

## Whole heartedly

Aside from having a syndrome named after him, Pedro Brugada has made Flanders a hotbed of cardiology research ▶ 7

## Fifty years a migrant

A celebration across Flanders of the tradition of migration and a 1964 treaty with Turkey and Morocco ▶ 11



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Bart Heirweg photographs Belgium's Great War sites at the crack of dawn for his new book ▶ 14



© Jean Deville, "Opheus", 1893

# Perchance to dream

## Brussels' new Fin-de-Siècle Museum shows one of art's most startling transitions

Georgio Valentino

Brussels' newest museum spotlights the city's history as an artistic capital at the close of the 19th century and its crucial international role in the spread of Modernism

The deepest sublevels of one of Brussels' oldest buildings are an unlikely home for the Fin-de-Siècle Museum, the capital's newest cultural attraction. But it makes some kind of sense. To begin with, the building is the seat of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts on Regenschapsstraat, where Belgium's largest, most prestigious collections are housed in the Modern and Old Masters Museums.

Then there's the theme. *Fin-de-siècle* (the end of the century) technically refers to a time period, but the description is not as innocent as that. The close of the 19th century was lived by its citizens and artists as a time of decadence – as the end of the world as they knew it. The former were right, for this was a time of social injustice and political irresponsibility, the immediate consequence of which was the apocalypse of the First World War.

It ended better for the artists. They welcomed the end of the old

order as the beginning of the new. When it came, the Great War was only more fuel for the modernist fire. The *fin-de-siècle* saw the spectacular death of the classical ideal, which was rooted in a belief no longer shared by a new generation of artists – that of a transcendent, harmonious beauty.

These artists rather felt themselves at the threshold of something new, something modern, although the term had yet to be defined – hence the uncertainty bordering on foreboding. So the quintessential *fin-de-siècle* artwork exudes a dark, dream-like, subterranean atmosphere. The age of experimentation had begun.

The Fin-de-Siècle Museum is dedicated to these years between 1865 – the year of seminal Parisian poet Charles Baudelaire's self-imposed exile in "poor Belgium" – and 1914, when the outbreak of the war put an abrupt end to the proceedings. During this half-century, Brussels became an artistic as well as a political capital, thanks to so many indefatigably modernist young locals. Among them were visual artists like James Ensor, Fernand Khnopff, Constantin Meunier and Félicien Rops; architects like Victor Horta and Henry van de Velde; and men

of letters like Maurice Maeterlinck and Emile Verhaeren.

The museum's inauguration in early December was an all-star affair, attended by the international press, a sizeable delegation of federal and regional ministers and the man of the hour, Michel Dragnet. Speaking at the opening, the Royal Museums' director put the whole project in perspective. "The 19th century is a key moment in the history of European culture," he said, "when modernity announced itself in a flowering of new forms to embrace a wave of new ideas".

Impressionism, Symbolism, Realism and Art Nouveau were all stylistic innovations that followed intellectual and social currents. They were reflections of a society in upheaval, torn between yesterday's classical ideal and tomorrow's promise of "progress", alternately heartening and alarming.

Most of these currents originated abroad, in Paris and later Vienna, but Belgian artists were early converts to this fledgling modernism, and their advocacy was crucial to its international spread. "Peripheral in comparison with the scene in Paris but central due to its role as a crossroads of Europe, the Belgian art world carried the modern movement forward in all its



# No more wild animals in circus

## Government's new legislation bans wild animals such as lions from performing in Belgium

Alan Hope

Wild animals will no longer be able to be part of circus performances in Belgium, the federal parliament voted last month. Members of parliament supported a proposal to create a white list of animals allowed in circuses. The list includes mostly domesticated animals such as poultry, llamas, dogs, horses and sheep. The list excludes popular circus animals such as tigers, elephants and lions. The choice of a white list avoids circuses getting around any black list by introducing unlisted species. The animals on the white list will still, the legislation says, have to be kept in conditions that respect the minimum norms on the housing of animals.

The legislation came about after a 2011 report from the Council for Animal Welfare pointed out that circus animals were often kept in cramped conditions that took no account of the animals' particular needs, for example regarding temperature. In related news, animal rights organisation Gaia has demanded an investigation after a snow leopard was shot dead following its escape from an animal park in Wallonia last month. Gaia director-general Michel Vandenbosch said the animal could have been captured using a tranquilliser dart and that the park, Monde Sauvage in Aywaille, has had other questionable incidents.



## Warm temperatures, popular baby names grace New Year

Antwerp saw a heavily increased police presence on New Year's Eve after threats of terrorist attacks in Antwerp and Brussels. In the end, there were no incidents, and Antwerp's 300 extra police spent their time checking for illegal fireworks. In 2013, for the third year in a row, Lucas was the most popular boy's name in Flanders, according to family welfare organisation Kind & Gezin. For girls, Marie made a comeback after two years in which Emma held the top position. The last month of 2013 was the sunniest since 1972, according to the Royal Meteorological Institute. The sun shone almost twice as long as the

seasonal norm of 45 hours. It was also unusually warm, with an average high temperature of 8.6 degrees, compared to the normal 6.1. **AH**



Fireworks displays in both Brussels and Antwerp came off without a hitch

## KU Leuven looks for shale gas in Limburg

The Flemish government's agency for innovation through science and technology (IWT) is funding an investigation by the University of Leuven to see if there is shale gas under the ground in Limburg that might be economical to extract. The natural gas found within shale formations is thought by some geologists to represent a solution to the decline in fossil fuels. Shale gas is not currently extracted in Europe, but it is to a growing degree in the United States through a technique known as fracking, which involves pumping water underground at high pressure to fracture the layers of rock,



Shale gas extraction through "fracking" is controversial

allowing gas to be extracted. Opponents of fracking claim the process can cause underground instability and lead to earthquakes. It also pollutes groundwater. The Leuven team will examine rock samples from the archives of the Belgian Geological Service,

drilled out of the ground during the decades when the coal mining industry was active in Limburg. The samples will show whether shale gas is present and to what extent. Meanwhile, opposition is forming. "I can't understand why anyone would want to carry out this research," Ludwig Vandenhove, Limburg's deputy for the environment, told VRT. "The economic advantages are far outweighed by the incredible ecological disadvantages." Political party Groen, meanwhile, called for money to be spent on researching clean and renewable energy sources rather than shale gas extraction. **AH**

## New arrest in Brussels Airport diamond robbery case

The Brussels prosecutor's office has confirmed a new arrest relating to the massive diamond robbery that took place on the tarmac of Brussels Airport in February last year. Two vehicles carrying eight armed men in police uniforms gained access to the airport through an adjoining construction site and held up a Swiss Airlines flight getting ready to take off for Zurich. The thieves made off with 121 bags of uncut diamonds worth €37 million. The robbery took only five minutes and no one was hurt. Police in various locations eventually arrested 31 people, four of whom remain in custody. The man thought to be the brains

behind the operation, Marc Bertoldi of France, was released on bail last month. No trace of the stolen diamonds has been found, and investigators have speculated that the robbers were expecting to find a large cash shipment instead of diamonds and were unprepared to deal with the stones. The latest suspect is a 43-year-old man identified as Nordine A. He was arrested on 13 December but released after questioning and providing a DNA test. He was arrested a second time on 23 December. The prosecutor would not confirm that the arrest was related to DNA evidence. **AH**

## New inquiry into Mortselsel jail death

The Antwerp prosecutor's office is re-opening the investigation into the death of a young man in custody in 2010, after a court ordered further enquiries to be made. Jonathan Jacob, then 26, was picked up by police in a disoriented state after taking amphetamines. He was taken to a police station in Mortselsel, Antwerp province, where a doctor was called in and determined that he was suffering a psychotic episode. He was refused entry to a psychiatric centre in Boechout because of aggressive behaviour

and was returned to the police cell. A magistrate ordered Jacob to be sedated, which he was, but he continued to resist. Six members of the Special Intervention Squad restrained him, and he died in the cell a short time later. According to the autopsy, the cause of death was internal injuries caused by blows received in the cell. The entire incident was recorded by a CCTV camera and fell into the hands of the media earlier this year. The case received such attention that even the

torture committee of the United Nations called for an explanation of why it had not been dealt with after three years and why the officers involved had not been disciplined. The court agreed to a number of new investigative tasks, including a toxicology report, more information on the cause of death and the questioning of the doctor who gave Jacob the sedative. The court also rejected a request for the identity of the six officers to be kept confidential. **AH**

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

40%

of cinema tickets sold by Kinepolis in Flanders over the holiday period were for Flemish films, with *Kampioen zijn blijft plezant*, *Het Vonnis* and *Marina* all topping 350,000 sales

8,000,000

SMS tickets sold by public transport authority De Lijn in 2013, a 45% increase on 2012, with 700,000 people making use of the facility, which De Lijn said allows drivers to keep better time

65,484

births in Flanders in 2013, a 2% reduction on 2012, the study centre for perinatal epidemiology reported. The fall was spread against all provinces, with the biggest drop, 4.11%, in Limburg

254

reports of UFO sightings in Belgium in 2013, 70 fewer than 2012, according to the UFO reporting office. The figure is largely due to common sightings involving everyday objects being excluded from the count

417

cases brought before the Flemish council for examination complaints challenging an exam result, 30% more than in 2012. Just over half of all cases – 52% – result in a ruling in favour of the student



WEEK IN BRIEF

Education minister Pascal Smet has ordered an investigation into claims by former staff of the Natan school in Antwerp that the school – launched in September with claims to **teach children the spirit of entrepreneurship** – has only one teacher for 80 pre-schoolers and has problems with management, budget and hygiene. “I am taking this very seriously and have asked for the case to be investigated,” Smet said.

A failure of the Bancontact/Mister Cash payments system on the Monday before Christmas **cost retailers €51 million in lost sales**, according to the NSZ, which represents the self-employed. The system, operated by Worldline, went down for 2.5 hours the day after a record number of payments had been recorded, leaving customers unable to pay by card and eventually unable to obtain cash from depleted bank machines. According to NSZ, just over one million transactions failed, worth an average of €50 each. It is demanding damages, as well as guarantees the failure will not be repeated. Worldline reassured customers no money will be deducted from their accounts if their transactions were not completed.

A youth magistrate has been appointed to handle the case of a **newborn baby boy who was left** at the entrance to the Paul Brien hospital in Schaarbeek on 28 December. The baby is being cared for in the Queen Fabiola hospital in Laken while attempts are made to trace the parents. If neither parent is found within a month, the baby will become a ward of the court.

Hasselt-based fashion designer **Stijn Helsen left a farewell letter** before throwing himself from a fourth-floor hotel balcony on New Year’s Eve, police have revealed, in an incident that was initially reported as an accident. Helsen suffered fractures to the wrist and

pelvis in the fall, but his life is not in danger. He recently suffered what was described as a burn-out.

Barely one in eight seats on the **boards of Belgium’s major companies** are held by women, according to a study by consultancy Hay Group. According to the report, carried out among 391 large public companies across Europe, the EU average of seats held by women is 21%. Belgian companies will be obliged by law to hold one in three board seats for female directors by 2016 – nearly three times as many as now.

Six people were trapped for nearly an hour 85 metres above Brussels’ Paleizenplein when the **Skyliner attraction malfunctioned** on the Saturday after Christmas. Operator Christoph Loosen said the problem was caused by the steel tower’s software.

The University Hospital Leuven is the first hospital in Belgium to **detect Down syndrome in foetuses** through blood tests. The hospital is currently doing an average of 30 so-called NIPT tests a week. The tests replace the usual amniotic fluid test or chorionic villus sampling, both of which increase the risk of miscarriage. Via blood, doctors can determine the genetic material of the foetus and ascertain with near certainty whether the foetus has a chromosome abnormality. The non-invasive prenatal test costs €460, however, and the medical insurance agency Riziv does not yet cover it. e court-appointed administrators.

