? Convinced that where and how a child is born is an important indicator of its future, Blancquaert says that "you can learn a lot by the first touch and the first breath taken; it's such a strong moment."

She accompanied new mothers to their homes and communities, forever curious and questioning. In West Bengal, Tanti returns to her village the day after giving birth, supported by her family although the father of her child is absent.

As a Hindu family, their strong beliefs and traditions extend to childbirth. On her return home, Tanti must ritually wash and then remain in the one room, resting and excluded from all household chores for 21 days. During this period, a husband may not touch either his wife or child. Once recovered, Tanti will have to find work as a cleaner in Calcutta.

This ritual of cleansing and recovery is repeated in many of the countries Blancquaert visits and is one of the many fascinating and revealing facets of her project. It was conceived when witnessing women first in Kabul and later in Burundi and Congo giving birth in terrible conditions. For



© Lieve Blancquaert

the bible-belt of Atlanta, in the US state of Georgia. Widespread right-wing and religious convictions have resulted in the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the world for a developed country. Contraception and abortion are discouraged and are prohibitively expensive. Poverty is another theme of these sad stories of young girls bringing up their babies alone.

Economic hardship accompanies snapshots of Rio de Janeiro, where pregnant women and small children live on the streets. Blancquaert found the city schizophrenic, its inhabitants sharing an optimism despite the divisiveness of its society. In the slums of Nairobi, meanwhile, Blancquaert is faced with a "hellish" place where people live around an open sewer. Amid the squalor is a maternity hospital where nearly 100 babies are born a day in an endless assembly line little concerned with the sanctity of life. Despite the poverty, violence, overcrowding and HIV, there is also a place for joy in the community, where an orphanage,

The Nest, rescues abandoned babies and children.

In another part of the world, unimaginable wealth has created another vulnerability. The oil-rich country of Kuwait is suffering dwindling fertility: Inbreeding is commonplace as families intermarry to preserve their fortune. It avoids the problem by providing citizens with treatment via the Brussels University Hospital rather than tackling the root causes.

Meanwhile, a luxury delivery suite at a maternity hospital in Kuwait City provides five-star care, including post-birth nips and tucks. Kuwaitis, Blancquaert discovered, become instantly detached from their babies because of the gulf of privilege that separates their society. In the hotel-like maternity clinic, babies are immediately whisked away to a nursery.

The incessant heat has also led to a pervading torpor and inherent laziness. One recurring theme is the way women leave the comfort of the clinic for the cocoon of their mothers' home for a 40-day "unclean" period in which she is further pampered. Another is how childbirth remains a matriarchal event from which men are frequently excluded.

Blancquaert then dons thermals and a ski suit to talk to health professionals in the isolated Greenland town of Sisimiut. She also has to adjust to a slower way of life among the Inuit community, which is determined to pass on its traditional way of life to children in a sustained battle to reverse the Danish social programmes that started in the 1950s, resulting in widespread alcoholism and abuse, as well as a loss of identity.



© Isabelle Persijn

The final episode of the TV series and the book is devoted to Brussels and is perhaps the most shocking for being so close to home. Blancquaert leads us into the little-known world of immigrants in the capital of Europe. Exploitation, displacement and poverty are a sad indictment of the western world.

How did the lengthy assignment affect Blancquaert, who has two children with film director husband Nic Balthazar? "The project marked me in many ways, which is normal. The way I worked was close to life – real life, no theatre. Sometimes it was hard, and some days it was full of joy, just like life."

Blancquaert's portfolio is dominated by social and political work, but she is a woman on a mission. Her future projects are *Wedding Day* and *Last Day*.

Birth Day is published by Editions Lannoo and is available in English, Dutch and French. The TV series airs Mondays nights on Eén



Until 5 January

Birth Day
ING Cultural Centre
Koningsplein, Brussels
► www.birth-day.be

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Agricultural equipment
► Case New Holland

The agricultural and heavy equipment manufacturer is investing €9.2 million in its research centre in Zedelgem, West Flanders. The company, which employs 2,575 people on the site, plans two new buildings, which will make it Flanders' largest industrial research operation.

Air ► Jetairfly

Jetairfly, the affiliate of UK-based TUI Travel group, will launch a three-flights-a-week service between Brussels Airport and Tel Aviv for the 2014 summer season. The company will also start operating flights between Brussels and Istanbul next year.

Banking ► BNP Fortis

The Belgian state has sold its 25% stake in the country's largest financial institution, BNP Paribas Fortis, to the French majority shareholder for €3.25 billion, making a profit of €900 million. The state rescued the bank in 2008 by injecting €2.35 billion at the height of the financial crisis.

Holdings ► Henex

Holding company Henex, quoted on the Brussels stock market, is to be delisted following a decision by its leading shareholder Union Financiere Boel to buy out minority holders for €63.50 a share, valuing the company at almost €800 million. The takeover bid is expected to be launched later this year.

Railways ► Infrabel

The NMBS rail infrastructure authority has won the European Rail Award for the €300 million Diabolo link, which connects Brussels Airport directly to key national and international networks. Diabolo was launched in the summer of 2012.

Software ► Itineris

The Ghent-based software developer in business solutions for utilities has received a €6.5 million capital injection from Flanders regional investment company GIMV. The move will allow Itineris to develop its activities on the US market, which already contributes some 40% of its revenues. The company hopes to increase its sales fourfold over the next four years.

Telecoms ► 4G

Mobile telecoms operators Belgacom, Mobistar and Base have paid €120 million each for a 4G frequency that will allow the operators to improve mobile internet accessibility and speed. The companies expect 98% of the country's territory to be covered within three years.

Voka proposes creation of Westhoek City

Region hopes to improve employment and export figures

Alan Hope

The region of West Flanders – known as the Westhoek – the most westerly part of the province abutting the French border – needs to be re-branded as Westhoek City, a network region centred around the four cities of Ypres, Poperinge, Veurne (*pictured*) and Diksmuide, according to entrepreneurs in the area.

The Westhoek, says the local branch of the Flemish chamber of commerce Voka, performs less well than the rest of West Flanders and Flanders as a whole on five main indicators: economic growth, GDP, taxable income, the number of start-ups and exports. "Our ambition is to bring the wealth of the Westhoek up to the level of the West Flanders average," said local Voka representative Veerle De Mey.

Voka brainstormed with local business people and drew up a plan based on



© ericgodet/Flickr Commons

four main factors: entrepreneurship, people, governance and mobility. Only 21% of Westhoek production is destined for export, compared

with 31.5% for Flanders as a whole. Voka calls for targeted investments, support for new businesses and an emphasis on clean technology in

agriculture, innovation in tourism and sustainable construction and renovation.

The region faces not only a greying population but also a brain-drain and calls for an effort to provide more jobs in general and particularly more skilled jobs for young people.

On governance, municipalities need to strike up alliances with each other to increase their economic and political muscle, says Voka. "The Westhoek needs leadership," the group concludes. And they set out five priorities: 10% economic growth in the coming five years; a permanent reserve of two to 25 hectares of land along the main road connections; the completion of an internal access road network within five years; a reduction of 20% in the number of young people leaving the area; and the fusion of municipal services into the network of Westhoek City.

Peeters allocates €2 million for creative enterprises

Flanders' minister-president has announced €2 million in funding for five projects that will aid start-ups in the creative sector. The money is to help creatives – artists and others earning a living in the cultural sector – to obtain management and entrepreneurial skills. The five projects chosen were based on responses to a call for applications issued by the government in January.

Two of the five are initiatives of major organisations already heavily invested in start-ups: Voka and Flanders DC. The other successful applications were submitted by Enterprise Centres West Flanders, Dag1 from Waasmunster in East Flanders and SPK from Turnhout in Antwerp province. As part of the scheme, all five will join together to form a region-wide network.

"The creative sector is extremely important for the economy and the competitive position of Flanders," Peeters said. "The figures show

that the sector represents 13% of all full-time self-employed people in Flanders, with the equivalent of 121,800 jobs."

According to the government, the sector not only represents a major component of the economy, but the relationship between creatives and entrepreneurs is also likely to be reciprocal: Businesses provide commercial know-how to creatives, who in turn bring creative thinking to commerce. The new scheme also installs the Creative Industries Counsel (OCI), a consortium of 26 organisations representing 12 different sectors, as the official partner of the project to maintain regular contact with Peeters' office and with the Enterprise Agency on policy issues.

The recognition of OCI, Peeters said, would allow the agency to "better keep its finger on the pulse of the industry's economic development needs". AH

40% of Uplace already occupied

Three years before it is due to open, the shopping and leisure centre Uplace in Machelen, which borders Brussels, has already let 40% of its 32,000 square metres of shopping space, the company said. "The question is no longer whether Uplace will open," CEO Jan Van Lancker said. "We are ready, and we are only waiting on the final green light from the Council of State."

