

Hello CEO

The federal government and the board of Belgacom waste no time in appointing a new leader

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Bagging a flag

Hasselt's FlagBag puts the hard-to-employ to work while making one-of-a-kind designs

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Picture pioneers

Two early champions of both media photography and women in the field on show in Antwerp

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Uncovering Bruges' treasure

The inside of the world-famous Church of Our Lady in Bruges is undergoing restoration

Daan Bauwens

There's the Rozenhoedkaai, Minnewater park, the Basilica of the Holy Blood and the Gruuthuse city palace. But the Church of Our Lady is without question Bruges' finest Gothic gem. Two years after its fearsome tower was released from decades of scaffolding, the interior is slated for a thorough facelift, with a pricetag of more than €1 million. In between talking to building contractors and taking measurements, the first-ever Bruges city archaeologist, Hubert De Witte, tells me what makes the interior so special.

The Church of Our Lady has an impressive history. Its tower – slightly askew, finished in the middle of the 14th century, hit in 1938 by a warplane loaded with bombs (that miraculously did not explode) – is still the second-highest brick structure in the world. It features in one of Jacques Brel's most famous Flemish songs. It harbours the mausolea of some of the middle ages' most powerful dukes and duchesses. And, last but not least, it's home to Michelangelo's captivating "Madonna and Child", the only work by the Renaissance master to have left Italy during his lifetime.

Of course, the church owes its enormous popularity to the presence of Michelangelo's statue. But in recent years it has become something of a mixed blessing. "We've seen Bruges becoming more and more popular," says De Witte, deputy director of all Bruges' museums, "and this church in particular started suffering."

Until a few years ago, he continues, "it used to receive two million visitors a year, walking in and out to see the Madonna. Each of them brought in dust and moisture. The marble Madonna wasn't affected, but the other treasures were. Canvases and wooden frames suffered, the paint on the walls started peeling. The church looked, and still looks, a bit dirty."

There was a simple solution to the problem: A division was made between the church and a separate paying museum – the only part of the church where the Madonna can be seen. As well as creating a much-needed source of income, this brought the annual number of visitors to the church down drastically, to 250,000.

But the damage had been done, and the interior was in urgent need of refurbishment.

The easiest phase of the renovation – new tiles, electrical infrastructure and lighting – is now nearly finished. Most paintings in the church have simply been covered to protect them from dust. The four phases that lie ahead will be much harder.

Two weeks from now, the mighty choir and posterior parts will be sealed off from the public, and important paintings by Flemish



Road rage driver turns himself in as dashcam sales double

Legality of dashcam images in court is in dispute, as images hit the internet

Alan Hope

A man filmed carrying out dangerous manoeuvres in a BMW on the E314 on New Year's Eve has turned himself in to police, amid a debate on the legality of dashcam footage used to identify him.

The 49-year-old man from Sint-Genesius-Rode, just outside of Brussels, was filmed repeatedly braking suddenly as he cut off the driver of a van equipped with a dashboard camera, causing a near-collision more than once (pictured).

On being questioned by police,



the man placed the blame for the dangerous driving on the driver of the van and claimed the video footage had been manipulated.

“Further technical research and witness statements should

allow us to obtain more clarity,” a spokesperson for the Leuven prosecutor’s office said.

The sale of dashboard cameras doubled in Belgium in the last month, according to a report by VTM news. In 2012, a total of 4,000 cameras were purchased, many as a result of widespread clips of a meteor on the internet from Russia, where a dashcam is the norm. In Belgium, those fitting their car with a camera must declare it to the Privacy Commission.

Questions have been raised, however, over the legal value of

dashcam footage in any subsequent prosecution. According to the Privacy Commission, the victim who filmed the road rage incident may have breached the privacy of the man who drove so aggressively by publishing the image of the BMW’s licence plate online.

“Whoever makes an image of someone committing a crime or offence ought to take those images to the police,” a commission spokesperson said. “Putting the images online without the person’s consent could lead to sanctions.”

Meanwhile, the victim of another

incident of dangerous driving has filed a complaint with police. The incident took place on the E40 motorway near Drongen, East Flanders, and was also recorded by a dashcam. According to an EU study, three in four drivers have been the victim at some point of aggressive driving by other motorists. According to a British study, meanwhile, BMW drivers are the most aggressive, followed by the drivers of Land Rovers and Audis.

► www.tinyurl.com/e314dashcam

Frietkoten recognised as cultural heritage

Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege has added the region’s *frietken*, or french fry, culture to the government’s list of intangible cultural heritage. Last week the minister received a petition signed by supporters of Navefri, the national association of french fry shops, for the *friet* culture to be listed.

The claim requires the demonstration of broad public support; the petition circulated during the Week of the Friet in November last year obtained more than 20,000 signatures.

The recognition covers the knowledge and traditions of the *friet* culture, but also the famed



Joke Schauvliege and Kris Peeters indulge in Flanders’ official cultural heritage

Bernard Lefèvre. “It was thanks to the interest shown by foreigners that we started realising their value. We now have to ensure they carry on existing.” The association brought along its own *frietkot* with the petition, presenting Schauvliege, together with minister-president Kris Peeters and invited members of the press, with a New Year’s portion of *friet*.

“The application also shows that there is a heritage community behind the *friet* who wish to ensure that the tradition continues,” said Schauvliege. AH

Fossils found in Flemish Brabant are ancestors of dogs and cats

Fossils that have long been found in Domaal, a district of Zoutleeuw in Flemish Brabant, are making headlines around the world this week as scientists connected to the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences announced that they provide invaluable insight into the evolution of carnivorous mammals.

The fossils belong to a common ancestor of dogs, cats, bears and other carnivores. Using 250 fossilised teeth, scientists were able to map the full dental structure of the *Dormaalocyon latouri*. This predecessor of cats

and dogs, one of the so-called “carnivoraforms”, lived about 55 million years ago. The new research illustrates that the origin of carnivoriforms lies in Europe. Apart from the teeth, the discovery also included ankle bones, which show that the species lived in the trees and moved via tree tops. “Knowledge about the origin of carnivoriforms is important to reconstruct the adaptation of mammals to a carnivore diet,” explains Floréal Solé of the research group. “The *Dormaalocyon latouri* provides useful information concerning

the evolution of these mammals after the extinction of the largest dinosaurs.” Andy Furniere



How *Dormaalocyon latouri* looked 55 million years ago

Flanders to clamp down on foreign number plates

The government of Flanders plans to make “regular, large-scale checks” of drivers whose cars are equipped with foreign number plates, in an effort to detect those who are avoiding local registration and road taxes, finance minister Philippe Muyters announced earlier this week. An initial inspection this month in Sint-Genesius-Rode, just outside of Brussels, led to 37 offenders being caught.

The checks are organised by the Flemish tax service Vlabel, together with local police. According to the law, said David Van Herreweghe of Vlabel, “you can’t live here and drive around with a foreign number

plate. And you’re obliged to pay road and registration taxes.” Vlabel used cameras with automatic number plate recognition to identify cars with foreign plates, which were then pulled over by police to have their tax details checked. The first major check in the Flemish Brabant municipality showed that one in four cars with foreign plates is not in order with taxation. The result, Muyters said, is “enough to warrant increased attention from the taxation service.” Owners found to be in breach face a fine of up to €1,250. AH

Sven Nys cements cyclo-cross status with ninth win

Flemish cyclist Sven Nys claimed an astonishing ninth Belgian national cyclo-cross championship at Waregem last Sunday, dominating the race over rivals Rob Peeters and Bart Wellens, who came second and third respectively. Defending champion Klaas Vantornout abandoned the race, as did Niels Albert.

Nys, 37, is now only one title away from equalling Roland Liboton’s record tally of 10 championships, earned in the 1980s. Nys recently declared that he’s adding two more years of racing to his career, which



means he’s now scheduled to retire at the age of 40. His next goal is the cyclo-cross world championship in Hoogerheide, the Netherlands on 2 February, a rare chance to clinch the Belgian-world double. Leo Cendrowicz

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

25,674

flights in 2013 at Ostend airport, down more than 10% on 2012. Freight handled was down 12% to 45,485 tonnes. Passenger numbers went up, however, by 6.5% to 247,674

29%

more users of the Cambio car-sharing scheme in Flanders in 2013, with user numbers increasing to more than 6,900. East Flanders has the most users with 2,725

748

motorists ticketed during December for the misuse of bus lanes in the zone Brussels-Elsene, police said. Another 594 were fined for driving in cycle lanes

128

fines handed out on the Brussels public transport network for begging and busking without a permit – up massively from the 12 fines in 2012

€59,926

extra subsidy from Flemish heritage minister Geert Bourgeois for the continuing restoration of the “Adoration of the Mystic Lamb” altarpiece

WEEK IN BRIEF

New roads constructed in Flanders should **not be equipped with light poles** unless there is a clear reason they should be, according to advice offered to the government of Flanders from the Roads and Traffic Agency (AWV). According to the evidence, said the agency, lights have no effect on the number of accidents. Existing lighting facilities would not be removed under the AWV plan; the new rules would only apply in the case of new roads.

A court in Antwerp has sentenced the **first drug offenders to be brought to trial** since the introduction of the city's policy of zero tolerance. Most of the 24 were fined either €450 or €900, depending on whether the offence concerned "soft" drugs – cannabis – or "hard" drugs like cocaine and heroin. Those with previous drugs convictions were also sentenced to 15 days in prison. Last September, Antwerp changed its policy on the prosecution of possession of marijuana to allow adults holding less than three grams to be charged with an offence.

A 29-year-old father from Wingene, West Flanders, has developed a system to prevent parents from **accidentally leaving their children behind** in the car – a mistake that famously led to the death of a baby in Flanders in August of 2012. The Gabriel system, invented by warehouseman Kenny Devlieger, involves a pressure- and temperature-sensitive mat placed under the child-seat. A key-fob carried by the driver emits a warning signal if the baby is still in the seat when the adult is more than five metres away. Devlieger hopes to see his system on the market soon.

Antwerp waste treatment company Indaver is bidding for the job of managing **chemical weapons waste from Syria**. The Syrian regime has handed over 1,300 tonnes of chemical weapons to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which will

produce a quantity of toxic waste to be incinerated.

Flemish actor Wim Opbrouck has launched a campaign to hold an international minute of silence in fire stations across the world **during the 30,000th Last Post** in Ypres next year on 9 July. The Last Post has been sounded at 20.00 nightly at the Menin Gate since 1928, with a break only during the Nazi occupation from 1940 to 1944. According to Opbrouck, the moment of silence would take place at 20.00 local time worldwide, moving around the world in a silent wave.

The city of Bruges is considering a proposal to allow **swimming in the canals** during the summer, said the alderwoman for sport. The city council is exploring the idea with local swimming associations, while the city examines the quality of the canal water.

Federal finance minister Koen Geens has promised to **tighten up controls on the tax shelter system** of film financing, after warnings from Flemish filmmakers that the system was being abused by investors, and the money pumped into the system was failing to reach the audio-visual industry in the way intended. The system allows a tax deduction for investors of 150% of their investment, while imposing a 70% minimum on the amount of money raised that has to be spent on audio-visual services in Belgium.