Rail infrastructure company Infrabel has bought a **house badly damaged by the train crash** in Wetteren last May. The house is closest to the spot where a freight train was derailed and a cargo of toxic chemicals caught fire. The house was badly damaged by the fire and the lengthy fire-fighting work

that followed. The owners intend to build a new house in the area. The suspected Islamic radical who posted a message before New Year warning “the faithful” to stay away from public celebrations in Brussels and Antwerp has claimed it was **not intended to be a threat**, but advice. “What the media made of it is something else,” Madjlis Shura Muhajirien wrote on Facebook. Police are investigating the identity of the person who posted the message online and sent it to the newsroom of *Het Laatste Nieuws*. Criminal charges could ensue.

Unizo has called on the government to ensure that **retailers respect the law against fake discounts** as the January sales began last Friday. According to the organisation, some retailers claim to offer discounts based on falsified “previous prices”. The sales started with clothes shops still holding up to 40% of their winter collections, which remained unsold thanks to mild weather this winter. The sales end on 31 January.

The king’s children – crown princess Elisabeth, princess Eléonore and princes Gabriel and Emmanuel – are to receive **full-time police protection** following the receipt of letters at the end of last year threatening to kidnap the 12-year-old Elisabeth, the federal interior minister said. The royal protection detail requires 249 police officers and costs €17 million a year.

A Brussels-based start-up offering free online radio has **bought the media player Winamp** from internet giant AOL. Radionomy, set up five years ago, offers a platform to allow anyone to run an online radio station and operates 7,700 channels with 17 million listeners, financed by advertising. Radionomy recently also acquired Targetspot, a US company that manages radio advertising.

withstand conditions on the lunar surface. It also had to pass through NASA’s tough pre-boarding checks. “How the little sculpture fit in with those procedures I don’t remember,” Commander Scott told the online magazine *Slate* recently. “I just know it was in my pocket when I got to the moon.” Van Hoeydonck is still angry about how things turned out, but December’s tribute by the Washington museum was intended to put things right. The artist donated a replica of “Fallen Astronaut” to the Smithsonian in 1972. Another replica was presented to the late King Boudewijn, and another is part of the permanent collection of the Flemish parliament, together with other works by Van Hoeydonck.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



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Jeanne Brabants

Jeanne Brabants, the founder of the Royal Ballet of Flanders and described by minister-president Kris Peeters as the *Grande Dame* of the Flemish dance world, has died in hospital in Antwerp. She was 93. “I think I was born dancing,” she once told an interviewer. She was born in Antwerp in 1920, the daughter of a father who was a gym teacher. She studied to follow the same profession but was soon diverted into ballet, studying with Lea Daan, taking over her father’s gymnastics and dance association at age 15, going to London for further studies and setting up her own dance school at 21. Her search for financing for the school brought her into contact with the world of Antwerp politics, and in 1969 she set up the company that would be known as Ballet of Flanders, later winning the right to call itself Royal. She ran the company for 15 years. During that time she worked as a choreographer, producing more than 200 works, and setting up groups like Danza Antiqua, which specialised in old dance forms, and Jeugd en Dans for young people. She retired officially in

1984 but continued to make her considerable presence felt throughout the world of dance in Flanders. In 2000 she was offered the title of baroness by King Albert II but declined to accept. “Without her tireless commitment, energy, knowledge and passion for dance, the Flemish dance world would not have the international reputation it has today,” the Royal Ballet said in a statement. “Ms Brabants will be remembered for her professionalism, her strength and her inspiration,” general manager Lena De Meerleer added. The company’s artistic director Assis Carreiro called her “a tremendous force in the world of ballet” as well as “a true pioneer and a visionary”. Brabants’ death comes as the Ballet of Flanders and Flemish Opera join in a single organisation – a development she opposed. “Her legacy in the Ballet, to which she remained committed to the last, will continue in the new organisation, standing on its own two artistic feet, and managed as a performing contemporary institution,” culture minister Joke Schauvliege said in a statement. “Two souls with one idea.”

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Man in the Moon

Last month, the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC, paid tribute to a very special figure. Made of aluminium, 8.9cm tall and of Flemish origin, the figure has resided for 42 years on the surface of the Moon. The small sculpture called “Fallen Astronaut” (*pictured*) is the work of Antwerp-born artist Paul Van Hoeydonck. It was placed on the Moon’s surface by Commander David Scott of the Apollo 15 lunar mission in 1971 and was intended to pay tribute to the men who had lost their lives in the space race up to that time. Van Hoeydonck was living in New York when the plan was hatched in 1969 and imagined the stunt would make him famous. Instead, he later



returned to Wijnegem a virtual unknown, accused of profiteering from the space programme. His previous work had often been on themes of space, and when gallery director Louise Deutschman proposed sending a sculpture into space, he jumped at the idea. The result was designed with no visible signs of race or gender, small enough to be carried in the hand and tough enough to

FLANDERS TODAY



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## 5TH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Meanwhile, on the other side...

In the federal government, politicians from both language groups meet. They represent different parts of the country, with different sensitivities. They have their own electorate and their own logic. These have nothing to do with the other part of the country, but they may still affect it.

Take the socialist PS, the largest party on the French-speaking side. By nature it is leftist, but it finds itself in a government with Flemish parties that have more right-wing economic views. The policies that result from this are often contested – both from the left (in French-speaking Belgium) and the right (in Flanders).

In recent months, the small leftist PTB (comparable to Britain's Socialist Workers' Party) has been nibbling away at the popularity of the PS. To avoid losing votes, the French-speaking socialists have become even more leftist – while in the eyes of some Flemish they are "Marxists" already. This is the background to the events that led to the resignation of Johnny Thijs, the CEO of Bpost who everyone agreed was doing a good job.

To woo leftwing voters, minister of government enterprises Jean-Pascal Labille insisted on curbing Thijs' wage package to €650,000 annually for his second term as CEO – a nice sum, but far less than the €1.1 million Thijs has made so far. In the end, Thijs resigned, citing a "lack of confidence".

As coalition partners, the Flemish parties CD&V and Open VLD were expected to support Labille in this. However, they stood by in silent astonishment. After a few days, Open VLD president Gwendolyn Rutten said Labille had some explaining to do. Rutten's remarks seemed rather disloyal, but as it turned out, in his negotiations with Thijs, Labille had not stuck to the mandate he was given by his coalition partners either.

The discussion is typically pre-electoral and comes after earlier disagreements about government appointments and tax reform. Although the federal government can boast some achievements, such as getting through the economic crisis relatively well and unifying the working statutes for employees and workers, the image that remains is one of total discord. At the start of his term, prime minister Elio Di Rupo said one of the ambitions of his government was to help the Flemish coalition partners CD&V, Open VLD and SPA end the steady rise of N-VA. The pre-electoral fever that hits all government parties these days only makes it harder to achieve that.

# British and Irish prime ministers visit Flanders Fields

## David Cameron and Enda Kenny visit World War sites in show of solidarity

Derek Blyth

British prime minister David Cameron joined Irish taoiseach Enda Kenny for a visit to First World War sites in West Flanders last month. The two leaders toured five memorials and cemeteries from the 1914-1918 conflict before attending a European Council summit in Brussels.

Britain and Ireland have had an uneasy relationship for many decades over the disputed status of Northern Ireland. The visit on 19 December was the first time that Irish and British leaders have jointly visited the war memorials at Mesen, where thousands of Irish soldiers died fighting in the British army.

In a symbolic act of reconciliation, the two leaders laid wreaths at the grave of Major Willie Redmond, an Irish nationalist who died in the attack on Mesen ridge in June 1917.



David Cameron (centre) and Irish taoiseach Enda Kenny (right) visit Flanders' war sites

In accordance with his last wishes, Redmond's grave was located outside the walls of the British military cemetery in protest at the

execution of the leaders of the 1916 Rising. The leaders then visited the Menin Gate in Ypres, where a

commemoration ceremony was held. They were joined by Belgian prime minister Elio Di Rupo, Flanders' minister president Kris Peeters and Flemish tourism minister Geert Bourgeois.

"It is very important that the two countries have come together here in Ypres, the peace city of Flanders," said Bourgeois. "This is important for remembering the war but even more so for the reconciliation process between the British and the Irish."

Cameron and Kenny then travelled to Brussels to attend the EU leaders' summit. "The thought crossed my mind standing at the grave of Willie Redmond – that is why we have a European Union and why I'm attending a European Council," said Kenny.

## Government launches "people's bond"

The federal parliament has voted in favour of a new investment product, known as the *volkslening*, or people's bond. The intention is to allow the massive sums of money currently tied up in savings accounts to be put to use to stimulate the economy. Individuals can now buy the bond, which has a minimum term of five years and offers a tax advantage: instead of the normal 25% tax paid on interest earned from the bond, investors will pay only 15%. Interest on the bond will be set by the banks at a market rate.

In return for allowing the government to effectively borrow from citizens, all investments in the system will be guaranteed to a ceiling of €100,000 – the same as



if the money were left in a normal savings account. The bond therefore offers the same risk but higher earnings than savings accounts. The people's bond is available at any bank for any client, starting at €200.

Alan Hope

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

## Antwerp citizens vote on how to spend €1 million

Antwerp's district council has launched an ambitious pilot project to allow citizens to vote on how to spend about 10% of the annual budget. The district, which represents the inner city, spends €11 million annually on roads, culture, sport and parks. From the end of January, its 190,000 residents will get to vote on how the council allocates about €1 million of that funding.

Similar pilot projects have been launched in Kortrijk and Genk, but this is said to be the largest of its kind ever launched in the Low Countries. It will have an impact on the centre, home to most of the city's museums, theatres and historic buildings.

"The days are over when a politician was a cultivated, well-educated man who ran the community from on high," said alderman Willem-Frederik Schiltz of the Flemish liberal party Open VLD. "People now

thankfully want to have a share of the power."

Schiltz, who is in charge of citizen participation, argues that politicians are afraid of handing over power to citizens. "But this is misguided. By handing over a little power, you gain a huge amount of legitimacy. Otherwise you end up with everything being decided by the loudest voices and the ones who complain."

The project is initially being launched at a local level, but councillors hope it can eventually be extended to all nine districts of Antwerp. "Society has changed, so politics has to change as well," said Antwerp district mayor Zuhail Demir of the Flemish nationalist party N-VA. "Cities and towns have to think a lot more about ways of involving citizens in their policies."

DB

## Air quality in Flanders "slightly improved"

Air quality in Flanders improved slightly in 2012, according to the annual report published by the Flemish Environment Agency (VMM). Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege said that the report showed that the positive trend of previous years was continuing.

Flemish MP Hermes Sanctorum of the Groen party immediately criticised the government's policy, saying that it was doing too little to improve air quality and that levels of fine particulates and nitrogen dioxide in Flanders remained unacceptably high.

The level of nitrogen dioxide – largely caused by vehicle emissions – remains dangerously high, said Sanctorum, because Flanders was not making enough effort to reduce traffic. He also argued that

the government of Flanders was following "a deliberate policy of more rather than less air pollution" because of large infrastructure projects that would lead to more traffic such as the widening of the Brussels Ring and the construction of Uplage shopping centre.

On the same day, European Environment Commissioner Janez Potocnik launched tough new measures to clean up Europe's air, including a national emission ceiling, arguing that more Europeans die from bad air quality than in road accidents. He estimated that the direct cost of air pollution was about €23 billion annually and that implementation of the EU's pollution reduction plan would cost just one-twelfth of the amount that would be saved through improved health. DB

## Call for health-care projects that focus on prevention

Innovation minister Ingrid Lieten has announced a second call for health-care research that focuses on prevention and the needs of patients. She has set aside a new budget of €5 million, following a previous call in 2012 for projects focusing on innovative methods for treating dementia and cancer.

