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# The home of technology

## European Commission ranking praises Leuven's excellence in ICT

Ian Mundell

Leuven has been singled out as one of Europe's foremost hubs for information and communication technology (ICT) and commended by the European Commission as a small region punching above its weight. The result is gratifying, but hardly a surprise to the people involved.

**“W**e were happy Leuven ranked so high, of course, but we more or less expected it,” says Jeroen Ampe, who deals with European issues in the knowledge economy directorate of the Flemish Brabant provincial government. “Flemish Brabant has a very important university, and it has imec and several ICT companies around

Leuven and between Leuven and Brussels. So we were not surprised.”

The ranking, published in April, lists 34 ICT hubs across Europe, with Munich, east Inner London and Paris dominating the top of the table. Leuven appears in 11th place, with Greater Amsterdam above and Bonn below. In its announcement of the results, the Commission mentioned Leuven alongside Darmstadt and Karlsruhe in Germany and Cambridge in the UK as proof that smaller regions could still appear high in the ranking.

The study examined ICT activity at the level of 1,303 administrative regions across the European Union. Sometimes these regions cover only a part of a major city, as in the case of

London, or the whole of an urban centre, such as the Brussels-Capital Region (which ranked a respectable 24th on the list). For Leuven, the region covers both the city and the rest of the Leuven administrative area in the east of Flemish Brabant.

The ranking is based on an assessment of each region's research and development (R&D) activity and its ability to take the knowledge to the market, and then build an intense business activity around this innovation. Indicators were chosen in each area to show the relative concentration and the intensity of the activity, its level of internationalisation and the extent of its networking with other centres. In all, 42 indicators were used.

To appear in the ranking at all means that a region has

# Kempens Landschap wins Grand Prize for cultural heritage

Europa Nostra awards the Antwerp organisation its Grand Prize for Exceptional Effort

Alan Hope

The land management association Kempens Landschap has been awarded the Grand Prize for Exceptional Effort by Europa Nostra, the European network of heritage associations. In March, Kempens Landschap was one of three local organisations to be awarded prizes by Europa Nostra. The others were the Horta Museum in Brussels and Shaping 24, which twins heritage events in Ghent and Norwich, England. Prizes were handed out to 21 organisations, six of which would go on to win a Grand Prize worth €10,000 at a ceremony in Vienna's Burgtheater. One of the six has gone to Kempens



Ter Laken Castle in Heist-op-den-Berg, Antwerp province, one of the many historical properties managed by Kempens Landschap

Landschap. The association was founded in 1997 and now manages 800 hectares of historically valuable land in the Kempen, a large natural area in Antwerp and Limburg provinces. Most of the land is co-owned and managed by Kempens Landschap in order to conserve its cultural and natural heritage and to ensure public access to the space. The jury said it had rarely seen such an effective example of the implementation of the European vision since the introduction of the European Landscape Convention 10 years ago.

“Our association has developed a unique approach to the protection, safeguarding and maintenance of a wide variety of heritage sites, buildings and nature reserves spread over 70 municipalities, thanks to the sheer number of projects we have handled in past years,” said director Philippe De Backer, accepting the award. “The challenges remain huge, but with the necessary creativity, innovation, co-operation and passion, we will attempt to achieve valuable results on the ground. The Europa Nostra award and Grand Prize are for us a welcome reward for the work we have done.”

[www.kempenslandschap.be](http://www.kempenslandschap.be)

## Too many beehives threatening Brussels ecosystem, group warns

Brussels is now home to too many bees as a result of companies, municipal authorities and other organisations trying to present a more “green” image, according to environmental group Apis Bruoc Sella, which specialises in educating the public about wild and domesticated bees. “We’re in the process of making catastrophic mistakes,” said the organisation’s co-ordinator Marc Wollast. “Every municipality and association these days wants to

have a beehive on the roof or in the garden, but they don’t think about the consequences.” Those can include, he says, a disruption of the ecosystem for other bees and other insects. “It’s as if people were to buy a cow, although they have no grass in their garden,” Wollast said. Bees need food, and there is not enough for the city’s wild bees at present. The city’s bee population, estimated at about 55 million, keeps on growing. Last year two hives were



A rooftop beehive maintained by BNP Paribas Fortis in Brussels

placed on the roof of City 2 shopping centre, joining hives on the nearby administrative buildings of the city.

The Jette district this week unveiled two new hives, following on from Etterbeek, Molenbeek and Elsene. “Often it’s a question of greenwashing,” Wollast said. “Companies and organisations want to do something about biodiversity, but that’s a difficult challenge. A beehive is a relatively simple solution, and it’s also popular, since the honey works as a sort of calling card – a way to show off one’s green credentials. Watermaal-Bosvoorde, for example, gives out pots of honey

to newlyweds.” Jette now plans to do the same with the product from its hives. Apis Bruoc Sella is joined in its call for a census of beehives by the environmental organisation Leefmilieu Brussel. The two groups also support a campaign to encourage companies and others to try other options for improving biodiversity, such as installing green roofs and climbing plants. AH

[www.apisbruocsella.be](http://www.apisbruocsella.be)

## German war cemeteries to be renovated

Flanders’ heritage minister Geert Bourgeois has approved funding of €445,000 for the restoration and maintenance of German First World War cemeteries. The funding will be divided among the cemeteries at Langemark-Poelkapelle, Vladslo, Hoogdele and Menen, all in West Flanders. Langemark-Poelkapelle receives €211,000 for the renovation of the inside and outside of the reception block, as well as of the burial grounds. The hall of honour and the Kameradengraf – a common grave for those of the fallen who could not be identified – will be reconstructed. A group of sculptures by the German artist Emil Krieger will be returned

to its original position. The cemetery in Vladslo, a district of Diksmuide, receives €150,000 for works, including a stone surface at ground level around the sculpture of the mourning parents by the German artist Käthe Kollwitz, as well as changes to make the cemetery more accessible for people with disabilities. An additional €84,000 will be available for maintaining the appearance of all four sites, including the removal of overgrown weeds from paths and gravestones, maintenance of trees and hedges and the cleaning of buildings and gravestones. AH

## Government of Flanders forces suspension of flight paths

The government of Flanders has invoked a constitutional measure to stop the implementation of changes to the routes used by aircraft taking off from Brussels Airport. By invoking a conflict of interest, Flanders suspended any move by the federal government on the issue for 60 days. The protest concerns a decision by federal secretary of state Melchior Wathelet to adapt the take-off routes of some flights to ease the noise pollution over the Brussels districts of Etterbeek, Oudergem and Watermaal-Bosvoorde. Critics complained that the changes favoured the three areas, to the detriment of the residents of the Flemish periphery of Brussels.

Flanders introduced the conflict of interest block on territorial grounds. “The problems of the southern part of Brussels should not be passed on to the northern Flemish periphery,” said Flanders’ minister for the *Vlaamse rand*, or Flemish belt around Brussels, Geert Bourgeois. The “Wathelet Plan”, he argued, was a unilateral federal decision with effects for Flanders, and therefore a conflict of the interests of the two governments. Earlier in the week, a report by environmental agency Leefmilieu Brussel revealed that twice as many Brussels residents – an estimated 388,000 – were affected by noise nuisance after Wathelet’s changes

than had been the case before. That figure includes people who had lived under a flight path previously but now had to put up with additional aircraft movements. The changes led to a huge increase in complaints: 1,056 between February and April, compared to only nine in the same period last year. The Brussels region said it would seek to have the Wathelet Plan overturned in court. The latest move has pre-empted that action. The issue will be further handled by the Concertation Committee, made up of representatives of the federal and regional governments, which will produce a report within 60 days. AH

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

28

infants under one year of age infected with measles in a single crèche in Zwijndrecht, near Antwerp. Nine of the children, who are too young to have received their first vaccination, were hospitalised briefly

21,043

jobs advertised with the Flemish employment office VDAB in April, an increase of more than 17% compared to the same period last year, continuing a growth of 14% and 20% in January and February

415,000

tourists visited at least one First World War site in West Flanders last year, a record number, bringing in at least €40 million in revenue. School groups made up 44% of the total

36

gangs in Brussels, a record number, according to federal interior minister Joëlle Milquet. The majority of members of the gangs – 76% – are Belgian, followed by 11% Congolese

€58,000

raised through crowdfunding by the organisation CINEACT to save the former porn cinema ABC on Brussels’ Adolphe Maxlaan and turn it into an art-house cinema



WEEK IN BRIEF

The E40 motorway was the scene of **massive traffic chaos** on Monday, 5 May, after three lorries collided on the eastbound exit to the Groot-Bijgaarden petrol services and caught fire. One truck driver died, and the road was blocked in both directions for several hours. The driver who died was a British national. His details have not yet been released. The exact cause of the accident is being investigated.

The University Hospital of Ghent is one of the candidates being considered to **carry out face transplants on 175 mutilated American soldiers**. In 2011, Ghent plastic surgeon Philip Blondeel was the first Belgian to carry out a successful face transplant; the 20-hour operation involved the largest amount of bone ever transplanted in an operation of its kind. If chosen, the co-operation would take years to realise, said Blondeel.

Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani schoolgirl who was shot by Taliban fighters in 2012 because of her blog promoting education for girls, has been **awarded the Peace Prize by the city of Ypres**. The €25,000 prize, which is given every three years, will be awarded on 11 November, the anniversary of the First World War armistice. Previous winners of the prize include the anti-death penalty campaigner Sister Helen Prejean, human rights activist Sima Samar and Congo women's health activist Denis Mukwege. Malala was treated for her injuries in Britain, where she now lives with her family.

Half of all **children who cycle never wear a helmet**, according to the Belgian Institute for Road Safety. Flemish cyclists' federation Fietzersbond said it could not support the institute's suggestion that helmets be legally mandatory for children. "In countries with a helmet obligation, the number of cyclists has decreased, which means more car traffic and a step backwards for road safety," said a Fietzersbond spokesperson.

Brussels will begin construction of its **new Museum of Modern Art** in 2017; it will be located in the former Citroën building overlooking Ijzerplein near the canal. The conversion of the 15,000 square-metre building will be carried out with the help of the French auto manufacturer. The modern art collection of the Brussels Fine Arts Museum has been in storage since 2011, when the modern arts wing closed. In the meantime, the main works from the collection will be on view in the Vanderborcht building on Schildknaapstraat, close to the Sint-Hubertus galleries.

The city council in Antwerp has reached an agreement with the main trade federations to designate the **first Sunday of every month as Shopping Sunday** in the centre of the city. Antwerp recently won the right to open on Sundays in the centre, but shopkeepers had misgivings about the plan because of associated costs. The plan will begin in September.

The world's **largest collection of documents related to the First World War** has gone online, the Royal Library of Belgium announced. The project Europeana Collections 1914-1918 contains documents from 10 national and university libraries from Belgium, the UK, Denmark, Italy, France, Austria and Serbia.

► [www.europeana1914-1918.eu](http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu)

Staff of the **22 community centres in Brussels** run by the Flemish Community Commission (VGC) held a day of action last week, closing their doors and handing the keys to the three members of the VGC council: ministers Guy Vanhengel and Brigitte Grouwels and secretary of state Bruno De Lille. The centres are protesting at the loss of a large number of staff, whose contracts will not be renewed after they failed an exam described by one worker as "seeing who does a sudoku puzzle the best". Six out of 10 staff members failed the exam, which was not an adequate measure of professional aptitude, according to

staff representatives.

Flemish government education inspectors have recommended the **closure of the primary school "for entrepreneurs"** in Antwerp, which opened as the Natan school last year and now goes by the name Tom College. The inspection was ordered after complaints in January from former members of staff and found shortcomings in both the pre-school and primary sections. The inspectors recommended withdrawing the school's licence. The school can appeal on the basis of a remediation plan.