The arrival of the massive complex on the site of the former Renault manufacturing plant has been fraught with controversy, with critics arguing it will create traffic chaos around Brussels, while draining the life out of the commercial centres of nearby towns, from Vilvoorde as far as Leuven. A number of opponents have taken the project to the Council of State, claiming the project did not adhere to proper procedures in obtaining permits. Despite that uncertainty, preparations are going ahead. "Eighty shops are already rented, and we're in advanced negotiations with a number of others," said COO Lorin Parys. The complex will include about 300 shops, as well as a hotel, offices, restaurants, a cinema, a play area for children and a bowling alley. AH

Ports of Zeebrugge, Antwerp and Singapore to co-operate

The ports of Zeebrugge and Antwerp have signed a memorandum of understanding with the port authority of Singapore to harmonise procedures for the provision of liquid natural gas (LNG) as a fuel for ships. The ports said the choice of LNG was made because of new tougher sulphur emissions standards imposed by the International Maritime Organisation from 2015. LNG produces less sulphur than petroleum fuel and costs less than low-emission diesel.

The switch will force ports to invest in bunker facilities for the storage of LNG, a technology in which Singapore leads the world. Another aspect of the memorandum is the exchange of know-how between Singapore and the Flemish ports. "Co-operation with a world player will ensure that Flanders maintains its leading position in Europe for the development of LNG infrastructure," commented mobility minister Hilde Crevits. Zeebrugge already has a major gas terminal and will now examine, together with Antwerp, the possibility of constructing a bunker to supply ships in the port of Antwerp. AH

€8.8 million investment for tourism projects

A selection of 57 tourism projects will receive government financing of €8.8 million, Flemish tourism minister Geert Bourgeois and Toerisme Vlaanderen announced.

More than 130 applications for funding were received for three "impulse programmes" – Flemish Coast, Flemish Regions and Flemish Art Cities-Brussels – and funding has been allocated for €2.3 million, €3.9 million, and €2.6 million, respectively.

The art cities programme includes a Beer Experience Centre in Antwerp, which receives a subsidy of €787,356. The centre in the De Koninck brewery will be a tourist meeting point, as well as the starting point for a tour that also

relates the history of the city. Elsewhere, the repurposing of the city hall in Leuven receives €61,740.

The Green Regions programme includes funding for the National Jenever Museum in Hasselt, the former vagrants' colony in Merksplas and a new tourist centre in Aalst. The Coast programme, meanwhile, sees support for a network for day-trippers, an extension of the conventions bureau in Ostend and development of the Willems Park in Knokke-Heist.

"Continued investment in tourism is extremely important to encourage tourists to come to Flanders and Brussels," Bourgeois said. "The 2013 appeal for projects for the three programmes has been a huge success." AH

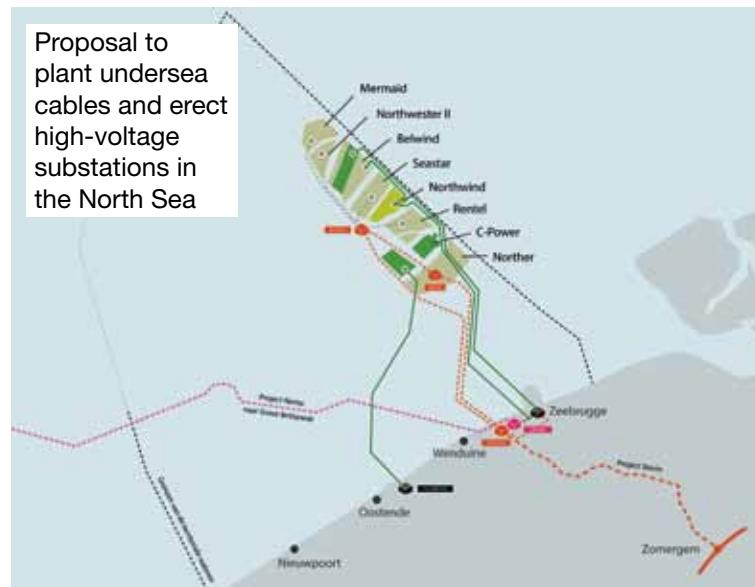
Offshore energy dreams

Elia's plan to transfer wind energy inland rests with the Council of State

Andy Furniere

Energy grid manager Elia has ambitious plans to transport the energy produced by wind farms in the North Sea to land and to connect Flanders with the UK through an underwater cable. One crucial sticking point remains, with implementation of both projects depending on whether the Council of State approves a high-voltage connection to the Flemish interior. In an adjustment of the electricity law last year, Belgian energy market regulator CREG assigned the management of a future offshore energy network to Elia. This week, the Brussels-based company submitted an application for permits to install the Belgian Offshore Grid (BOG) in 2016 and 2017. That decision now rests in the hands of federal North Sea minister Johan Vande Lanotte and federal energy secretary Melchior Wathelet. At stake are Elia's plans to build two high-voltage substations – Alpha and Beta – in the North Sea. This should connect eight operational wind farms at the coast by 2017. "Alpha will be built on an artificial island, while Beta is constructed on a platform at the Norther wind farm," explains Elia spokesperson Pascale Wauters. Both substations can be thought of as huge electric sockets into which the wind farm cables will be plugged.

Currently, the C-Power, Northwind and Belwind wind farms each have their own connection to the onshore grid. By replacing this multi-cable "spaghetti" system with a meshed grid, Elia says it will be able to boost the economic, environmental and technical capacity of offshore wind production. "It will be less expensive and more efficient to bundle several connections, involve fewer cables in the seabed and enhance the operational security," says Wauters. But construction on the offshore grid can only begin once all the permits for Elia's Stevin project have



Elia's plans involve connecting wind farms and running cables across Flanders to pump the energy inland

been granted. Through the Stevin project, Elia will transport the wind farm-produced energy between new high-voltage stations in the coastal city Zeebrugge and in Zomergem, East Flanders. Elia plans to install a high-voltage line over a 45-kilometre route, which will run through the municipalities of Bruges, Damme, Maldegem and Eeklo.

At the request of the Flemish government, Elia plans to build as much of the line as possible underground – part of it will run through a tunnel under the Boudewijn canal, for instance. According to Wauters, Elia is also trying to get local residents involved through info sessions and is minimising the impact for communities by planting tree and bush lines to serve as natural protective screens. Some of the residents affected by construction of the line would also receive financial compensation.

The provincial authorities of West Flanders have followed the example of the municipal authorities of Bruges, Damme and Maldegem

by lodging an appeal against the project at the Council of State. These appeals are still pending. "We expect a decision in the coming weeks," says Wauters. If the verdict of the Council of State turns out in favour of Elia, the last remaining step is to ask the Flemish government for final approval of the Stevin project.

If the Council of State rejects our plans, we will have to completely start over

In the best-case scenario, Elia could begin construction next year, with the connection fully operational in 2016. "But if the Council of State

rejects our plans, we will have to completely start over," says Wauters, adding that establishing a new project could take four additional years. According to the Flemish chamber of commerce Voka, a further delay would spell economic disaster for the West Flemish region. Electricity from the UK should also arrive at the new Stevin high-voltage station in Zeebrugge by 2018. Elia is planning to put down an undersea cable from Zeebrugge to Richborough, England. This Nemo project would be carried out in co-operation with National Grid, the British grid manager.

The new connection would allow Belgium to transport energy surpluses to the UK and vice versa. But because the undersea connection works via direct current, electric conversion stations to create alternating currents in both countries are needed. The Belgian conversion station would be established at the high-voltage station of the Stevin project.

"So the implementation of the Nemo project also completely depends on whether the Stevin project receives approval," says Wauters. The combined estimated investment for the BOG, Stevin and Nemo projects is €700 million.

To acquire the know-how to roll out of its national and international plans, Elia is taking part in a project even further overseas – in the United States. Its consultancy and engineering department is closely involved in the development of the US Atlantic Wind Connection. The goal is to develop an offshore network on the coasts of New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. One of the partners on the project is technology giant Google. "The know-how gained by working with such innovative companies is invaluable," says Wauters.

www.elia.be

WEEK IN INNOVATION

€7.8 million for medical "tricorders"

Scanadu, founded by Aalst entrepreneur Walter De Brouwer, has attracted private capital amounting to \$10.5 million (€7.8 million) in the US. The company, located at Silicon Valley in California, will invest in the development of two medical "tricorders".

In the *Star Trek* TV series, tricorders are the scanners that doctors use to collect information about the body and diagnose diseases. Scanadu wants to create actual medical tools that transmit such data to smartphones. The Scout device would measure the respiratory rhythm and blood pressure in about 10 seconds, while the Scanaflo would measure certain values in urine within a few minutes.

The extra funding should help to get the devices approved by the American Food and Drug Administration. Tests on patients will start in January.

www.scanadu.com

Documentary on cleantech sector

In the two-part TV documentary *Alles kan schoner* (Everything Could Be Cleaner), Flemish biologist and journalist Dirk Draulans gives an overview of the state of the Flemish clean technology sector. The first episode, revolving around water and materials initiatives, will be shown on Canvas this Wednesday. On the following Wednesday, the focus will lie on mobility and energy.