"We are nearing the end of a period of mass medication in health care," she said this week. "At the moment, we take huge amounts of medication, but actually less than half of it does us any good."

Lieten stressed that innovative health-care research was a key priority for her ministry. "Over the last 20 years, health-care research has made spectacular progress

in understanding the causes of illnesses such as cancer, dementia, asthma, rheumatism, diabetes and heart disease," she said. "But we are less successful in applying the latest findings in the treatment of patients."

She argued that medical science is providing us with far greater awareness of how the body functions and what makes us sick. Some treatments work for some people but not for others – in cases involving breast cancer, for instance. She noted also that recent research into biomarkers was helping doctors to anticipate whether a particular individual was at risk from illnesses such as dementia and cancer. DB



# Perchance to dream

## Flemish artists became pioneers in the turn-of-the-century art movement

► continued from page 1

facets,” Draguet said, “from avant-garde frenzy to critical backlash.”

Indeed, by the mid-20th century the country would be an established centre of the *fin-de-siècle*’s triumphant heir, high modernism.

The Fin-de-Siècle Museum is not just a celebration of Belgium’s contribution to modern Europe’s cultural heritage; it is also the second step in a long-term policy programme. “The opening of the museum is a milestone in a project to reorganise museums and restructure federal museum collections,” said Philippe Courard from the Belgian Science Policy Office (Belspo), speaking at the museum’s inauguration ceremony.

The feds’ first move was the establishment of a dedicated Magritte Museum in 2009. If all goes well, the project will culminate in the creation of an ambitious new modern art museum somewhere in Brussels. Though details on that are still sketchy, Courard promises a museum that will “bring together art collections from the 20th and 21st centuries and within a building to be renovated or constructed in a place still to be determined.”

The Fin-de-Siècle Museum is also a technical

“They started this collection during a decade when Art Nouveau monuments were being destroyed

innovation in keeping with contemporary architectural values as well as the latest developments in multimedia technology. This includes interactive touchscreen stations that take visitors on virtual tours of long-demolished architectural gems such as Horta’s Volkshuis.

Luckily, loads of art survived the vagaries of public taste. Some *fin-de-siècle* artists even became legends. Ostend’s favourite son James Ensor, for example, is still celebrated as a pioneering modern – not just in Flanders, but all over the world.

The painter took his cue from the French Impressionists, who had experimented with the optical and psychological mechanisms of perception, but Ensor ended by pioneering a form of expressionism, bordering on surrealism, that anticipated the 20th-century movements of the same name.

### Symbolism

Meanwhile, in Bruges, Khnopff was putting his stamp on another French import, Symbolism. Influencing the visual arts, poetry, music and theatre, Symbolism can safely be described as the defining movement of the *fin-de-siècle*, and its rejection of representation in the classical mould would pave the way for even bolder experiments in both the following and present century.

Khnopff and his Symbolist confreres developed an art that operates more like dream than waking reality. Their art is rooted not in literal signs but in “symbols”, with meanings that must be deciphered. If all this sounds familiar, that’s because the *fin-de-siècle* was also the age of Freud, who absorbed the spirit of Symbolism and incorporated it into his psychoanalytical



Fernand Khnopff’s “Memories: Lawn Tennis” (1889); James Ensor’s “Skeleton Fighting over a Pickled Herring” (1891); Alphonse Mucha’s “Nature” (1899-1900)

model.

Khnopff’s “symbol” of choice is the femme fatale. His canvases are bursting with women: Some are angelic but most are diabolical or at least vaguely unsettling. Almost all of them are modelled after Khnopff’s muse, his own sister Marguerite.

The *fin-de-siècle* fixation on this particular symbol can be read sociologically as anxiety over the growing public role of women, or artistically as evidence of the Symbolists’ search for new, subversive ideals of beauty.

Still other *fin-de-siècle* artists were not interested in “beauty” at all. Their ideal was social justice. Brussels-born sculptor Constantin Meunier conducted a warts-and-all investigation of contemporary labour conditions and presented his findings in timeless bronze. His noble (although often exhausted) proletarian figures brought attention to the plight of the industrial worker. They also made him an international standard-bearer of Social Realism.

Belgium’s Art Nouveau legacy is more controversial. Of course, the style is one

of the capital’s signatures. Speaking at the inauguration, federal culture minister Laurette Onkelinx said that, when it comes to Art Nouveau, “people automatically think of Brussels, next to other larger cities such as Vienna, Paris, New York and Nagoya.”

But the co-existence of both fine and decorative aspects under the heading Art Nouveau was and still is a bone of contention among critics. “Decoration” – encompassing privately commissioned architecture, furniture and what we would now describe as design – is still not recognised by all cultural “authorities” as worthy of the arts-museum treatment.

In light of this schism, the bequest of Anne-Marie Crowet and Roland Gillion’s extensive, formerly private collection of Art Nouveau “art” and “decoration” posed a problem. This gift is the heart of the Fin-de-Siècle Museum, but there were some who would have split up the Gillion-Crowet collection, incorporating the paintings and sculptures into the museum collection while excluding the hand-crafted chairs, desks, lamps and tableware.

It was, after all, just this sort of fine-arts

chauvinism that allowed the couple to amass such an extraordinary collection in the first place. “Mr and Mrs Gillion-Crowet started this collection in the 1960s, a decade during which some Art Nouveau monuments were destroyed both in Belgium and other parts of Europe,” said Brussels minister-president Rudi Vervoort, speaking at the museum opening. “Their painstaking search enabled them to assemble one of Belgium’s most exceptional collections of decorative art from the late-19th century.” They did us a favour by preserving these objects, whatever their official status. After delicate negotiations between the Gillion-Crowet family and representatives of both the Brussels-Capital Region and the federal government, the collection was finally donated in its entirety to Brussels in 2006. Again, modernity wins out.

### Fin-de-Siècle Museum

Regentschapsstraat 3, Brussels  
► [www.fin-de-siecle-museum.be](http://www.fin-de-siecle-museum.be)



WEEK IN  
BUSINESS

## Banking ► KBC

The Antwerpse Diamantbank, the leading institution specialised in the financing of the diamonds trade, has been sold by its parent, KBC, to the Chinese Yinren group, based in Shanghai. The move is the last of the long list of disposals imposed by the EU in exchange for approving the multi-billion-euro state aid that rescued KBC in 2008.

## Cars ► BMW

The German manufacturer is investing €34 million to upgrade and develop its local activities: €4 million is earmarked for the brand's Bornem training centre, €25 million for a 28,000 square-metre garage in Evere and €5 million for a showroom in central Brussels.

## Dredging ► Deme

The Antwerp-based dredging company has won contracts worth €200 million to build and install 15 wind-powered turbines off the coast of Kent in the UK and for building the underwater sub-structures of 97 mills off Germany's North Sea coast.

## Energy ► Electrawinds

The rescue of the Ostend-based renewable energies company took a new turn with the €50 million bid by Liège-based energy distribution and cable company Tecteo. If successful, the offer, which has the support of Electrawinds management, would provide Tecteo with major interests in four offshore wind farms.

## Engineering ► TPF

The Brussels-based engineering and public utilities services company has acquired the Madrid-based Getinsa for €25 million. The move will allow TPF to develop activities in high-speed transport building projects and provide access to Latin American countries.

## Materials ► Umicore

The Brussels-based nonferrous metals and materials group has acquired Palm Commodities International, with its headquarters in Nashville in the US, which is specialised in transforming nickel and cobalt into plating materials.

## Plastics ► Solvay

The Brussels-based chemicals and plastics group is to sell its Benvic PVC production operations in France, Spain and Italy to the Opengate Capital investment group.

## Property ► Berlaymont

The Belgian state has netted €636 million by collecting by anticipation 18 years of rents of the Berlaymont building in Brussels, the heart of the European institutions.

# Bpost CEO quits over salary

## Head of the national post refuses federal government's €650,000 salary cap

Alan Hope

Johnny Thijs, CEO of the partly privatised post office Bpost, is stepping down though will continue working until a successor is found. Thijs announced his decision to the Bpost board last month after a decision by the federal government to cap his salary at €650,000. Thijs was paid €1.1 million last year.

The cap comes as the latest step in the government's campaign to rein in the salaries of the heads of government enterprises. When last year a number of top jobs were re-assigned, including the rail authority NMBS and air traffic agency Belgocontrol, the new occupants of the posts found their salaries capped at €290,000.

An exception was made for government enterprises quoted on



the stock market. Those include Bpost and Belgacom (whose CEO, Didier Bellens, was sacked in

November after a series of negative statements).

In his statement to the board, Thijs said that he was stepping down because of "a lack of confidence and trust on the part of the majority shareholder" – the Belgian government.

The socialist trade union ACOD said that the departure comes too soon: "We are not prepared for this," a spokesperson said. "We knew he would stop one day, but a month ago there wasn't a hint this would happen."

Former NMBS boss Karel Vinck wrote to the minister for government enterprises, Jean-Pascal Labille, accusing him of approaching the task in a "purely ideological" way. "That might be a worthwhile

approach for a health insurance fund but is certainly not right for a company that is subject to the laws of the market."

The new CEO salary at Bpost is the same as that earned by its directors, whose pay is not affected by any changes in government policy.

All sides agree that Thijs was an excellent manager at Bpost. He has been in the post since 2002, at a time when the post office was facing diminishing volumes of mail, with the widespread arrival of email and social media. In just over a decade, he turned Bpost into a profitable company, partly privatised and listed on the stock market.

Thijs will take part in the process of finding a replacement, together with Bpost chair Martine Durez.

## Government buys Ford Genk site for €1

The government of Flanders has reached an agreement with the management of Ford Europe to buy the land on which Ford Genk is situated for €1, minister-president Kris Peeters has announced. The factory is due to close in December 2014.

The government will take possession at the end of 2015 but before then has the right to enter into negotiations with potential third parties interested in making use of the 140-hectare site.

The agreement also includes provisions relating to "all government claims on Ford relating to the Ford Genk site".

The government had previously demanded the repayment of nearly €43 million in aid to Ford, which was made conditional on maintaining employment in Genk.

Since the closure of the factory will result in about 5,000 Ford workers being made redundant, with an estimated 5,000 more jobs under threat in the local economy, the government has said it expects the money to be repaid. Ford has stated that it has no intention of repaying the aid.

The deal signed between Peeters and Ford boss Stephen Odell last week means Ford will pay back only €7 million, with the rest of the



government's claim being dropped – as well as a claim for €60.9 million in damages from the city of Genk, for the loss of tax income. The Flemish government will pay compensation to Genk of €5 million a year for nine years.

Meanwhile, the agreement binds the

Flemish government to carrying out what remains of cleaning up the site, at a cost, according to the public waste agency Ovam, of €5 to €10 million. The various sums add up to an effective purchase price €108 to €114 million.

"Today we have the guarantee that the Ford site in Genk can rapidly be developed by the Flemish region, in close co-operation with the city of Genk," said Ingrid Lieten, deputy minister-president in charge of government investment. "New enterprises will be able to move in quickly, and we'll be able to look for new and sustainable jobs." AH

## Inquiry into missing depleted uranium in Ostend

The Federal Agency for Nuclear Control (FANC) is carrying out an investigation into a quantity of depleted uranium (DU) that went missing from the airport at Ostend last month. The DU was being removed from two decommissioned Boeing aircraft.

DU has a much lower proportion of the uranium isotope involved in nuclear reactions and is used for its extremely high density for a variety of purposes. One is to provide counterweights in aircraft, which contain 400 to 1,500kg of the

substance, encased in a protective container. It can be dangerous if involved in a fire, and major aircraft manufacturers, among them Boeing, stopped using DU in the 1980s.