Nearly 90% of Flemish children between the ages of nine and 12 **have never travelled alone on public transport**, according to a poll by Ipsos for the Belgian Institute for Road Safety. An online survey found that children outside urban centres don't always have a stop near their home or school and don't know where to get on and off. The family car is the most common form of transport, for 82%, though many children alternate between cycling and being driven to school.

Flemish digital TV provider **Telenet has reached a compromise** in its dispute with owners of decoder boxes that will not function after 1 September. Customers protested at the cost of replacing their box, about 100,000 of which are still in use. The company has now agreed to supply subscribers with a new high-definition box for free for five years from the time when they bought their existing box.

Last week the case of the **unsolved murder of 13-year-old Lieve Desmet** from Dentergem, West Flanders, in 1984 was officially closed. She disappeared on her way to school, and her body was later found in a field. A main suspect disappeared without trace. A criminal prosecution for murder, should a suspect ever emerge, is now impossible.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



© Jean Baptiste Mondino

Selah Sue

One of the funny things about depression is that it can happen even to people who have everything going for them. One of the strongest examples of recent times is that of Stephen Fry, the hugely successful and beloved British polymath. Flanders now has its own example, in 25-year-old Sanne Putseys from Leuven, who last week appeared on the late-night talk show *Reyers laat* to give an open-hearted testimony of her life with depression and the positive role medication has played in her recovery. Putseys is better known as Selah Sue, the shock-haired singer-songwriter who was the most downloaded artist in Belgium in 2011. The reason she decided to talk about her own experiences, she said, was a report that aired earlier on the VRT's *Panorama* programme that argued that many anti-depressant drugs are little better than placebo in the effect they have on depression. That claim is supported by research, but Putseys wanted to offer some counterpoint support for medication. "I would never have reached the place I am now, either personally or in my career, without that medication," she said. Selah Sue was born in Leefdaal,

Flemish Brabant, and went to school in Wezembeek-Oppem. At the age of 14, she revealed, she suffered an emotional blow from a broken friendship and from then until the age of 18 was in a constant state of depression. She was at that point prescribed anti-depressant medication, which she continues to take to this day. During her teen years, she was also learning the guitar and taking her first steps in songwriting – steps that would lead at 17 to a performance at an open mike night at Het Depot in Leuven. She was noticed by Flemish singer Jonathan Vandenbroeck, better known as Milow, who signed her up as his support act. She would later open for Jamie Lidell in London and Paris, and for Prince in Antwerp. She's now one of Belgium's most popular musicians. Her problem, she thinks, is inherited: both sets of grandparents have had trouble with mental illness. But the solution has been entirely pharmaceutical. "I am who I am now 100% because of medication," she told *Reyers laat*. "In my case, medication picked me up when I was worn out. If you're truly ill, anti-depressants, together with talking, are the best way out."

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

The needs of the few

Get any 10 people together in one room, and whatever their race, religion, ideology or whatever else, if you start talking about the state of the nation's railways, in no time you'll have everyone behind you in a way Winston Churchill could only have dreamed of. The latest is the reaction to the new timetable announced last week, due to come into play in December. As with every new timetable, the usual suspects – generally user groups and opposition parties – are united against it. This time, though, train users, represented by the group TramTreinBus, are joined by an unlikely bedfellow: the artistic elite of Brussels. The new NMBS timetable has one



main feature: scrapping early and late trains into and out of Brussels. Early and late trains have fewer users, so their cancellation will save money and have little effect, reasons the NMBS. What this ignores, say users, is that early and late trains are of an importance far beyond the number of users, as there is no alternative. People who work late, or early,

and live outside of the city have no other way of getting home. The artistic leaders of Flanders and Brussels, however, have their mind on another group: those who go to concerts, performances and other events in the capital that see them busy until at least 23.00. Brussels-based outfits, particularly those with strong Flemish connections, like Rosas, Kaaithheater, Ancienne Belgique and KVS, count a large number of visitors from outside the city. And many of them drift into the venues' cafes to spend money after performances. What the arts establishment fears is that these people will give up coming to Brussels for such events altogether, unless it's for a matinee.

FLANDERS TODAY



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## 5TH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Nothing personal

A complaint often heard during election campaigns is that issues dominate the debate less than *politique politicienne*, politicians' politics. This campaign, however, is more about issues than it has been in decades.

Education, for instance, has been discussed extensively ever since N-VA distanced itself from the agreement reached in the government of Flanders. How should future secondary education be structured so that both weaker and stronger pupils benefit from it?

Social and economic matters are also omnipresent, especially since all parties agreed to have the impact of their respective programmes examined by a number of academics. One of the most striking proposals comes from N-VA – again. Bart De Wever's party wants unemployment benefits to be cut after two years. N-VA believes this will either encourage people to get a job or weed out those who don't really need the benefits. All others would turn to the social aid agency OCMW.

Other parties are horrified by this proposal, which radically breaks with Belgium's current social system. They feel it is cold-hearted, as there are simply not enough jobs for everyone, and those over the age of 50 find it particularly difficult to find new employment.

The controversial proposal caused yet another incident at the weekend. Questioned about it, N-VA's Jan Jambon stated that homeowners should not receive support from the OCMW before they sell their houses and use that revenue to live on.

All of this fits into N-VA's belief that people should first look after themselves. CD&V, which feels particularly threatened by N-VA's success, reacted promptly, with an ad campaign featuring a woman and the quote: "I am 55 and lost my job. I want to work, but no-one wants to hire me. According to N-VA, I should sell my house."

The ad hit home. Jambon retracted his words hours later. In one of the few debates with CD&V's Kris Peeters, De Wever lashed out: "This is American-style campaigning – the lowest I have ever seen." Later he confronted Peeters with a similar loophole in CD&V's programme.

As the election date nears, the bitterness between N-VA and CD&V mounts by the day. Open VLD, another potential coalition partner for N-VA, also came under attack, as De Wever let slip "I can't stand the guy" about vice-prime minister Alexander De Croo.

Maybe there's a bit of politicians' politics after all.

# New picnic on Beursplein

## Picnic the Streets will be back on 8 June to protest against plans

Derek Blyth

The action group Picnic the Streets has called on its supporters to take part in another picnic on Brussels' Beursplein on Sunday, 8 June. The group launched its campaign two years ago, when 2,000 people joined a picnic on the square and across Anspachlaan.

The aim of the action – largely organised using social media – was to persuade Brussels' city council to ban cars from the part of Anspachlaan in front of the Beurs (Stock Market) and to give more priority to pedestrian-only areas in general in the capital.

The city has now agreed to limit traffic, but protesters are unhappy about the way the plan is being implemented. "The only positive news we can bring you is that Beursplein is going to be traffic-free," said Picnic spokesperson Gerben



Van den Abbeele in an interview with FM Brussel. "But the neighbourhood around the square will become less

liveable." The group argues that traffic congestion will increase in the area

around the Beursplein. "The Picnic movement is all about creating a nice urban environment, and the current plan will create a disastrous situation around areas such as Arteveldestraat and Fontainasplein," claimed Van den Abbeele.

The movement is also concerned about the plan for the construction of five new underground car parks. Van den Abbeele: "We want to hold this picnic to show people what is really going to happen."

The well-known Brussels social scientist Philippe Van Parijs helped to launch the first picnic on Beursplein in 2012, which drew its inspiration from the successful protest picnics organised by the expat magazine *The Bulletin* in the 1970s to ban cars from the Grote Markt. Van Parijs recently argued that Schumanplein should also be made car-free to create an authentic European meeting place.

## Flemish government funding for Blue-bike scheme

Flanders' mobility minister, Hilde Crevits, has released another €100,000 this year to promote the Blue-bike scheme. National rail authority NMBS introduced the Blue-bikes in 2011 at train stations across the country to offer passengers cycle transport to and from the station.

The Flemish government subsidy, introduced last year, goes specifically to a three-tier payment system intended to make the scheme more affordable. Under an arrangement with certain Flemish municipalities, the government of Flanders pays €1 for each journey, the city where the bikes are based pays a further €1, and the customer contributes €1. The extra money brings the number of cities participating in the three-tier payment system to 13, including Lier, Roeselare and Mechelen.

The distinctive blue city bikes are currently available at 44 train



stations across Belgium. The numbers of users has grown steadily, as has the number of journeys. Some 4,500 customers used the bikes last year, which was twice as many as the previous year, while the number of journeys increased threefold to 33,000. The figures so far for this year suggest that the number of journeys will double again in 2014.

A recent survey found that eight out of 10 users were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the service, and 96% said they would continue to use it. **DB**

► [www.blue-bike.be](http://www.blue-bike.be)

## Brussels transport minister confirms route of new metro line

The Brussels-Capital Region has finalised the route of a new metro line that will eventually connect Schaarbeek and Evere with North Station. The route – called line 3 – will have stations at Noord, Liedts, Colignon, Waelhem, Riga, Linde, Vrede and the Bordet train station. The stations will be located near existing tram stops at some of the locations.

The decision was announced by Brussels transport minister Brigitte Grouwels and mobility minister Bruno De Lille, who had to choose between two different routes. They said the route they chose was the best

in terms of passenger volume and ease of construction.

The region now has to obtain urban planning and environment permits before construction can begin. If all goes according to plan, tunnelling work should begin in 2018.

The region also plans to turn the underground tram line linking North Station with South Station into a full metro line. Once that is done, metro trains will provide a direct connection between Evere, Schaarbeek, the city centre, Sint-Gillis and Vorst. "This project shows that Brussels is continuing to develop alternatives to the car," said De Lille. **DB**

## Voter summons letters must be in Dutch

Flanders' interior minister, Geert Bourgeois, has overturned a decision by the Linkebeek city council to send out the letters calling on residents to vote in both French and Dutch, depending on the language of the recipient. These *oproepingsbrieven* are sent to everyone registered to vote in a municipality. Voters must bring the letter with them to the polling station.

Linkebeek is one of six municipalities located in the belt around Brussels that are referred to as "facility municipalities": Although they are located in Flemish Brabant where the official administrative language is Dutch, French speakers living there can request administrative

paperwork in French.

Linkebeek's decision, said Bourgeois, "is in conflict with the language laws ... confirmed by a decision of the Council of State on 23 December 2004 and 19 June 2008. The law states that the municipality of Linkebeek is required to send out the summons to vote in Dutch and only Dutch." According to the law, after the *oproepingsbrieven* are received, French speakers can then request a letter in French.

Meanwhile, authorities in Wezembeek-Oppem, another facility municipality, plan to meet this week to decide how to send out their *oproepingsbrieven*. **DB**

## Dredged sand to be used to protect Flemish coastline

Flanders' mobility and public works minister, Hilde Crevits, has launched a €3 million research project to investigate ways of protecting the Flemish coastline while improving sea access to the port of Zeebrugge. The Flemish government is developing a flexible approach known as the Flemish Bays Plan to protect the coast from the consequences of climate change, floods and superstorms.

Crevits hosted an international conference called Superstorms in November last year, in which she proposed the construction of three artificial sandbanks along the coast between Zeebrugge and the Dutch border and the expansion of Zeebrugge harbour to help protect the coast.

One of the measures to be implemented is the introduction of an innovative technology known as sand motors or sand engines, already used in the Netherlands,

which moves sand dredged from river estuaries into offshore locations where it protects the land from flooding.

Crevits plans to move sand dredged from Zeebrugge harbour to other locations along the coast where it will provide a first line of defence in the event of a superstorm. The same technique would also be used with sand dredged from the Scheldt estuary, which could protect vulnerable cities such as Antwerp, Ghent and Dendermonde from potentially disastrous flooding.