The Brussels regional government has begun the procedure to list as protected a number of cellars in houses on Louizalaan which were used as **detention cells during the Occupation**. The cellars in houses numbered 347 and 453 were used to detain resistors and Jews and still bear graffiti left by prisoners on the walls. "These cellars carry the traces of a period in our history we must not allow to fade away," said Brussels minister-president Rudi Vervoort.

Emiel Pauwels, hailed as the **oldest athlete in the country**, died by euthanasia last week at his home in Bruges. At 95, he was remarkably fit but suffered from stomach cancer. Pauwels made his name last spring when he became European champion of the 60-metre sprint for the over-90s; his victory video on YouTube became a national hit.

Belfius bank has agreed to scrap a fund that led investors to **speculate on commodity prices**, after a complaint from the development charity 11.11.11. Speculation on the prices of commodities and raw materials, the charity said, had a negative impact on food prices and helped impoverish the poorest people in the developing world. Belfius, one of several banks named in the complaint, said it has stopped dealing with the fund and would now look into ways to guide investors towards more sustainable investments. "We hope Belfius is setting a trend that other banks can follow," said the chair of 11.11.11.

Film and TV subscription service **Netflix has denied reports** it is planning an imminent arrival in Belgium. "We have no specific plans for further European development," a company spokesperson said, responding to recent reports. US-based Netflix started out as a postal DVD rental service but now provides online streaming of films and TV programmes. In Europe, it operates in the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands and much of Scandinavia.

The European **Court of Human Rights has found against the Belgian** state in the cases of eight people ordered to be interned for psychiatric reasons who were detained in prison without access to treatment. The latest cases bring the number of judgements against Belgium for this problem to 14. Seven of the complainants last week were awarded damages of €15,000 and one received €17,500.

OFFSIDE

Land of iniquity

Don't sit next to the door in a restaurant, and if someone in the street asks you to sign a petition, it could be a cover for an imminent mugging or pocket-picking. That's just some of the advice being given by the US State Department to US citizens travelling to Belgium.

Other countries are more or less concerned for their citizens when they go abroad, to the extent of warning if a destination is at war or a hotbed of suicide bombing. The United States, though, is the fussy mother of nations, making sure its citizens are wearing clean underwear and have washed behind their ears.

So people from places like New York, Detroit and Washington, DC, apparently need to have it pointed out to them that "low-level street crime, such as muggings, purse snatching and pickpocketing is common, particularly in major cities". Thieves, it seems,

"loiter in transportation hubs like the metro and train stations, notably the Gare du Midi ... They take advantage of disoriented or distracted travelers and watch for people who put their luggage down and are inattentive for even a moment."

Of course, it's always best to be forewarned and too much advice is probably better than too little. But is it really accurate that "Belgium maintains open borders with its neighbors, allowing the possibility of terrorist operatives entering/exiting the country with anonymity"? Isn't it a little bit much to claim that "even demonstrations meant to be peaceful can become violent and unpredictable. You should avoid them if at all possible"?

At least one piece of advice is not an exaggeration: "While in Belgium, you may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States."



FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



© Electrolux

Ronnie Leten

He's the kind of manager you hear little about because he's off running a company in some other part of the world – in this case Stockholm, where Ronnie Leten is CEO of the multinational Atlas Copco. But last week the Limburger was allowed for an evening to be entirely Flemish again, when he won the title Manager of the Year, awarded by the business magazine *Trends* and the cable TV channel Kanaal Z.

The name Atlas Copco may bring back memories to anyone who ever played with toy trucks. The company makes all manner of construction equipment – stone crushers, generators, compressors, digging machinery – all in the company's distinctive hi-vis yellow-and-black livery. They employ 40,000 people around the world and last year had a turnover of a not inconsiderable €10.5 billion, which would have put them in fifth place here if they were a Belgian company.

Leten, 57, was born in Beringen

and studied economics at Hasselt University. His first job was with

LU General Biscuits, and he

moved to Atlas Copco after a

short stint with another Swedish

company, Electrolux, in 1985. He's

been there ever since, heading

up various divisions before becoming the company's chair and CEO in 2009.

Atlas Copco has a factory in Antwerp. "I just can't understand how a country that is so well-situated still can't be competitive," he told *De Standaard* in a recent interview. "We're doing something wrong."

The Wilrijk plant was under constant threat, he said, "not only because of salary costs but also because of policy surrounding permits and the lack of logistic back-up. If my workers in Wilrijk are plagued with logistics problems, they're not busy with their work. Every day I see how things could be different, in Sweden."

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters congratulated Leten on his win, calling him "a driving force behind the success of Atlas Copco. The multinational is an important partner for the [Flemish] government for the success of our New Industrial Policy. Under Ronnie Leten's leadership, the company continues to search for innovative industrial solutions."

Leten was nominated with nine other prominent managers, among them Johnny Thijs, who recently stepped down as CEO of Bpost.

FLANDERS TODAY



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And the winner is...

The pre-election period – European, federal and regional elections will be held in May – often foreshadows the government that will be formed afterwards. On the Flemish side, there is a remarkable rapprochement between N-VA, the largest party by far, and CD&V, the party that held that position for decades.

Relations between the two parties, once united in a cartel, became bitter after N-VA lashed out in the alleged tax fraud case of ACW, the Christian Workers Movement closely linked with CD&V. These days, Bart De Wever's party acts rather differently to what may well be its coalition partner in the new governments. N-VA now hopes to weaken Open VLD, which, in economic terms, it is close to. In the run-up to elections, all parties draw up electoral lists.

Under the Belgian electoral rules these are all important, as the place on the list determines a candidate's chances of getting elected into parliament. With N-VA expected to take up a large share of the votes, the stakes are much higher for all other lists.

Journalists love this list-forming, if only because it has clear winners and losers. Open VLD alone saw two head-on clashes for the top place on its lists, between Bart Somers and Dirk Vanmechelen (Antwerp province) and Jean-Jacques De Gucht and Matthias De Clercq (East Flanders). As both genders have to be represented in the first two candidates on any list, the men who lost out could only count on third place – with a much slimmer chance of getting elected. Somers and De Clercq won.

Over at CD&V, former finance minister Steven Vanackere had hoped for second place on the European list, after former party president Marianne Thyssen. However, the party decided to grant the second place to former TV journalist Ivo Belet. Vanackere contemplated leaving politics altogether, only to be persuaded to accept third place and an uncertain future after all.

On the losing side this week is also Jean-Marie Dedecker of the eponymous LDD. Dedecker had hoped for a place on a list of N-VA, the party he joined in 2006, only to be kicked out some days later after a veto by the then cartel partner CD&V. N-VA's De Wever has always said he owed Dedecker, but electoral calculation stood in the way of a renewed alliance. Dedecker may still get elected with LDD, but his political relevance has shrunk to almost zero.

Reforms mean “a new Belgium”

Government's landmark constitutional reforms hand more power to regions

Derek Blyth

The country's leading politicians met last week in the prime minister's Brussels residence to sign a landmark constitution reform that fundamentally changes the structure of Belgium. Known as the sixth state reform, the document contains 82 new laws approved by all six political parties that form the current coalition government – and Groen, which is in opposition. The federal government took two years to reach agreement on the wide-reaching changes, which will shift many powers from the federal government to the regions and language communities. Among the many changes in responsibilities are determining child allowances, controlling the job market and running homes for the elderly.

Prime minister Elio Di Rupo is confident that the new reforms



Prime minister Elio Di Rupo (left) and Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters shake hands over recent constitutional reforms

will bring political stability to the country following several years of uncertainty. “Over the past two years, our country has evolved from

a country in crisis to a stable land that has gained more international credibility,” he said during last week's ceremony. “Once the sixth

state reform takes effect, we will have a new Belgium.”

State secretary for state reform Servais Verherstraeten added that “the eight political parties and the federal government have finished their part of the job and are now handing over the baton to the regional governments”. He added on his Twitter account: “From the cradle to the grave, the regions are now responsible.”

Flanders minister-president Kris Peeters praised the reforms as “a turning point in the history of this country and its regions and communities.” On his Twitter account, he noted: “Following the reforms, the regions now have the power to make their own decisions to create a strong economic policy and efficient government. No time to lose!”

Government names new CEO for Belgacom

The federal government has nominated Dominique Leroy as the new CEO of Belgacom. Leroy was executive vice president of the consumer business unit of the company. She replaces Didier Bellens, who was fired in October after the latest in a series of controversial statements. The sudden departure of Bellens left Belgacom – which is still state-controlled, with the government holding 50% of the shares plus one – somewhat rudderless, coinciding with the arrival of brand-new chair Stefaan De Clerck. US-based headhunters Russell Reynolds were brought in immediately, and Leroy's name was mentioned from the start as a potential successor. Leroy is French speaking (but bilingual), while De Clerck is Dutch speaking, which appealed to the government in terms of

balance. Leroy is also not tied to any political party, in contrast to Bellens, who was emphatically of the French-speaking socialists (PS) of government enterprises minister Jean-Pascal Labille.

Prior to Belgacom, Leroy spent 24 years at Unilever, working in marketing, finance and customer development before becoming managing director of Unilever Benelux. At present she sits on the boards of Belgacom subsidiaries Tango and Scarlet, as well as of Lotus Bakeries.

Leroy's name was one of five presented to the ministers by Russell Reynolds. The choice of Leroy was ratified by the board of Belgacom, with both De Clerck and acting CEO Ray Stewart describing themselves as “delighted” at her nomination. *Alan Hope*

Vande Lanotte sues Dedecker over corruption allegations

Federal economy minister Johan Vande Lanotte has brought a court action for slander against Jean-Marie Dedecker, leader of his self-founded party LDD, following repeated allegations of corruption linked to the Electrawinds wind turbine farm.

Vande Lanotte announced in a TV interview last month that he was “fed up” with repeated allegations of conflict of interest in connection with the Ostend-based green energy company. “People sling mud, and the mud sometimes sticks,” said Vande Lanotte. “When something is published that is a lie, and there is no evidence that it is true, then I'll take the case to the courts. I'm sick of it.”

Vande Lanotte, a vice prime minister in the federal government,

played a key role in bringing Electrawinds to Ostend, where it benefited from about €150 million in government subsidies. Dedecker claimed in an open letter published on his website that Vande Lanotte had bought shares or share options in Electrawinds.

Vande Lanotte said last week that there was no evidence for the allegations. He added that an independent expert had examined the company's books and found no evidence of share dealing. The economy minister has now asked the court to award notional damages of €1 and order Dedecker to pay for publication of the verdict in several newspapers. The case is not due to be heard until later this year. *DB*

SP.A's new pension proposal based on years worked

Bruno Tobback of the Flemish socialist party (SP.A) presented a proposal last week to change the pension system by scrapping the right to a pension at 65 years in favour of the award of a pension after 42 years of work. “More and more people are agreeing with the idea that the number of years worked is more important than age,” CD&V party member Sonja Becq responded on her Twitter account. The Groen party has proposed an alternative system in which everyone would be awarded a basic pension of €1,000, plus a supplement for each year worked. Meanwhile, N-VA wants to keep the retirement age at 65 but with higher or lower rates depending on the number of years worked.