The aircraft sent to Ostend for break-up were Boeing 747-200s dating from before that time. Part of the DU from the two planes was found in a waste container at the airport, but some of the load found its way to a scrap merchant's yard. FANC is now investigating how the DU came to be taken to a scrap merchant without being identified. AH

## Britain's Hilco takes over Free Record Shop

The British investment group Hilco Capital last month agreed to take over the bankrupt Free Record Shop for an undisclosed sum. The British company now owns 67 of the 68 shops in Belgium; the store in Tiel-Winge, Flemish Brabant, is going to another takeover partner, which has not been named.

Last weekend, Hilco announced that the shops in Belgium would have to close "temporarily" from Monday

while detailed agreements were made with landlords and suppliers, "which will be necessary to ensure a stable company in the long term," the company said in a statement.

The agreements were also required, Hilco said, to decide on the continued employment of the 230 staff, who were placed on temporary contracts when the company went bankrupt; those contracts expired on Monday. AH

## 2013 a record year for Port of Antwerp

The port of Antwerp handled a record amount of freight in 2013 – 190.6 million tonnes, 3.5% more than the previous year, according to the port authority's annual report. The main reason for the increase was a larger volume of liquid bulk products such as crude oil and petrochemicals. That went up to 59.7 million tonnes, an increase of almost one-third.

Port Authority CEO Eddy Bruyninckx described the results as "the best growth figures in Flanders and the Benelux". The total volume of traffic was not only better than last year, it also narrowly broke the record set

in 2008, before the global economic crisis, at 189.39 million tonnes.

The port's main business activity – container freight – fell by 1.7% or 1.8 million tonnes to 102 million tonnes. "That's an extremely stable outcome, given how neighbouring ports, including Rotterdam, saw a much more pronounced reduction," Bruyninckx said.

The most serious negative result concerned dry bulk goods, which saw a fall of more than 25%, largely as a result of lower volumes of coal.

AH





# Heart smart

## Pedro Brugada has made Flanders a hotbed of cardiology research

Leo Cendrowicz

Spanish-born Pedro Brugada moved to Aalst in 1991 to set up an electrophysiology laboratory at the city's local hospital. Since then, he has made the hospital, as well as UZ Brussel, leaders in cardiology research and diagnosis – and had a syndrome named after him

Pedro Brugada insists he never sought the label, even if it earned him an extremely rare distinction as a doctor: having a syndrome named after him. Brugada Syndrome – first coined by Japanese researchers to describe the hereditary heart rhythm disorder the doctor wrote about two decades ago – has stuck.

The pioneering Spanish-born cardiologist, who has headed the heart rhythm management centre at the University Hospital Brussels (UZ Brussel) since 2006, recognises that this is probably how history will remember his name. “It has made me well-known, of course,” he tells me, “but what’s more important is that it has helped raise awareness of heart conditions and has stimulated research.”

Brugada Syndrome can be fatal, causing an apparently healthy person to go into cardiac arrest. Identifying it has ensured Brussels’ global influence in cardiology. Thanks to his high profile, Brugada, who has lived in Aalst since 1991, has been able to bring some of the world’s best technology and talent to local hospitals, clinics and research centres.

And it has brought in a number of big-name footballers since the 59-year-old became the go-to doctor for heart conditions. This includes former Bolton Wanderers midfielder Fabrice Muamba, whose heart dramatically stopped for more than an hour during a game last year, and former Senegal and Inter Milan striker Khalilou Fadiga, who suffers from an extrasystole, which means his heartbeat can be irregular. Closer to home, he is credited with saving the life – and career – of KV



Pedro Brugada, who leant his name to the Brugada Syndrome

point, the young Pedro considered music at the local conservatory; later he thought of studying art since he was a decent oil painter. In the end, he opted for philosophy and medicine at the University of Barcelona.

After excelling in his first-year exams, he moved to an elite research stream at the pharmacology department, giving him an early experience of laboratories. He wanted to work in the haematology department, studying blood, but he couldn’t afford the required extra

had a well-established reputation for cardiology. He learned Dutch and in 1986 became a cardiology professor. The language proved critical in his next move – in 1991 to Aalst. Brugada was invited to create an electrophysiology laboratory – studying the electrical properties of biological cells and tissues – in the cardiology department of Aalst’s Onze-Lieve-Vrouw Hospital.

In 2006, UZ Brussel approached him. “Again, a similar story,” he says, “a move to create something that they didn’t have. It is now one of the leading centres for clinical physiology in the world, with one of the world’s most technologically advanced cardiology departments.” At UZ Brussel, he oversees the work of 200 people. Brugada still lives in Aalst and has a private clinic there. In the meantime, some 32 centres in Belgium for electrophysiology have been set up, many created by Brugada or by people who worked and trained in his department in Aalst.

It was in Maastricht in 1987, that Brugada encountered the first patients with the syndrome that now bears his name. A Polish man brought his three-year-old son to see him, who had a history of repeated episodes of fainting and cardiac arrest. The boy’s electrocardiogram (ECG) had strange abnormalities, and Brugada’s curiosity was piqued. So he asked the father, who was returning to Poland,

for electrocardiograms of the boy’s sisters. “They had the same abnormalities,” he says. “And so did the father.”

Over the next four years, Brugada – with his brother Josep, then working alongside him – found more patients with similar conditions. By 1992, with eight documented patients, they published the findings in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, describing it as a distinct clinical entity. Further patients were discovered, and in 1996, a Japanese paper on the issue first described it as Brugada Syndrome.

“What has happened since has been incredible,” Brugada says. “We initially thought of it as a curiosity, a nice paper, that is it, with not much wider relevance. Now we hear of one new family with the Brugada Syndrome every week.”

Brugada describes the syndrome as caused by ventricular fibrillation – when there is unco-ordinated contraction of the cardiac muscle of the heart’s ventricles. “In every other way it could be a completely normal heart – at the coronary arteries, the muscles, valves – but the electricity is a problem,” he explains.

The oldest person he found with the syndrome was 87, proving that it does not necessarily cut short someone’s life. He has also found that some drugs, like malaria pills, can trigger it, as well as fever, as some of the activators in the DNA are heat-driven.

He emphasises that the attacks usually happen outside of sport. Most patients actually have attacks at night; they tend to die in their sleep. “It happens when stress and adrenalin levels decrease,” explains Brugada. “So adrenalin in fact protects you.”

Indeed, it is no coincidence that the Japanese were the ones to coin the term Brugada Syndrome, as it is thought to be closely linked to sudden unexpected death syndrome (SUNDS), which is particularly prevalent in East Asia.

Brugada today deals with the whole spectrum of heart issues, including raising public health awareness. A former smoker, he says prevention of cardiovascular disease should begin as early as 12 years old. “Twelve is a very important age to start teaching children about health, diet and other issues,” he says. “At 14 or 15, it’s too late; they may have already started smoking, sitting in front of the TV and eating hamburgers.”

Brugada still works with his brother Josep at the University of Barcelona, as well as his third brother, Ramon, at the University of Girona. In 2000, the brothers discovered another genetically determined arrhythmia – short-QT syndrome – and they later succeeded in describing the genetic defect responsible. And he is trying to set up a Brugada Foundation in Belgium; there is already one in Spain.

► [www.brussels-chvz.be](http://www.brussels-chvz.be)

## WEEK IN INNOVATION

### KU Leuven developed software for Gaia

The University of Leuven developed the software for the space observatory Gaia, which was launched by the European Space Agency last month. The team at Leuven created software to find and characterise different stars, which will lead to the largest and most precise 3D map of the Milky Way ever created.

For five years, Gaia will observe the position and brightness of one billion stars with its extremely sensitive measuring equipment, which can, for example, measure the thickness of a hair from a distance of 1,000 kilometres. Gaia will produce more than one million gigabytes of information, or 1% of the data of the estimated 100 billion stars in space. The data will help researchers to discover new space objects.

### Recognition of foreign doctors “on hold”

Doctors from non-European countries have to wait several years before the equivalence of their diploma is acknowledged, and currently 95 applications are not even being processed.

The Minderhedenforum, or Minority Forum, recently denounced the Flemish Interuniversity Council, which advises the government on doctors’ diplomas from outside the European Economic Area. “Since April 2012, the responsible commission has no longer even held meetings,” said the forum. According to newspaper *De Standaard*, the reason for the lack of action is a dispute with education minister Pascal Smet on a new procedure to assess diplomas.

### UZ Leuven uses bedside scanning

From now on, no patient at Leuven’s University Hospital is allowed to take a pill before it is scanned at the bedside. The system has been designed and installed to prevent medication errors, which annually cause about 150 deaths and thousands of incidents in Belgium.

Bedside scanning is the norm in the US, but only a few European hospitals have started to test it. UZ Leuven is the first hospital in Europe that is using the system for all of its patients. The nurse first scans the barcode of the patient and then the barcode of the medicine. The computer checks whether the dose is meant for that patient, if the patient has any allergies that need to be considered and if the combination of medications is risk-free. **Andy Funiere**

“What has happened has been incredible  
... we hear of one new family with  
Brugada Syndrome every week

Mechelen’s Anthony Van Loo, who he fitted with a defibrillator in 2008 when the young star was diagnosed with a life-threatening heart condition.

So, how did this Spanish professor end up in Flanders, turning the region into a hothouse for cardiology? Brugada himself attributes it to chance.

His father once tried to groom him to take over the family farm, but his mother insisted he study. At one

year of school.

“My wife was pregnant, and I needed a job. So that is how I ended up as a cardiologist; a position was immediately available,” he says. “But when you look at medicine, every single discipline is so beautiful. It doesn’t matter if you do gastroenterology, pharmacology, cardiology or surgery.”

Two years later, Brugada was ready to return to research. He moved to Maastricht University, which



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# Opening the future of research

## KU Leuven’s initiative raises funds to investigate brain disorders

Andy Furniere

We hear a lot about the increasing health challenges posed by brain disorders like Alzheimer’s disease, but scientific understanding of these conditions is still very vague. To support visionary research, with much potential but no clear view of the results, the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) organised a fundraising campaign called Opening the Future. The initiators of the campaign are KU Leuven honorary rector Mark Waer, managing director Koen Debackere and Urbain Vandeurzen, chair of the Flemish government’s investment corporation, Gimv. Vandeurzen, a driving force from the start a few years ago, now chairs the campaign. “More than cancer, brain disorders are the biggest medical-scientific threat for our society,” he says in KU Leuven’s *Campuskrant* magazine. “We focus on three neurodegenerative diseases – Alzheimer’s, ALS and muscular dystrophy – and autism, on which research is still in an early stage.” Alongside Vandeurzen, the board of directors includes other names from the business world: imec chair Antoon De Proft, Telenet chair Frank Donck, Janssen Pharmaceutica honorary chair Ajit Shetty and Reynaers Aluminium managing director Martine Reynaers. From KU Leuven, Waer and Debackere are joined by professors Hilde Laga and Désiré Collen, chair Herman Daems and rector Rik Torfs. Opening the Future is embedded in and receives administrative aid from the Leuven University Fund but is independently managed. Apart from providing funding, the aim of the campaign is to create a framework in which KU Leuven researchers can meet donors to establish a more permanent connection instead of a single donation. “This way, we can create an excellence network with top figures from the business and university world, which in today’s knowledge society is the ideal platform to achieve social and economic breakthroughs,” says



Brain disorders are “the biggest medical-scientific threat for our society”, and the Opening the Future campaign will support research into certain brain conditions