Crevits said in a press statement that the storm that hit West Flanders last December – known as the Sinterklaas storm – revealed the need for urgent action. "The United Nations' latest report on climate change provided further proof that we need to have an effective plan for protecting the coast," she said. **DB**



# The home of technology

## Tech knowledge that translates to the marketplace is one reason for Leuven's success

► continued from page 1

performed well across the board. But in Leuven's case, R&D activity was a particular strength. In these indicators it ranked sixth in Europe, with the performance of its academic computer scientists standing out, along with its participation in ICT aspects of Framework 7, the most recent EU research programme.

But for the city's university, KU Leuven, ICT research is more than just computer science. "There is considerable ICT work going on in electrical engineering as well," says Koenraad Debackere, managing director of the university and executive director of its knowledge transfer office. "If I take a broad view on ICT in the engineering and science faculties, we are talking about 800 to 900 researchers devoted to ICT-related developments and research projects. So it is a heavyweight activity within the university."

There are a number of strengths, such as encryption technology and security, distributed networks and wireless applications, particularly addressing medical and energy applications. But there are also people working on other specialities, such as data analysis. Debackere: "As in any university, you have strongholds where you have a high critical mass, then you have a broader base from which future strongholds may emerge."

Much of this work takes place in the Leuven ICT Centre, which brings together computer scientists, electronics engineers, economists and social scientists working in the field. This encourages a multi-disciplinary approach and the development of socially relevant lines of enquiry.

There is also an understanding that basic research will go hand in hand with research with commercial applications. "Our groups want to do relevant work, and relevant work is work that finds an application in a marketplace," says Debackere (pictured below).

And while this is a matter of principle for the university, the government of Flanders has also played its part. It insists that researchers across Flanders compete for funds so that the best ideas rise to the surface. It also sets aside money for research with industrial relevance carried out in collaboration with companies.

KU Leuven's combination of academic excellence and the exploitation of research results has helped it perform well in the Framework programme, where projects must involve academics and industrial researchers from different countries in order to win



A glimpse into imec's 300mm cleanroom. On the cover: A cleanroom worker showing a 300mm wafer

funding.

"We can provide this entire pipeline of research and innovation, from the basic scientist up to the user in our networks, so that makes it easier to engage in Framework programme projects," says Stijn Delauré, who heads the EU team within the university's research co-ordination office.

Another success factor appears to be the

and applications, looking ahead of what is currently being used in industry.

Imec focuses on pre-competitive research, far enough ahead that even companies that are competitors can get involved. "Then all the companies can, in their own R&D centres, shape the results towards the products they want to have," explains Anne Van den Bosch, imec's director of public R&D policies and

*"Our groups want to do relevant work, which means work that finds an application in the marketplace"*

business developers – people embedded in the research groups at KU Leuven whose role is to bring research out of the university and into the marketplace. "If, as a group, you have this kind of business developer involved, the chance of winning a European grant is twice as high," says Delauré. "Their impact is not to be underestimated."

He also sees the university's internationalisation strategy as an important factor. To become a professor at Leuven, you have to have worked in a university or a company abroad. And in the younger generation of researchers, 35 to 40% are from overseas. "This brings a culture of internationalisation, of collaboration with other entities around the world," says Delauré, "and that also explains part of our success in the Framework programme."

Imec is another major contributor to Leuven's success as an ICT hub. Set up in 1984 under an initiative from the Flemish government to promote microelectronics, it has since grown into a substantial independent research organisation with more than 2,000 staff around the world.

It specialises in nano-electronics, scaling down transistors, the building blocks of chips. Smaller transistors make chips ever faster or more powerful, or enable more functionality. Part of imec's research concerns methods that can be applied across a broad range of devices

programmes.

Alongside this horizontal research is work on distinct applications, usually in collaboration with companies who see more immediate commercial benefits. These projects often take imec into other areas, such as energy technology or the life sciences.

On the occasions when industry partners are unwilling to commercialise, imec may take the initiative itself. "If there are some entrepreneurial researchers within imec who see value in it, then of course we want to take this part of the research, spin it out and give it a chance on its own," says Van den Bosch. To date, imec has 36 spin-offs to its name, some of which have since been bought by larger concerns.

Imec also contributes to Leuven's high score in the Framework programmes, putting in its own bids and fielding numerous requests to join project consortia from elsewhere in Europe. Meanwhile, it takes steps to involve local small- and medium-sized enterprises. "For them, the administrative burden is really high, and they don't always know what to expect," says Van den Bosch, referring to both the process and what they can gain from such a project.

The province of Flemish Brabant steps in when new knowledge is turning into new business. It has funds it can use to co-finance innovative

projects and, while the amount of money is not substantial, it is important in attracting funds from other sources, such as EU regional development programmes. "It is more seed money than the bulk of the investment," says Ampe, "or the last piece of funding to start things running."

Projects supported include the Arenberg Science Park, which provides a home for technology-based business start-ups and has a cluster devoted to ICT companies. Then there are platforms such as the DSP Valley network, which specialises in smart design. Having begun in Leuven, it now involves more than 100 companies and research institutions in Belgium and the Netherlands. Both imec and the university cite this as a major factor in Leuven's success.

The province is particularly keen for spin-off companies to remain local. "One of our objectives is to keep them here, but of course space in Flemish Brabant is not endless," says Ampe. The science parks offer one option, and there is an "acquisition platform" that brings together all the relevant authorities able to smooth the way for newcomers to set up shop in Flemish Brabant.

If spin-offs must go elsewhere, perhaps to be close to other centres of excellence in their specific fields, then the focus shifts to the triangle between Leuven, Aachen in Germany (17th in the list of ICT hubs) and Eindhoven in the Netherlands (ninth). Ampe: "We mainly aim to have spin-offs and companies in our territory, but if it is with our neighbours, we are happy for them."

In addition to its ICT companies and knowledge generators, Ampe identifies a further important factor for Leuven's success in this area: the people. "We have a critical mass of early adopters of new technology," he says, pointing to the schools, colleges and non-specialist businesses that are keen to try new things. "We have an environment where innovation, research, development and ICT are normal."

► [www.imec.be](http://www.imec.be)  
► [www.kuleuven.be](http://www.kuleuven.be)



KU Leuven managing director Koenraad Debackere



WEEK IN  
BUSINESS

## Cars ▶ Volvo

The Ghent-based assembling affiliate of the car manufacturer increased production of its best-selling XC60 by 18% in the first four months of this year. The company expects a bumper year in terms of production and has earmarked an investment of €20 million in end-of-assembly processes.

## Construction ▶ Besix

The Brussels-based building company has won the contract to build the 1,500 square-metre Belgian pavilion at the 2015 Milan World Fair.

## Distribution ▶ FNG

The first stone of the future e-commerce distribution centre of the Wilrijk-based apparel group was laid last week in Antwerp's east port. The facility, to be completed early next year, will supply the group's six international brands, including Fred & Ginger and Claudia Sträter stores throughout Europe.

## Engineering ▶ TPF

The Brussels-based engineering bureau has acquired 70% of the Spanish Euroestudio, specialised in the engineering of high-speed train infrastructure. TPF paid €25 million last year to acquire another Spanish research outfit, Getinsa, which will be merged with Euroestudio.

## Finances ▶ Aon

The UK-based insurance and risk management company will transfer its pension fund from the Netherlands to Belgium to benefit from a favourable regulatory environment. The move follows earlier decisions by the pension funds of Alcon, Euroclear and Johnson & Johnson.

## Fitness ▶ David Lloyd

The high-end fitness and leisure club with facilities in the Brussels district of Ukkel has plans to open a second centre near Antwerp within two years at a cost of over €20 million. A further project in Ghent is expected later.

Holdings  
▶ Samsonite

The US luggage manufacturer has created a local holding company, with €3.5 billion of capital to be used as the group's internal bank. Samsonite already operates an R&D unit and a production unit in Oudenaarde, East Flanders.

## Transport ▶ Van Hool

The Lier-based bus and coach manufacturer has inaugurated its €40 million assembly line in Macedonia. The new facility should produce up to 500 buses for the US market at costs significantly lower than in local units.

## Flanders asks for tax breaks for Genk and Turnhout

## Region nominates cities as "support zones" for special tax conditions

Alan Hope

The government of Flanders has applied to the federal government to have the areas around Genk and Turnhout declared "support zones", allowing businesses that create jobs there to benefit from special tax conditions. Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters said he hoped the system could come into operation "as soon as possible. Everyone from the areas around Genk and Turnhout needs this".

A competition and employment agreement reached last autumn between the regions and the federal government allows each region to nominate four support zones – areas hard-hit by redundancies that



need the support of tax breaks to help get them back on their feet.

Businesses that take on new workers are exempted for two years from

paying a portion of the income tax on workers' salaries – the equivalent, said Peeters, of a 5.1% reduction on the cost of creating jobs. The government is nominating Genk, which is suffering the effects of the closure of the Ford factory (pictured), with the loss of more than 6,000 jobs, and Turnhout, which has seen the loss of about 500 jobs at Philips and Heinz. The support system lasts for a maximum of six years and applies to a 40-kilometre radius around the businesses affected. In this case, that would cover the whole of Limburg, a part of Antwerp province and an area in the east of Flemish Brabant.

## Court rejects interim ban on Tomorrowland, festival to go ahead

A court in Antwerp rejected an application for an interim ban on the second weekend of the Tomorrowland dance festival in Boom, Antwerp province. The festival in July is now free to go ahead with its two-weekend programme. To celebrate its 10th anniversary, the dance festival, one of the most popular in the world, extended its usual three-day schedule to six, over two weekends instead of one. A group of local residents applied to the court to have the licence that was granted by Antwerp province and the towns of Boom and neighbouring Rumst suspended, arguing they would suffer additional nuisance from the extended festival. The court declared the application for an immediate suspension inadmissible on the grounds of lack of urgency. Residents had been aware since last December of a planned second weekend, and urgency would have demanded an application be lodged no later than two months after that, the court said.

In addition, the decision to suspend the licence was outside the

jurisdiction of the judge in this case, since it would have prevented the festival from going ahead, while a judge in an interim interdict case is only empowered to take temporary measures.

The interim procedure was also not the place to rule on the demand of the residents to have noise restricted to 45 decibels in the daytime and 40 decibels in the evening, according to the court.

Tomorrowland organisers said they were relieved at the ruling. "We've done everything over the last year to make sure the festival was in good legal order, and now we can continue work on what should be an unforgettable anniversary edition," spokesperson Debby Wilmsen said. The organisers would continue to work closely with local residents, including those who applied for the injunction.

"People shouldn't cry victory too soon," commented Griet Cnudde, lawyer for the residents. "We will be undertaking further action because there is too much at stake for my clients to give up now." AH

## Fyra train manufacturer pays €2.5 million to NMBS in settlement

The national rail authority NMBS and the Italian rolling stock manufacturer AnsaldoBreda have reached a settlement in the dispute over the ill-fated Fyra train. AnsaldoBreda will pay the NMBS €2.5 million in damages.

The Fyra train was the intended replacement for the Benelux train between Brussels and Amsterdam, and began service in December 2012. It was suspended only weeks later, following a series of failures: carriages were broken, parts were missing, dangerous wiring was exposed and a majority of trains were cancelled or delayed due to mechanical problems.

At the time, NMBS was also being heavily criticised by customers and consumer organisations because of the cancelling of the convenient and less expensive Benelux service. The new Fyra link between Brussels and Amsterdam was more expensive, took longer, required a reservation and did not include a number of familiar stops.