The documentary features Flemish scientists working on new materials, such as graphene, which can help to create a cleaner future. Viewers will learn how researchers improve the water purification system and extract energy from sludge. Tune in also if you want to know how sea water can be made drinkable without consuming much energy.

www.tinyurl.com/alleskanschoner

Q&A

Eline Vanuytrecht is a doctoral researcher at the Soil and Water Management department of the University of Leuven. She recently completed a thesis on the effects of climate change on agriculture in Flanders

You used different climate models to look at how farming might be affected. What did you discover?

There were two sorts of impact – a negative impact on the stability of yields with more fluctuations, and water availability went down. I looked at the four main crops grown in Flanders: winter wheat, corn, potatoes and sugar beets. On the other hand, there was also a positive aspect, mainly because of increased carbon dioxide concentrations, which are good for crops. The average yield went up over the years, up until 2050.

People may think of climate change as a problem for the distant future, but you found

there will be marked differences within 40 years.

Yes, even the moderate changes by 2050 will be very noticeable for agricultural production and food supplies. I also looked at the possibility of adopting other cultivars – varieties of the same crops with different characteristics, such as a longer growing season, so the crops can benefit from the higher temperatures earlier in the season. But I didn't look into the introduction of other crops; maybe that's not the way to go. I know people are talking about growing soy beans here, but that would be a rather big step, while changing cultivars is a smaller change that farmers are more likely to adopt.

So there are negative effects and positive effects, and those balance each other out, right?

No. It's not because there's a positive and a negative effect that the balance becomes zero. There may lie opportunities in a higher CO₂ concentration improving crop productivity, but we will have to take measures against the reduction in water availability and stabilise production levels. At this point, we can expect those two negative effects, and they're not being taken into account by policymakers. So the overall effect could easily be more negative than positive. But if there are measures to deal with those issues, the positive effect could come to the fore. *interview by Alan Hope*



EU funding for recycling research

The European Union has allocated €5.55 million to two Flemish projects that are developing innovations for the recycling of waste materials. Ghent University's project ManureEcoMine produces sustainable manure by re-using, with minimal consumption of energy, this natural resource in areas with nitrate-poor soil. The Flemish Institute for Technological Research (Vito) is the co-ordinator of ReFraSort, a separation technology for the recycling of heat-resistant materials used to build, for example, furnaces and reactors. The EU is funding 14 projects for a total investment of €40 million. 140 partner organisations from 19 countries are involved in the projects. **AF**

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Actors tackle youth anxiety

The duo behind *Ikandani* want to help children overcome fear of failure

Daan Bauwens

Listen to this: "Am I doing well? Am I doing it well enough? I just hope I won't disappoint anyone." Or this: "What's with my hair today? I hope no one will notice the red spot on my nose. Must get a new cell phone; this one is the laughing stock of the entire school!"

Believe it or not, this is what goes on in the brain of a 15-year-old in the space of a few seconds. The new two-woman show *Ikandani* wants children, parents and teachers to sit down, relax and talk about the stress, anxiety and fear of failure they're putting on each other.

This play-cum-lecture by acting duo Vrouwentongen (Women's Tongues), realised with support from the government of Flanders, is currently preaching its take-it-easy gospel in schools, cultural centres and theatres across Flanders.

Actress Karin Jacobs, winner of the 2010 Flemish Musical Award for best lead actress for her role in *Ganesha: A Perfect God*, and mother of equally famous actors Jelle and Clara Cleymans, portrays Dr Janssens, a specialist in "fear-of-failurology". Vera Puts, the other half of Vrouwentongen, plays the renowned "stressologist" Dr Peeters.

"It's a lecture, but a funny one," explains Jacobs. "We pretend to be two scientists and explain what stress is, what fear of failure feels like, how to recognise it, talk about it and where to go to when it all gets too much." The show covers black-outs, exam stress and other forms of cognitive fear of failure.

But the actresses also tackle a different kind of monster – social fear of failure. "It's the fear of not being accepted in a group because you're not wearing the right clothes or because you think you're funny-looking," she says. "But the most important thing about the lecture is that we do it with a lot of humour."

Puts agrees and says that humour is their strongest weapon. "It helps get the message across because it keeps the young kids interested; we get their unconditional attention."

The name of the show is a contracted form of the Dutch *Ik kan dat niet* (I can't do that), a phrase typically uttered by insecure toddlers or kids. But *Ikandani* isn't targeting just children. "It's meant to inform everyone, including parents and teachers," says Jacobs. "We're living in a society that focuses on achievement and perfection, with winners on one side and losers on the other. That is what creates fear of failure."

For Jacobs, that kind of pressure doesn't just pop up out of the blue. "It's something people do to each other," she says pointedly. "We have to be careful with our expectations, our perfectionism, with the



Karin Jacobs (left) and Vera Puts want to teach kids – and parents – to lighten up

pressure we put on our children."

In arranging the show, Puts and Jacobs, who've been performing together since 2000, were in part inspired by their own experiences. "We're actresses. We're on stage constantly and we're always judged by the public, in the most direct and honest way," Puts explains. "It's easy to know whether people like what you're doing or not," which, she adds, has been the source of a lot of doubts and anxiety before going on stage.

The child of a friend of mine is only six, and she's already suffering from a fear of failure

Before Puts began acting, she worked in television. She experienced it as a tough world ruled by perfectionism, in which stress and expectations ran high. Puts says she saw many of her colleagues check out – some collapsing under the stress, others taking long leaves of absences because they could no longer handle the pressure. "At the end, I became sick myself, as well."

But what drove the actresses to tackle the theme

of anxiety most of all were the sad stories coming to them from different corners, many of them involving children. "The child of a friend of mine is only six, and she's already suffering from a heavy form of fear of failure," Puts says. "She had to start seeing a psychologist. Can you imagine that?"

With the 90-minute show, the two women hope to lift the many taboos surrounding fear of failure and anxiety. And the creators called for back-up. The show includes short video clips in which the likes of film director Erik Van Looy, Olympic judo medallist Gella Vandecaveye and actress Nathalie Meskens discuss their anxieties and fears. "They serve as role models for youngsters and tell them that there's nothing to be ashamed of," Jacobs explains.

In one of the clips, Paul Van Bruystegem, bass player of Flemish rock band Triggerfinger, reveals that he used to drink to suppress his anxiety. He tells the audience that he sought the help of a psychologist to help him deal with his fears and that he now does relaxation techniques before the band's shows.

According to Puts, the discussions they have with the audiences after the shows demonstrate that their approach is working. "People, young and old, talk without fear," she says. "The taboo is gone."

Until 14
February

Across Flanders
► www.vrouwentongen.be

Vilvoorde embarks on major school construction project

Vilvoorde schools are about to turn into a huge construction site. The Catholic school association is getting ready to welcome the largest school construction project ever to come to the city.

Thanks to the Flemish public-private partnership Schools of Tomorrow, the Catholic Education Vilvoorde (KOV) network will be able to carry out the largest school construction project ever in the city. The works, slated to begin at the start of 2014, will outfit five schools with new or updated infrastructure by 2016.

An estimated 2,000 children will benefit from the major building project, which has been designed by the Lennik-based architectural firm Licence. "Schools of Tomorrow is currently solving a huge problem," says Eddy Deknopper, general director of KOV. "Although it's possible that we will need to expand again in a decade."

The project requires an investment of €32 million. Vilvoorde primary schools will receive funding for 81% of the costs, instead of the usual 70%, with secondary schools receiving 71% instead of 60%



© AG Real Estate

Explaining that, like in other Flemish towns close to Brussels, a Vilvoorde population surge had created a need for additional school infrastructure, Deknopper says that the catch-up move was critical. "The current infrastructure is aged, and many students now have to follow courses in container classrooms," he says.

The construction, which covers a surface area of 14,500 square metres, includes sports facilities in addition to classroom space. And students in office or health-care tracks in the Vilvoorde

secondary school Virgo+ are in for a special treat: Some of the school's classrooms will be outfitted like offices or hospital rooms.

Campus Roosevelt will welcome the largest building, with both primary school De Knipoog and secondary school Virgo+ getting new or renovated buildings. Campus Roosevelt also includes an on-site monastery, which has been labelled valuable heritage. A new destination for the monastery is still being sought. According to Deknopper, funding to renovate and maintain the building is urgently needed.

The Schools of Tomorrow project is a consortium of the Flemish government and private partners BNP Paribas Fortis and AG Real Estate. Together, they set up the DBFM Schools of Tomorrow company, which is responsible for realisation of the expansive project. The private partners will finance the design, construction and maintenance of the schools for 30 years, during which time the schools will pay the partnership a usage fee. After 30 years, ownership of the buildings will transfer to the schools. **Andy Furniere**

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Improved mainstreaming for special needs

Starting in the 2014-15 academic year, Flemish schools can only refer a pupil to the special education system if they can demonstrate that they made adequate efforts to mainstream the pupil into normal classes. That is the result of a new decree approved by the government last week. Special education is for pupils who are mentally disabled or who have learning disorders.