Vandeurzen. Six researchers at Leuven are receiving assistance via Opening the Future: professors Jean Steyaert, Bart De Strooper, Wim Robberecht, Peter Carmeliet, Maurilio Sampaolesi and Chris Van Geet. Steyaert, De Strooper and Robberecht explained their projects and the value of the campaign in *Campuskrant*. Autism expert Steyaert believes the advantage of the fundraising campaign lies in the fact that it creates possibilities for interdisciplinary research. “Classic donors from the public sector often find such research difficult to evaluate, because it’s not always clear who does what in which domain,” he says, “but Opening the Future almost gives us carte blanche.” According to Steyaert, autism can only be treated in an interdisciplinary way because it involves genetic, biochemical, social, psychological and upbringing issues. “There are also already more than 200 genes identified that contribute to autism disorders,” he says, “and even patients with a similar genetic anomaly can show very different behavioural problems. This complexity makes it difficult to find financial support.” Thanks to the fundraising campaign, Steyaert’s team is working on two research topics. One focuses on

testing a new orthopedagogical evaluation and treatments. The other concentrates on early detection in babies by mapping the biological markers or characteristics that predict an increased risk of autism. Although Alzheimer’s expert De Strooper acknowledges that he can count on substantial financing from the public sector, he says he only receives those subsidies for “safe projects”. “These projects with a large feasibility are important,” he says, “but to achieve real breakthroughs, you need to try experiments that also have a high risk of failing.” He also denounces the administrative obligations connected to, for example, European subsidies. “These are understandable, but also counterproductive for the research,” he says. “In Opening the Future, all attention goes to our creativity.” De Strooper’s team will use the financial support to explore the role of so-called microRNAs, small molecules that regulate the biochemical function of a cell, in the development of Alzheimer’s. The next step would be to find therapeutic means to influence the activity of microRNAs. He hopes the attention and financing for Alzheimer’s research will soon rise to the same heights as that



Wim Robberecht      Bart De Strooper

seen for cancer and Aids. “That’s necessary because in the next 10 years, the number of patients with dementia – of which Alzheimer’s is the best-known form – will increase by 50%,” he says. According to Robberecht, Opening the Future is an ideal way to support translational research, which translates fundamental research into possibilities for clinical applications. “If the solution is not yet fully ready for the pharmaceutical or biotech sector, the top scientific papers will often refuse to publish it,” he says. “This risk discourages many donors, although the research is of vital importance because it prepares the way for the actual application.” Robberecht specialises in amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, the motor neurone disease that is mostly known because of physicist Stephen Hawking, who has had the disease since the age of 21. With the additional funding, Robberecht’s team will set up several research projects, from the search for therapeutic options to the analysis of hereditary anomalies. “Our insights can also be of great value for Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease,” he says. Fellow researcher Carmeliet is an expert on angiogenesis, the physiological process through which new blood vessels are formed, which is important in the battle against cancer. Sampaolesi investigates cardiovascular pathologies related to muscular dystrophy and stem cell therapy, while Van Geet works on blood platelets in patients with neurological disorders.

## WEEK IN EDUCATION

### Recovery of teachers’ back-pay waived

The Flemish government has rescinded the demand for the repayment of back-pay that was mistakenly paid out to 188 teachers. Due to an administrative error, about €400,000 was paid to teachers after a back-pay deadline had passed. The Flemish Agency for Education Services (AgODI) had allowed back-pay of wages up to 10 years later, although a new law had brought back the payment term to five years. Teachers can be entitled to back-pay because of incorrect calculations, for example, or the submission of inaccurate information. AgODI started a procedure to retrieve the excessive payments, but that has now been overruled.

### Brussels invests €45 million in infrastructure

The City of Brussels is investing €45 million in the building and renovation of schools and crèches this year, said Yvan Mayeur, the new mayor of Brussels City. Part of the investment will go to a new Dutch-speaking nursery and primary school in Vuurkruisenlaan, in the north of Brussels, which will provide space for 900 children. The budget also promises the foundation of a new Dutch-speaking school in the centre of Brussels. Two new crèches are also promised, which will offer 140 extra places. According to the city council, these measures are essential to address the demographic challenges and improve Brussels’ economic situation.

### KU Leuven seeks secret of happiness

The psychology department of the University of Leuven is examining what makes us happy. The researchers were inspired by *The World Book of Happiness* by Flemish expert Leo Bormans, who will collaborate on the project. Researchers are dividing participants into three groups. For one month, the first group will receive one happiness tip a day. The second group will be given more profound advice once a week, while the last group will be left alone. After six months, the results of the trial and an online survey open to the public will be evaluated. Bormans hopes that the study will provide “results we can use to treat patients who suffer from, for example, depression or heart problems”. According to his book, 40% of our happiness depends on our own actions and decisions, 10% is determined by concrete life circumstances and half is genetically defined.

► [www.tinyurl.com/kulhappiness](http://www.tinyurl.com/kulhappiness)

## Q&A

### Interior architect Paulien Smets has won the Flemish Dissertation Award with her Master’s thesis on the value of ruins for artistic purposes

**Why is your thesis called “The beauty of decay”?**  
Personally, I find the mysterious atmosphere in ruins very inspiring because it automatically brings up philosophical questions. In my thesis, I have tried to express these complex feelings and thoughts through poems and photos. I have become convinced that, because of their special character, ruins are ideal environments for artist workshops and cultural events like exhibitions and theatre performances. On a walk, I came across an old jenever distillery in the Limburg sub-municipality of Kuringen, which belongs to a painter. I realised it was a perfect building to turn into an art centre, which I called *de nis* or the recess.

**You used unusual, intuitive methods to develop a new concept for this building**  
It may sound bizarre, but I used 20 photos of a dance performance by Flemish choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui to stimulate my creativity. A theatre play by another Flemish artist, Jan Fabre, inspired me for the interior of the exhibition space. Just like their art, I want the interior to make people halt and reflect on the different sides of life, like its ephemerality.

**Did you never have second thoughts about your unconventional choice?**  
I had several moments when I wondered if my work was too odd or



when I felt that nobody would care about my insights. However, I found support in the poem “Ode aan de prutters” (Ode to the Butchers) by the Dutch author Saskia de Bruin,

in which she encourages people to muddle on, even in difficult moments. By persevering, I not only finished my thesis but also learned an important life lesson.

**What does the future hold for your project and for you?**  
I have presented my ideas and scale models for the distillery to the owner, who will now consider how to possibly implement them. I am currently studying to get a teacher’s degree. In the future, I hope to combine careers in the education sector and at an architects’ bureau. I’m also thinking of how to spend the €2,500 I won with the Dissertation Award and am considering a long trip abroad. **Interview by AF**



## WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

### Bommelfeesten

Carnaval comes early to Ronse in East Flanders, with a three-day folk festival that traditionally marked the end of the 12 days of Christmas. A "Bommel" is a fool or clown, and the celebration has its roots in the medieval Feast of Fools, when societal roles were reversed, rules were broken and everything was topsy-turvy. Highlights include a parade on Saturday evening followed by fireworks, a children's carnival on Sunday and a costumed ball on Monday afternoon. *11-13 January, Ronse*

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

### Conifer Walk

Enjoy a winter walk through the extensive collection of conifers in the National Botanic Garden in Meise (Flemish Brabant). Pick up a free brochure full of interesting facts about pine trees at the information desk and view more than 350 varieties from around the world, including some endangered species, at your own pace. *Until 15 January, National Botanic Garden, Nieuwlaan 38, Meise, €6.60*

► <http://tinyurl.com/conifer-walk>

### Midnights in Tongeren

Fans of both poetry and art should check out this mixed-media show, which explores the visualisation of the written word through photography, spoken word and film. The exhibition is a collaboration between poet Marina Kazakova and artist Anuschka Theunissen. Visitors can also participate in an interactive photo-booth project. *10-19 January, Julianus shopping centre, Tongeren, free*

► <http://seanema.eu>

### Winter Fire

After the Christmas decorations come down, it's time to say goodbye to the old Christmas tree – and what better way than with a big bonfire? The fire will be lit at 18.00, and you can enjoy the spectacle and warmth along with food and drink. *18.00-22.00, Klein Strand recreation park, Ostend, free*

► <http://tinyurl.com/winter-fire-ostend>

### Repair Café Schaarbeek

Repair Cafés are free community events where people come together to repair all manner of household items. Bring your damaged appliances, bikes, clothing, furniture, etc. and make use of the tools, materials and expertise provided by volunteer electricians, seamstresses, carpenters and others. The Repair Café in Schaarbeek is held every second Sunday of the month. *12 January, 14.00-17.00, Wijnhevelenstraat 14, Schaarbeek*

► <http://tinyurl.com/repair-schaarbeek>

# Sunday shopping

## Antwerp requests permission to open its shopping street up on Sundays

Alan Hope

**S**hops in Antwerp's historic city centre could be open seven days a week from this autumn, following the city council's decision to apply to the Flemish government to have the centre recognised as a tourist zone. That would allow shops to be open on Sundays, as is already the case in towns along the Flemish coast, as well as in Bruges and Maasmechelen. Antwerp is the first of several cities heading down the same road, with Kortrijk and Ghent thought to be contemplating the same move.

Shopkeepers in town centres are concerned at the competition they face from e-commerce and out-of-town shopping centres and are looking for ways to increase revenue. The city justifies the move by the need to attract new visitors, from elsewhere in Belgium but especially from other countries – and in particular the Netherlands. Maastricht shops are open on Sundays once a month, attracting shoppers from Germany and Belgium.



Sunday opening hours would only apply around the Meir shopping street and the Groenplaats in Antwerp's city centre.

Unizo, the organisation that represents small-business owners in Flanders, said that shops should only be open on Sundays if efforts are made to attract new shoppers from outside the region. "A euro can only be spent once, and if you spread the same spending over seven days instead of six, it doesn't do anyone any good," commented Peter

Aerts of Unizo Antwerp.

Unizo director-general Karel Van Eetvelt said he was resigned to Sunday opening hours but would fight a move to a seven-day working culture. "The self-employed already work six days a week, more than eight hours a day," he said. "I think they also deserve the chance to spend a day with their families, or just relax a little." The Christian trade union said it was not against Sunday hours in principle, as long as staff were

properly compensated. "That's where the problems arise," said Chris Van Droogenbroeck of the union LBC. "There is no legal framework for tourist zones, and the majority of workers are paid as if Sunday were an ordinary working day."

According to research by University of Leuven professor Maarten Goos, who looked at shopping hours in the US, Sunday opening could help create hundreds of jobs if implemented in Antwerp and a 4 to 11% increase in sales. "The figures translate to the Belgian situation, particularly if we're looking at the larger cities," he told *De Standaard*.

While the increase in sales looks impressive, Goos warned, it has to be weighed against the increased costs of operating the store.

Following the procedures for recognition as a tourist zone, the earliest that shops would be allowed to open on Sundays would be this autumn.

# Dirk Bosmans wins Het Groot Dictee

## Communications advisor from Brussels takes the celebrated competition

Andy Furniere

**F**lemish communications advisor Dirk Bosmans of Brussels won the celebrated Het Groot Dictee der Nederlandse taal, the annual dictation competition that draws numerous celebrities and citizens to prove their merit in the dictating of the Dutch language.

This year found 62 Flemings and Dutch participating in the contest. Just like the runner-up, graphic designer Joke Beltman from the Netherlands, the 36-year-old winner made 13 dictation errors but, crucially, one less spelling error.

The popular event, which takes place at the Dutch Senate in The Hague, is broadcast on Dutch and Flemish

television. With this 16th Flemish victory in the event's 24-year history (occasionally there is a tie), Flanders now has five more wins than the Netherlands.

Coincidentally, Bosmans went to the same primary school as last year's winner, Edward Vanhove. Bosmans praised the lessons of his former teachers "Mr Mathy and Miss Stella, who taught me to read and write."