When the Fyra service was brought to an end in January 2013, NMBS also cancelled the delivery of three new

trains. "After thorough investigation, it appears that the design of the V250 train displays fundamental shortcomings, with possible severe consequences for reliability as well as safety," the NMBS said in a statement.

The Dutch rail authority NS also had a dispute with AnsaldoBreda, but that case has already been settled. NS paid €213 million for trains delivered and received €125 million in settlement of damages.

The final settlement with NMBS is far below the €27 million in damages originally sought, not to mention a penalty of €12.7 million demanded for late delivery of trains. AnsaldoBreda had offered to pay €6.5 million on condition that the then CEO of NMBS, Marc Descheemaeker, stated publicly that the quality of the trains' construction was satisfactory. Descheemaeker refused, and the deal fell through.

NMBS has already had €37 million in deposit payments returned by a court ruling. "We have been reimbursed for our entire investment in the trains," a spokesperson said. AH

## Flemish TV productions nominated for Banff Rockie Awards

Four Flemish television programmes have been nominated for a Banff Rockie Award, handed out annually at the Banff World Media Festival in Alberta, Canada. The Rockies are one of the world's most prestigious awards for international television. *Plankton Invasion*, a series of seven-minute cartoons that air in both Belgium and France, has been nominated for Best Animated Series. Billed as the first humorous series that deals with climate change, it finds plankton planning a take-over of the planet, though they are



ill prepared in going about it. The series is a co-production between Vivi Film, Team TO and Tinkertree and airs in Flanders on VTM.

The comedy series *Safety First* by Shelter, also responsible for such

classics as *Benidorm Bastards* and *Wat als?*, has been nominated for Best Comedy Series. The series, which aired last autumn and is currently in production on a second season, follows three bumbling friends who start up their own security company (pictured). It's nominated for a Rockie against such American luminaries as *Arrested Development* and *The Big Bang Theory*.

Nominated in the category of Music and Variety is *Het perfecte koppel* (The Perfect Couple), the evening

quiz show hosted by Marcel Vanthilt that features couples answering questions about each other. Finally, *The Fall* is nominated for Best Procedural Drama. Flemish director Jacob Verbruggen made the series for the BBC; it stars Gillian Anderson as a police detective and Jamie Dornan as the serial killer she is after.

Last year Flemish shows *Quiz Me Quick* and *Wat als?* both won Rockies. The winners for this year will be announced on 8 June. Lisa Bradshaw

▶ [www.banffmediafestival.com](http://www.banffmediafestival.com)



# Bunnies on a mission

## Vets Without Borders sends rabbits to Rwanda to improve local animal health

Alan Hope

Last week, four rabbits from Belgium boarded a flight at Brussels Airport bound for Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. The rabbits, two males and two females, were off to start a new life – one in which they will join the company of local rabbits and breed with them in an effort to prevent in-breeding. The flight is the latest in a string of initiatives undertaken by the nonprofit Dierenartsen Zonder Grenzen (DZG), or Vets Without Borders, aimed at improving animal health and livestock rearing in eight African countries. Back in 2012, we wrote about the visit to Flanders of a dairy farmer and a vet from Mali, while last February we reported on the return leg, in which three organic farmers and a vet from Belgium visited Rwanda.

The four rabbits – two of them called Pluisje and Kalina, following a naming competition – were accompanied by two humans, who also won a selection competition. Carole Meerschaert is a veterinarian from Vielsalm in Wallonia, while Francis De Beir is a businessman from Merelbeke in East Flanders. De Beir is also the father of Hélène De Beir, the humanitarian worker killed in an ambush in Afghanistan in 2004. While still chair of the insurance company ForestRe, De Beir is now also president of the foundation that bears his daughter's name, as well as a board member of DZG.

Both winners are engaged to support the NGO for one year, and their first task is to accompany the four rabbits to Rwanda to see for themselves how the organisation works on small-scale agriculture in the area. They will visit micro-farms where locals work with the descendants of rabbits, goats and pigs once donated by DZG. They will also have the opportunity to install kitchen gardens and energy-saving ovens for families.

The rabbits will allow the Rwandan villagers to begin small-scale livestock farming. The animals can be bred with local varieties, slaughtered for meat, and surplus animals can



DZG workers checked on the rabbits before take-off at Zaventem



be traded for other commodities or other animals.

"If families breed with the same animals for too long, they run the risk of less healthy and less productive animals," explains DZG spokesperson Josti Gadeyne. "In-breeding leads to smaller, less fertile rabbits that are more susceptible to health problems. To keep the bloodline healthy, DZG will cross-breed the farmers' rabbits with new animals of the California variety."

explains. "A non-crossed rabbit of the same age would fetch only €2. These rabbits are highly sought-after by other farmers and by consumers. Californias also adapt very well to local conditions, such as feed and climate."

Pointing out that he keeps sheep, chickens and donkeys, De Beir says he is a great animal lover. When he saw the DZG contest, he immediately applied. "I'm so glad they chose me. The organisation

levels: people, animals and nature. "That's what I find most exceptional," she says. "Veterinary medicine is extremely important, of course, because the animals have to stay healthy. As a vet, I find the combination of healthy, sustainable livestock farming and the improvement of the standard of living of livestock farmers tremendously exciting."

The two ambassadors will be keeping a record of their voyage in a blog on the DZG website. There, shortly before departure, De Beir explained his motivation for going on the trip. "I am convinced that we are all responsible for our actions, and that everything we do has consequences. Even steps in the right direction have consequences. The work that DZG does is exceptional and has only good consequences, and I want to see it with my own eyes and describe it further in the days to come."

The four rabbits will now go to live with vet Jean-Claude Ngizwenayo in Butare in the south of the country. There they will help replenish the stock of California rabbits whose offspring are used to supply families and breeders across the country.

► [www.vsf-belgium.org](http://www.vsf-belgium.org)

*"The focus on healthy animals isn't the end in itself"*

DZG first imported California rabbits – a middle-sized variety resistant to disease – from Congo to Rwanda in 2011 as an experiment, and successfully crossed them with local beasts. Families whose own rabbits were crossed with Californias produced larger, stronger animals that fetched a better price on the local market.

"For a six-month-old cross-bred rabbit, they could get €4.50," Gadeyne

does great work," he says. "They focus on healthy animals, but that isn't the end in itself. The main thing here is the living standards of extremely disadvantaged people, which is a much broader issue. Since my daughter died 10 years ago during a humanitarian mission in Afghanistan, I've been working towards a more just world."

Dr Meerschaert adds that DZG simultaneously works on three

## Q&A

**Bert Tierens is chair of the Radiation Protection unit at Ghent University, which is working with other university hospitals on a "radioactive passport"**

### Why is such a system needed?

Belgium's university hospitals have started a pilot project: the "radioactive passport". The hospitals will now start documenting every radiology intervention a patient undergoes. Radiology is very easily accessible in Belgium. But we have to start making sure that every x-ray is absolutely necessary. Every time a radiological exam is carried out, people receive a certain dose of radiation.

We know that Belgians are much more often exposed to radiation than people in other countries. The

health effect of radiation on the human body is measured in the unit sievert. Research shows that the mean exposure per Belgian is two millisievert per year. In the Netherlands, the mean exposure per year equals 0.7 millisievert. That is a significant difference. What explains this difference? In the Netherlands, they take far fewer x-rays.

### How does the system work exactly?

It's a digital registration. Eventually, we want to include every Belgian citizen in the system. Hospitals

will then exchange the information to make sure patients are not exposed to too much radiation in short periods of time. We know the radiation value of each separate kind of radiological examination. These values are added up and inventoried in an individual file.

### How certain is the link between radiation exposure through x-rays and cancer?

There is no certainty, only a risk. Don't think that when you pass a certain threshold of radiation, you will develop cancer. But we know that, in a large population where everyone receives the same amount of radiation, a certain number of



them will develop cancer. And of course: The more you are exposed, the higher the risk. Likewise: The higher the dose of exposure, the higher the risk of developing radiation-induced cancer. Radiation damages the DNA of the cells, and this damage can lead to cancer, years or decades later. Interview by Daan Bauwens

## WEEK IN INNOVATION

### Islands in the Scheldt by 2050

Climate change will make necessary far-reaching geological adjustments in the river Scheldt by 2050 to ensure the security of the port of Antwerp and the hinterland, according to the Scheldt Congress in Antwerp last week. The creation of islands in the Scheldt is one of the most significant options. At the congress, transport economists, ecologists and scientists from other disciplines explained their vision of how the river will look by 2050 and the expected consequences for the port, shipping and the environment. "We are taking into account a rise of 60 centimetres in the sea level," said ecosystems scientist Patrick Meire of Antwerp University. "There is already a plan for adjustments, the Sigma plan, but we still need years of study to prepare the river by 2050 for the changing climate."

### Lighting and video for stroke patients

Sint-Augustinus Hospital in Wilrijk, a district of Antwerp, is the first Belgian care institution to test "adaptive healing rooms" for stroke patients. Four rooms are equipped with lighting and video screens that provide information and music to improve rehabilitation; the technology was developed by multinational Philips. Patients can also use the technology to listen to music and in future should be able to receive messages via social media. The hospital will examine the results in the coming months, after which the number of rooms equipped with the devices could be increased.

### Homo sapiens linked to Neanderthals

Archaeologists from the University of Leuven have, in the desert of central Saudi Arabia, found prehistoric artefacts of Homo sapiens and Neanderthals. This, it is hypothesised, was the place where modern humans and Neanderthals first met and intermixed. At the Jebel Samar site, researchers found stone objects with obvious characteristics of the African production process. "It's clearly the same technology that the early Homo sapiens used in North Africa about 130,000 years ago," archaeologist Philip Van Peer told the university's *Campuskrant* newspaper. A couple of years ago, Van Peer found stone from the same period near the site, but with technological characteristics that more resembled those of the Neanderthals. Andy Furniere





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# Designing out stigma

## Flemish researcher takes on negative side of prosthetics and cycle helmets

Andy Furniere

Products such as hearing aids often feel embarrassing to their users, causing stress, discomfort and shame. Flemish product designer Kristof Vaes examined ways to alleviate “product-related stigma” in his PhD at the University of Antwerp and Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) in the Netherlands.

Vaes is a lecturer in the faculty of design sciences at Antwerp, but he sought the support of TU Delft because of its specialised Institute of Positive Design, where researchers invent designs that make people happier – like, for instance, a to-do list made of chocolate that the owner can eat once they’ve carried out the tasks on it.

The starting-point of Vaes’ research was a request from the Finnish-Belgian company Genano to improve the child-friendliness of dust masks to protect asthmatic children who need them to filter small particles out of the air. “The children often don’t like to wear them because they get stared or laughed at when they go out with the masks on,” explains Vaes.

“*He was perceived as weak, sick and dependent, while he is actually self-reliant*”

To examine the scale of distress caused by the masks, Vaes sent his Antwerp students out into the streets with a dusk mask on. “It was not an agreeable experience for them,” he confirms. “Other people stared, shouted, laughed or



Kristof Vaes examines ways to relieve “product-related” stigma, such as trading in an oxygen tank for a backpack

kept more distance than necessary out of unease or anxiety.” Using an ultrasonic sensor, Vaes ascertained that, on average, passers-by kept about 45 centimetres more distance than normal if the student they encountered wore a dust mask.

Inspired by these eye-opening experiments, the students started to camouflage the masks with a scarf or personalise it with a drawing. Their designs led to the development of prototypes of new masks, but the commercial progress of this project for Genano is currently on hold for financial reasons.

However, Vaes also developed solutions for companies to reduce the stigma attached to various other products, including prostheses and cycling helmets. He analysed a database of about 300 good examples of innovative products that reduced stigma.