The one certainty in the debate is that the system is going to have to be overhauled in the coming years to take account of the changing population. Federal pensions minister Alexander De Croo agrees that the system will have to change, but he says he wants to defer a decision until later this year when he has looked at the figures compiled by the Pension Reform Committee 2020-2040. *DB*



Homeowners need to double up on energy efficiency

Flemish energy minister Freya Van den Bossche has launched a new campaign to get residents to insulate their homes and cut their energy bills. Some seven out of 10 houses in Flanders can still make energy savings, according to the minister.

Van den Bossche quoted a study by the Flemish Energy Agency that showed that about 50% of Flemings had already taken advantage of subsidies, compared to just 20% back in 2008. “Many more people realise the need to save energy and have taken steps to do so,” she said.

She noted that applications for wall insulation rose by 50% last year compared to 2012, while the number applying for a solar boiler was more than three times higher in 2013 compared to one year earlier. Meanwhile, applications for subsidies to insulate roofs were down from 72,000 in 2012 to 53,000

last year, but this was because the roof insulation subsidy was the first to be introduced, so many homeowners had already taken advantage of it. About 80% of homeowners have now insulated their roofs.

Despite the progress that has been made, Van den Bossche says there is still room for improvement. “We have noticed that people often adopt one energy-saving measure but not the others,” she said. “But the biggest savings are made when they are combined.”

The new campaign, dubbed “Go for a 100% warm nest”, is trying to persuade homeowners to install roof insulation, wall insulation, double glazing plus an efficient boiler. “By adopting energy-efficient measures, we don't just benefit the environment and our wallet, but also the Flemish building industry,” said Van den Bossche. *DB*

Uncovering Bruges' treasure

City archaeologist reveals the mysteries of the city's Gothic gem

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Primitives Pieter Pourbus, Gerard David and Adriaan Isenbrant will be moved to the south aisles, where the Madonna is exhibited.

It's only in the third phase, due in 2017 or 2018, that real problems are expected. "We are still not sure what will happen to the Madonna then," De Witte says. "It is fixed to an altar in the south aisle." And with good reason. "It was stolen," says De Witte, "twice."

First by the French in 1794, then by the Germans during the Second World War. "It was retrieved after the war in a salt mine in Altaussee, Austria. After that, it was affixed."

He adds that Bruges' Madonna, as well as Ghent's "Adoration of the Mystic Lamb", features in a new Hollywood production by George Clooney. (He declined to go into detail, but Clooney's film *The*

"It would be fascinating to start digging, but it is not appropriate"

Monument Men, due to open in the US next month, is the likely culprit.) In any case, De Witte expects that Michelangelo's statue will be inaccessible for at least a year during the refurbishments.

The work also includes the restoration of the organ, the conservation of paintings and treatment against woodworm for the church's confessional chairs. Most of the more basic infrastructure work is in the hands of the same architect who carried out the renovation of the exterior some years ago. In fact,



The Church of Our Lady towers over the city and is still the second-highest brick structure in the world

more than a century ago the great-grandfather of the current architect was responsible for renovating the church. It's a real dynasty.

But while this year's refurbishment is very ambitious, some of the initial plans, such as underfloor heating, had to be left out. "A German company came here with geo-radars," De Witte explains, "to measure where we could install the heating system without damaging anything that is historically valuable. It turned out to be impossible. There are crypts with skeletons, coffins and wall paintings lying hidden under literally every tile on the floor. We cannot damage those."

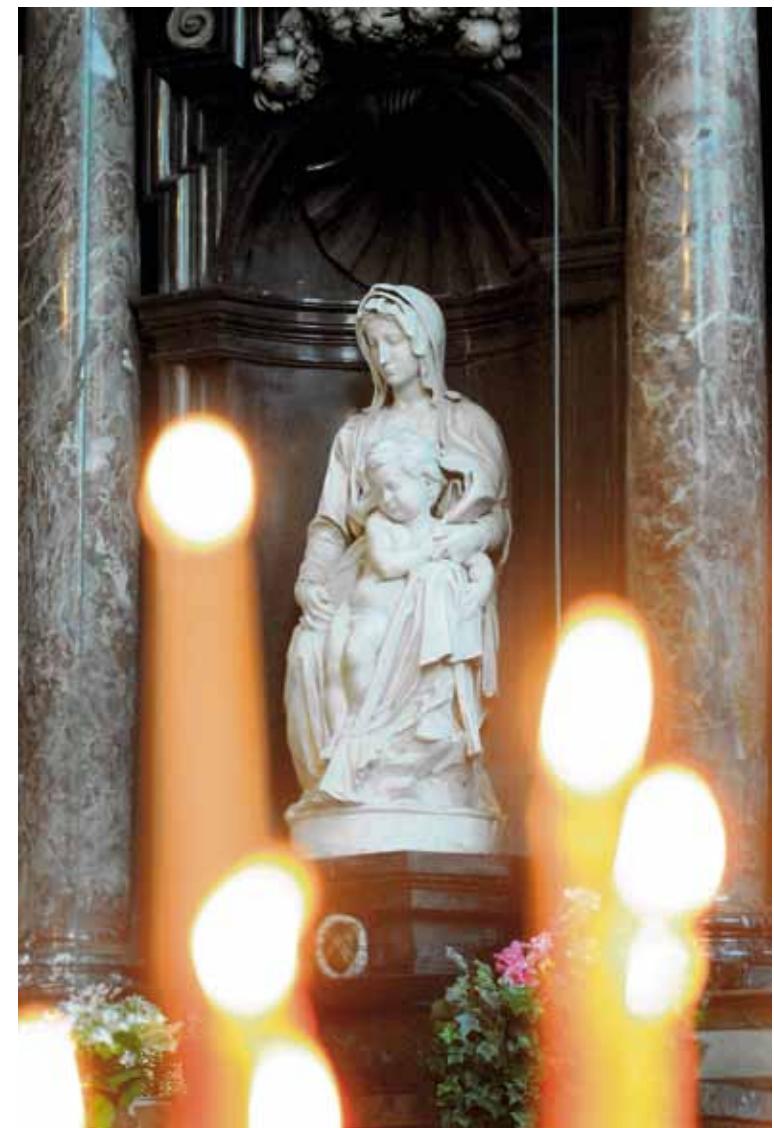
It's not very likely that those crypts will ever be dug up. According to De Witte, 90% of what is hidden under the floor has never been seen by anyone alive today. "It would be fascinating to start digging,

but it is not appropriate," he says. "The investment to see what's underneath and to preserve what you then have found is too big. We need to focus all our time and energy on saving valuable things that are already in danger and need to be preserved. We prefer not to touch what can be kept underground."

There are a few crypts that have been uncovered, though. We are now at the mausolea of Charles the Bold and his daughter Mary of Burgundy, behind the high altar in the choir area, already sealed off from the public. There are contractors all around, but De Witte insisted on taking me here. This place, he says, explains his personal bond with the church.

Back in 1978, as the first city archaeologist, De Witte discovered the remains of duchess Mary of Burgundy underneath the church's choir. "We knew from a report in 1803 that the crypt was here," he explains, "but it had been filled with debris after a restoration, dumped through a hole in the vault of the crypt. Mary's lead coffin had been stolen and her skeleton thrown out." The search began, and De Witte's team "found her skeleton, intact, under the debris. We also found the urn containing the heart of her son Philip the Fair, who died in Burgos in 1506. His heart was sent from Spain to Flanders to be placed in his mother's grave."

Thanks to De Witte's excavations in the 1970s, the real cause of Maria's death could be determined. "We already knew she had fallen from her horse while riding in the woods close to Torhout," he says, "but after studying the fractures on the ribs we came to the conclusion that her horse must have faltered and fallen on her. She died some days later,



Michelangelo's captivating "Madonna and Child", the only work by the Renaissance master to have left Italy during his lifetime

here in the Court of the Prince, from pneumothorax and infections, things that are easily treated and cured nowadays. Not back then."

More than 35 years later, De Witte still gets excited talking about those days: "I am the only man on this

planet who can say that he drove Mary of Burgundy in his car, on the passenger seat, to an anthropologist in Antwerp."

► www.onthaalkerk-brugge.be

LIVING HISTORY

Churches in Bruges might be classified as museums, but that doesn't mean they aren't still places of worship. The Church of Our Lady hosts masses every night, even during restoration. "That is a conscious choice," says De Witte. "The past is not something that is gone and has to be put in a museum. It lives on today."

Likewise, traditions dating back centuries still exist in Bruges. For instance, the last congregation of the knights of the Golden Fleece, an illustrious order founded by Philip the Good in 1430, was at the end of 2012. Nobility from all over Europe, including the kings of Spain and Belgium, gathered in Bruges, changed into black habits

in the Gruuthuse palace, put on their famous golden amulets and walked – in procession – from the palace to the Church of Our Lady. The press was allowed into the congregation for a few seconds, then the doors were closed, and worldly matters were discussed among chivalry. "Anachronistic, but necessary," says De Witte. "The golden amulets they were wearing are priceless; some date back to the 16th century. They were sent to us from the treasury in Vienna, and we kept them with us in the museum depot for two days. It's an unimaginable fortune. It needed to be kept a secret or it would have been too risky."

planet who can say that he drove Mary of Burgundy in his car, on the passenger seat, to an anthropologist in Antwerp."

© Jan Darthet

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WEEK IN BUSINESS

Banking ▶ KBC

Flanders' largest financial institution has reimbursed €500 million to the Flemish government from a total of €3.5 billion it received in early 2009 in the midst of the banking sector's crisis. KBC has a further €2 billion to refund before 2020.

Chemicals ▶ Taminco

The Ghent-based chemical company, specialised in amines and derivatives, agrochemical additives and water treatment products is to acquire the formic acid activities of the Finnish Kemira company for €140 million.

Fashion ▶ Wolf

The Flemish government's investment fund is paying €18 million for a 52% stake in the French lingerie producer Wolf, known for brands Rosy, Sans Complex, Oups and Jardins Secrets. Wolf is a leading supplier to the retailing sector and hopes to expand beyond France with Gimv's help.

Insurance ▶ Ageas

The Brussels-based insurance group has made a bid to acquire the Milano Assicurazioni activities of the Italian Unipol insurance company, with premiums of €1.7 billion a year. The sale is requested by Italian regulatory authorities for competition reasons.

Medical ▶ Arseus

The Waregem-based distributor of pharmaceuticals and medical equipment has sold the bulk of its dentistry activities to the US Henry Schein company for €50 million to concentrate its activities on supplies to pharmacies.

Pharmaceuticals ▶ Okapi

The Leuven-based spin-off from KU Leuven, specialised in veterinary products, has been acquired by the US Aratana Therapeutics for €30 million. Okapi has developed new treatments against swine fever and foot-and-mouth disease.

Property ▶ Sotheby's

The international realty division of the well-known auction house plans to open its first office in Brussels to handle upmarket properties on the local market.

Shipping ▶ Euronav

The Antwerp-based shipping group is investing €722 million to acquire 15 VLCC tankers from Maersk Tankers, an affiliate of the Norwegian Maersk group. The move, which will double Euronav's fleet, will be financed through a €280 million capital increase and additional credit facilities. The company is also seeking a Wall Street quote to facilitate its access to extra funding.