Third place in the popular competition went to Emilie Cardon from Lokeren, a 21-years-old biomedical sciences student. The best performance among the celebrities also came from Flanders: Poet-performer Maud Vanhauwaert made 21 errors. The

Dutch sociologist Paul Schnabel finished second and third was the Flemish journalist Ann De Bie of public broadcaster VRT.

The dictation was written this year by Dutch actor and writer Kees van Kooten. For the first time, the dictation included language mistakes, which participants had to mark but not correct. Van Kooten used words incorrectly, for example, and incorporated incorrect sentence constructions.

Bosmans was glad that van Kooten put "language pollution" in the spotlight. "You don't hear spelling errors, but you do read and hear such language mistakes," he said. The chair of the



From left: Jury chair Inez Weski, Dirk Bosmans and Kees van Kooten at Het Groot Dictee

jury, Dutch lawyer Inez Weski, said that this approach will be used again next year. "Language is more than spelling," she declared. "The context is also important."

Alan Hope

## BITE

### Tale of a fish

The saga of the Vietnamese pangasius continues. Last week it was announced that more than 1,000 people had signed a petition against the opening of a distribution centre in Zeebrugge for pangasius, a white freshwater fish farmed in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam and sold worldwide. The agreement to use Zeebrugge as the European hub serving the rest of the continent with imported pangasius was presented as one of the triumphs of the recent visit to Vietnam by Flemish minister Hilde Crevits.

However, the local fishing industry is anything but happy with the move. The 200,000 tonnes of pangasius planned to start moving through Zeebrugge is cheap competition for the white fish landed by Flanders'

own fishing industry, as well as the fledgling aquaculture sector.

And the fishermen are not alone: The petition is supported by environmental activists for whom pangasius is not a sustainable alternative to locally landed fish, as well as by big names from the culinary world, among them celebrated seafood chef Filip Claeys of restaurant De Jonkman in Bruges and Tom Vansteenkiste of Belga Queen in Ghent.

"The value of this fish in the kitchen is zero," Vansteenkiste told *De Standaard*. "It's insane that they're bringing it tens of thousands of kilometres, while we have so much better North Sea fish right here."

At one time, pangasius – also known as basa or panga – seemed like the



© Alpha/Wikimedia Commons

answer to all problems of over-fishing. The fish is reared relatively easily by fish-farmers in Asia and can be sold to consumers as white or pink fillets – boneless, skinless and pretty much tasteless, which is not in itself considered a disadvantage given how many consumers steer clear of anything tasting too "fishy".

However, importers into Europe were concerned only with pushing prices down, fisheries representatives in Flanders say, which had two main

effects. First, it raised the spectre of chemical adulteration, with the fish fillets being treated with polyphosphates to make the flesh absorb more water – effectively free weight. Second, it put many fish-farmers out of business as they were making less than it costs to raise the fish, with market prices of about €0.42 a kilogram, whereas the sustainable price is more like €2.61 a kilogram.

According to the website seafoodsource.com, about 70% of independent pangasius farmers in Vietnam have stopped production in the past two years. Virtually the only farmers remaining are those employed by the processed food industry itself.

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



# Crossing boundaries

## Marking 50 years of labour treaties with Turkey and Morocco and a tradition of migration

Andy Furniere

In 1964, Belgium signed labour treaties with Turkey and Morocco so that interested people could come to work here. To commemorate 50 years of migration, organisations all over Flanders are setting up activities that put this history and the culture of minority communities in the spotlight. The highlight of the programme will be Heritage Day in April, with the theme "Boundless"

In difficult economic times, like today, migration is often subjected to rigorous control and perceived as a problematic issue. But in the 1960s, the Belgian economy was in full swing and needed plenty of strong hands to work in the mines, textile factories, steel industry, metros and other sectors. Half a century ago, Belgium signed bilateral labour treaties with the Turkish and Moroccan governments, inviting migrant workers or "guest labourers", as they were called at the time.

In many cases, family members joined the newcomers after they had settled in. Flanders became a more multicultural region, but of course, the Turkish and Moroccan workers were not the first migrants to seek a better future in the region: The Italian, Spanish,

Greek and Polish communities in particular were already strongly represented at the time. The celebrations of 2014 take the labour treaties as a starting point, but focus attention

on a variety of migrant histories and cultures.

The programme of 50 Years of Migration is supported by culture minister Joke Schauvliege, who with others made €100,000 in subsidies available for associations' related projects. In Flanders, the co-ordination is in the hands of Faro, the government agency for the support of Flemish cultural heritage. In Brussels and Wallonia, cultural centre Espace Magh takes up this task.

An important goal of Faro is to improve the perception and celebrate the culture of ethnic minorities during this jubilee year. "We want to illustrate how these diverse groups have contributed

to the construction of our society," says Faro's communication officer Katrijn D'hamers. "It's also essential to show respect for their cultural identities and their personal stories of integration, which involve language difficulties, family concerns and homesickness."

A next step, according to D'hamers, could be the founding of a museum about migration in Belgium with a broader scope than the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp. "We notice a large demand and a lot of ideas for such a museum among the minority associations," says D'hamers, "but there are also many different

opinions about the concrete implementation of these plans." Abroad, there are for example migration museums in the German city of Hamburg and the French capital Paris.

Although the programme is far from complete, we can already distinguish certain top events. The federations of Turkish (UTV) and Moroccan (FMV) associations are taking the opportunity to establish ambitious projects, with financial support from the Flemish government. With the heritage organisation Kardelen, UTV is organising the Miras 50 project, while the FMV is setting up the Dakira project. *Miras* is Turkish for "heritage" and *dakira* means "memory" in Arabic.

Via the website [www.miras50.be](http://www.miras50.be) and a Facebook page, UTV wants to tell the tales of immigration from the perspective of the pioneering and later migrants themselves. The project documents the conditions of the labour migration but also the evolving life circumstances, leisure activities and religious customs of the community. With the collected material, a documentary and travelling exhibition will be created. The exhibition will be set up in Antwerp, Brussels, Genk and Ghent. There will also be informative events such as debates, meant especially for young people who have only fragmentary knowledge about their own background. The purpose is also to promote the project in Turkey, with the principal aim of reaching migrant workers who returned there.

The aim of the Dakira project is to attain similar goals through its own website ([www.dakira.be](http://www.dakira.be)), book and an exhibition in the same four cities. Special attention will be devoted to the confrontation and dialogue with the Flemish society, the different urban and industrial settling



© FARO/Arthur Ermonian

environments and information on festivities, rituals and traditions. The FMV will also organise activities involving singing, dancing, storytelling and workshops.

In Ghent, for example, the city museum STAM offers thematic city tours under the banner of "Blijven plakken" (Lingering On, *pictured*) and the Museum of Industrial Archaeology and Textile is setting up several related exhibitions. The Red Star Line Museum and Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) are two Antwerp locations where thematic expos are being organised. Until 2 February, an exhibition in the Limburg town of Heusden-Zolder puts the lives of Italian immigrants in the picture.

To learn about the lives of migrant women from all over the world, visit the expo *Ik kom van ver* (I Come From Afar), at Leuven's Museum M until 16 February 16. The University of Leuven will invite experts for a series of lectures throughout the year. In Bruges on 11 February, journalist and writer Dirk Musschoot lectures on the history of Flemings who left for the US and Canada between 1850 and 1930. On 27 April, the annual Heritage Day will form the high point of the programme.

► [www.uitinvlaanderen.be/50-jaar-migratie](http://www.uitinvlaanderen.be/50-jaar-migratie)

## Delicious, nutritious, and now officially approved

It's official: We are free to put insect paste on our bread or cook worm hamburgers for supper. A few days before Christmas, Belgium's Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC) published a long-awaited list of 10 insects that are now approved for human consumption. According to experts, all are "delicious" and "nutty-tasting".

Entomophagy, or the eating of bugs, is widely regarded as one of the most promising solutions to increasing environmental pressure, worldwide food insecurity and the rising cost of animal protein. Edible insects, which require minimal space to breed and produce no greenhouse gases, are 40 to 70% protein. (Corn, in comparison, is only 10%.)

While the EU is yet to come out with a clear position on eating insects,

Belgium has taken the lead and legalised its own list of 10, making it the first European country where the consumption of insects is officially allowed. The list includes larvae of mealworms, superworms, the African grasshopper, American desert locust and specific subspecies of crickets and beetles. Retailers who want to put insects on the market first have to be registered with FASFC and abide by all applicable rules concerning hygiene, traceability and labelling. There are currently only five people in the country breeding insects for human consumption. Antwerp-based Peter De Baptist is the only one who is licensed to distribute and sell them. He has long been lobbying for large-scale consumption and acted as a consultant in the drafting of the list.



"Breeding insects has 10 times less impact on the environment than the breeding of cows and pigs," he told *Het Nieuwsblad*. "Plus, they are very

healthy. Apart from carbohydrates, insects contain everything we need to keep our immune system up and running: protein, not less than 14

vitamins, fatty acids and minerals." Additionally, according to De Baptist, most insects are delicious. Raw mealworm larvae taste like hazelnut; when heated they miraculously turn pistachio-flavoured. African grasshopper, depending on the method of preparation, can taste like walnut, bacon or chicken. There is just one thing standing in the way of mass consumption: widespread public distaste. While more than 80% of the world's population eats insects and humans have been eating bugs for as long as they've existed, most Europeans are put off by the sight of grilled beetles on a plate. "There is a need for a change of mentality," says De Baptist. "Insects are not scary."

Daan Bauwens





“

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# Into the darkness

## Abattoir Fermé's artistic director on the search for modern American Gothic

Daan Bauwens

Something weird this way comes: Abattoir Fermé's trio of atmospheric and often disturbing plays looking at offbeat Americana. Artistic director Stef Lernous talks *Flanders Today* through them.

Abattoir Fermé always reach the darkest corners of the soul. Their plays, mostly revolving around fundamental fears, obsessions and dark worlds, easily merge into feverish rituals or dreams impossible to wake up from.

*Lizzie Borden*, based on the infamous 1882 Massachusetts murder, is a dance of blood-covered naked young girls with axes. *Ghost* (pictured) is a trip through the hazy swamps of Georgia, with voodoo and spiritual music in the distance. With the upcoming *Grey Gardens*, based on the discovery of Jackie O's relatives in an overgrown and dilapidated stately home, Mechelen-based Abattoir set off on their Americana series, aimed at finding nothing less than a modern American Gothic.

"It's because I'm a film freak," is how Stef Lernous, Abattoir's co-founder and artistic director, explains his fascination for all things American. "At 18 I went to Hollywood. But it wasn't what I had expected. It was much more trashy. But I happen to love trashiness, just like bad cinema. I found people to be obsessed: It's all about the movies. Every bartender is an actor trying to get in.

"But there's more. The right to express yourself is taken to extremes, resulting in weirdness all around you. Los Angeles is a theme park where everywhere you look there is something new. But in the meantime you are still in California, and only a short drive away you'll find yourself surrounded by wilderness."

Lernous, who has since visited America at least once a year, ended up last year in Savannah, the colonial capital of the old province of Georgia. It was the starting point for *Ghost*,



Abattoir's dark tale about the true face of the deep South.

"I had read about Savannah in a book by John Berendt and was instantly fascinated by its eccentricity," he says. "So I decided to spend three weeks there. We didn't know it would be just like Bruges: One day is enough. So we started driving around, always further and further away from the hotel, across state borders, digging, and that's how we bumped into the unexpected."

In the play, Lernous confronts us with the deep smell of wet earth and the buzz of mosquitos. Iconic characters stand up from between the ferns – the beauty with deep cleavage, nasal voice and oversized glasses, the young boy losing his football between the ferns, the black voodoo man, the big fat momma, the junkie and the rifle-wielding killer in dungarees.