“For example, a hearing aid that has been integrated into glasses, a sporty

wheelchair or, for cyclists, a device with sensors that registers a fall and only then unfolds a protective helmet,” he explains. There is also an innovative dust mask – the Airwaves Connected mask – which uses a particle sensor to measure air quality and shares the data via Bluetooth, allowing the user to wear it only when necessary.

To encourage designers to take product-related stigma into account before coming up with a concept, Vaes created a more user-friendly checklist than is currently available. The checklist includes questions like: “Is the product discomforting or repelling during use?” and “Does using the product cause unease or a threat to others?”

The checklist was tested to examine the case of a person with a respiratory condition that requires him to carry a mobile oxygen dispenser during the day – integrated in a shoulder bag. The oxygen travels through a

lightweight translucent tube that is placed underneath the nostrils. “The person felt he was often perceived as weak, sick and dependent, while he is actually self-reliant,” explains Vaes. Vaes also developed a card set for designers that provides 17 strategies to alleviate the stigma attached to products. These strategies include adding colour, giving the product a sportier look, integrating it into another accessory, camouflaging and customising.

“The mobile oxygen dispenser we examined, for example, could be integrated into a very sporty backpack, and the tube could be integrated into a modern spectacles frame,” Vaes explains.

Vaes will now continue the research, including through projects with the Centre for Care Technology at the University of Antwerp. He also hopes to involve the business world more, here and abroad.

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

## UHasselt architecture students design sustainable school in Turkey

A group of architecture students from Hasselt University (UHasselt) are taking part in the 10th international Isover Multi-Comfort House Students Contest. They had to design a sustainable primary school building for about 400 pupils for the city of Gaziantep in southeast Turkey.

Gaziantep currently has 600,000 inhabitants but is one of the fastest-growing cities in Turkey and has drawn up an ambitious climate plan. The winning design will be built in a completely new area of the city.

The team is the first to represent Belgium in the competition and consists of three students in the second year of the Master’s degree in architecture at UHasselt. A national jury selected the design by Anneleen Croonen, Saskia Horions and Katrien Desair as the best proposal, beating those of two other teams at Hasselt, the only Belgian university to participate in the contest.

The trio will compete with 60 other teams from 23 countries at the final, which will be held at the



Architecture students Anneleen Croonen, Saskia Horions and Katrien Desair are taking their school design to the international Multi-Comfort House Students Contest

end of the month in Bucharest.

The students designed a school that first fulfils the Multi-Comfort House criteria: very low energy consumption, a healthy interior atmosphere, sustainability, good acoustics and natural light. These sustainability criteria were compiled by the Saint-Gobain business group, to which the organiser Isover, an international insulation

company, belongs.

But the students went further than meeting these demands and developed an innovative concept of a school that can also be used intensively outside school hours by local residents and associations. They called named their concept “From education to recreation”.

“The school consists of three parts: the part with the actual classes, the sports hall and a building consisting of the library, cafeteria and art and language classes,” explains Horions. Above the three buildings, the students would place a green roof with local plants, and solar panels would be laid on top of the sports hall. The design includes the use of a heat pump and night ventilation.

Rainwater would be collected for watering the vegetables in the gardens at the school. “All the classes would have their own vegetable garden,” says Horions. Through its eco-friendly design, the school also forms a link between the nearby park and the urban part of the Gaziantep quarter. **AF**

► [www.isover-students.com](http://www.isover-students.com)

## WEEK IN EDUCATION

### One in three students helped by CLB

One in three Flemish students received assistance from a pupil support agency (CLB) during the academic year 2012-2013. CLBs assist primary and secondary students and parents with questions on any aspect of education, including questions related to stress and anxiety. CLBs received about 371,000 questions from students during the period. Flanders has a total of 1.1 million primary and secondary school students. “We are surprised the figures are so high,” spokesperson Annelies De Graeve told *De Standaard*. The annual number of students who need advice has increased by 160,000 since 2000, when the current structure of the service began, but staff numbers have remained the same.

### Attentive style prevents truancy

Schools should try to communicate more effectively to students what they expect from them, but should also pay attention to their problems, according to researchers at the Free University of Brussels (VUB). “When those who skipped school regularly look back, they mostly consider the strictest schools the best schools,” researchers Bram Spruyt and Gil Keppens told Flemish education magazine *Klasse*. “Truants who notice that the school makes an effort to keep them on board feel more recognised and connected to the school.” They say teachers should communicate that they noticed their absence with a statement, like “we missed you yesterday”, so they feel they belong. Punishing truants has little effect, since family problems are often the root of the behaviour.

### More students in Dutch-speaking technical schools

Enrolment in technical schools within Brussels’ Dutch-speaking secondary education has increased by 14% on last year, a notable trend reported by the Flemish Community Commission (VGC) in its annual research. Brussels minister Guy Vanhengel, responsible for education matters in the VGC, told *brusselsnieuws.be* that he was pleased with the evolution. “We campaign in favour of the technical and professional education year after year,” he said. “It’s clear that the enthusiasm among Brussels youngsters for these study tracks is growing. This means, however, that the Dutch-speaking education sector and the government have to respond by establishing more technical schools.” **AF**



WEEK IN  
ACTIVITIES

## Pride Parade

A big parade and street party mark the closing of this year's Pride Festival, a celebration of the LGBT community in Belgium. PrideVillage will be centred on the Beurs, which is also the starting point for the parade. For the first time, MuntPunt and Muntplein will host activities for families and children. *17 May, Anspachlaan, Brussels. PrideVillage 12.30-22.30, parade 14.00, DJ sets on main stage 16.00-22.00, free*

► <http://web.thepride.be>

## Santé aan Zee

Come to Nieuwpoort on the Flemish coast for a two-day celebration of the sea with free children's entertainment, an antique market, Dixie bands and carnival attractions. On Sunday there will be a solemn benediction of the sea, following by free drinks and *hapjes*. *17 & 18 May, 11.00-17.00, Hendrikaplein, Nieuwpoort-Bad, free*

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

## Car-Free Sunday

Walk, skate or ride your bike on Hasselt's Green Boulevard, the ring road around the city centre, while it's closed to cars for the day. There will be creative workshops and games for kids, as well as an art fair, antique market, live music, street theatre and more. *18 May, 13.00-19.00, Colonel Dusartplein, Hasselt, free*

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

## Watersport Day

Tenth edition of this free two-day event aimed at getting people active in the water. Try out a dozen sports in 90 locations across Flanders. Windsurfing, sailing, kayaking, stand-up paddling, rowing, surfing and waterskiing are among the many options. Check the website for an activity in your area. *17 & 18 May, free*

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

## Côté Jardin

A free outdoor concert for the whole family, on the grounds of the Bijloke Site in Ghent. Bring your picnic basket, relax on the lawn and enjoy performances by half a dozen musical acts. *18 May, 11.00-22.00, De Bijloke, Jozef Kluyskensstraat 2, Ghent, free*

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

## Latino Festival

An outdoor celebration of Latin culture in the heart of Aalst, with dance workshops, flamenco demonstrations, music by salsa band Tumbao Cubano, paella, BBQ, tapas and more. *17 May, 18.00, 18 May, 14.00, Vredeplein, Aalst, free*

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

## A personal approach

## Limburg firm wins "architectural Oscar" for home adapted to disabilities

Tom Peeters

Limburg architectural firm CT has won two Architizer A+ Awards with its custom-design apartment in the centre of Bilzen. CT Architects bureau won both the jury and the audience prizes in the "Aging" category. The Architizer A+ Awards is an international contest with more than 60 categories and over 200 judges with proven credentials in the architectural world. Though the competition is only in its second edition, some have already begun referring to the prizes as the Academy Awards for architecture.

"It is indeed a very young prize," says Nick Ceulemans, the C in the Bilzen-based CT Architects, who runs the firm together with Liesbet Thewissen, "but the appeal is huge and very international."

So Ceulemans has already packed his bags for the return trip to New York, where the award ceremony will take place on 15 May.

All this would not be happening were it not for one young man from Bilzen. Six years ago, Eric (who prefers we use only his first name) was in a serious car accident. Head injuries kept him in a coma for six weeks. After a three-year rehabilitation programme, he tried to pick up his life where he left off.

*"We added small changes, but for Eric, they made a big difference"*

But the accident had affected his speech, hand grip and sense of balance, making it difficult to walk and talk but also to pick up items, to open and close doors and to manipulate taps and buttons – basic skills people need to live on their own.

"Walking with his Zimmer frame, he kept on bumping in to things," says Ceulemans. "So when he approached us, we knew we had to come up



From extensive to simple, every change in Eric's flat has a purpose suited to his needs

with very personal solutions."

A few years ago, Ceulemans, who also lectures at the universities of Hasselt and Antwerp, set up a student project around care and living. The recovering Eric found out about the initiative and came knocking at Ceulemans' door. "He told me what had happened to him and asked if I could use his case for my students."

Until then, Eric hadn't liked the traditional solutions other architects had come up with. "Technically, they were OK, but they didn't satisfy his specific needs," Ceulemans explains. Some designs, for instance, provided ample space for the bed, so Eric could easily get in and out of it. Other models included easy-to-clean linoleum and scratch-resistant seat legs. But all the designs were ill adjusted to Eric's situation one way or another.

One architect, for instance, suggested a one-person folding table and a very small kitchen. "It resembled a cold hospital room rather than a real home," Ceulemans explains. "He also wanted to have dinners and poker evenings with friends. His father is a cook, and he also likes to cook." "Ninety percent of the time I will be alone," Eric, now 28, realised, "but I wanted to be able to invite friends, and I wanted to sit at my terrace and barbecue in the summer."

Ceulemans and his team gradually familiarised themselves with the particularities of Eric's world

and devised solutions tailored to his situation. Eric remembers how one particular afternoon they tested all sorts of furniture – bath taps, showers, kitchen cabinets and more. "This was very important because my hand grip is limited," he tells me.

"It was challenging," Ceulemans admits. "Looking at things from another perspective always is." But the architect adds that it was also rewarding, explaining that they, for instance, learned that it was preferable to design cabinets without external hinges. "And the table we made also has a shelf underneath where you can keep a magazine within reach," he says. "We added small changes, but for Eric, they made a big difference."

At least as important as the practical solutions was the atmosphere Ceulemans and Thewissen created in the flat – a 25-metre long but just three-metre wide space. They brought in natural light and added more warmth with a hardwood floor. The inclusion of two stoves at different heights made it possible for Eric and his friends to cook together. With all these adjustments, the original hospital-like room eventually was transformed into a cosy home.

Reactions to the apartment have so far been encouraging. "Furniture manufacturers have shown interest, and an American hotel chain even wants to use our design," says Ceulemans. For him, this shows that a lot of catch-up work remains in healthcare when it comes to people with disabilities.

Eric's flat can also easily be further adapted. "If I ever have to sit in a wheelchair, I will be prepared," he says. "It's better to think of these things in advance."

Ceulemans adds that he comes across more and more clients, even in their 20s and 30s, who think seriously about their distant futures when they buy a home. "Often they've seen how their grandparents tried to stay in their large, unadapted homes until the very end, but couldn't and eventually had to move in to a nursing home." Eric is especially glad to see that his compact and custom-made home may really become a solution for other people with disabilities in the future. "That's what makes me most proud," he says.

► [www.cta.be](http://www.cta.be)

## BITE

## Aubergine, Vegetable of the Year

It's odd-shaped, purple and not exactly Flemish, so what's all the fuss about the aubergine recently in the media? Answer: It was voted Vegetable of the Year last week during Week van de Groenten en Fruit, or Fruit and Vegetable Week.