The new measure requires schools to make "reasonable adjustments", like software for students with dyslexia, for example. If schools think it is unfeasible to keep the student with the rest of the class, they must provide an extensive explanation as to why. A team of 109 pedagogical experts are on hand to assist the schools in mainstreaming students.

New game combats bullying in schools

The University College West Flanders (HoWest) has developed a lesson kit against bullying called "Re: pest", with a 3D game for students in the first two years of secondary school. Via the simulation, students can experience what it's like to be in the shoes of bullies, bullied students and onlookers. They are encouraged to reflect on their own behaviour and choices. According to Flemish education minister Pascal Smet, bullying in Flemish schools was reduced by 40% after the launch of the game there. The kit also includes lesson suggestions for teachers and an info brochure for parents. The project was commissioned by the city of Kortrijk and co-funded by the government of Flanders.

Schools need help battling effects of poverty

The education system can play an important role in dealing with child poverty, but it needs help from the government, according to the Flemish Education Council (Vlor). Vlor recommends increasing school subsidies for parents with low incomes and to link the price of before- and after-school care to family income. Vlor is also asking for guidelines for schools on how to handle unpaid invoices.

According to the organisation, teachers should learn how to better detect and respond to poverty-related issues via specific and on-going training. The government should give schools and the pupil support agency CLB more means to employ experts that can "bridge the gap between the life of the child and the school environment," it said. **AF**

WEEK IN
ACTIVITIES

Science Day

Next Sunday, universities, schools, scientific organisations and museums all over Flanders will welcome families and anyone with an interest in science for a day of special activities, workshops and demonstrations. Visit a dinosaur hospital, make a necklace from your own DNA, build a windmill or launch a rocket – there's something for everyone. Visit the website to search for events by region, scientific field or age group.

24 November, across Flanders

► www.wetenschapsweek.be

The Art of the Brick

After touring North America, Australia and Asia, this exhibition of Lego art makes its European debut at the Brussels Stock Exchange. American artist Nathan Sawaya creates large-scale sculptures from thousands of Lego blocks, including reconstructions of famous monuments and works of art. 22 November to 21 April, tickets €11-€15.50

► www.expo-artofthebrick.be

Snow & Ice
Sculpture Festival

This year, Bruges' annual ice sculpture installation is based on the Disney animated feature *Frozen*. Visitors walk through the indoor exhibition, which is kept at a constant -6°, encountering fantastic creatures, characters and settings from the movie, which is based on Hans Christensen Andersen's fairy tale *The Snow Queen*. 22 November to 5 January, daily 10.00-18.00, tickets €11-€13

► www.icesculpture.be

Arrival of Sinterklaas
in Brussels

Next Wednesday, Sinterklaas arrives by steamboat at the Akenaai in Brussels, with multiple Zwarte Piets and gifts for all the children. There will be entertainment, face painting, singing and dancing, games and a bouncy castle. 27 November, 13.30-17.00, free

► www.brusselsbywater.be

Six Days of Ghent

Indoor track cycling event at 't Kuipke in Citadel Park. Contests include time trials, team races, elimination rounds and the popular "Derny races". 19-24 November, tickets €16-€35

► [www.z6sdaagse.be](http://z6sdaagse.be)

Winter Moments
with Flowers

International winter flower show featuring holiday decor, floral design, table settings, workshops and demonstrations. 22 November to 1 December, Oud Sint-Jan Site, Bruges, tickets €10

► <http://happenings.be>

Fancy a brew?

American beer writers get the lowdown on Flemish beers

Alan Hope

This month the country was invaded by Americans – 16 of them, all beer experts intent on taking in as much of the brewing culture as possible in a four-day rush from Bavik brewery in Bavikhove, West Flanders, to Het Anker in Mechelen (pictured).

The tour was organised by the Belgian Family Brewers association (BFB), set up in 2007 to promote and protect the tradition of craft brewing. They tackle the problems of an industry where multinationals dominate and where, for many abroad, "Belgian beer" can mean the products of a company like AB InBev – the largest brewer in the world, managed by Brazilians, with sales overwhelmingly targeted at the American market.

BFB has 21 members, all family businesses, each of which has more than 50 years of brewing experience in Belgium. They include household names like Duvel Moortgat and Lindemans, as well as those more familiar to beer geeks, like Van Honsebrouck (brewers of Kasteel) and Bockor (Omer).

Xavier Vanneste, director of Bruges brewery De Halve Maan and chairman of BFB, stresses the association's commitment to diversity, innovation and tradition, but warned against the proliferation of "Belgian-style" beers. "There are many countries where the reference is often used to claim legitimacy or to leverage the potential of a new beer, but it's opportunistic," he says.

"Imitation is said to be the sincerest form of flattery, but beer lovers around the world deserve to know the real story."

BFB operates a quality label system, currently accorded to 80 beers from the members' range of more than 150. The label is intended to guarantee the authenticity of the beer in the family brewing tradition – a sort of controlled designation of origin,



© Belgian Family Brewers

albeit without the legal force.

Export is of critical importance to independent brewers, given that domestic consumption has been declining for years, from over 12 million hectolitres in 1990 to 8.2 million in 2012. Exports overtook domestic sales in 2005 for the first time, reaching 62% of total production in 2012, mainly to EU countries. The American market offers huge potential for export growth. Hence the tour of American brewers.

"The American craft beer market has always loved Belgian beer," said Derek Buono, publisher of *Beer Magazine* and one of the 12 American journalists and bloggers who, with four beer importers, took part in the tour. "The proof is our continual attempt at producing the same styles and instilling the same passion into American beer as the Belgian brewers. Many of our breweries have stated that visiting Belgium and experiencing their beer and tradition inspired them to start a brewery."

The four-day tour took in 12 breweries and a number of other beer-related sites, such as the tavern A la Bécasse in Brussels, which serves authentic lambic beer as it might have been drunk in the middle ages. Needless to say, the itinerary also included numerous tastings. *Flanders Today* contacted some of those taking part to gauge their first impressions before they expand on their experiences later in their own media.

David Gilbert, *Ale Street News*: "The tour was a world-class representation of the art of brewing and the complexity of Belgium's culinary magnificence. It truly is a beer paradise."

Chuck Cook, *Celebrator Beer News*: "It was a great tour, packed with new experiences, great beer and superb food, with fine hosts. I had been to all 21 of the breweries before but nevertheless learned a lot of new things and met many friendly and knowledgeable people."

Jay Brooks, *Brookston Beer Bulletin*:

"The trip was amazing. Having covered the beer world as a journalist for over 20 years, seeing, meeting and drinking with all 21 family brewers was a unique and unrivalled experience. Sampling them again in rapid succession brought home... their overall high quality as well as the diversity. What they've accomplished separately for generations and are now beginning to do together is historic, and I think it bodes well for the future of Belgian beer."

Derek Buono, *Beer Magazine*: "I have had many Belgian beers and have appreciated them, but this trip showed me another level of passion. In America, we celebrate brewers as rock stars. In Belgium, they celebrate the beer as the star. This trip confirmed that Belgian beers are among the best and most inspirational beers in the world. Belgium is a dream destination for beer enthusiasts around the world, not only for the quality of the beer but for the stories of the families and their love of the tradition."

Robyn Boyle

BITE

A Taste of Molecules

"If I was going to dissect and better understand the secrets of flavour, I wanted to learn by doing, tasting and being surrounded by good company," explains author Diane Fresquez in the first chapter of her new book. There's no better place for the New Mexico-born writer to be, then, than right where she lives – in Brussels, where she executed most of the research for her book.

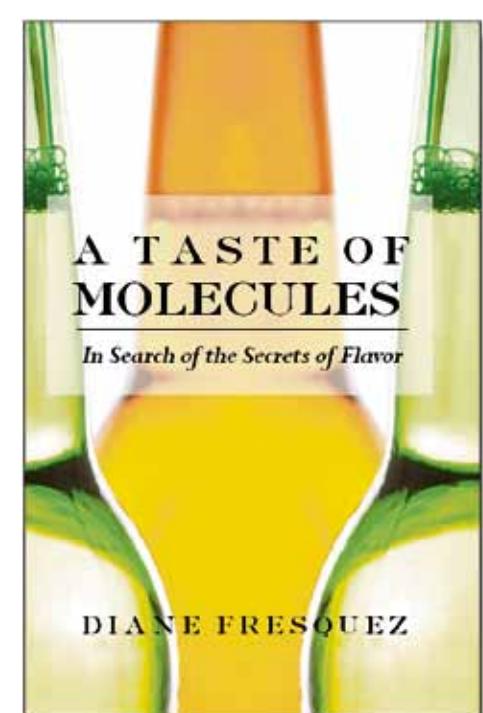
While the title, *A Taste of Molecules*, may sound technical or overly scientific, it is in fact a very pleasant and easy read filled with anecdotes from the author's youth, her travels and her relationships with food as well as people. It's the story of how she followed the journey of a young Brussels beekeeper as he tried to give mead a taste makeover with the help of a food scientist.