"All are based on figures I encountered during the road trips,"

Lernous explains, "but we created them in such a way that the audience recognises them. There should be some familiarity, or the simple notion: 'I think I've seen this character before, but I don't remember where.' The eventual goal of the production is the search for Southern Gothic. A true, modern American Gothic. Old plantation houses, all overgrown

theme, but in a different way. Five girls, students of Lernous at the RITS acting programme, are dressed in white corsets and dance in between dungeons and slaughtered cattle. While each of them undresses and bathes in blood, they tell the tale of 22-year-old Lizzie Borden, whose parents were killed with an axe on the hottest day of summer.

“There should be some familiarity: ‘I think I’ve seen this character before, but I don’t remember where’

and run-down, inbred rednecks, the grittiness, swamps and voodoo. That is Southern Gothic."

*Lizzie Borden* touches on the same

"These are the direct descendants of Victorian puritans, the first British who set foot on American soil and are now trying to live in a strange

American equivalent of what they knew back home," Lernous explains. "It is damp and sticky, but people had to cover up. In the meantime they see the Indians immerse themselves in the ponds to cool down. Etiquette is the most important thing; there's an important element of sexual repression. This is very different from the Southern Gothic. It is Victorian Gothic, but no less American."

Lernous refers to the explicit nature of the piece as his vocabulary. "I love make-up. I adore bodies. It is my language. You might as well ask: Why do people stand up and breathe?" he says. But there's much more to the blood and nudity.

"Most pieces written for theatre carry something gruesome," Lernous explains, "from the Bacchantes to most of what Shakespeare wrote. But the horror is only put down in words. It is a taboo to flirt with it on stage, it's not done to show blood and carcasses, it's frowned upon. That's why, as long as it's a taboo, I will keep on doing it."

"It also has to do with my fascination for the escapism of horror," he adds. "Just like musicals, horror creates a world in which everything is possible. People can start singing in the middle of the movie, they can fly as well, the whole word starts dancing along and everyone goes crazy. It's wonderful. But if you dare to combine these elements with theatre on stage, it is considered to be bad taste. That's why I like it so much, and that's why I do it. But it's a double feeling. It saddens me when people have negative remarks. At the end of the day, I want to be loved as well. They're two urges that don't match."

*Lizzie Borden* (RITS, Abattoir Fermé and Nona) is at KVS in Brussels on 10 January and De Werf in Bruges on 11 January. *Ghost* is at Vooruit in Ghent on 16-17 January, and *Grey Gardens* is expected to premiere in April

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

## MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

### Speak!

**Sanja Mitrovic and Stand up Tall Productions, Amsterdam**  
Political speech has become a media spectacle. Or: Public speakers have the power to shape society. Based on a wealth of historical material, from Thatcher to Hitler, two performers try to catch the emotion behind the words in pursuit of the perfect speech. The audience decides which is more convincing. But what exactly made the winner win? 8 January, *Nona*, Mechelen

► [www.nona.be](http://www.nona.be)

### Genesis

**Eastman and Yabin Dance Studio**

The East comes calling again for Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, probably the country's most renowned choreographer. He has created a new piece for the Chinese dancer Yabin Wang, a dance based on nature, light and rains, pure movement without theatrical elements, with a scenography by Chinese visual artists. After its world premiere in Beijing in September, the piece will now be shown for the first time on a European stage. 10-18 January, *deSingel*, Antwerp

► [www.desingel.be/en](http://www.desingel.be/en)

### Drumming Live

**Rosas and Ictus**

The American minimalist composer Eric Reich wrote *Drumming* after a short stay in Ghana in 1970. The piece for nine percussionists and few voices was used in 1998 as the basis for one of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's most fascinating choreographies. The result is an unforgettable, energetic, swirling oath to the force of life. 9-12 January, *Kaaitheater*, Brussels

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

### Ciné-concert

**Eric Sleichim and Bl'ndman**

Contemporary music ensemble Bl'ndman (pictured) is not just a saxophone quartet bringing Bach to unseen heights; it's a musical laboratory. This Saturday, the world-renowned quartet plays newly composed scores to 1920s French surreal movies by Marcel Duchamp, Germaine Dulac and Man Ray. 11 January, *Flagey*, Brussels

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



© Guy Kohnen



WEEK IN ARTS  
& CULTURE

## Student's photo "one of year's best"

A photo by Ghent-based photography student Aurélie Geurts was selected by *National Geographic* magazine as one of the best of 2013. The photo shows a young boy playing outside a run-down house, a white dove in his hand. It's part of the 21-year-old's *Frumoasa* series, "the Romanian word for beauty," she said. "It's a work about Laurentiu and his family. They live in shacks next to the railway near Ghent Dampoort. They have to deal with all kind of obstacles on a daily basis ... They form a happy, warm and close family, despite the constant uncertainty in which they live."

## Jan Matthys wins EuroFIPA

Flemish television director Jan Matthys has been awarded this year's EuroFIPA of Honor by the International Festival of Audiovisual Programmes. The award, which covers Matthys' entire body of work, will be handed over at the festival in Biarritz, France, later this month. One of Matthys' best-known series is *De smaak van De Keyser*, a 10-part family saga set in Hasselt, co-directed by Frank Van Passel. The war-time drama won three FIPA awards in 2009, including best series. Matthys' other titles include the award-winning *Quiz Me Quick*, *Katarakt* and *Aspe*. The festival will close with a screening of *Vlaamse velden* (In Flanders' Fields), his latest work, which airs in 10 parts on channel één from 12 January.

## Holocaust museum nominated for EMYA

The Kazerne Dossin Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on the Holocaust and Human Rights has been nominated for the European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA). The annual prize is awarded to a new or renovated museum located anywhere in Europe. Mechelen's Holocaust museum opened in November of 2012 on the site of the Dossin barracks, from where more than 25,000 Jews and gypsies from Belgium and northern France were shipped in rail cars to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Kazerne Dossin is the only museum in Belgium to be nominated for the prestigious prize, which counts 34 nominations this year. The EMYA rewards museums that have taken an unconventional, often social approach to presenting information. The Holocaust museum's location makes it unique as does its role as a documentation and education centre and memorial. The winner will be announced in May.

► [www.europeanmuseumforum.info](http://www.europeanmuseumforum.info)



© photos: Bart Heirweg

## Dawn in Flanders Fields

## Flemish photographer captures sites of the First World War for new book

Denzil Walton

Bart Heirweg gave up his day job just two years ago to focus on photography. His new book *Silent Fields* captures the First World War sites of Flanders in a new light

Not many of us would consider setting the alarm for 4.00 so that we can sit in a cemetery and watch the sun rising over the gravestones.

But for two years, this was a frequent start to a normal working day for Bart Heirweg. The apparent madness had a serious objective – to capture the early morning light and atmosphere for a series of photographs of the war sites and landscapes of Flanders Fields.

Over a two-year period, the Flemish nature and landscape photographer travelled from Nieuwpoort to Koksijde via Veurne, Diksmuide, Ypres and Poperinge, and through the Heuvelland to the northern French border at Wervik and Komen. The result is *Silent Fields*, an ambitious book of 150 breathtaking photographs of the memorial sites of the First World War, with short texts in both Dutch and English.

Heirweg's photos are exceptionally evocative, such as the shots of the IJzer Valley at sunrise. How many thousands of young soldiers would have seen the sun rising above similar distant lines of poplars almost 100 years ago and wondered if it was to be the last sunrise they would ever see? Or meditate on his atmospheric photos of the Handzamevaart as it flows through the Flemish landscape. You can almost see it through the eyes of a despairing young private as he considers slipping into its dark waters and sinking into oblivion to escape the hell around him.

Then there are the cemeteries – Tyne Cot, Polygon Wood, Dozinghem, Houthulst. Heirweg, who is based in Oudenaarde, East Flanders, manages to capture the purity and the serenity of these places, with their white headstones marking the final resting places of thousands of soldiers whose last memories had been anything but peaceful.

Not surprisingly, the project



left an indelible impression on Heirweg. "Visiting these locations – particularly for the first time – affected me emotionally," he says. "And as I was often there alone, these fields were really silent, and I could quietly go about my work while thinking about what had happened here almost 100 years ago. During those special times, I was pleased to have set my alarm clock so early."

*Silent Fields* is Heirweg's first book and comes as a remarkable achievement for someone who gave up his full-time day job in IT to become a professional photographer just two years ago. He says he's been interested in nature since he was seven years old.

"As a young boy, I was always outside, exploring the local fields and woods, discovering bugs and frogs. By the age of 14, I was a keen birdwatcher, and I bought my first camera to take nature photos when I was 17."

In 1999, Heirweg purchased his first digital camera – a Nikon CoolPix – which he was delighted to find could be mounted on his bird-watching telescope. But the thought of making a living from photography was a long way from his mind. Instead, he buckled down to study multimedia and communication technologies at the Karel de Grote University College in Antwerp and subsequently embarked on a successful six-year career as a web developer.



During this time, he continued to develop his photography skills and gradually his dream of earning a living through nature photography began to take shape. "My philosophy is that if you want something badly enough and are willing to do everything in your power to reach your goal, then nothing is impossible," he says. Putting this philosophy into practice, Heirweg reduced his working hours in IT and began to devote more time to photography. Two years later, he made a leap of

faith and completely gave up his IT job. In between these activities, he takes commissions, writes articles for photography magazines in Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK and works for tourism agencies, which is how he got the commission for *Silent Fields*.

The idea for the book originated from a job he was doing for Westtoer, the West Flanders tourism agency. Westtoer commissioned Heirweg to take photographs for six new auto routes across Flanders Fields. After this was successfully completed, Heirweg realised he had amassed

“Visiting these locations affected me emotionally

faith and completely gave up his IT job.

Today, much of Heirweg's income comes from workshops he gives to amateur photographers and from lectures to photo clubs and natural history societies. Topics range from the basics of landscape and nature photography to more specific subjects like macro or winter photography. Heirweg also organises and leads week-long photographic expeditions for small groups to locations abroad, including Iceland, Provence and the Isle of Skye.

a huge catalogue of photographs of Flanders Fields – 16,744 to be precise. Subsequent conversations with book publisher Lannoo resulted in *Silent Fields*.

*Silent Fields*, with text in both Dutch and English, is available for €29.99 in bookshops and from Bart Heirweg's website

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



For a better world

# Conflict and Design

Until 9 March | C-Mine, Genk

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

The seventh edition of the Design Triennial in Flanders recently kicked off in the former mining buildings of C-Mine in Genk. The current "Conflict and Design" edition explores the problem-solving powers of design.

Design, for some people, conjures up images of cool, must-have trinkets and gadgets. But design is about a lot more than that. Design revolves around the question of how something looks and how it is built. Objects, sure, but also services, communication models and even societies. Each design has an impact, however minimal, on the environment and society we live in.

And the designers currently on view in C-Mine have been investigating just how their designs can offer an answer to the problems of our time. Every object, process and concept in the Design Triennial is presented on the basis of a "conflict", alongside the answer from the designer's perspective. "Conflict and Economy" and "Conflict and Nature" are the most obvious



Tine De Ruysser's necklace, called Money Makes the World Go Round

exhibition sections. Upcycling, recycling, circular economies... This part of the exhibition features everything from classic designs like the NMBS recycling points to new, innovative ideas like a system that uses plants to clean up soils polluted by old oil tanks.

"Conflict and Society" looks at how design can improve our way of life. The experimental project The Soup Station, for example, lets commuters drop off vegetables at a mobile station

kitchen on their way to work so they can collect their readymade soup in the evening.

"Conflict and Conflict", finally, tackles major issues like war, imprisonment and death. An inspiring project here is "Disarming design", in which Palestinian designers worked with elements of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, creating shower curtains with images of the separation wall for example.