BIN improves port security

Local information network involves police, business and customs

Alan Hope

More than 450 companies active in the port of Antwerp have signed up for the creation of the Neighbourhood Information Network (BIN) to help improve safety in the harbour area. The port area, which covers 13,000 hectares, is vulnerable to criminal activity because of the wide range of legal traffic streams in and out and the vast contacts with both the European hinterland and overseas concerns.

The results are thefts, vandalism and environmental offences, according to Stanny De Vlieger, director of the federal judicial police in Antwerp. BIN, he said, will put companies in closer contact with police to report suspicious movements or activities; police can then send out messages to other companies warning them



© Courtesy port of Antwerp

police will be able to react more rapidly whenever suspect activities are noted, which will have a deterrent effect on people of criminal intent."

Only last week police reported an increase in the amount of waste being dumped in the harbour deriving from the production of synthetic drugs such as ecstasy and amphetamines. Last year it was discovered that malware had been installed on computers of companies working in the port to allow criminals to trace containers used for smuggling drugs.

BIN was signed by representatives of the Port Authority, police, customs and the mayors of the port area municipalities of Antwerp, Beveren and Zwijndrecht.

to be vigilant.

"Thanks to better information management," said the Port Authority in a statement, "the

Brussels economy "very positive" says Standard & Poor's

The influential rating agency Standard & Poor's has maintained Brussels-Capital Region's AA rating, while adding a warning that the outlook is negative. "We consider the Region of Brussels Capital to be benefitting from a sound financial management and a wealthy economy," the agency said.

Brussels finance minister Guy Vanhengel (*pictured*) said he was delighted with the report. "We had projected a budget deficit of €132 million in 2013," he said. "But it looks as if we will end the year with the books balanced, or even

with a slight surplus. We are the capital of Europe, and so we have to set an example. We can say with confidence that Brussels Region is the best student in the class."

Vanhengel noted that the positive rating had been achieved without having to increase the tax burden on residents or companies, despite the enormous financial challenges it faced as the capital of both Belgium and the EU – especially in areas like transport and education.

The S&P report noted that Brussels was one of Europe's wealthiest regions, with a per capita

purchasing power that was 255% of the EU average. It added that the city's prosperity was founded on its position as national capital and seat of EU institutions, while noting that its "economic strengths do not fully translate into financial wealth for the region, a paradox explained by current institutional arrangements". As well as rating companies and countries, S&P tracks the financial health of hundreds of city councils and regional authorities. The rating is an important tool for national and international investors; a positive rating makes it easier for a city to



raise funds at a low interest rate for major infrastructure projects. The rating agency recently downgraded the European Union one notch from AAA to AA+.

Derek Blyth

Flemish brewers look to the past for image updates

Two West Flemish breweries yesterday announced plans to move towards the future by turning to the past. Brewery Bavik from Bavikhove this year marks its 120th anniversary by dropping the name it adopted in 1990 and going back to the family name De Brabandere. "A survey showed us that the brewery was in need of a new image," explained Albert De Brabandere of the fifth generation of the family. "Hence our return to our roots and to authenticity. We have identified three main components of authenticity: our heritage, our

regional commitment and our traditional brewing process." The name Bavik will remain for the pils beer brewed by De Brabandere. And the company also announced a new beer: 1894, subtitled "Hops & Oak" and distributed in 75cl bottles, has been developed to mark the brewer's anniversary. Brewery Bockor in Bellegem, meanwhile, announced a similar move. The name Bockor



will be replaced by the name the brewery sported from its founding in 1892 until 1977 – Brouwerij Omer Vander Ghinste. Bockor already brews Omer, a speciality beer pointing towards its roots. The name Bockor will be retained for its pils.

Finally, the company announced a new logo and house style and a new beer, Brasserie LeFort, available in bars and shops from next week. AH

Tourism industry calls for regional split of school holidays

School authorities in Flanders have given a chilly reception to a proposal from the tourism industry to split school holidays in Flanders and Wallonia so they no longer coincide.

The proposal came from Thomas Cook, one of the country's largest tour operators. According to the company, separating the two holiday periods – they would begin and end at different dates, but would overlap – would extend the holiday season for customers and for tour operators. Prices for

consumers would come down, said spokesperson Baptiste van Outryve, since there would be less demand at any given time.

Mieke Van Hecke, head of the Catholic schools network, said the idea had "little sense," pointing out that it would create difficulties for schools and for the jobs market. "There is not a single argument in favour of a review," she said. "As far as I'm concerned, we're not interested." AH



Close doors against the cold, retailers advised

Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed, has launched a campaign to encourage shops to keep their doors closed during the cold weather. "Shop doors that stay open during the cold winter months allow heat to escape unnecessarily," the organisation said. "Such needless energy consumption is not only damaging for the environment but also sends the energy bill of retailers through the roof."

Many shopkeepers are reluctant to keep their doors closed because they feel it presents an unwelcoming face to the public and discourages passing trade. Unizo is not convinced. "From a poll of consumers, it appears only a very small minority see a closed door as an obstacle," a spokesperson said.

To set minds at rest, the campaign also includes a sticker for retailers to put on the doors wishing shoppers a warm welcome and leaving them in no doubt that the shop is open.

Unizo is not, however, in favour of going as far as the city council of Hasselt, which has introduced a fine for shopkeepers whose doors are open. "That goes too far and sends the wrong signal," Unizo said. AH

Mapping the stars

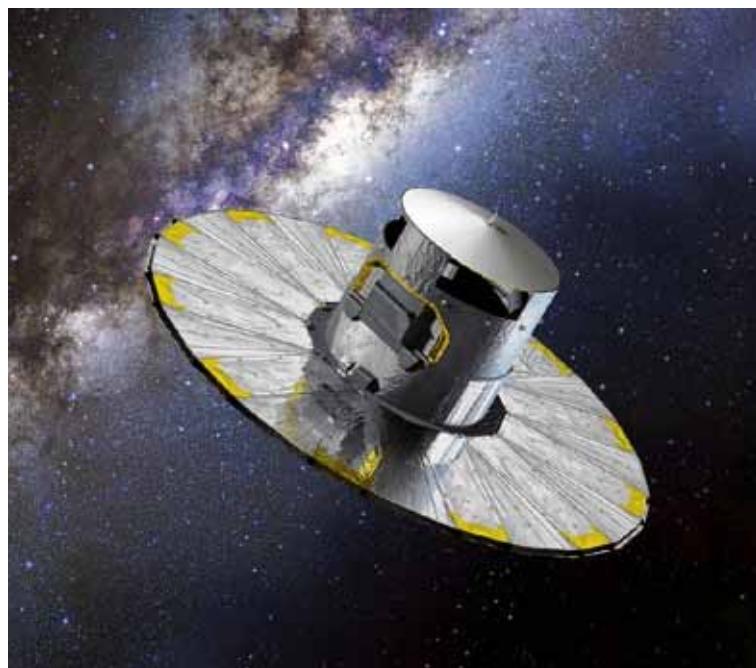
KU Leuven researchers developed the software for Gaia satellite

Andy Furniere

The recently launched Gaia satellite will create the largest and most detailed map ever of the Milky Way. Several Flemish research teams worked on this European Space Agency pioneering project.

Over the next five years, a new satellite from the European Space Agency (ESA) will create the largest and most precise map ever of the Milky Way. ESA recently launched this Gaia space telescope from its base in Kourou, French Guiana. Several Belgian knowledge centres and companies worked on the star-mapping project – among them experts from the University of Leuven (KU Leuven), who analyse the way stars “breathe”. You may have heard of the Hubble Space Telescope, the satellite that has been recording images of our galaxy since 1990. “But while the Hubble could be compared to a large photo camera in space, the goal of Gaia is much more ambitious,” says Joris De Ridder, head of KU Leuven’s Institute of Astronomy. “The Gaia satellite will map the characteristics of one billion stars, which constitutes about 1% of all the stars in the Milky Way.”

The foundations for the Gaia project were laid two decades ago, when ESA began thinking about a successor for the Hipparcos satellite, which completed the space agency’s first star-mapping mission. Between 1989 and 1993, Hipparcos – named after the Greek astronomer Hipparchus – observed the position of approximately 100,000 stars. On its orbit around our sun, some 1.5 million kilometres away, Gaia will observe the position and brightness of the stars with extremely sensitive measuring equipment. The instruments on board can, for instance, measure the thickness of a hair from 1,000 kilometres away. Gaia is expected to produce more



Through computer simulations, Gaia researchers will be able to reconstruct a star's history

than one million gigabytes of information, or 200,000 DVD's worth of data. This information will help scientists gain new insights into the birth, composition and evolution of our galaxy.

In the space of five years, Gaia will observe each star a combined 100 times. It will measure the position and key physical properties of each star, such as its brightness, temperature and chemical composition. It will also measure each star's distance and its speed of motion.

Through computer simulations, researchers will be able to reconstruct a star's history, going back hundreds of millions of years. The satellite might also spot new planets in other solar systems and objects that could pose a potential threat to the Earth, like asteroids. In the next few years, researchers will also process Gaia satellite data to create a 3D map of the Milky Way, enabling everyone to explore this

virtual space universe from their computers.

A team led by De Ridder at the Leuven Institute of Astronomy developed the software that the ESA

“The goal of Gaia is much more ambitious than that of the Hubble

satellite will use to analyse so-called starquakes. “Certain stars have a way of expanding and shrinking that makes it seem like they are breathing,” explains De Ridder. “This flickering of stars happens on a regular basis, unlike earthquakes.”

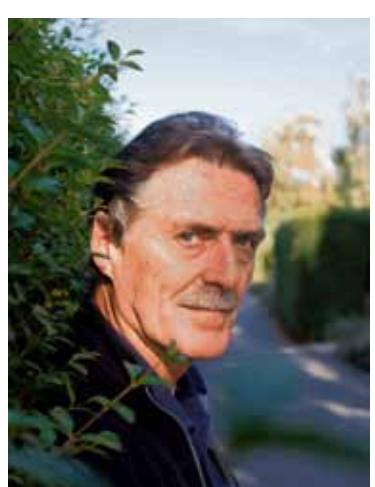
Q&A

The VUB has awarded Wim Distelmans a €150,000 grant for his pioneering work on palliative care and euthanasia

How will you spend the grant money?

The VUB rewarded my efforts to translate scientific knowledge into social commitment, and I will use the grant to continue that work on patients' rights to a dignified end to life. I will invest it in the organisations established at the expertise centre W.e.m.m.e.l. – like the day centre Topaz, the Omega palliative care forum and the LEIF information forum.

A milestone in your career of 25 years must have been the legalisation of euthanasia in 2002. I have always been and am still engaged in improving palliative care facilities. But, yes, the legalisation of euthanasia was a defining moment, although the law has serious flaws.



What kinds of flaws?

Take the will statement, which should guarantee that a euthanasia request is respected when a patient

becomes incapable of asking the doctor for it. This statement is only valid for five years and only applies to patients in an irreversible coma. But what about patients who suffer from brain haemorrhages or dementia? Writer Hugo Claus, who asked for euthanasia in an early state of dementia, could, for example, have lived months longer, if he had been certain of a dignified end to life in a later stage of his condition.

The Belgian Senate recently approved a proposal that expands the law to minors.