From a foodie perspective, however, the book is much more than that. It's an introduction to some fascinating local experts and their secrets, such as the Au Vatel bakery in Etterbeek and Brussels' best places for slow food and dining in the dark. At the end there are a handful of recipes, including hop shoots from

Hommelhof restaurant in Watou and sabayon made with Musa Lova, a banana liqueur from Leuven developed with the director of Leuven University's *in vitro* banana species collection (the largest in the world).

A theme throughout the book is not only the science behind flavours but how flavours have the power to provoke memory. Once, while tasting a particularly malty beer at family brewery De Ryck in East Flanders, Fresquez is reminded of malted milk balls, a favourite sweet from her childhood. "Our favourite foods from childhood are accompanied by colourful back stories, as personal as a fingerprint," she writes, "and are introduced to us at a time when we are as impressionable as bread dough."

Fresquez continues in this nostalgic spirit throughout the 210-page book, conjuring up images of warm family dinners, long hours spent gathered around the table and, of course, scrumptious dishes. Just in time for the holidays, I'd say.



The old man and the sea

Former boat engineer has lovingly curated a fascinating history of shipping

Toon Lambrechts

At first sight it seems to be just a local cafe, with people at the bar and a smoking room that's fuller than the rest of the place. Only the name – Het Streekmuseum – suggests there is something more going on. Curator Armand De Becker, a tough man in his 80s, shows the way to the back. When he puts on the light you stand face-to-face with the Streekmuseum's showpiece: a model of a 17th-century galleon, the Prince William 2. At more than six metres long, 4.7 metres high and one metre wide, it's the largest model ship in the country, De Becker explains with pride. "Here you see more than 10 years' work. Everything is reconstructed as it was in the original ship," he says. Along the open wall of the vessel it becomes clear how detailed everything inside is; even the cannons are there. It's a life's work, just like the rest of the museum. "I traced back my family tree to the 16th century," says De Becker. "All of them were boatmen or people who had something to do with the water. I myself used to be a ship engineer. But after a serious accident I could no longer work, so as a tribute to my family history I started a museum about shipping, first in my garage, but it soon became too small." Now the museum extends over a labyrinth of chambers in three houses. "But if you give me three more houses, I can fill them too without problems. Moving out is not an option any more. The largest model is forever embedded in the floor."

The concept is simple: Everything



Armand De Becker surrounded by some of the exhibits in his Mariekerke shipping museum

that has to do with shipping or the history of Mariekerke in Bornem, Antwerp province, will find its place in the museum. This has led to a bizarre collection ranging from miniature ships on Roman coins to furniture from 100 years ago. But where does all this stuff come from? "I used to know someone who worked on a dredger on the Scheldt. Everything he found on the bottom of the river

he gave to us," explains De Becker. "If someone dies and his house is emptied, we go have a look. And many of our volunteers are themselves retired fishermen and boatmen. If someone stops his work on the water, we know it from each other. On the old ships there is often much to find." Still more rooms are full of other fascinating objects, like an old diving suit that could have come

from a Tintin comic. Two giant wooden mortars, designed to salvage sunken ships. Fossils from the bottom of the Scheldt. Tools from shipbuilding, eel fishing equipment, a reconstructed local fish store... This isn't a place where you'll get bored easily. But the main attraction is the miniature boats; a whole fleet of them, you might say.

Creating miniature boats is a

popular activity among retired fishermen. All types are collected here, but in particular the boats that once sailed on the Scheldt," says De Becker. "This type, for example, was an eel fishing boat. There was only one in Mariekerke; the others had to attach their small boats on it to fish for eel." Back in the garden of the Streekmuseum, another surprise awaits. It looks like if a life-size ship has been buried. "In the summer it is really nice to sit out here around the ship. Sometimes there are three buses of tourists every day, and the farthest visitors came from Brazil. A Brazilian from Mariekerke had his family over, and together they visited our museum. Really, just look in the guest book!"

De Becker has good reason to be proud of his museum. It's a collection of special items, each with its own story, a unique series of miniature boats, many of which are homemade. And all this in a museum that has also become the village's meeting place. "We've achieved all that without subsidies or support from the government," he says. "It's our choice, so we can do what we want. Altogether there are about 50 volunteers, mainly former boatmen. We amuse ourselves, and that's what counts in the end."

The Streekmuseum is at Omgangstraat 34, Mariekerke. It is open to visits every day from 10.00 to 21.00, except on Tuesdays.

► www.mariekerke.be

Design award for revived beauty brand

Every year, lots of shops, restaurants and bars open in Brussels, and the 10 with the most remarkable interior design receive a Commerce Design Award, issued by Design September. One of this year's winners is Delbôve, a cosmetic shop in Elsene selling the entire range of the Belgian beauty brand Delbôve.

The name might not ring a bell immediately, perhaps not surprisingly, as for the last two years the products have not been available. Until, that is, loyal customer Gina d'Ansembourg decided to give the brand a revival and open a boutique, introducing everybody to this Belgian beauty secret.

Back in 1950, Roger Delbôve ran a famous hair salon in Antwerp and Brussels and developed his own range of hair lotions, called Omega. His wife, Marion, wanted to expand the salon with a beauty parlour, but she wasn't satisfied with the range

of products available. Along with a biochemist and a phytotherapist, she developed a formula for a face cream packed with natural ingredients and essential oils. When a journalist was asked to test the ointment, she was so impressed she called it "witchcraft". The product was baptised "witch cream" and up until 1990 the range was expanded with 20 more products. When Marion retired, the end of the popular beauty products seemed near.

"One day my husband suggested we should continue the Delbôve business," says d'Ansembourg. "We'd both been using the products for years and believed they were just too precious not to be shared." With her mother-in-law and Delbôve's daughter, Isabelle, d'Ansembourg relaunched the brand. "We had to find a new lab and recreate certain formulas, as some of Marion's handwritten notes had gone missing,"

she says. "Two years later the entire range was available again and when my mother-in-law proposed opening a boutique in a stunning building in Elsene, it all made sense."

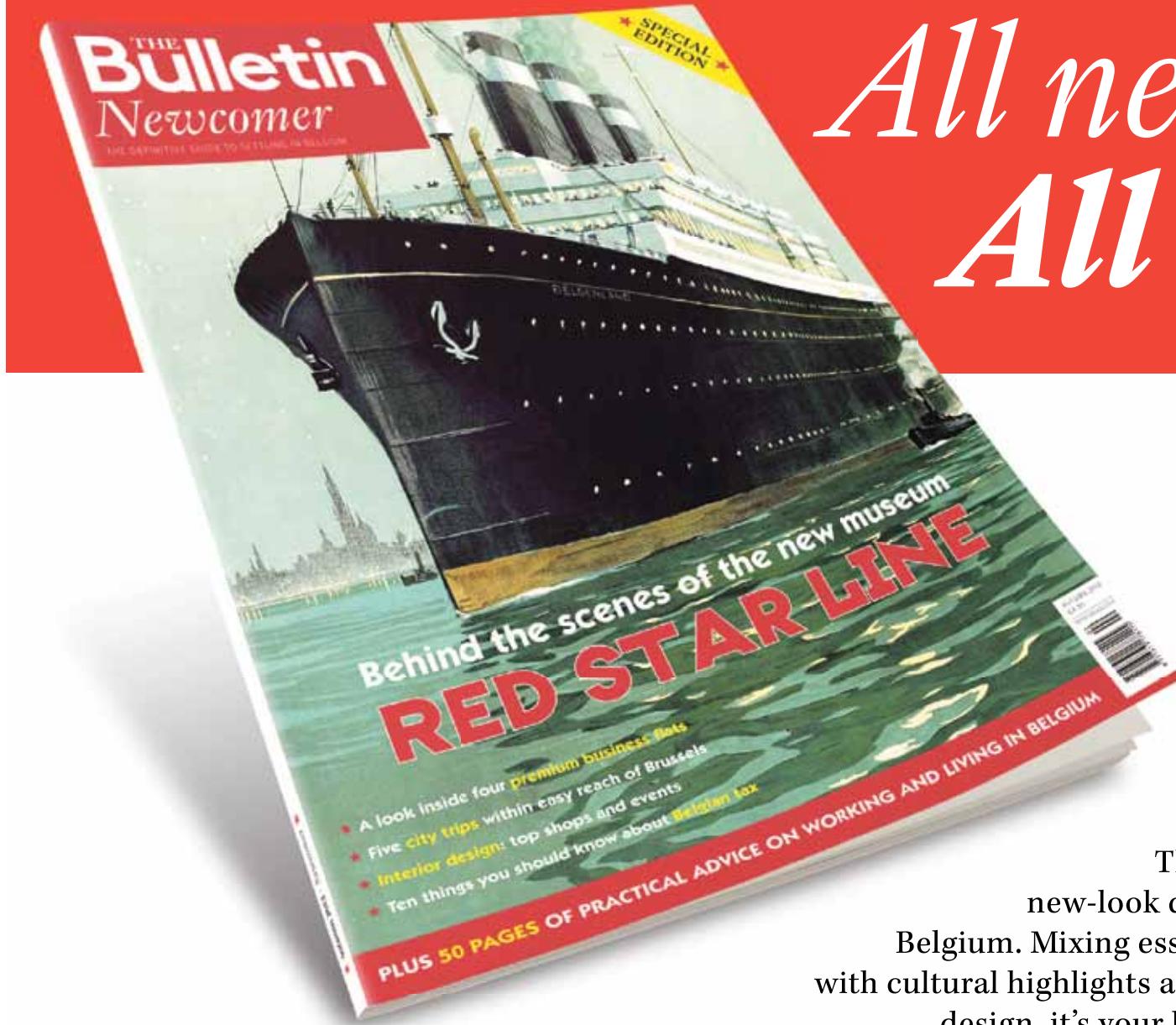
Art director Christophe Rémy turned the former antique shop into a spacious beauty shop with a sleek design and a hint at the past. He also created the packaging for the products, still resembling the pharmaceutical look of the old ones but in a more luxurious way. "In the shop you'll find all the info on how to use the products, written on doctor's notes," says d'Ansembourg. "And every now and then we organise parties where a beautician who worked in the original salon reveals the Delbôve beauty secrets."