However ingenious or innovative, not every object or idea showcased in the Triennial is likely to find its way to the real world. But that's hardly the intention of this Design Triennial. Rather than concrete solutions, this "Conflict and Design" shows that design can be a space to think about a better world.

Toon Lambrechts

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Ziggy Marley

15 April, 20.00 | Ancienne Belgique, Brussels

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

Bob Marley's eldest son, Ziggy, has been staking his own claim as a reggae superstar since the 1980s, when he and his brothers and sisters formed The Melody Makers. An all-star collaboration with Talking Heads' Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth yielded the crossover hit "Tomorrow People" and made the Makers frontman a household name, just like

daddy Bob. Ziggy has kept busy ever since. He writes and records new albums, of course, but also works as a voice actor in cartoons (he's the go-to guy for Jamaican drawl), advocates for progressive political causes (famously, the decriminalisation of marijuana in the United States) and endorses Ziggy Marley-brand organic products. **Georgio Valentino**



## VISUAL ARTS

Du fond d'ombre revenus

10 January-1 February | Ludwig Trossaert Gallery, Antwerp

► [www.tinyurl.com/trossaert](http://www.tinyurl.com/trossaert)

The savage civil war in Syria continues, even though the media largely ignores it these days. Syrian artist Lawand reminds us with a haunting exhibition of dream-like paintings. The painter himself insists that his work is engaged but not political. It's true that he is removed from the immediate drama of the war. He was born in Aleppo but his family moved to France in the 1990s, long before the current conflict. And, yes, the themes of loss and loneliness are universal. But this collection of fuzzy figures, abstracted from context, floating in negative space, invariably evokes the tragedy unfolding in Lawand's homeland. Flemish art critic Hugo Brutin

presides over the opening of the exhibition on Friday. **GV**



## PERFORMANCE

Drumming

9-12 January | Kaaithheater, Brussels

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

Rosas reprises its acclaimed contemporary dance production *Drumming* once more. The Brussels-based company premiered the piece in 1998 to enthusiastic reviews. An encore run followed in 2012. Given its pedigree, *Drumming* was probably assured a warm reception. The choreography for 12 dancers was conceived by Flemish dance luminary Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker and is accompanied live by the musicians of Rosas' house band, Ictus. The score was written by seminal contemporary classical composer Steve Reich. Indeed, Reich's 1970 composition "Drumming", written in 1970 in Africa, inspired the whole throbbing, tribal choreography. The production's costume designer



© Herman Sorgeloos

is another big name, Antwerp fashion designer Dries Van Noten. After a four-day run at Brussels' Kaaithheater, *Drumming* is bound for Heist, Nîmes and Barcelona. **GV**

## FESTIVAL

Djangofolllies

14-31 January | Across Flanders

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

Django Reinhardt was born on 23 January, 1910 in Liberchies, Belgium and, although the newborn gypsy jazz pioneer's stay was brief and he would rise to fame rather as a Frenchman, the Belgians have always considered him a local hero. So the festival organisers at Brosella put on an extensive winter shindig in his honour. Djangofolllies (yes, with three ls) is about as extensive as they get, encompassing more than 30 concerts across the whole of Belgium. Performers come from all over Europe to pay tribute to the master of the *manouche* guitar. You'll see groups from the Netherlands, Great Britain, Greece, Germany, France, Scandinavia and, of course, Belgium. Representing Flanders are the Hans Mortelmans

Group (pictured), La Femme Belge and DjanGo-On. **GV**



© Johan Van Eycken

## Performance

### Brussels

**Kathakali:** Initiates from India's Kalamandalam School perform an epic, 15th-century Hindu ritual. In addition to the performance, this Bozar programme includes an introductory lecture, film and behind-the-scenes look at the hours-long preparation of the performers' symbolically coded face paint.

12 JAN 16.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23

► [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

### Exhibition

#### Antwerp

**Folkert de Jong – The Pleasing Delusion:** When he first exhibited at Antwerp's open-air Middelheim Museum, back in 2006, de Jong was a promising up-and-comer; now his sculptures can be found in exclusive collections all around the world. The contemporary Dutch artist returns with 11 new bronze sculptures, displayed in and around Middelheim's pavilion.

UNTIL 6 APR at Middelheim Museum, Middelheimlaan 62

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

#### Leuven

**Michiel Coxcie:** Retrospective exhibition on the life and work of the forgotten 16th-century master painter. Coxcie was celebrated as the Flemish Raphael in his day but his fame didn't last.

UNTIL 23 FEB at M Museum, Vanderkelenstraat 28

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

## Festival

### Brussels

**Winter Jazz:** Flagey and Théâtre Marni join forces to put on their annual neighbourhood jazz festival. Flagey hosts the kick-off concert featuring performances by Italian jazz cats Enrico Rava and Stefano Bollani.

14-25 JAN at Flagey, Heilig-Kruisplein

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

## Family

### Brussels

**The Art of the Brick:** Nathan Sawaya's Lego sculptures bridge the gap between pop art, surrealism and good old-fashioned family fun. More than 70 of the American artist's works are on display, many of them Lego-fied interpretations of familiar masterpieces like Rodin's "The Thinker".

UNTIL 21 APR at Beurs, Beursplein 1

► [www.expo-artofthebrick.be](http://www.expo-artofthebrick.be)



# Talking Dutch

## Rust to rust

Derek Blyth

I've said this before, but I'll say it again. Things move slowly in Brussels. The renovation of the Justitiepaleis, or Justice Palace, proves that quite clearly. It was covered in scaffolding about 30 years ago so workmen could repair the crumbling structure. But the project has dragged on and on without an end in sight. Now the situation is getting dangerous. *De renovatie aan het justitiepaleis sleept al zodanig lang aan* – the renovation of the law courts has gone on for so long, according to a recent article in *Brussel Deze Week*, *dat de steigers die gebruikt worden voor de werken nu zelf aan renovatie toe zijn* – that the scaffolding that is being used for the work is now going to have to be replaced. *Dit is een hoofdstad onwaardig* – this is a shameful situation for a capital city, says Annemie Maes of the Flemish Groen party. The Brussels parliament recently debated the state of the building's renovation. *Door de decennialange verwaarlozing zijn de stellingen – die het beeld van het justitiepaleis al jaren ontsieren – beginnen te roesten*. After decades of neglect, the scaffolding – which has disfigured the appearance of the building for many years – is beginning to rust, it



was said. Taxpayers might want to skip the next sentence. *De stellingen moeten nu zelf worden gerestaureerd* – the scaffolding now has to be restored. In other words, they can't get started on the restoration of the building until they have taken down the old rusting scaffolding and replaced it with shiny new scaffolding. No one has said how much that will cost. Not only that. *Om de veiligheid te garanderen en te vermijden dat vallende brokstukken slachtoffers maken, moeten er zelfs veiligheidsnetten worden geïnstalleerd* – to ensure safety and prevent people being injured by falling rubble, safety nets will have to be put up, according to Maes.

And to make matters even worse, it appears that the scaffolding should never have gone up in the first place. *De stellingen zijn illegaal geplaatst* – the scaffolding was put up illegally, says Brussels minister-president Rudi Vervoort. This may seem a little odd for a building that is teeming with lawyers and law enforcers. Maes believes that the capital deserves something better. *De stilstand in dit dossier getuigt van een gebrek aan respect voor onze hoofdstad* – the lack of progress in this case reflects a lack of respect for our capital. I suppose they will get around to replacing the scaffolding one day. I hope it's not too late by then to save the reputation of Brussels.

## VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

**Ashton Rouén @TheNieuws**  
Omg I can get Flemish radio on my iPad so much better than hearing standard Dutch all the time.


**Pumba @pumbaFF**  
#np Selah Sue... probably my favorite Soul-Reggae-R&B artist with that Flemish swag

**Janelle @Uh\_Oh\_Janellio**  
@bravingthebrew just introduced me to a Flemish Sour. I can honestly say MIND BLOWN. #beer #sourale I don't know what to do with this.

**<@= tΔ™ @LeFt0**  
Video: Nice video for Beyoncé by Brussels-based director Pierre Debusschere. [pierredebusschere.com](http://pierredebusschere.com) [tumblr.co/ZoPJZy115hxDc](http://tumblr.co/ZoPJZy115hxDc)

**In response to: Beer project mixes beer with chocolate**  
**Peter Rose:** Chocolate beer. That's one for the girls. I hope the other is one for the boys with a beer taste

**In response to: Antwerp requests Sunday shopping in 2014**  
**Mike Chambers:** More shops around Belgium are opening on Sunday and attracting a large number of shoppers, mainly from the expat community.

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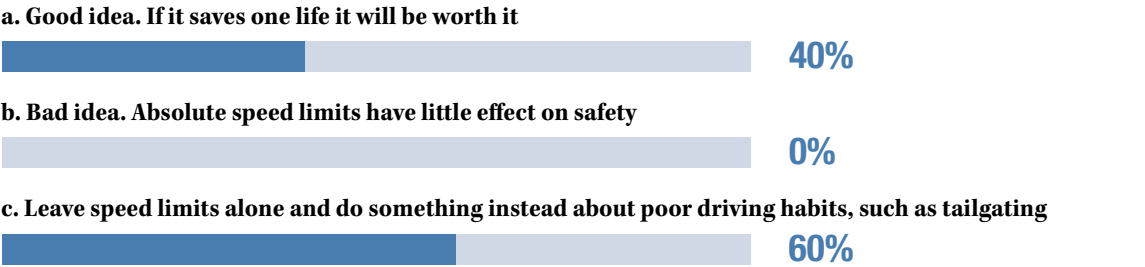
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## Poll

A Flemish traffic agency would like to see motorway speed limits cut to 90 km/h and to a maximum of 70 km/h on other roads. What do you think?



Interesting results this week, especially the revelation that not one of you thinks that speed limits are worthless in and of themselves. Although you think speed limits may not be the biggest problems facing Flanders' drivers, no one dismisses their importance to road safety. The majority of you think speed limits are fine as they are, but that something should be done about other forms of bad driving behaviour. Of course most of us would agree that it's *other* drivers – not us – who are inconsiderate, stupid and dangerous. Though some of Flanders' bad driving habits are quite obvious to expats: tailgating

on the motorways and generally aggressive behaviour in traffic overall, especially in the capital. Four out of 10 of you agreed with the traffic agency, a scientific body that is, after all, made up of experts on the matter. A large minority like that might be enough to cause politicians to take notice.

**Next week's question:**  
The federal food safety agency has approved a list of 10 insects for human consumption (see p11). What do you think?  
Log in to the Flanders Today website and click on the link on the homepage to vote!

## THE LAST WORD

**Class action**  
“Our education system is not prepared for the 21st century.” Flemish education expert Dirk Van Damme of the OECD thinks that Flemish teachers are good but have an old-fashioned approach

**Haunted**  
“It’s as if I’m driven towards the last walk of those two children. I imagine I might notice some detail I overlooked before. A ridiculous idea, but still I have to do it.” Since Kim and Ken Heyrman disappeared in Antwerp in January of 1994, investigator John Van Onsem has walked their last journey in the hope of finding a clue. Kim’s body was found a month later; Ken has never been traced

**Danger zone**  
“We live in Molenbeek and we plan to go on living here. We want our streets back.” Studio Brussel presenter Frederika Del Nero made an emotional appeal in the media after her housemate was wounded by random gunfire shot off by neighbourhood youths

**Cheese plant**  
“The popularity of houseplants has been going down for some time, partly because people prefer minimalist interiors. Market research shows that promotion is needed.” The Flemish agricultural marketing agency Vlam has turned to YouTube to try to make houseplants attractive to young people