The annual ode to these two cornerstones of nutrition was launched six years ago by – it should come as no surprise – Frank Fol, aka De Groentekok (The Vegetable Chef). The aim of Fruit and Vegetable Week is to put local produce in the spotlight as part of a campaign to encourage healthy eating habits called "Think Vegetables, Think Fruit".

Fol's initiative is a reaction to a growing need he saw among local producers to promote the fruits of their labour, quite literally. "The choice of aubergine as vegetable of the year occurred in consultation with the growers," explains Fol. "They let me know that the aubergine has not yet been so successful. We hope that this title will boost the aubergine's image, because it's a vegetable that deserves it."

Indeed the purple veg has a long list of attributes. It's available year round, thanks to producers in Spain and greenhouses in the Netherlands and

Belgium. It's healthy, packed full of vitamins and protein. The aubergine is versatile, too. Whether fried, steamed, baked, grilled or stewed, the spongy white flesh is great for soaking up all the lovely oils and flavours in a dish, especially tagines and curries. Popular aubergine dishes from around the world include baba ganoush, moussaka and aubergine parmigiana.

If Fol has anything to say about it, we'll all be inspired to whip up a few tempting aubergine dishes at home, including one from his website. A veggie burger like no other, this delectable pile of alternating layers of aubergine, mozzarella and tomato is grilled until barely melting, drizzled with virgin olive oil and seasoned with a bit of fresh basil. Just in time for summer.

## Frank Fol's Grilled Aubergine Burger

2 large aubergines  
2 large beef tomatoes  
240g mozzarella  
sea salt  
ground black pepper  
olive oil  
fresh basil



Slice the aubergine into about one centimetre-thick slices. Season with sea salt, pepper and chopped basil, drizzle with olive oil and let marinate for 10 minutes. Wash the tomatoes, remove the stems and cut into thick slices. Cut the mozzarella into similarly sized rounds. Next, assemble the burgers by stacking the slices of aubergine, tomato, mozzarella and a couple of basil leaves. Use toothpicks to hold them together. Grill for about five minutes on each side, until all the ingredients are warmed through and just turning lightly brown. Enjoy hot or serve later cold; serves four.

Robyn Boyle



# Planckendael goes to Americas

## Mechelen animal park unveils revamped and expanded Americas-themed section

Diana Goodwin

Planckendael, Mechelen's popular animal park, unveiled its newly renovated and expanded Americas section last month, just in time for the Easter holidays. The star attraction in the renewed zone, which includes animal species from North, South and Central America, is without question the penguin exhibit.

The 2,600-square metre enclosure houses 69 Humboldt penguins, a threatened species native to the Pacific coast of South America. The penguins share their environment with a flock of Chilean flamingos and several other bird species. A paved walking path splits the enclosure, with the penguin habitat and pool on one side, and the other birds occupying a grassy field on the other.

A passage in the low fence bordering the penguin exhibit allows the creatures to move freely between their habitat and the walkway, where they can mingle with visitors – especially during the twice-daily feeding times. It's a unique way to experience these rare birds, whose ungainly waddle when walking on land contrasts with their agility and speed in the water.

The zoo's colony of Humboldt penguins, which combines populations that came from the Antwerp Zoo and from Emmen Zoo in the Netherlands, is growing. This spring, 13 breeding pairs laid more than 20 eggs, which have already started hatching. The male and female penguins take turns sitting on the nest to guard the eggs.

In addition to the penguins, the Americas area features a new prairie exhibit bordered by a trio

of tipis. An viewing platform in the shape of a giant nest allows visitors to look out over the prairie's inhabitants – a herd of North American bison and a group of elk. Nearby, in the Wild West town, a children's petting zoo houses potbellied pigs and pygmy goats.

A tower in the shape of a Mayan temple (complete with both stairs and a fireman's pole) looks out over an enclosure housing the guanaco, a type of llama native to South America. Nearby, a pair of giant anteaters, the only ones in Belgium, are easily viewed through the Plexiglas window of their enclosure. Even the termite colony that provides their natural source of food has windows allowing visitors to peer inside.

One of the most delightful attractions in the Americas section is the one housing the white-headed marmosets and golden-headed lion tamarins. These monkeys' habitat extends above the footpath and into the branches of the trees, where they can climb and jump from limb to limb. The marmosets in particular are free to roam about, enabling visitors to come literally face-to-face with the little monkeys.

Planckendael's revamped Americas zone also includes some animal species new to the zoo, including Darwin's rhea, a large flightless bird, and the pudu, the world's smallest deer. Both are native to South America.

The new attractions combined with fine weather led to Planckendael's record-breaking attendance figures over the Easter break. The park reported 100,000 visitors during the two-week school holiday. So far this year, they have experienced a record 84% increase



The renovated exhibits allow penguins and visitors to mingle – especially during twice-daily feeding times

in attendance over the same period last year. Visitors have also been keen to try the new shuttle service from Mechelen train station – a bus decorated with images of penguins.

The new penguin exhibit and other improvements have helped Planckendael keep up with the park's biggest competitor in Belgium, Pairi Daiza. This animal park welcomed a pair of giant pandas earlier this year and recently announced the arrival of two white Siberian tiger cubs. Pairi Daiza was chosen as Best Zoo in Belgium for 2012 at the Diamond Theme Park Awards. Planckendael won the same award for 2013.



One of the park's two giant anteaters – the only ones in the country

## A Generation Y solution to a timeless problem

Most of us have been there: closets and wardrobes overflowing with garments that we don't wear anymore but are too "timeless" to throw away. But who has the time or energy to resell all those used dresses, shoes or bags?

Oh My Dress!, an online platform for the sale and purchase of second-hand high-end fashion for women, is the 2.0 solution to this problem, and it is taking the Brussels' second-hand market by storm.

Just a year after its launch, Oh My Dress! counts 4,500 members and 280 regular sellers. More than 6,000 items have been uploaded, of which about half have been resold. Last March alone, the website had 20,000 visits, giving the platform a grand total of 250,000 visits since it began.

Not bad for founders Arthur Spaey and Valentine Witmeur, whose combined age doesn't even reach 50.

Oddly enough, Spaey and Witmeur have the 2008 crisis to thank for the success of Oh My Dress! In the economic hard times that followed, locals began looking at second-



The Oh My Dress! founders wanted to offer a fresh-looking, user-friendly platform for second-hand fashion sales

hand alternatives when making purchases. According to a study from market research firm iVOX, the number of Belgians buying second hand was up 37% in 2013 compared to 2011.

Along with this trend, the popularity of e-commerce also grew. According to a study from the payment processing company Ogone, the number of online transactions in Belgium

went up 25% in 2012, with two out of three Belgians selling used goods via the internet.

Amid these developments, co-founder Spaey then manager at the Pain Quotidien bakery chain, observed the success of his mother's clothing sales between friends. "There was that coupled with the phenomenon that more used clothes were being sold using social media channels," he says. "The idea then came to me that there was something there worth developing."

The inspired Spaey, 24, soon came across his future business partner. Returning from her studies in fashion and luxury management in Milan, Witmeur and her eye for fashion complemented Spaey's entrepreneurial vision. Oh My Dress! was born.

Potential sellers bring their apparel to the Oh My Dress! office in Brussels or send them by post. Witmeur, 25, then carefully selects pieces and suggests a price. If accepted, Spaey takes care of the photo shoot, uploading the garment and sending it to its future owner.

The seller then receives a bi-monthly summary of all their sales. It's as simple as

that. Meanwhile, buyers can search articles by size and brand and benefit from a two-week return policy.

"The idea is that people can get good fashion for their money," says Spaey. "We wanted a user-friendly and professional platform offering second-hand products that look brand new. In other words: get rid of the unattractive, stuffy image of second-hand clothing."

Oh My Dress! charges a commission per piece that can vary between 25 and 50%, depending on the selling price of the item. Most of the articles on the website sell for €35 to €80, which means a 35% commission. The seller gets 65%.

Spaey and Witmeur are pushing the boundaries of young entrepreneurship and want to encourage other young people to do the same. "It may seem ambitious and risky to start a business at our age, but just don't hesitate," Spaey says. "If you have an idea that you believe in, and you go about it correctly, there's no reason that it shouldn't work."

Kelly Hendricks

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



# Change is good

## Ghent-based band Amatorski abandon vulnerable for their second album

Christophe Verbiest

It's unusual for a new song by a Flemish band to premiere on the website of a renowned international newspaper, but that's exactly what happened last month when *The Guardian* revealed the new single by Amatorski: "Hudson", the harbinger of this Ghent-based band's second album, *From Clay to Figures*.

"It was a great feeling," says guitar player Sebastiaan Van Den Branden. But he is realistic: "It doesn't mean every British music lover is going to buy our album."

But they do have more famous fans: Internationally rising star Stromae named Amatorski one of his three favourite bands from the country. But the rumour that they refused an invitation to be the support act on one of his gigs is wrong, Van Den Branden: "It was a wild idea of our booking agent to try to set this up, but we didn't follow up on it."

Singer and keyboard player Inne Eysermans chips in: "Not that we don't like Stromae's music – quite the opposite – but it's a whole different vibe." That's certainly true. Who would they like to open for, if they could follow their wildest dreams? They answer in unison: "Damon Albarn. Every day of the week."

Amatorski formed six years ago when Van Den Branden and Eysermans met at Ghent's music conservatory. When the band first rose to fame, reaching the finale of the über-popular Humo's Rock Rally in 2010, they were a foursome. Only Eysermans and Van Den Branden are still on board. Last year, bass player Hilke Ros decided to concentrate fully on her duties as the band's manager.

"It happened naturally. It's not like we had musical differences," Van Den Branden says. They have just added a new drummer to their line-up, Christophe Claeys. In the recording studio, they're a duo, onstage a trio.

Amatorski got their name from *Amator*, in English known as *Camera Buff*, a film by the Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski. "An amateur is occupied with something that he or she really



likes," explains Eysermans. Three years ago, they released their debut, *TBC*; the follow-up, *From Clay to Figures*, has just hit the streets.

The songs have become less musing, sound less vulnerable and float in the borderland between intimate electronic music, moony, piano-driven pop songs and dismayed but restrained guitars.

The new tunes are less experimental than the previous ones, and Eysermans sings increasingly confidently. The somewhat new direction stems from the different projects Amatorski have embarked on over the past three years. One of them was accompanying *Impatience*, a mid-length silent feature film from 1928 by Brussels director Charles Dekeukeleire.

Van Den Branden: "After that, we wrote the soundtracks for the television series *1 op 10* (1 in 10) and the Dutch feature film *In jouw naam* (In Your Name).

And we released some songs on compilations. All this gave us the chance to experiment freely. It felt great to continually try out

every record, and Van Den Branden puts this drive down to their curiosity. Eysermans: "My greatest fear is that one day we won't realise

“My greatest fear is that one day we won't realise anymore that we're repeating ourselves

something new." Eysermans adds: "All those other projects really had an influence on the band: Musically, Sebastiaan and I have grown closer to each other."

The change isn't only the consequence of different circumstances, it's also the result of some deliberate choices. Eysermans insists they want to change with

anymore that we're repeating ourselves."

The singer points out another difference: "My lyrics are less abstract than on *TBC*." Still, as a lyricist she's more an impressionist than a straightforward storyteller. "For this album, I was inspired by Flemish author Saskia De Coster. She mentioned once that the plot

is not the most important thing; characters dynamics and what happens in-between story elements are much more interesting. I feel the same when I watch a film or listen to music."

The band likes De Coster's books, and she likes their music. She even wrote the lyrics for the new song "Deer the Wood". "It's not a first," explains Eysermans. "She has also written lyrics for Dez Mona and Daan. She gave me the lyrics and told me I could use them however I wanted. We worked together to edit them a bit for a musical context." Both parties are happy with the result and are planning to work together again in the future.