Katrien Lindemans

► www.delbove-cosmetics.com



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Mapping the world

Brussels theatre group Tristero presents its first-ever production in English

Tom Peeters

With its foot firmly planted in theatre with a social context, Tristero has chosen David Hare's *A Map of the World* for its English-language debut.

It's arrogant to look at the world through one particular perspective." Everyone knows that, but that doesn't stop us from doing it.

"You use the poor as a prop to express your own discontent, which is with yourself!" Take that.

One thing is clear: You can't escape being pulled into the heated debate of *A Map of the World* by British playwright David Hare, which Brussels theatre company Tristero (pictured) is tackling in a new coproduction with KVS. The play is set in 1970s Bombay (present-day Mumbai) during a Unesco conference on poverty.

Established in the early 1990s by

première at KVS of Tristero's first play in English. Almost a decade after *Abigail's Party*, Tristero's twisted remake of film director Mike Leigh's 1977 cult play, the troupe again finds itself in a '70s decor, complete with the then fashionable hairdos, wigs and wicker chairs. Dress-up parties can be tricky, but here the costuming seems to add value.

"The content is very bound up in time," explains Kristien De Proost, who joined Tristero in 2002 and became more widely known in Flanders with her role in the VRT drama series *Kinderen van Dewindt*. "But at the same time, not a lot has changed today, and that's very unsettling."

"It's a matter of *Reculer pour mieux sauter*," says Youri Dirkx, the third member of the company's creative core group. He explains that setting the story in the past creates a distance, which alienates

"The content is very bound up in time, but at the same time, not a lot has changed today. That's very unsettling"

Peter Vandenbempt, Tristero has built a strong reputation through intelligent adaptations and its own works, especially those that appear at a glance to be comedies. The group's production of Hare's 1981 play *A Map of the World* (not to be confused with the 1994 novel of the same name) explores the contrasting views of the Western and developing worlds, right and left, rich and poor – and then some.

For Tristero, Hare's piece seems to have come at just the right time. In their 2012 *Reset*, the company already explored the complexity of rebellion in an increasingly inter-related world. New tour dates for this piece, which shows a more explicit social commitment on the part of the creators and actors, have been announced for early 2014 in select Flemish cities.

But first, there's the December

the audience a bit. But as the story unfolds, everything gets scarily close, holding up a revealing mirror to viewers in the process. "Social commitment was cast off as something trivial for a long time," adds De Proost, "but it's starting to become relevant again."

Vandenbempt: "It's true that some people told us this was schoolmarmish political theatre. I think that's only true when the actors become stuck in the formal aspects of telling their story. But we don't."

According to De Proost, the best way to integrate your social commitment to a theatre role is to bring something of yourself, and she says both *Reset* and *A Map of the World* are excellent examples of that. "Both plays show characters coping with their own powerlessness."

The parties around the table of



© Danny Wilms

the conference on poverty ask themselves – can we still make change happen? In *Reset*, the people who visit the newsstand feel everything is too connected and complex to be able to make good choices in an age of information overload. "I'm struggling with this global inter-relatedness," Dirkx admits. "You have to start with – if I can quote Michael Jackson – 'the man in the mirror'." But even changing just one person's ways can prove a tough feat. "Being consistent is difficult, if not impossible," Dirkx says. "Can you buy an Israeli avocado in a Carrefour supermarket? Or a bottle of water in a Relay press shop? I recently bought new trousers at H&M, and I

felt really guilty reading the Made in Bangladesh label."

Still, the company remains bent on showing the real world, with all its complexities and nuances. "It's not our goal to offer a solution," De Proost says, "but showing that all these different perspectives exist is already quite something."

A Map of the World is just the play to do that because it packs an intriguing double, if not triple, layer. The stage setting not only represents the poverty conference

KVS

Arduinkaai 9, Brussels

In English, with Dutch and French surtitles

► www.tristero.be

MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

Wanneer gaan we nog eens bowlen? (When Are We Going Bowling Again?)

Bart Cannaaerts

Inspired by The Dude character in the Coen brothers movie *The Big Lebowski*, the Antwerp comedian – one of those behind the acclaimed TV shows *Benidorm Bastards* and *Wat Als?* – wonders why we are always irritated by the little things. 20 November, Arenbergschouwburg, Antwerp; 21 November, Het Perron, Ypres; tours Flanders until May (in Dutch)

► www.bartcannaaerts.be

De Kleine Oorlog

Valentijn Dhaenens/SKaGeN

The former Toneel Dora van der Groen student already showed his talents for rhetoric in the monologue *DegrotemonD*, for which he used speeches by world leaders. Now he focuses on the cannon fodder, evoking a field hospital at the front of the First World War. 20-24 November, STUK, Leuven; 26-27 November, deSingel, Antwerp (in Dutch)

► www.skagen.be

Vortex Temporum

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker/Rosas & Ictus

The Flemish choreographer proves in this close collaboration with the Brussels contemporary music ensemble Ictus why she is still at the top of her game. Based on a piece by French composer Gérard Grisey, dancers and musicians collide and distance oneself again, reflecting and even shaping time. 27-28 November, Stadsschouwburg, Leuven; 5-7 December, deSingel, Antwerp

► www.rosas.be



Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's *Vortex Temporum*

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Hof van Cleve
Belgium's best

Flemish chef Pieter Goossens' Hof van Cleve in Kruishoutem, East Flanders, again earned 19.5 points in the new Gault&Millau restaurant guide, making it the guide's top-rated restaurant in Belgium. Brussels' Bon-Bon, Comme Chez Soi and Sea Grill tied for second place with 19 points each. Three restaurants – one from each region – were named Discovery of the Year. In Flanders, the honour went to Maison D in Ronse, East Flanders, for its creative take on local cuisine and light-infused interior. Sepideh Sedaghatnia of restaurant 't Zilte, in Antwerp's Museum aan de Stroom, won the guide's Sommelier of the Year for the Benelux (see p3). 't Zilte, meanwhile, received 18 out of 20 points.

► www.gaultmillau.be

Website links culture and education

Schools can find cultural educational activities for their pupils on a new "matchmaking" portal. The website that links the cultural and education sectors was launched as a co-operation between Canon, the culture department of the Flemish education ministry, and the cultural marketing organisation CultuurNet Vlaanderen. Much like Facebook, cultural organisations can create a page on the website, listing their activities suitable for schools. Teachers can find performances, workshops, lectures and exhibitions related to certain teaching goals and themes and contact the organisers directly. The integration of social media functions will also facilitate the exchange of experiences with colleagues.

► www.cultuurkuur.be

Kids Arts Day a huge success

The second annual Kunstendag voor Kinderen (Arts Day for Children), which took place at the weekend, attracted 30,000 participants across Flanders and Brussels, 5,000 more than last year. The initiative was spearheaded in 2012 by Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege to get kids interested in all forms of arts, from dance to filmmaking. About 250 organisations hosted events this year. The Bijloke in Ghent presented concerts and workshops; Museum M in Leuven gave a child-oriented tour of its big winter show about Michiel Coxcie; and Mu.Zee in Ostend got kids interested in Surrealism. "Schauvliege said: "It's important children discover culture with their families. That will ensure that culture will be part of their lives later on." Lisa Bradshaw

In with the new

Royal Ballet's dancers given free rein to create during choreography festival

Georgio Valentino

The Royal Ballet of Flanders is using its annual *Coupe Maison* event to mix artistic tradition and innovation, resulting in nine original pieces that veer from neoclassical to uncompromisingly contemporary. We spoke to the dancers behind the moves.