Let's hope that this proposal makes it soon. To be clear, only minors with “will capacity” would be able to receive euthanasia, meaning that a doctor or psychologist

Because Gaia will measure the brightness variations of a billion stars – and this about a hundred times – the computers need to be so artificially intelligent that they can automatically recognise the starquakes. The nature of this “breathing rhythm” gives researchers clues about the interior of a star, which helps them classify the stars as, for example, light, heavy, old or young.

“We estimate that Gaia will help us classify about 100 million stars of the total amount of one billion stars,” says De Ridder.

The cost of the Gaia mission is €740 million, to which Belgium – mostly through the Belgian Science Policy Office (Belspo) – contributed about €20 million. According to De Ridder, that's money well-spent. “This kind of fundamental research may seem overly expensive because it doesn't have immediate practical results, but the generation of our grandchildren will reap the rewards.”

In designing Gaia, the engineers used a material known as silicon carbide to protect the satellite instruments from high temperatures. This material is both incredibly hard and resistant to deformities.

“It's the first time that this material has been used on such an industrial scale, and this expertise could lead to future innovations,” De Ridder says. The Gaia space telescope is also protected by a sun shield made of solar cells, which generate energy for the instruments on board.

The KU Leuven team – which also worked on Nasa's Kepler satellite – wasn't the only research group in Flanders to collaborate on the Gaia telescope. The University of Antwerp and the Royal Observatory of Belgium helped classify stellar objects and define their characteristics.

► <http://sci.esa.int/gaia>

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Sex changes triple in decade

Last year, the University Hospital Gent registered 113 transgender patients requesting sex-reassignment surgery, triple the number of 10 years ago. The hospital, which assists the majority of Belgium's transgendered people, only had about 17 patients in the 1990s. Co-ordinating professor Guy T'Sjoen believes the taboo around sex reassignment is decreasing because of the growing visibility of transgendered people. “The judicial regulations are also increasingly clear and the surgery more advanced,” he says. “People can also now find a lot of information on the internet.” The growing demand has led to longer waiting periods, however, with people having to wait an average of two years for surgery.

Researchers find new cause of pain

Researchers at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) have found that pain is not just caused by a stimulation of pain nerves but also by an internal shortcut in these nerves. This discovery could contribute to the development of new painkillers. In the cell walls around nerves that detect pain there are so-called ion channels that open if we experience stimuli like extreme cold or heat. An electric signal then goes to the brain and we perceive pain. The scientists found that pain can also be felt if an ion channel remains closed, and that some medicines cause an increase in pain. A shortcut makes the electric signal deviate from its normal route through a pore in the ion channel, finding its way in the surrounding material instead. This stimulates the pain nerves even more.

Scientists advance Alzheimer's research

Researchers at the Interuniversity Institute of Bioinformatics in Brussels have developed a method to predict the dynamics of proteins that play a role in diseases like Alzheimer's. The research team succeeded in predicting where the main chain of proteins is more or less rigid, using only their amino acid sequence. By providing information in the dynamics of all known proteins, scientists can get an insight into the movements during the evolution of similar proteins in different organisms, their rigidness or flexibility and variable behaviour. These characteristics used to be a “grey zone” in research. Diseases like Alzheimer's are caused by the “sticking together” of proteins, in which these characteristics play an important role.

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Strawberry surprise

Antwerp is measuring levels of fine particles in the air with strawberries

Andy Furniere

In Antwerp, researchers of the AIRbezen project are using strawberry plants to measure the amount of fine dust in the city. It's the first time this kind of bio-monitoring has been applied on such a large scale.

The initiative is the result of a co-operation between StadsLab2050, a think-tank for sustainable city ideas from citizens, and the department of bio-engineering sciences at Antwerp University. The partners are looking for at least 500 inhabitants who want to care for a strawberry plant from March until May. Participants can keep the fruit, as the researchers are only interested in the leaves.

"The amount of fine dust on and in the leaves is a good indicator of the local air quality," researcher Jelle Hofman told Flemish science magazine *Eos*. Hofman co-ordinates the project as part of his PhD research. On the basis of the analyses of the plants, he wants to create a detailed map of the air quality in Antwerp.

Antwerp's air quality is currently monitored through three measuring stations in the city. "These stations are actually insufficient, because the concentration of fine dust can be different 10 metres away from the installation," said Hofman. "Installing extra measuring equipment would be expensive, but plants measure the fine dust just as well while being both cheap and easy to distribute."

Strawberry plants have the advantage of being



Strawberry leaves can help researchers measure air quality in Antwerp – and volunteers get to keep the fruit

popular with the general public, but the leaves are also convenient because they contain many hairs that collect the fine dust. Previously, Hofman and his colleagues have used moss, grass and other leaves to measure local air quality.

"Plants take up fine dust particles superficially in their leaves," explained Hofman. "We can detect the magnetisable particles, like iron, and on the basis of their concentration estimate the air quality to which the plant was exposed during its growth. The higher the magnetic signal, the more fine dust." The map should be ready in August 2014.

The researchers have already identified several problem areas in Antwerp. Ivy leaves at Park Spoor Noord, for example, contained high concentrations of metal, probably due to the historically polluted soil. Where the park is now, there used to be a marshalling yard. Currently, large construction works are being carried out, which probably brought the polluted soil to the surface where it was then spread by the wind.

Antwerp residents can register for the project at airbezen@gmail.com.

► www.uantwerpen.be/airbezen

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Education ministers hold first conference

Education ministers from the three Belgian language communities held their first "interministerial conference" last week, in the presence of King Filip. The ministers will continue to meet, without the king, twice a year. The conference led to an agreement on measures to improve the exchange of language teachers. Teachers will be able to give lessons in another region without loss of salary and will be compensated for commuting costs. Flemish education minister Pascal Smet presented his planned reform of secondary education in Dutch-language schools. French-speaking minister Marie-Martine Schyns was concerned that his proposed reform could be too radical, while German-speaking minister Oliver Paasch was interested in the new, broad first year.

Interest low priority in choice of study

Until the fourth year of secondary school, the interests of individual students play only a minor role in their choice of study track, which is mostly determined by their academic performances and social status, according to Maarten Pinxten of the University of Leuven. Pinxten's research confirms that many students enrol in streams that don't suit them but that have a prestigious reputation – like Latin – because they or their parents are averse to streams with less social status such as technical studies. From the fourth year in secondary school, the students' interest gains in importance. Certain schools are proposing grouping pupils earlier according to the study areas in which they show a particular interest. Pinxten notes, however, that interests can change dramatically from the first to the last year of secondary school. Experts therefore warn against a strict classification of study areas.

New head of Catholic schools network

Lieven Boeve, dean of theology at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven), has been elected as the new director-general of the Catholic education network VSKO. The network is made up of schools across Brussels and Flanders, with about 700,000 students. From 1 September, Boeve will take over from Mieke Van Hecke, who has held the post since 2004. He will lead the VSKO for at least five years. Boeve has been in his current post at KU Leuven since 2008 and also leads the university's teacher training programme. He will remain connected to KU Leuven, where he will continue to work with PhD students. AF

UHasselt student develops architectural design tool

PhD student Lieve Weytjens of Hasselt University (UHasselt) has developed a method to create a new, practical design tool for architects. Existing simulation programmes are often not user-friendly or not usable in an early stage of the design phase, because they demand too much detailed input. It is in the early stages that architects need to make the most important decisions on energy and comfort, concerning questions such as orientation, windows and compactness.

Incorporating more glass structures will result in more heat loss, but also in a better use of sunlight. In winter, the sunlight helps to heat the building, while in summer a surplus can lead to overheating. "To find the right balance just on the basis of professional experience is very complex," says Weytjens in a press statement from UHasselt. To improve the tool's user-friendliness, Weytjens involved several professionals from the wider work area. "Architects find it important that the design process is interrupted as little as possible and that feedback is available immediately during the designing," she says.

In her PhD, Weytjens developed a module that calculates the effects of a design on energy consumption and thermal comfort, without requiring all



Lieve Weytjens (front right) with Dr Griet Verbeeck (front left)

relevant details. The module enables architects to evaluate the design quickly and make adjustments if necessary. Weytjens also proposes using a single 3D design programme, so the architect only has to work in one virtual environment and doesn't have to switch between programmes.

Weytjens' promoter, professor Griet Verbeeck, says: "Architects are overwhelmed by info on energy-saving and sustainable measures, but these are often either very superficial or very technical. It seldom gives them a clear insight into the impact of a measure."

"You get the impression that designing a carbon-neutral house is mostly a matter of bringing together the necessary technologies and that it has little to do

with architecture anymore. An architect can provide an essential contribution to the creation of energy-efficient buildings which remain architecturally interesting. With the development of new tools, we can hopefully support them in this mission." UHasselt has recently also started research to support architects concerning the use of sustainable materials.

The PhD research was funded with a grant from the Flemish government's agency for innovation through science and technology (IWT). Further work is now necessary to translate the methodology into an actual tool, but architecture students have already successfully tested a prototype during an exercise on the design of carbon-neutral houses. AF

UGent announces sustainability ambitions

The board of directors at Ghent University (UGent) has approved a "sustainability vision" for the future of the institution. By going beyond slogans, UGent hopes to set an example for the rest of the country.

The university pledges to reduce its energy consumption and to produce more of its own energy via solar panels and wind turbines, among other initiatives. It also wants to set a sustainable mobility policy for students and staff. Materials, greenery management and food are other areas covered in the text of the vision. University restaurants will, for instance, offer less meat and more fish caught via sustainable methods.

To involve the students, UGent is setting up an optional course, available in all study concentrations, titled "Sustainable development". The course will familiarise students with social, ecological and economic sustainability issues while presenting possible solutions.

Rector Anne De Paepe is also encouraging students to launch their own initiatives and to participate in the think-tank *Transitie UGent*. AF

► www.ugent1010.be



WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Brussels AutoSalon

For automobile enthusiasts, this is the event of the year, with plenty of dream cars on display to fuel those open-road fantasies. The 92nd edition of the car and motorcycle show features a number of world premieres, including the new Nissan Qashquai, one of the most popular SUVs in Belgium. **16-26 January, daily 10.00-19.00, Brussels Expo**

► www.autosalon.be

VeloFollies

For those more inclined to ride under their own horsepower, there's a big bicycle expo in Kortrijk this weekend aimed at everyone from weekend cyclists to the semi-pro. See the latest models from top manufacturers, watch a BMX show and meet Flemish cyclo-cross champion Sven Nys. **17-19 January, Kortrijk Xpo**

► www.velofollies.be

Flanders Bike and Hike Fair

With the holidays behind us and a new year just beginning, it's time to get active again. This weekend event is organised by and for outdoor enthusiasts, with information about recreational cycling, bicycle tourism, biking and hiking clubs, pilgrim routes and more. Try out a new bike or tandem, or attend one of several workshops and readings. **18-19 January, Nekkerhal, Mechelen**

► www.fietsenwandeleursvlaanderen.be

Saint Antonius Festival

The Oosthoven neighbourhood in Oud Turnhout celebrates a unique folk tradition every January: The local priest blesses the animals (mainly horses and dogs) as they are paraded past the church steps. These days, the animal procession is followed by farmers driving their tractors by to receive the blessing as well. After the ceremony is an auction of bread, fruit baskets and a whole pig's head. Food, drink and live music in the village square add to the festive atmosphere. **19 January, 11.00-17.00, Oud Turnhout (Antwerp province)**

Beroepenhuis

Do you know a teenager who's trying to decide on a future career? During Open Sunday at Het Beroepenhuis (The Career House) in Ghent, kids aged 11 to 14 can try out one of 50 different jobs in 11 fields, including shipping and logistics, chemistry, construction, catering and graphic design. The Beroepenhuis is a joint initiative of educators and the business sector aimed at encouraging students to pursue vocational or technical education. **19 January, 9.30-16.30**

► www.beroepenhuis.be

New perspectives on housing

Z33 looks at housing as the Flemish population grows ever more dense

Toon Lambrechts

Housing will be an increasingly important issue in the coming years, as open space becomes more scarce in Flanders, while the pressure on it continues to increase. In *Atelier à Habiter*, Hasselt's culture centre Z33 explores new ideas on the future of housing.