Amatorski's debut *TBC* was self-released, but with *From Clay to Figures* they have signed to Crammed Discs, the vivid, Brussels-based independent label. Van Den Branden says: "This time around, we're aiming further than the Benelux, so we needed some support. Crammed isn't a major label, but it's big enough to help us fulfil our ambitions."

As well as in the Benelux, the record has been released in France, Germany, Italy and the UK. The United States will follow later this month. The idea is that they will also tour there in the future. There's certainly a potential audience waiting for them, as their Deleting Borders project has proved: Around 100,000 people have visited deletingborders.com, where you can personalise an Amatorski song. Using the internet as both a creative marketing tool and an artistic outlet has become part of Amatorski's identity. In the run-up to the release of *From Clay to Figures*, the band launched [unlock.amatorski.be](http://unlock.amatorski.be): Every time someone clicked on the site, a millisecond of a new song was given free, until the whole song was online.

Being inventive musically and in the way they present their music: That's the essence of Amatorski.

*Amatorski play the Les Nuits Botanique festival in Brussels on 21 May*

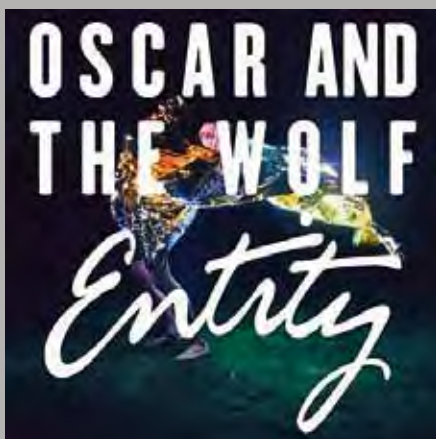
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## MORE NEW MUSIC

### Oscar and the Wolf

Entity • Debonair / PIAS

In four years, Oscar and the Wolf have come a long way. The band based round singer Max Colombie have released a few EPs of contemplative folk rock and indie pop, but their debut album, *Entity*, is something else: much more electronic with RnB-related production techniques. Though at the heart of the music still beats Colombie's somewhat morose voice. It's an interesting combination. *Entity* is exactly what Colombie predicted in *Flanders Today* last year: music you can dance to, that also makes you think. ★★☆☆



### Triggerfinger

By Absence of the Sun • Excelsior

With their previous album, *All This Dancin' Around*, Antwerp threesome Triggerfinger became one of Flanders' most-liked bands, and their popularity hasn't waned: Their new one, *By Absence of the Sun*, entered the charts at number one. On this fifth studio outing, Triggerfinger still deliver their characteristic high-octane blues rock with miasmic guitars, rumbling drums and horny bass lines. But the band have also developed a stronger pop sensibility, as the amazing single "Perfect Match" shows. Only once does the tempo go down, but what a result:

The perturbing "Halfway There" is, regardless of its menacing tone, one of the most alluring songs I've heard this year. More of this next time, please! ★★☆☆



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# Out of the cupboards

“Forgotten” works by the Antwerp artist Jan Vanriet are on show in Hasselt

Christophe Verbiest

Flemish artist Jan Vanriet once said that he liked to deliberately paint clumsily, but he never did so gratuitously. “When I leave a work seemingly unfinished, that’s a clear choice. But if a work asks for virtuosity, I produce it,” he explained. That two-fold approach is clearly visible in *Works on Paper 1976-2014*, an exhibition at Cultuurcentrum Hasselt that explores the extensive oeuvre of this 66-year-old Antwerp artist.

Vanriet’s works have been shown in important art biennales such as Venice and São Paulo and in a wide variety of museums abroad. In 2010, just before the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp began its transformation, the artist presented an overview of his works juxtaposed with the museum’s own collection in *Closing Time*.

Yet his name might be not on most art patrons’ lips when they are asked to name Flanders’ top visual artists. And that’s a pity, as *Works on Paper* proves.

The exhibition is made up of drawings and aquarelles, and serves a double purpose: showing both new and “forgotten” works. The former category comprises, for instance, “Wachter in de zon” (Waiting in the Sun), a series of 25 studies that lead to the delicate watercolour “Twee wachters in de zon” (Two Waiting in the Sun).



Jan Vanriet's "Partie de campagne"

But many of the works present are what Vanriet himself had “forgotten”. He made them, but for various reasons they were not exhibited, and they landed in drawers and cupboards. It’s a good thing he cleaned out his closets, because it would be a shame if they had stayed unseen.

Vanriet’s work is loaded with subtleties and a great eye for colour, making an object as mundane as a laptop into a despondent image (“Powerbook”). The contrast between black and red heightens the

intensity of “Sebastiaan”. Or look at the fascinating variation in the dark tints of “Klein verhaal” (Little Story). Some of the works are recognisable portraits (“Gilbert without George”, “Deelder”), others not: is “Fabre” – a faceless black figure with an ominously white hand – a portrait of Vanriet’s fellow Antwerp artist? We don’t know, but it’s not important to know to appreciate the work.

Vanriet is also a much sought-after illustrator, working for Flemish newspapers *De Morgen* and *De Standaard* and literary magazines

– for years he has been drawing the cover of the magazine *Revolver*. He also designs the covers of books (Hugo Claus, Cees Notenboom, his wife Simone Lenaerts). An ample selection of this work is on show in display cases. By the way, Vanriet himself is also a writer who has published several collections of poetry.

*Works on Paper* shows a collection of great art, but sadly it’s not an ideal location. The so-called large exhibition room – in fact it’s the foyer – of CC Hasselt is flooded with natural light, streaming in through long rows of windows. Since these vulnerable works on paper have to be presented behind glass, a majority bear heavy reflections. That’s really a shame because it partly spoils the aesthetic joy these works deliver. It’s the only drawback of this interesting exhibition.

## A forbidding counterpoint

Parallel with the Vanriet exhibition, CC Hasselt is showing work by two other artists. Awoiska Van der Molen is a Dutch photographer working in rigid black and white. The small exhibition *In Landscapes* is divided

into two parts: Urban and Nature. The latter are gloomy pictures of desolate, mountainous landscapes, devoid of people. In the former, you see houses and apartment buildings, but still no living soul in sight. (Those are even more forbidding than the nature ones.)

Overall, you have the impression Van der Molen is as much interested in the geometrical side of her composition than with the subject itself. Nothing wrong with that, of course.

From a distance, the drawings of the French artist François Trocquet, also look like black-and-white photos. But coming closer, there’s no doubt what they are. The exhibition *Tekeningen en objecten* (Drawings and Objects) shows an artist drawing with a maniacal frenzy.

His houses – some show a weird kinship to Edward Hopper – and his trees are drawn with agitated, dense black ballpoint lines, like a form of hatching. As with Van der Wolen, the works, which also include a collection of scale models “coloured” with the same line patterns, are foreboding.

Together, the exhibitions form an interesting counterpoint to the Vanriet show.

Until 22 June

CC Hasselt

Kunstlaan 5

► [www.ccha.be](http://www.ccha.be)

## Museum Prize nominations announced

Arts and heritage organisation Openbaar Kunstbezit in Vlaanderen has announced the nominations for its annual Museum Prize. Five museums are nominated from each of Belgium’s three regions, and a jury picks one winner from each region. Each winner receives €5,000. Although the prize money is modest, the title – now in its ninth year – has become very prestigious.

The most important criteria for being nominated for a Museum Prize is an institution’s attention to accessibility in presenting its collection and its ability to successfully engage and connect with the public. Past Museum Prize winners include the Museum of Industry, Labour and

Textile (MIAT) in Ghent, Leuven’s M Museum and Brussels’ Horta Museum.

This year’s nominations for Flanders are the Belle Époque Centre in Blankenberge (pictured), which immerses visitors in the coast’s glory days between 1870 and 1914; Bruges’ Groeninge Museum, with its six centuries of Belgian art, including seminal works by Jan Van Eyck and Hans Memling; Gaasbeek Castle in Flemish Brabant, decorated in 19th-century style and with an extensive collection of art and a unique historical garden; Tongeren’s Gallo-Roman Museum, which lures visitors in with realistic installations of half a million years of history; and Antwerp’s Red Star Line Museum,



© Tjil Vermeersch

an interactive story relating the history of European emigration to the New World. Museums nominated in Brussels include

Autoworld at Jubelpark; the Bibliotheca Wittockiana bookbinding museum in Sint-Pieters-Woluwe; the new Fin-de-Siècle Museum in the museum district; city museum Broodhuis in Grote Markt and the René Magritte Museum in Jette (not to be confused with the Magritte Museum at the Museum of Fine Arts).

The public can also vote online for any of Belgium’s museums to win the Public Prize. Children, meanwhile, can vote for museums that appeal to them for a separate prize. The Museum Prize will be announced on 3 June.

Lisa Bradshaw

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

## Order breaks down in Tim Etchells show at Argos

British artist Tim Etchells is making the most of his invitation to the Kunstenfestivaldesarts. He has monkey-wrenched the election campaign by hanging enigmatic posters across Brussels. He has made a spectacle of himself at Kaaithheater. And he has rummaged in the cupboards at the Argos arts and media centre, compiling a group exhibition titled *Order Cannot Help You Now*, in collaboration with curator Ive Stevenheydens.

It opens with “Mirror Pieces”, produced by Etchells for the exhibition and drawing together many of its themes. It is built up from



© Edith Dekyndt

three different but linguistically similar phrases – “optical illusions”, “poetical confusions” and “political delusions” – written in multi-coloured neon and arranged in mismatched, mirrored pairs. The meaning of each phase is

destabilised by its neighbour, blurring in the mixture of bright colours.

These ideas of poetry merging with politics, of deceptive texts and of light as a means of communication echo through the dozen artworks in the exhibition.

Some are simple, such as the mesmerising short videos by Flemish artist Edith Dekyndt. One examines a soap bubble held in a cupped hand, lingering on the swirling colours until it suddenly bursts and is gone (pictured). Another produces delicate lines from light passing through the concentrated salt water of the Dead

Sea.

Lines also speak in Till Roeskens’ “Vidéocartographies: Aïda, Palestine”, in which residents of a Palestinian refugee camp talk about their lives and draw maps. We hear their stories, but only see what they draw, a remarkably potent way of sharing their point of view.

The stories are more fantastic in “Kempinski” by Neil Beloufa. Filmed in Mali, a series of men imagine the future and talk about it as present

reality. Each holds a fluorescent tube, becoming a kind of living neon sign in the African night.

“NP 1977” by Neša Paripović follows the artist as he walks through Belgrade, taking the line of most resistance. He is challenging the order of the urban environment, yet the charm of the piece lies in his nonchalant manner. Paripović is a tall dandy in red velvet jacket and flares, ambling for art. Ian Mundell

Until 29 June

Argos

Werfstraat 13, Brussels

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



## The woman is fickle Rigoletto

Until 23 May | De Munt, Brussels

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

Just how long can we keep on forgiving the bad behaviour of a friend? De Munt Opera puts that question to Brussels audiences this month in Giuseppe Verdi's legendary opera *Rigoletto*.

Hunchback Rigoletto is the court jester of the Duke of Mantua, an infamous and callous playboy. Duke and Rigoletto get along fine and often team up for the sake of the Duke's scandalous games, until one night the father of one of the victims of the Duke's philandering ways places a curse over both of them.

But the conflict that Rigoletto later blames on the curse was actually set in motion earlier when the Duke set his eyes on an innocent girl in the church. Unbeknown to the Duke, the beautiful Gilda is Rigoletto's daughter, who he keeps hidden away. When Rigoletto discovers

that she has been seduced by his master, he falls into a rage and hires assassins to kill him.