In a modern world ever in search of the new, ballet seems an anachronism. The genteel dance form was born and raised hundreds of years ago under the patronage of Renaissance aristocrats and has never quite lived down its feudal upbringing. It's not for nothing that the Royal Ballet of Flanders' standard features the ostentatious crown of the House of Saxe-Coburg. Don't be deterred by this affront to liberty, fraternity and equality. If you scratch the surface, you'll find a healthy dialogue here between (artistic) tradition and innovation. Indeed, the ballet may be the last place where such dialogue still exists. Elsewhere the lines have long been drawn and the respective camps have long withdrawn behind them, to develop their crafts unbothered by dialectical tension in the splendid isolation of their artistic ghettos.

I suppose ultimately both the music and choreography influenced each other equally

The Ballet's annual *Coupe Maison* might be the most perfect expression of this diversity of opinion. Once a year the company gives free rein to its worker bees – the dancers – to develop and perform their own choreographies. This year's edition of *Coupe Maison* includes nine original pieces, ranging from the staunchly neoclassical to the wildly contemporary. Their creators spoke to *Flanders Today* about the process.

On one end of the creative spectrum is Ricardo Amarante's celebration of spiritual and technical harmony, *Rondo Capriccioso (I DO)*. The Apollonian choreography, set to 19th-century classical compositions, promises to evoke the atmosphere of a wedding reception and all the sentimental platitudes that go with it – or, in Amarante's own words, "that enchanted moment when the bride and groom experience the feeling of their first dance,



followed by a sophisticated celebration of love". At the opposite end is guest choreographer James Cousins. The Scottish artist comes from the contemporary school of dance and accepted the challenge precisely because the conventional ballet form is rather a novelty for him, a novelty he intends to play with (and possibly subvert). "This will be my first time working with dancers *en pointe*," Cousins says. "This new challenge is my main inspiration for this project. I want to discover how far I can push the dancers and develop my style using pointe work." *Coupe Maison* veteran Jonas Vlerick (he's participated in six editions and counting) is also seizing on the opportunity to experiment. His *Theropoda* transforms its six performers into dinosaurs. "My piece is partially inspired by images of prehistoric birds and dinosaurs," he says, "and partially by scientific theories of adaptation,

evolution and extinction." It's a technical exercise as well as a thematic statement. "I like animalistic movements," he continues. "They stimulate the dancers to find their personal limits. The style is very detailed so it is hard for the dancers to remember the steps. It's a real challenge." Claudia Phlips was inspired by neither the tools of the trade nor the glory of love. It was a YouTube video, specifically a clip of Alan Watts' lecture "What If Money Was No Object?" The New Age guru's radical ideas roused Phlips to create a similarly progressive choreography for four of her fellow dancers.

One dancer in particular is putting his stamp on *Coupe Maison* in a big way. Christopher Hill decided to go all out for this, his first choreography. Not only is he creator, director and star of *Everything Commences in the Dark* but he has also taken on the mantle of soundtrack composer (and performer!) as well as costume and lighting designer. In fact, his contribution to *Coupe Maison* is an entirely one-man operation, DIY in the strictest sense. It's an ambitious move but Hill's objectives are modest; he wants only to learn and grow. "This is my first *Coupe Maison* and my first choreography," he says. "It's been a conscious decision not to have too many expectations apart from being open to the process, accepting what comes out of it and learning as much as I can about the creative process." It was quite a process. Hill worked through five drafts of the soundtrack in his home studio, fine-tuning as the solo choreography evolved in similar steps. It was a clever way of forestalling the critic's inevitable chicken-and-egg question. "I suppose ultimately both the music and choreography influenced each other equally," he laughs. The big tent of the Royal Ballet of Flanders houses all these personalities and perspectives (and then some). This year's *Coupe Maison* is bigger and better than ever with the addition of the *Mini Coupes* programme. Four dancers-turned-choreographers, including *Theropoda*'s Vlerick, welcome you to the company's studios for a behind-the-scenes glimpse at shorter rough cuts of new pieces that aren't quite ready for the main hall. Think of it as an appetiser before the main course.

21 November -
1 December

Coupe Maison
Theater 't Eilandje

Kattendijkdok Westkaai 16, Antwerp

► www.balletvlaanderen.be

Broken Circle Breakdown nominated for Best European Film

The Flemish film *The Broken Circle Breakdown* has received five nominations in the European Film Awards – more than any other nominated film. Directed by Felix Van Groeningen (*De helaasheid der dingen*), the film had already been included in the People's Choice category a few weeks ago. Now it's in the running for best film, best director, best screenplay (Van Groeningen and Carl Joos), best actor (Johan Heldenbergh) and best actress (Veerle Baetens).

Broken Circle is the story of a bluegrass singer (Heldenbergh) and a tattoo artist (Baetens) who meet and fall madly in love. Eventually they have a daughter, but when she becomes fatally ill, the couple struggle to fulfil each other's needs in the face of overwhelming grief. The film is based on the 2009 stage play by Johan Heldenbergh and Mieke Dobbels of Ghent-based Compagnie

Cecilia – a play that sold out across Flanders on multiple tours.

Broken Circle is up against five other contenders for best film in this 26th edition of the awards, including the multiple award-winning Spanish film *Blancanieves* and the Palm D'Or winner *La Vie d'Adele*. Van Groeningen's film has already won several awards worldwide, including the Panorama Audience Award at the Berlin Film Festival and both Best Actress and Best Screenplay at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York.

The film is now playing across the United States to excellent reviews. "Van Groeningen chose to tell the story out of order, and it works," wrote Stephanie Merry of *The Washington Post* last week. "Seeing portions of an outcome before we know why ... fuels a mysteriousness that keeps the viewer watching. Although the stunning



cinematography alone might be enough to do that."

The European Film Awards ceremony takes place on 7 December in Berlin. Lisa Bradshaw

► www.europeanfilmawards.eu

For the melancholic in you

Autumn Falls

20 November to 6 December | Across Brussels

► www.autumnfalls.be

It's only the fourth edition of Autumn Falls, but this time of the year already wouldn't feel the same without it. Fans of adventurous, melancholic and – you saw this one coming – autumnal music gather over the next two weeks for this Brussels music festival.

One of the highlights – Ghent twosome Madensu – is sold out, but there are still enough goodies to be had. Two not to be missed concerts are Scott Matthew and Califone. The former is an Australian New Yorker with a mesmerising whispery voice: often melancholic, but seldom devoid of hope. Earlier this year



he released a cover album on which he brings songs you might know from The Smiths, Joy Division and, no kidding, Whitney Houston!

Califone delivers even more melancholia: It's a rootstronica band hailing from Chicago that inventively marries roots with intimate electronics – though at times they also rock out as a loud as they can. The most renowned name on the festival is Blixa Bargeld, though the German doesn't come with his famous ensemble Einstürzende Neubauten, but as a duo with the Italian composer Teho Teardo (pictured), bridging

the gap between songs and experimental compositions.

Among the more than 50 concerts are a lot less famous names: Autumn Falls is the ideal festival to discover new artists. One of them is Flemish singer-songwriter Pauwel De Meyer, who specialises in extremely vulnerable tunes. More nice music from Flanders: the chamber quartet DAAU with its unusual line-up (clarinet, accordion, double bass, drums) or the devastatingly loud, but always highly entertaining, Raketkanon.

That and much, much more in a dozen locations across Brussels. **Christophe Verbiest**

CONCERT

GET TICKETS NOW

Arsenal

19 April 2014, 20.00 | Lotto Arena, Antwerp

► www.lotto-arena.be

Flemish electronic producers Hendrik Willems and John Roan formed Arsenal in 1999 and found immediate success when one of their first tracks was featured in the American TV series *Six Feet Under*. A 2011 hit "Melvin" catapulted their fourth album *Lokemo* into the stratosphere. After selling out the Ancienne Belgique five times in a row, it was clearly time to find a bigger venue. Antwerp's Lotto Arena, which the duo first tried (and sold) out that same year, fit like a glove. Things have since been quiet on the Arsenal front, but the group's triumphant return was recently announced for spring 2014. Tickets went on sale this week, and they're expected to sell briskly. **Georgio Valentino**



FAMILY

Polish Culture Day

23 November, from 11.00 | Oud Badhuis, Antwerp

► www.oudebadhuis.be

Here's your chance to learn more about the Polish community. The Oud Badhuis provides three floors of cultural immersion that might make you feel like you're in Krakow instead of Antwerp. Performers include folk singers Czarna Gora, dancers and storytellers the Children of Europe and Ghent-based accordion sextet Aerophonic. In the spirit of edu-tainment, you and your children will learn about important Poles throughout history. Upstairs you can join one of several workshops for adults and children. Finally, way up in the second-floor bathing hall you'll find an exhibition of paintings and prints by Polish artists. Entry is free all day, although the optional lunch will cost you €8 (approximately 33 Polish zloty). **GV**



VISUAL ARTS

Daar wordt aan de deur geklopt (There's a Knock at the Door)

Until 5 January 2014 | Huis van Alijn, Ghent

► www.huisvanalijn.be

The Flemish have a long history with Sinterklaas, and the number of grown men willing to dress up as him is – like with the Santa version in the US – astonishing. Though Sinterklaas is slimmer and prefers the traditional papal fashions to his New World cousin's functional red fleece get-up, he still holds court in shops and schools, posing for photographs with starry-eyed youngsters who have yet to discover that childhood is built on such fictions.