Have you ever crossed the border between Flanders and the Netherlands while driving? The chances are, you immediately knew which country you were in: the neatly ordered Netherlands or the spatial chaos of Flanders. It is often said that Flanders is a place with no landscape anymore. Ribbon construction along the roads, illogical planning, fragmentation... Sometimes it looks so ugly that it almost becomes beautiful.

There have been plenty of plans to improve this situation. But Flanders is densely populated and far from being a blank slate where anything is possible. Open space is a rare commodity, and yet 330,000 new homes will need to be available by 2030 as the population continues to grow.

Z33, the centre for contemporary art in Hasselt, is inviting artists and viewers to consider answers to the question of the future of housing. It is hosting the exhibition *Atelier à Habiter*, in which artists, designers and architects reflect on the future of housing, curator Evelien Bracke explains. "Z33 chooses to work on themes that are socially relevant," she says. "We want to talk about what is happening in society. Housing is definitely an important issue, today and tomorrow. Everybody is an expert in it." The name of the exhibition contrasts with the idea of a house as a kind of machine. This concept of a *machine à habiter* has its origins in the work



of the influential French architect Le Corbusier. It is a vision of standard housing that fulfils standard requirements. The idea of a house as a workshop or atelier is less defined

“It's a new model in which different functions, such as housing and work, converge

and offers more opportunities for the residents to shape their environment themselves.

Yet the exhibition is not a theoretical exploration. Some models are already built, others offer pragmatic possible solutions. The Wikihouse, for example, is an open source

house. It is a model of components that can be printed from plywood and assembled, without much knowledge, in one day.

What is interesting in the context of Flanders is Co-terrijen, a pun on *koterijen*, the name given to the sprawl of semi-self-built structures behind many houses. The project proposes to merge these individual structures into common areas, also self-built, where people not only share their functions but can meet each other as well. *Atelier à Habiter* is part of The Ambition of the Territory, a larger study by the government of Flanders to develop a new vision on the use of space in the region. "These days, spatial policy starts with a tight pattern of demarcated zones, each with its own function," explains Bracke. "But in the long term, this model is not sustainable. There is simply too little space in Flanders.

Therefore, the idea came about of a new model in which different functions, such as housing and working, converge."

The idea was formulated for the first time at the Venice architecture biennale two years ago. The project and its concepts of shared functions in the use of space gained ground and initiated a thinking process on the future of spatial planning in Flanders. "It remains a theoretical issue though the aim is to translate these principles of shared space into concrete policies," says Bracke. "Therefore we chose The Ambition of the Territory as the broader framework of the exhibition. We want to translate the ideas to a wider audience. And housing is a perfect theme to do so."

Until 30 March

Z33

Zuivelmarkt 33, Hasselt

► www.z33.be

Alan Hope

BITE

Life during wartime

This year and for the next four, commemorations of the First World War will be prominent across Flanders, as the region casts its mind back to how things were during that terrible time, 100 years ago.

The attack by Germany on Belgium's border on 4 August 1914 was the beginning of four lean years, and not only in a figurative sense, according to a paper by Brecht Demasure for the Centre for Agrarian History in Leuven. Times were extremely tough for everyone, even far from the fighting, he writes, with some foods simply unobtainable, and others in short supply. However, the situation seems to have brought out the best in some people, not least housewives, who quickly learned to be more creative than had ever been necessary before.

The first domestic effect of the war was to shut down all trade with the occupied area, which forced Belgium to become wholly self-sufficient overnight – an impossible demand. At the time, around 80% of grain used to bake bread was imported, and stocks soon vanished or were commandeered by the German army. By November, three months after the invasion, shortages started appearing. By early 1915, food prices were through the roof, and the real risk of famine was on the horizon.

The race was on to find cheaper and more available calories: Meat, butter, eggs and milk vanished from kitchens, and potatoes became the staple food. Four out of five people lost weight as a result of malnutrition, and the cost of food took up to 85% of a family's income.



The public's response was to look to a burgeoning industry of food advice for help, with authors from all walks of life – from family doctors to farmers to science teachers – publishing pamphlets

on how to make the best of the situation. The German censor, who had to approve all publications, apparently made little attempt to prevent the pamphlets.

Necessity is the mother of invention, they say, and the shortages forced women cooking at home to be more creative than ever in making something palatable from potatoes, lentils, root vegetables and, in the place of butter, fats, like *reuzel* (suet) and *smout* (lard). Collections of typical recipes of the time can be found in the archives of the Centre for Agrarian History. Many of them, concentrating on low-fat and low-sugar, scarce in meat and high in fish, could as easily be published today.

► www.hetvirtueleland.be

City in a handbag

Hasselt thrift shop Okazi launches the eco-chic FlagBag

Diana Goodwin

Putting the long-term unemployed to work and reducing the city's waste, a Hasselt thrift store is getting creative with old banners to produce quirky, handmade bags. Hasselt mayor Hilde Claes is a fan.

The city of Hasselt, like many other Flemish cities, uses outdoor banners mounted on street poles to advertise major events and public campaigns. The large, nylon flags are colourful, eye-catching and change regularly with the seasons.

But what happens to these old banners after they've served their purpose and are replaced by the next cycle of topical flags? Until a few years ago, they were thrown away.

Now they are transformed into one-of-a-kind bags and accessories by a small, innovative company called FlagBag. What used to be trash is now the raw material out of which new products are created, thus reducing the city's waste and effectively recycling the flags. This alone would be cause for celebration in today's climate of environmental awareness, but there's more to the story.

The women who manufacture FlagBags are skilled workers who would otherwise have difficulty finding employment. Each of them had been out of work for at least five years before coming to FlagBag. Some are there on a short-term placement through the social aid office OCMW, while others are direct hires referred by the Flemish employment agency VDAB. Most of the women are foreign-born and so speak Dutch as a second language.



Each FlagBag is made by one person from start to finish in the workshop

the stylish sports bag she had just finished making.

Yvonne Muntu, a Congolese woman, learned to sew only after being hired almost four years ago. And Jamila Ouazzi, who has Spanish roots, previously worked as a bookkeeper in Morocco but says her new job allows her to exercise her creativity.

The FlagBag workshop is large and bright, the work stations equipped with shiny, new industrial sewing machines. This is clearly no

the organisation to offer a higher level of job training and employment and that the skills the women learn and use can be transferred to other jobs in the

Starting at €15 for a simple shopping bag and going up to €80 for a messenger bag, they can be expensive for the thrift-store crowd, or for consumers used to mass-produced bags from large retail chains.

Since the raw material for FlagBag's products is basically free, the price comes primarily from labour costs. And with each bag handcrafted by a skilled worker earning a living wage here in Flanders, the labour cost is higher than it would be for a similar item mass-produced in China.

On the other hand, FlagBag's prices are comparable to other handmade, designer items. Their target customer is someone who doesn't mind paying extra to have something unique, who is looking for something hip and trendy, and who values the social and environmental impact of such a purchase. With eco-chic becoming a hot trend in the fashion world, FlagBag's social mission and recycled products should continue to garner fans both locally and farther afield.

► www.flagbag.be

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Brussels' Christmas market third best in Europe

Brussels' holiday market Winterpret has been voted the third-best in Europe by visitors to the travel website Best Destination, coming in behind Dresden and Strasbourg and ahead of Lille and Cologne.

One-and-a-half million people visited Winterpret this year. The star attraction was the Iceberg on Muntplein, a sonic experience that makes the sound of cracking ice for those passing through it. The Iceberg will remain in place until 3 March.

According to tourism alderman Philippe Close, the attendance figures were helped by "extremely mild weather", though residents of the centre of Brussels complained of the effects of crowds on parking and mobility.

Genkenaar is new Miss Belgium

Laurence Langen from Genk in Limburg province is the new Miss Belgium. The 19-year-old was crowned last Saturday at the Plopsa Theatre in De Panne, flanked by second-placed Anissa Blondin and Laura Charlier in third place. Langen is in her second year studying law at the HUB in Brussels; she is also an avid horse-rider and studies classical ballet. "It sounds like a cliché, but it's as if I'm dreaming," she said after the two-hour show. "I was pretty stressed, but I just kept breathing." Her ambition in the short term is to improve her French. "My French is good thanks to my studies," she said, "but I'm not bilingual yet."

Schoenaerts the new face of Louis Vuitton

Matthias Schoenaerts, the Flemish film sensation currently wowing Hollywood, has been named as the new face of French fashion and luxury goods company Louis Vuitton, advertising their spring and summer collection. The star has already been spotted adorning posters in Italy.

The photos, which leaked onto the internet last week, show the 35-year-old actor wearing a tan leather blouson with the Louis Vuitton V emblem in red, white, blue and black on the back. He is also carrying one of the company's signature leather backpacks. The French fashion house will officially launch the campaign next month.

Schoenaerts, who grew up as a child actor in Flanders, is the son of the celebrated actor Julien. He shot to international fame in 2011's crime drama *Rundskop* (*Bullhead*).

"The company's core mission isn't product design but job training and employment"

According to Bert Melaer, FlagBag's adjunct director, the company's core mission isn't product design or even recycling, but job training and employment. Some of the staff have worked as seamstresses in their own countries and are able to use existing skills. Others receive on-the-job training from workshop manager Nicole Raskin and from their fellow employees, learning every aspect of the production process from pattern-making to finishing.

Manizha Sarwari came to Belgium from Afghanistan, where she worked as a seamstress. She has been working at FlagBag for six months and says she enjoys being able to try new things, such as

sweatshop. In fact, each bag is made by one person from start to finish – not on an assembly line where each worker is responsible for a single repetitive task.

Each FlagBag employee chooses the material for each bag herself from the stacks of old flags. New designs are collaborative efforts and are often suggested by the workers themselves.

FlagBag is an initiative of thrift shop Okazi. Like FlagBag, it is a *sociale werkplaats* (social workplace) offering jobs to disadvantaged workers. Employees collect, sort and clean the donations and work in the shop as cashiers. Melaer says that FlagBag has allowed



garment sector.