In Canadian director Robert Carsen's version, the opera's medieval setting is traded in for a circus, and, certainly unlike its premiere in 1851, it contains a considerable amount of nudity. The jester – or in this case clown, who can be seen entertaining the Duke's friends with an inflatable doll – enters the stage with a roar of laughter and almost imperceptibly breaks into tears.

The true strength of the piece, however, still lies with its creator. With *Rigoletto*, Verdi is said to have revolutionised lyrical art. The Italian libretto was adapted from Victor Hugo's play *Le roi s'amuse* (The King Amuses Himself), which contained all the elements for a perfect opera: court intrigue, shameless decadence and paternal emotions that combine to lead to the most tragic event thinkable.

With "La donna è mobile" – the woman is fickle, meaning prone to infidelity – sung by the Duke



© Bernd Uhlig

on the streets just before his assassin arrives, Verdi composed one of the most famous arias in opera history. **Daan Bauwens**

## CONCERT

Chris Eckman

16 May, 20.00 | Cactus Club, Bruges

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

When the alternative rock group the Walkabouts emerged from Seattle in the 1980s, their brand of precious, cabaret-meets-country music won them critical success in the US and commercial success in Europe. It's no surprise, then, that the band's guitarist, singer and songwriter, Chris Eckman, eventually relocated permanently across the Atlantic, although Ljubljana – lovely city that it is – wasn't the most predictable choice. Between the occasional Walkabouts reunion, Eckman has established himself as an in-demand record producer and a well-loved solo performer. He's currently on tour to promote his latest album, *Harney County*.

Georgio Valentino



## FAMILY

EU Open Door Day

17 May, 10.00 | European Quarter, Brussels

► [www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu)

The EU's Open Door Day kills two birds with one stone. Conveniently scheduled two weeks in advance of the European Parliament elections on 25 May, the annual open-house event is at once an opportunity for the EU's various institutions to familiarise the public with the workings of an admittedly complex administrative machine *and* to emphasise the importance of citizen

participation in the forthcoming elections. The European Parliament, Council and Commission all welcome visitors with an entire day's worth of events, tours, discussions, film screenings and more. As the Greek presidency of the Council draws to a close next month, Hellenic culture is celebrated with a photography exhibition and a dance performance. **GV**



## VISUAL ARTS

Desire

Until 6 July | Fin-de-Siècle Museum, Brussels

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

Sigmund Freud and his fellow psychoanalysts placed the question of desire at the heart of the human experience, and surmised that desire wasn't as cut-and-dried as the simple pursuit of pleasure. It's rather a complicated, often perverse labyrinth from which we can never escape. Although Freud named the thing, it was first described by the artists working around him. This exhibition presents multiple visions of how European modernist painters (including surrealists like Salvador Dalí and Paul Delvaux) and their fin-de-siècle forebears experienced the sea change in human desire brought on by the social, political and psychological upheavals of the modern age. **GV**



© Frits Van den Berghe, 'The man in the clouds', 1927 / RMFAB Brussels

## FOOD&DRINK

Antwerpen Proeft

15-18 May | Waagnatie, Antwerp

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

Antwerp's sprawling, open-air event, which takes place in the port city's trendy, post-industrial Eilandje district, is a foodie's dream. Dozens of local restaurants arrive, set up mobile kitchens and push their signature dishes all weekend long to thousands of strolling visitors. You'll find seafood by the esteemed sushi joint Zaowang (a must-taste),

sandwiches by Ellis Gourmet Burger, traditional beer-and-food pairings by Kontich's Brasserie Zytho and much, much more. There are even a handful of Michelin-starred establishments to class up the proceedings. It's not just restaurants either; producers and distributors are on hand to show off delicious regional products that you can use in your own kitchen. **GV**



## WORLD MUSIC

**Music from Crete:** Belgium-born Greek musicians Giorgos Apostolakis (lyra) and Manolis Koundourakis (laouto) present traditional music from Crete, their cultural homeland.

16 May 20.00, Art Base, Zandstraat 29, Brussels

► [www.art-base.be](http://www.art-base.be)

## CLASSICAL

**Dvořák Festival:** Festival dedicated to the Czech composer Antonín Dvořák, featuring Dvořák's works conducted by the Belgian National Orchestra, Trio Wanderer and the Pavel Haas Quartet, as well as works by other Czech composers including Bedřich Smetana and Bohuslav Martinů

15-18 May at Bozar and Royal Conservatory, Brussels

► [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

## VISUAL ARTS

**The Enterprise of Opera:** Exhibition of original documents from the most significant collection of Italian opera history, the Bertelsmann-owned Ricordi archive in Milan. The collection traces the making of an opera – from commissioning the composer to its first performance – using Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff*, showcasing scores and librettos, correspondence, drawings of costumes, set designs and more

15-18 May at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels

► [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

## FAMILY

**Billybo Home Sale:** Billybo, a webshop offering unique clothes, toys and gifts for babies, kids and mamas, is holding a spring sale at the home of founder Isabel Hinnekint, inviting families to peruse her colourful collection over drinks and snacks

17 May 10.00-19.00, at Leemweg 25, Sint-Laurens (East Flanders)

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

## MARKET

**Fiesta Europa:** Travelling international market with stops across Flanders all summer long, featuring stand-holders from every corner of Europe selling products from their countries, as well as handmade goods, cosmetics, gifts and more

16-18 May 11.00-21.00 at Werplein, Aalst

► [www.fiestaeuropa.eu](http://www.fiestaeuropa.eu)

## FOOD

**Aspergefeesten:** Second annual Asparagus Festival, featuring a buffet, concerts, election of the "Asparagus Queen", tastings and a variety of family activities and folk games involving asparagus

17-18 May at Driessens, Haelderheidestraat 6, Kinrooi (Limburg province)

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



# Talking Dutch

## Not such a dumb idea

Derek Blyth

The headline in *De Standaard* had me puzzled for a while. *Bijzonder zware ochtendspits: Vlaming kan niet meer in de regen rijden* – Exceptionally long morning rush-hour traffic jams: The Flemish can no longer drive in the rain. What could this mean, I wondered. *De regen zorgde vanochtend voor tot 250 kilometer file op de Vlaamse snelwegen* – The rain this morning led to 250 kilometres of traffic jams on Flemish roads. *Het is de eerste regenspits in lange tijd, we zijn het niet meer gewend om in de regen te rijden* – It's the first rain we've had for a long time, and we have forgotten how to drive in the rain, said Hajo Beeckman of the Flemish Traffic Centre. So that was the explanation. All that sunshine had made us forget that we live in Belgium, land of four-season rain. *Door het zachte lenteweer hebben we een lange periode met rustige ochtendspitsen gehad* – the mild spring weather has given us a long period with quiet morning commutes. *We zijn het niet meer gewend om in de regen te rijden, met kleine ongevalletjes tot gevolg.* – We are no longer used to driving in the rain, which resulted in several little accidents. But the police are working on a plan that could turn everyone into good drivers, whatever the weather. *Het gebruiken van "dummies", levensgrote tweedimensionale silhouetten van politieagenten of politiewagens* – the use of "dummies", life-size two-dimensional figures of police officers or police cars, *heeft een onmiskenbaar afschrikkend effect op automobilisten* – has an unmistakable deterrent effect on drivers, said the Belgian Institute for Traffic Safety, based on a pilot project in Zaventem. This could be the answer because other methods like radar and speed cameras are too expensive to apply across the entire road network, rain or no. But



dummies seem to work. *Het percentage geobserveerde automobilisten in overtreding halveerde tijdens de plaatsing van een dummy* – the percentage of drivers breaking the speed limit was reduced by half when the dummies were in place. And that could have a dramatic effect. *Zelfs een kleine daling in snelheid kan een positief effect hebben op de verkeersveiligheid* – even a small reduction in speed can have a positive impact on road safety. *Een daling van de snelheid met 1 km/u in een zone 50 levert 6 procent minder verkeersdoden op* – A reduction of 1km/h in a zone with a speed limit of 50km/h would cut road deaths by 6%. So the next time you see a police officer, it might be a dummy – and that's not such a dumb idea.

## VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



*In response to: Brussels and Flanders reject flight path changes*  
**Miranda Martin:** Almost every time I fly from Brussels the plane goes straight up over the port area. I am surprised not to see this route mentioned. Given the high population density there, more people must be disturbed by it than any other.



*In response to: Insects approved for human consumption*  
**Jennifer Griff:** All of a sudden, dieting and doing without meat seems so very appealing. Jennifer G, "picky eater"



*In response to: Sunday shopping in central Antwerp approved*  
**Hannah Delval:** It's a double-edged sword, it's amazing for convenience and helps those do the shopping, however it opens the way for less 9 to 5 and more shift work



**Joop Hazenberg @joophazenberg**  
The Borremans exhibition at #bozar is excellent. Don't miss it! #brussels pic.twitter.com/Uhrt5h7dry



**Kelly Casey @OllieNobleLTD**  
Heading off to #brussels and #Antwerp for a couple of days. Glorious gemstone event and scout for #designers + meeting a head of brand.



**Jamie and Phoebe @jamieandphoebe**  
The Menin Gate, Ypres. Amazing monument to those who fell in WW1. #belgium #ypres #ww1 #tweegram... instagram.com/p/n0bVHUwAoG/

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## Poll

The government has approved a request to allow retail shops in the centre of Antwerp to be open on Sundays. Are you in favour?

a. Yes! If "de klant is koning", then shops should be open on Sunday. Let the shops decide and the market develop as it will



b. No! Consumerism is already out of control, and we should spend Sundays with family and friends. Keep Sundays shopping-free



The city of Antwerp has decided to allow shops to open on Sundays and has now reached an agreement with the retail industry to make every first Sunday of the month "Shopping Sunday". Many shopkeepers have been reluctant because of the added cost of labour and the pressure to be open if everyone else is. Like some of its neighbours, Belgium has laws around shops being open

on Sundays, and special permission is required. This is meant to protect workers from having to work on the traditional day of rest. But it's also inconvenient for consumers. Those who work full time have to cram in shopping for clothes or appliances or anything else on the same day they have to get their grocery shopping done. For many expats, the habit seems archaic.

Votes in our poll were pretty evenly split, with a slim majority appreciating Sunday being set aside for less commercial pursuits. We already have six days to buy stuff, you conclude. We wonder whether those worthy sentiments will translate into action now that the decision has been made. Can you really resist the lure of all those shops? Nearly half of you have no intention of even trying.

### Next week's question:

Picnickers will take to the streets again next month in protest against Brussels' plans to pedestrianize Beursplein (see p4). What's your view?

To vote, visit the Flanders Today website, [www.flanderstoday.eu](http://www.flanderstoday.eu)

## THE LAST WORD

### Meat the neighbours

"In the old days a slaughtered cow would be shared by the whole family, or even the whole village. Now, thanks to the internet, anyone can buy a 10-kilo share of a cow." David De Keyser has invented the concept of "crowdbutchering" with his new website [www.deeleenkoe.be](http://www.deeleenkoe.be)

### Animal instincts

"The only problem is that you have to make sure the residents don't stuff the animals full of sweets and table scraps." A growing number of rest homes are introducing pets, explains Katleen De Jonge of Kouterhof in Heusden, East Flanders

### Sage advice

"To all supporters of the Red Devils: Please don't do anything in Brazil that you wouldn't do at home." Belgian charity Child Focus warned football fans about the increased problem of under-age sex workers in Brazil during World Cup

### Strong-arm tactics

"Oh, I don't really expect much from it. I'm not much of an athlete, you know." Federal migration minister Maggie De Block scored highest among the ministers who took part in a handbag-throwing contest in Leuven at the weekend, with a throw of 16 metres