Existential reservations aside, the photos in the exhibition *Daar wordt aan de deur geklopt* make for interesting and amusing artefacts. Sinterklaas is, of course, always the same, but the children, their parents, the locations, the clothes and photography itself changes from decade to decade. **GV**



LITERATURE

The Poetry of Hugo Claus

26 November, 20.00 | Passa Porta, Brussels

► www.passaporta.be

The English-speaking world is finally getting hip to one of Flanders' best-loved poets and authors of the 20th century. The late Hugo Claus (pictured) was an early champion of the avant-garde in Belgium and he never, even in old age, tempered his criticism of bourgeois attitudes towards art and society. Just this month American publisher Archipelago Books released *Even Now*, a collection of his poetry translated by David Colmer. The Australian writer makes the short journey from his current home in Amsterdam to Brussels to read from the book for those of us who live in Claus' homeland and to discuss the poet's legacy with Flemish journalist Mark



Schaevens. Colmer and Schaevens are joined by the great Flemish actor Jan Decleir, a long-time collaborator of Claus, who will read a selection of Claus' work in the original Dutch. **GV**

Concert

Hasselt

Will Samson: British-Indian musical adventurer who strolls between ambient, electronica, minimalism and folk and is fond of using vintage devices to experiment with different recording techniques, resulting in stunning, intimate songs reminiscent of Sigur Ros or Brian Eno

24 NOV 20.00 at Muziekodroom, Bootstraat 9

► www.muziekodroom.be

Comedy

Ghent

Deze week in slecht Nederlands (This Week in Bad Dutch): Ghent-based American stand-up comedian Jovanka Steele hosts this weekly chat show in front of a live audience, interviewing guests and providing plenty of laughs with her unique view on life in Flanders, which is sometimes silly and sometimes surprising (in bad Dutch)

26 November 20.00 at De Centrale, Kraankindersstraat 2

► www.decentrale.be

Visual arts

Turnhout

Vondsten Vertellen: Archeologische parels uit de Antwerpse Kempen (Telling Finds: Archaeological Treasures From the Antwerp Kempen): A look back at 10 years of work by the archeological department of the Antwerp Kempen region, featuring a collection of finds dating back to the first humans to settle in the area, up through the late Middle Ages

Until 2 March at Taxandria Museum, Begijnenstraat 28

► www.taxandriamuseum.be

Food & Drink

Brussels

Nocturnes van de Zavel: Annual holiday event with plenty of atmosphere featuring festive decoration and lights, red carpets, Champagne, numerous gift kiosks, sculptures and other works of art, concerts and demonstrations by top chefs

28 November to 1 December at Grote Zavel

► www.sablon-bruxelles.com

Special event

Brussels and Leuven

De Kotroute: Student rooms are transformed into miniature galleries and concert halls for one evening, giving young, promising artists and musicians the chance to perform or to show their work to a small public. Download the route via the website, order a wristband and look for the "Kotroute" sign on the windows

21 November 19.00-23.00 in student rooms across Brussels and Leuven

► www.amuseevous.be

Talking Dutch

For Piet's sake

Derek Blyth

It's that time again when newspapers select their new Dutch words of the year. This year, many of the new terms are linked to the controversy over Zwarte Piet, the folklore figure with the blackened face who accompanies Sinterklaas on 6 December. Some people argue that Zwarte Piet is a symbol of racism and should be abolished in a multicultural society. But others plead that he is an innocent character who simply got his face covered in soot while coming down the chimney. After comments from a member of a UN advisory council, a heated debate recently erupted, which led to several new words popping up in the Dutch language. You



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have, for example, a *Piettie*, the word for a campaign to save Zwarte Piet. The *Piet petite* (Piet petition) was launched by two *Nederlanders* – Dutch people who were worried that the UN might ban Zwarte Piet. The two men were so outraged that they launched a Facebook page called *Zwarte Piet moet blijven* – Zwarte Piet has to stay. Then they shortened it to *Piettie*.

The *Piettie* was a huge success – it had gathered more than

2.2 million “likes” the last time I looked. That is a lot of angry people out there who agree that dit prachtige kinderfeest moet blijven voor iedereen – this lovely children’s

festival has to be preserved for everyone.

The petition has in fact broken a world record. It gathered 646,000 “likes” within 24 hours of being launched. At a certain point, it was getting 100 new likes per second. *Daaarmee is het volgens onderzoek de snelstgroeiende Facebookpagina die ooit in Nederland is gelanceerd* – that makes it, according to a study, the fastest-growing Facebook page ever launched in the Netherlands. But not everyone agrees with the *Piettie*. That has led to another new word sliding into the Dutch language. *Pietenpolarisatie* – the Piet conflict.

And Flanders can’t avoid the conflict, according to one Facebook comment. *Wij Belgen zijn ook massaal aan’t “liken” hoor, deze tegenwind verwachten we binnenkort ook in België!!* – hey, we Belgians are also hitting “like” in huge numbers, and we are expecting to see a reaction soon in Belgium, too!! Indeed, groups both for and against Piet have sprung up on Facebook in recent weeks. It looks like this protest movement isn’t going away. It might not be as serious as the *taalconflict* – the language conflict, but *Pietenpolarisatie* is definitely bringing some interesting new words into the dictionary.

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



This Is Antwerp @thisisantwerp_

Congrats to L'épicerie du cirque and The Glorious for getting that Michelin star #antwerp #restaurant #michelin



flandersnews @flandersnews

“Take DNA from babies to battle crime”: The Antwerp Attorney-General Yves Liegeois has suggested the idea... <http://bit.ly/18DDoXQ>



MARS @30SECONDSTOMARS

Thanks to all who joined us in ANTWERP, BELGIUM yesterday!! → <http://ow.ly/qKBNB> #LoveLustFaithDreamsTour



City of Brussels @CityBrussels

Arrival of #Christmas tree at the Grand-Place #Brussels on 19.11, watch it via the #webcam: <http://www.brussels.be/8045>



Visit Flanders @VisitFlanders

Plaisirs d’hiver in #Brussels in #Stylistmagazine’s The World’s Best #Christmas markets shortlist <http://tinyurl.com/kgcyol6>



FlandersToday.eu

Helen Grant: I saw the Rogier van der Weyden exhibition at Museum M in Leuven a few years back and it was excellent (is this a reincarnation of that exhibition, I wonder?). As well as the beauty of the work, it was fascinating to see how common it was to make multiple copies of a popular painting. I would thoroughly recommend this exhibition – it’s bound to be interesting!

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Poll

The Belgian government is one step closer to allowing euthanasia for minors. What do you think?

a. I'm against the euthanasia law in general. It's morally wrong to take a life, even if it's a doctor who's doing it

0%

b. I support the euthanasia law for adults, but not for minors

9%

c. I support a new law. The decision is for the patient, the parents and the doctor – and no-one else

91%

Not much room for discussion this week. You were unanimous in support of the principle of euthanasia. We have to say we're surprised; we expected at least *some* anti-euthanasia response. On the substantive question, you were overwhelmingly in favour of a new law extending the right to euthanasia to

minors. The votes alone don't show it, but, according to a discussion that took place on Facebook relating to our poll, many of that 91% made it clear their support was limited to cases where there was a question of terminal illness and intolerable pain. Cases of psychological torment, which

has been used as a justification for euthanasia in adults, found little or no support in the case of minors. We should stress, as the original article did, that the exact conditions of any new law have yet to be determined. The matter is still very much up for discussion in parliament.

Next week's question:

The controversial new shopping and leisure centre Uplace in Machelen, located on the municipal ring around Brussels, has already let 40% of its retail space. Critics argue that it will increase traffic on Brussels' Ring Road and drive city centre retailers out of business. How do you feel about huge shopping complexes?

Go to the Flanders Today website and log in to vote! www.flanderstoday.eu

THE LAST WORD

Born to be filed

“I think it would be a good development to collect DNA material from every newborn baby and from everyone who comes into the country for the first time.”

Antwerp prosecutor Yves Liegeois has a Big Brother view of crime fighting

Monk business

“The view of the mountains is absolutely beautiful. The air is like in the Swiss mountains – a bit thin, but apparently very healthy.” Fifteen-year-old Giel from East Flanders has arrived in India to enter a Buddhist seminary

In the can

“The policy has always been: We throw nothing away. Whether it’s or a documentary on potatoes, makes no difference. We treat every print with the same amount of care.”

The Cinematek archive in Brussels, with more than 72,000 films, celebrates 75 years this month



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