The company got its start several years ago when the city donated a number of its old outdoor banners to Okazi. At first, they tried selling them in the shop, but, predictably, few were bought. Then they began to brainstorm ideas for using the banners to make something new. These days, the FlagBag product range includes bike bags, messenger bags, smartphone cases, cosmetic bags, handbags, backpacks and more. Hasselt mayor Hilde Claes is a fan, as is Hilde Poetemans, the city's environmental official.

Last year, FlagBag sold some 3,500 bags, including both retail sales and custom orders. They are sold online through the FlagBag website, in the city's tourist information office and from a small shop-within-a-shop at Okazi. Plans are under way for a standalone FlagBag store in Hasselt's city centre, due to open later this year. Melaer hopes that having their own retail location will boost the company's profile and introduce more people to its products.



One of the stumbling blocks for the company has been the pricing.



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A century of photojournalism

Antwerp's Photo Museum hosts the work of two pioneers in media photography

Tom Peeters

The photo heritage of Germaine Van Parys and her goddaughter Odette Dereze covers almost 100 years of Belgian history, from the homecoming of the royal family after the First World War to the devastating 1967 fire in the Brussels department store Innovation and the Herald Of Free Enterprise ferry disaster off the coast of Zeebrugge, 20 years later.

But, as the retrospective exhibition of the leading ladies of local press photography suggests, these mainly sad events are often countered by moments of joy. Van Parys and Dereze had their cameras ready when stars like Josephine Baker, Charles Trenet and Edith Piaf visited the country. And they had an almost perfect relationship with the royal family, giving the public a look behind the scenes.

On the poster for the exhibition at Antwerp Photo Museum, you see Queen Fabiola playing badminton in the Royal Palace of Laken. Dereze, invited to take some informal snapshots for the 25th anniversary of Boudewijn's coronation, explains what you can't see in the photo. "It was a young prince, the present King Filip, who tempted his aunt. I could hear her say the words: 'Wait boy, I'm going to beat you'."

And Dereze, now age 81, has many more stories to tell. At her apartment in the Etterbeek district of Brussels, she shows me a black-and-white picture of the Belgian press delegation accompanying King Boudewijn during an official visit to India. We count 20 male journalists and photographers and two females: the Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi and Dereze.

These trips to exotic places like India, Australia, Indonesia, China and the former Soviet Union opened her eyes in a time when the world wasn't yet a global village and travelling was still a privilege.

"It truly made me a richer person," says Dereze. And this *zinneke* – born in Brussels to a Walloon father and a Flemish mother – isn't talking money. "It's the contact with different cultures that's enriching. It



Queen Fabiola outside the Palace at Laken, 1976, photographed by Odette Dereze

made me more human.

"I saw the beauty of it all," Dereze continues, "but also the sad stuff, the poverty. I remember the king wasn't even allowed to stroll the streets of Calcutta, so he asked us what we had seen. The truth was cruel: Every morning a truck came to pick up the bodies of the homeless street vendors who died the night before. I even saw a dead baby in a garbage bin. Those harsh memories stick with you a lifetime."

The love for photography she inherited from her aunt and godmother, Germaine Van Parys, one of European press photography's few female pioneers. "I have an English article in which she is called the 'first female press photographer,'" Dereze says proudly. "But she had to deal with the jealousy of her colleagues. She wasn't always very welcome and had to defend herself, even physically, to find her place." Luckily, Queen Elisabeth noticed Van Parys in this male-dominated environment. Early in her career she was summoned to the palace. At first she thought it was another joke by her male colleagues. But it wasn't. From that moment, she maintained a very warm contact with the royal family. "When King Albert I introduced her to the Brussels mayor Adolphe Max as 'our national press photographer', she felt deeply respected," Dereze says.

Becoming a photographer was a way for Van Parys, who died in 1983 at the age of 90, to escape following in the footsteps of her parents, who were morticians. She started working

for the Brussels newspaper *Le Soir* as a freelancer. Her first official commission was to take pictures of the Unknown Soldier who would be buried at the tomb in Koningsstraat in Brussels.

"I especially remember her very strong work ethic," says Dereze. "Sometimes she took me with her, emphasising how important it was to work hard, to always immediately return home to finish the job and not to have an opinion. Because as a photographer you need to be welcome everywhere."

And to Van Parys, a promise was a promise. "After the death of Albert I, Queen Elisabeth wanted a few pictures of the king on his death bed. When she saw the result, she was very sad and asked my aunt not to publish it in the newspapers. She agreed, even though *L'Illustration*, a popular French newspaper, offered her 100,000 Belgian francs for the photos. But you just didn't break your promise."

As a child, Dereze was surrounded by photography and journalism. Her uncle (and godfather) wrote the articles that went with the photos her aunt took. Her mother helped in the dark room and talked her out of her other childhood dream of becoming a classical dancer ("At 30 your career will be over").

At 21 she received her press card, and it became clear that she had the same strong ethic. "I once had to photograph a fire with another photographer. At one point, I saw him trying to intensify the flames; I fired him immediately, saying 'It's



Joséphine Baker was one of many celebrities photographed in the first half of the 20th century by Germaine Van Parys

already horrendous that there are flames, and you're making them even bigger. That's a lie. Get out!"

Of course, Dereze witnessed the country's biggest post-war disasters. She lost colleagues in the fire at the Brussels department store Innovation, now called Galeria Inno. "Only by focussing on my technique could I put the emotions of the moment aside," she remembers. "It was the same during the tragedy with the Herald of Free Enterprise. It was awful, but someone had to do the job."

The world – and photography – have changed a lot since Dereze's retirement. She can't ignore the impression that too many photographers now just click away without even looking, hoping they will get one good shot. "But where is the feeling in that?" she asks. "I remember showing my new Pentax camera to my aunt. It allowed me to take 36 photos. She looked at me and said: 'I just did a report with five glass plates, and they are good – all five!'"

Photo Museum

Waalsekaai 47, Antwerp

► www.fotomuseum.be

► www.germainevanparys.org

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Across the Ravaged Land

Nick Brand

In this third part of the trilogy *On This Earth, A Shadow Falls, Across The Ravaged Land*, the British photographer portrays the wildlife in East Africa as "an elegy to a world that is steadily, tragically vanishing". Getting extremely close to the animals and offering widescreen panoramas, his photos are epic



and idyllic (pictured). Until 8 February, Young Gallery, Brussels

► www.younggalleryphoto.com

The Space Age

Aleksandra Mir

The human quest for conquering space has always intrigued people, not least this Polish-born, London-based artist with a Swedish-American passport. She links statements by Galileo Galilei with iconography and rituals of the Catholic Church and Nasa space exploration. Collages and films display unexpected

links between science, religion and art. Until 16 February, Museum M, Leuven

► www.mleuven.be

Park + Ride

Verbeke Foundation

Art collectors Geert and Carla Verbeke-Lens run one of the largest private initiatives for contemporary art in Europe. Their winter exhibition features *Archive of the Future* by Dutch artist

Jacobus Kloppenburg and *Cathedral of Human Labor*, a majestic tunnel made by former resident Marcin Dudek, among other installations and sculptures by emerging talent. Until 2 March, Verbeke Foundation, Kemzeke

► www.verbekefoundation.com

A museum haunt

With interventions and rearrangements, German artist scrutinises Museum Mayer van den Bergh

Ian Mundell

For her artist residency at the Mayer van den Bergh museum in Antwerp, the Ghent-trained contemporary artist Sarah Westphal rearranged, moved and lit up the grandiose collection of Low Countries works. The result is like having a poltergeist around.

Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerp is a museum masquerading as a home. It feels as if it was once an opulent private residence in the Flemish renaissance style, but in reality it was purpose-built in the early 20th century to house its namesake's collection. Now this air of grandiose domesticity has been gently subverted by Sarah Westphal, the first contemporary artist to be invited to work with the museum's collection.

Fritz Mayer van den Bergh had a passion for the art of the Low Countries, and his collection ranges from the middle ages through to the Baroque. He was instrumental in the rediscovery of Pieter Bruegel the Elder and his sons, collecting their work in the late 19th century when it was highly unfashionable.

In addition to paintings, he also collected statues and religious carvings, books and jewellery, furniture, fabrics and stained glass. Pride of place in the museum may go to Bruegel's epic vision of hell, "Dulle Griet", but just as much effort has gone into displaying the gilt leather wall hangings and the richly illustrated breviary in the library.

Home sweet home

Westphal, a young German artist who trained in Ghent, has taken up the challenge of seeing the museum as a home, rearranging the furniture, among other interventions, in a way that comments on the whole enterprise of the collection. Sometimes the effect is more like having a poltergeist around the place than an artist in residence.

In a room devoted to religious sculpture, Westphal has gathered together all the representations of the Madonna and Child and put them in a single glass case. Figures of various sizes all face inward, turning their backs on the viewer, as if watching over the smallest Madonnas in the centre of the group. It's as if Westphal is saying to Mayer van den Bergh: If you are going to collect them, at least collect them in one place.

One consequence of this rearrangement is that spaces open up in other cases where the Madonnas once stood. One thinks of a burglary or gaps left in the chapels where these statues presumably started their lives. In one case, all that remains are two

angry-looking *putti*, or little winged angel figures, one with a broken trumpet, the other pointing an accusing finger at the viewer.

In another room, the change is more subtle. Westphal has taken Alessandro Allori's full-length portrait of Francesco I de Medici off the wall and moved it a little closer to the painting that hangs alongside it. This is "Peasant Company by the Fireplace" by Pieter Aertsen, in which two drinking men grapple with a serving maid. A bird cage in the background is meant to signal that this is a brothel scene.

The space on the wall where Francesco once hung is indicated by a rectangle of projected light, and the shadow that marks his former position cuts through his left eye, his heart and his straight left leg. This emphasises his gaze towards the peasant scene, suggesting a step into the darkness of desire and dissipation.

Elsewhere, Westphal uses light alone, picking out details in a room of Baroque portraits to create the feeling of an animated bourgeois salon. The effect is more alarming with a 13th-century representation of Christ and St John in a casual embrace. This sculpture was intended to help nuns contemplate the "mystic marriage" they might achieve with Christ, but with Westphal's spotlights picking out the blushing cheeks, the ruby lips and the clasped hands, it looks anything but holy.

While some of the artist's interventions are playful (look out for the cat in the library), she also probes more sensitive areas of the collection. The most poignant involves Fritz's mother, Henriette, who established the museum following her son's death in 1901.

Henriette's presence is strongest in a small upstairs room that she used as an office. A portrait of her as a young woman hangs on the wall, but part of it had to be cut away to fit it in the space above the mantelpiece. The story goes that this remnant, showing Henriette's hands holding a fan, for years hung in the bathroom of a family friend. It was later returned to the museum, where it languished in an attic until its recent rediscovery. Westphal has built a kind of reliquary for the recovered portion of painting, a pedestal topped with a pair of clasped hands that seem to complete the missing limbs in the painting on the wall. Meanwhile, the wandering fragment of canvas lies flat in an illuminated niche within. Fans, porcelain and other objects that Henriette may have held are displayed in cabinets around the room. And so the collector's mother becomes part of the collection, incorporated into the monument she built for her dead son.

**Sarah Westphal:
Allure Craquelure**
Museum Mayer van den Bergh
Lange Gasthuisstraat 19, Antwerp
► www.museummayervandenbergh.be



Sarah Westphal (pictured right) created interventions both playful and alarming



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ING 

The sorrow of the virgin Andreas Scholl

25 January 20.00 | Bozar, Brussels

► www.bozar.be

The craze for authentic period instruments seems to have died down in recent years. But there is one authentic instrument always in demand: the male alto voice, usually referred to as a countertenor. Andreas Scholl is probably the most distinguished countertenor working today. Born in Germany in 1967 into a family composed entirely of singers, he showed early promise and was offered a place at the unusually young age of 18 at the Cantorum Basiliensis choir school in Basel, Switzerland. He now teaches at the school when not in demand from conductors the world over for recitals and opera roles.

CONCERT

Babylon Circus

23 January, 20.00 | Ancienne Belgique, Brussels

► www.abconcerts.be



Babylon Circus are no strangers to Belgium. The 10-piece French ska band have been frequent visitors for nearly 20 years now, as they are across the world, where their popularity never seems to wane. Since their formation in Lyon in 1995, they've played 1,500 concerts. The band are particularly hot on the Belgian festival circuit: Couleur Café, Dour, Leffingeuren and Klinkers have all hosted the bombastic group, whose sound combines classic ska with punk rock and world music. It may not be festival season, but Babylon Circus are back for a much-anticipated headline concert in the capital. The special occasion is the release of their latest album *Never Stop*. **Georgio Valentino**

VISUAL ARTS

European Photo Exhibition Award

Until 7 March | Philanthropy House, Brussels

► www.philanthropyhouse.eu

This new, socially engaged photo prize is sponsored by four European foundations (from Portugal, Italy, Norway and Germany) operating under the umbrella of Brussels' European Foundation Centre. In keeping with the we-can-do-it spirit of the organisation, 12 young artists submitted photo essays on the theme of "European identity". Not only is this the inaugural edition of the event, it's also the first-ever exhibition hosted in Brussels' new Philanthropy House. This newly opened home to the capital's various philanthropic lobbyists aims to stimulate discussion and facilitate European collaborations. **GV**

Pictured: Gabriele Croppi's "Hamburg #02" from the series *Metaphysics of an Urban Landscape*



Concert

Brussels

Nara Noïan: Armenian pianist and singer presents her fifth album, titled (with brutal logic) *No. 5*. Noïan sings her original compositions in Russian and interprets Belgian legends such as Jacques Brel

17 January 20.00 at Art Base, Zandstraat 29

► www.art-base.be

Get tickets now!

Tori Amos: The 14th album by the celebrated American songstress is due out in the spring with an extensive European tour in its wake

28 May at Koninklijk Circus, Onderrichtstraat 81

► www.cirque-royal.org

Performance

Brussels

What the Body Does Not Remember: The revival of Wim Vandekeybus' 1987 breakthrough dance production features live musical accompaniment by the Ictus ensemble

17-25 January at KVS, Lakensestraat 146

► www.kvs.be

GET TICKETS NOW

PERFORMANCE

Isabella Rossellini

12 & 13 February, 20.00 | Bozar, Brussels

► www.bozar.be

Italian actor Isabella Rossellini's multifaceted career recently took a turn for the surreal when she and legendary French screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière created *Green Porno* for American cable television. With this series of short sketches on animal mating behaviour, Rome's Renaissance woman added ethologist to her long list of job titles,

which already included actor, model and author. But Rossellini is an unconventional teacher. She doesn't just tell us how various creatures ensure the future of their species; she acts the entire process out (well, not the *entire* process) with the aid of playful, intentionally kitschy costumes and sets. (In English with Dutch or French surtitles) **GV**



Classical

Ghent

European Philharmonia: Flemish maestro Walter Proost conducts the orchestra in a special New Year's concert. Better late than never

19 January 15.00 at Capitole, Graaf Van Vlaanderenplein 5

► www.capitolegent.be

Visual arts

Drogenbos

Michel Seuphor: Exhibition dedicated to the Antwerp-born Dadaist who combined theory and practice. As an artist, Seuphor participated in the modernist revolution; as a critic, he defined its terms and goals

Until 9 March at FeliXart Museum, Kuikenstraat 6

► www.felixart.org

Family

Ostend

Poppen Aan Zee: De Grote Post's series of puppet theatre features Leuven's charming Wortel Puppet Theatre in *De ridder die bang was in het donker* (The Knight Who Was Afraid of the Dark) for young and old (in Dutch)

19 January, 10.30 at De Grote Post, Hendrik Serruyslaan 18A

► www.degrotepost.be

FAMILY

Peuterparade

18 January, 14.00 | CC Mechelen | ► www.ccmechelen.be



Mechelen goes polar for the weekend. The city's municipal theatre will be transformed into a tundra wonderland for the enjoyment (and edification) of children aged two and up. You and the young ones can watch one of several short performances, participate in interactive games or just relax and take in the atmosphere. The event's MC is none other than Dutch TV personality Jelle Amersfoort (pictured), whose Bamboeclub teaches toddlers about wildlife and conservation. The North and South Poles are of course home to many animal species. We landlubbers can thank the polar icecaps for keeping global sea levels in check, too. **GV**



Talking Dutch

Everything must go

Derek Blyth

You see orange *te koop* (for sale) signs on buildings all over Flanders. But not so often on a historic lighthouse ship. Or a protected nature reserve. They are a sign of the times, according to the news website deredactie.be. *De gemeenten maken moeilijke financiële tijden door; vrijwel overal moet er bespaard worden* – municipal councils are going through tough financial times, they are having to make cuts almost everywhere. *Gevolg van die besparingen is onder meer dat gemeenten heel wat van hun patrimonium te koop zetten* – one result of the cuts is that municipalities have to sell off a large bit of their heritage.

It seems that cities have never been so desperate to raise money. *De Vlaamse Vereniging voor Steden en Gemeenten* (the Flemish Association of Cities and Municipalities) *stelt vast dat het aanbod aan te koop staande gronden, huizen, machines en allerhande prullaria nog nooit zo groot was* – says that the amount of land, houses, machines and miscellaneous stuff on sale has never been so great.

The interested buyer can pick up some unique items. *Veel gemeenten stellen vooral gronden, niet langer in gebruik zijnde gemeentehuizen, pastorieën en schoolgebouwen te koop* – most municipalities are mainly selling off land or buildings they no longer need, like town halls, vicarages and school buildings. *Maar er zijn ook enkele meer opvallende verkoopsobjecten* – but there are also a few rarer items.

A few weeks ago, the newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws* published a list of some of those uncommon items of heritage that are currently on the market. They include Kasteel Terlinden in Aalst (*pictured*) which is on sale for €1.25 million, the abandoned ethnographic museum in Antwerp (€6 million) and a former cinema in Haacht. Buyers also have a rare opportunity to acquire a piece of World Heritage by snapping up one or more of the



27 houses for sale in Diest's *begijnhof*. Or someone with some cash to spare could gain a piece of maritime history by buying the old West-Hinder lightship currently moored at Kruibeke on the Scheldt river.

Some people were shocked a few months ago when they found out that the city council in Beersel, Flemish Brabant, was planning to sell off the former home of Flemish writer Herman Teirlinck. A Facebook petition has already gathered 1,786 signatures. *Het Herman Terlinckhuis is de meest magische plek in de Brusselse rand waar de voorbije decennia de meest fantastische tentoonstellingen van jonge en gevestigde kunstenaars plaatsvonden*, according to the historian Stephan Feremans – the Herman Terlinckhuis is the most magical spot in the Brussels periphery, where some fantastic exhibitions have taken place over the past decades involving young and established artists. If the asking price is beyond your budget, you can always put in a bid for one of the old bicycles being sold off by the Cycling Museum in Roeselaere.

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



Hilde Devoghel @HildeDevoghel

Expo on Flemish master Pieter Coecke van Aelst Oct 2014!! @ metmuseum: #tapestrytuesday <http://met.org/lidyVBt> pic. twitter.com/xDmoOca5G0



Paul Hilferink @pgmhilferink

Tomorrow Flemish Public TV broadcasts 1st episode of most expensive drama series they ever made, about a family in #WW1 <http://www.invlaamsevelden.be>



Assis Carreiro @SuffolkBroad

Back 2 rehearsals @BalletFlanders & look forward 2 seeing everyone. we countdown 2 WP #R&J @SlavaSamodurov 13Feb #Ghent @vlaamseopera



Cargobike mum @MamaMoose_Be

@WeWinGracie91 why don't you stay between Brussels and Menin Gate? For eg in Ghent? Lovely city, lovely people, cheaper accommodation.



Dirk Diels @DielsDirk

New startup cities emerge where the spirit of tech innovation is strong and where the cost of living is relatively low. #antwerp #startups



In response to: Insects approved for human consumption
Caroline Drysdale: Nope I'll stick to my normal food



In response to: First drug users sentenced in Antwerp since zero tolerance

Jayjay Adjei: Scientist and doctors have tested and proven that weed is good for medical use which is helping people, but alcohol which is legal is far worse than weed, so you tell me?

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Poll

Belgium's federal food safety agency has approved a list of 10 insects for human consumption. What do you think?

a. Insects are a nutritious and sustainable source of protein, and we need to stop being so squeamish. I'm trying it!

38%

b. Food fashions come and go, but I can't see this one catching on

38%

c. Fine, but don't bring them anywhere near my table. Ew!

25%

An encouraging sign for the future – only one in four of you is dead-set against insects as a 21st-century foodstuff. Though we don't see all 75% of you digging in soon, most of you are at least in favour of the reality of munching bugs. Quite right, too: Insects form part of the

diet of something like three-quarters of the world, and that's not counting all those who love shrimp, which are no more than bugs of the sea. Insect protein, disguised so that it looks about as creepy-crawly as tofu, is certain to arrive on our supermarket shelves before long,

and we'll all probably be very tentative about it at first. Eventually it'll be as commonplace as .. well, as tofu, and no longer shall eyelids be batted. One restaurant on the coast has already introduced the country's first mealworm burger (see right). *Eet smakelijk!*

Next week's question:

Antwerp has imposed its first fines for those in possession of drugs since the city introduced zero tolerance regulations (see p2). What do you think?

Log on to the Flanders Today website and click on the link on the homepage to vote!

THE LAST WORD

Road to Rio

"There are risks that you, as a Red Devils fan, have to take into account if you and your wallet want to make it home in one piece."

Antwerp province will host courses to teach locals about the hazards of travelling to the World Cup in Brazil

140 characters

"I hardly dare go into a bookshop for fear it's all been a dream. But it hasn't. I've just found out that Herman Brusselmans is reading my book. Terrifying."

New Flemish author Ann Thijssen came to the attention of publishers by tweeting snippets from her work in progress

Making it big

"I don't believe you can get rich in this country just by hard work. That's the case for only very few people. The success of recent tax amnesties has shown that a lot of people managed to build up their fortune in a not particularly legal way."

VUB economist Michel Maus says that the fortunes of most rich people are based on tax evasion

Bug burger

"With the first bite, the worst is behind us. The worms taste like crunchy pistachios. They crackle slightly, but the surprising flavour – luckily – gives us other things to think about."

Restaurant Cook & Roll in Ostend is offering a Tandoori Insect Burger containing mealworms, tested by *Het Nieuwsblad* with positive results



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