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Flanders' digital research centre offers start-ups a leg-up



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Analogue is the new digital at Antwerp recording studio Bobonne

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Painstaking work by conservators is uncovering the real Ghent Altarpiece

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© Courtesy Belgium Pier

A pier renaissance

Iconic Blankenberge pier celebrates 120th birthday and long, phoenix-like history



Diana Goodwin

More articles by Diana \ flanderstoday.eu

It's an icon of summers spent at the seaside, a protected architectural monument and a testament to the Flemish coast's long history as a tourist destination. It has survived two world wars, destruction by fire, and wind and water damage. Blankenberge pier is turning 120 years old this year, and it's as popular and magnificent as ever.

On any given day, but especially during the warm summer months, Blankenberge's pier attracts holiday-makers taking in the sights, locals meeting up for a stroll or drink, families with children enjoying a day-trip to the coast and older folk parked on benches soaking up

the rays. The pier still serves the purpose for which it was originally built – giving people the pleasure of walking over the water towards the horizon, and of looking out over the sea and shore.

On the other hand, a lot has changed since the original pier was built in 1894. At that time, coastal tourism was a relatively new phenomenon, only recently imported from England. "Taking the cure" was all the rage then: Seawater and sea air were thought not just to be enjoyable but to have restorative health benefits. British tourists first arrived in Ostend in the early 19th century, looking for new seaside bathing destinations.

At the time, Blankenberge was just a small West Flemish fish-

ing village. Tourism there only began to take off in the mid-19th century, with the greatest expansion occurring after 1863, when the rail connection between Blankenberge and Bruges was completed. Joining tourists from the surrounding region and from across the Channel, travellers from all over the country as well as France and Germany now began to find their way to Blankenberge.

So-called "pleasure piers" were also an English invention. Travellers arriving at seaside resorts by ship enjoyed the view from the quay and the thrill of walking over the water. Soon enough, strolling along the quay became an attraction in itself, and pleasure piers were built all along the English coast. An

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Brabant Killers suspect released

68-year-old remains under suspicion over fatal supermarket raids in 1980s



Alan Hope

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Jean-Marie Tinck, the man arrested in May on suspicion of being a member of the notorious Brabant Killers gang, has been released from prison but remains under suspicion, his lawyer said.

According to lawyer Jean-Edmond Mairiaux, the court found no reason for the continued detention of Tinck, 68. "The evidence against him has not changed since he was arrested," Mairiaux said. "This is a relief more than anything. The



© Nicolas Maeterlinck/Belga

court was convinced most of all by an increase of evidence in his favour, including a polygraph test and DNA evidence, as well as the failure to produce evidence against him."

Tinck's detention was prolonged for another month by a court in Charleroi two weeks ago, but his lawyer appealed and won. Tinck (pictured with Mairiaux) was originally suspected in the 1990s on the basis of drawings of suspects produced on witness testimony.

More recently, he is alleged to have boasted to a friend of being part of the Brabant Killers gang. He now denies any involvement.

The Brabant Killers struck terror into the heart of the nation in the 1980s, in a series of raids on supermarkets in which a total of 28 people died, the bloodiest of the attacks being at Delhaize stores in Overijse and Aalst in 1985. No one has ever been convicted of the crimes, as the time limit for prosecutions approaches.

"Homeland Security" department could clash with other services

A new "homeland security" department proposed by N-VA chairman Bart De Wever to tackle the problem of jihadi fighters returning from battle in Syria would risk clashing with existing services like state intelligence and the terror risk co-ordination office, according to criminologist and security expert Brice De Ruyver.

De Wever floated the idea of a new department last week on Dutch TV, when he evoked the risk to security of young men who have become radicalised and gone to Syria to fight on the side of radical Islamist groups. If and when they return, they could potentially become involved in terrorist actions.

One example is Mehdi Nemmouche, the 29-year-old French national accused of carrying out the shooting attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels in May. Nemmouche spent a year in Syria fighting with anti-government forces.

According to De Wever, the problem is one that can only be dealt with on a national or European level.

However, De Ruyver warned that attempts to create such a body in the past have met with little success. "As a historian, Bart De Wever ought to know that," he said. One example is the Criminal Intelligence Management office of the 1970s, an anti-drugs agency based on the US Drugs Enforcement Agency. The agency was plagued by problems and never achieved integration with other police services.

"If a new organisation arrives on a terrain where one already exists, they work against each other," De Ruyver said. "That is a known fact."

De Wever's proposal was also criticised by Mechelen mayor Bart Somers, appearing on the *Terzake* news programme. "We already have all of the instruments required to tackle the problem of Syria fighters," Somers said. "Those have to be reinforced. More has to be done to deal with the problem, but no new instruments need to be created." \ AH

Royal reception for Red Devils

Belgium's national football team returned to home soil last week to a welcome from airport fire crews, a reception from the King and a brief public appearance in celebration of their exploits in the World Cup in Brazil, which ended with the side being eliminated by Argentina in the quarter-finals. "If we had stepped out of the aircraft with the World Cup in our hands, then we would have laid on a party on a huge scale," said Football Union spokesperson Stefan Van Locke. "But we were put out in the quarter-final, which is a perfectly respectable result but no reason for major festivities. We're now going to the royal palace, in Brussels not in Laken, and anyone who is there can see the players."

As the plane carrying the Belgian delegation taxied at Zaventem, it was greeted by two of the airport's fire trucks, which proceeded to hose the aircraft down, in a rarely performed honour ceremony

known as baptism, normally restricted for the retirement of a pilot or the christening of a new aircraft. The delegation was welcomed at the gate by the full staff of Brussels Airlines, as well as departing prime minister Elio Di Rupo. In Brussels, the squad was received by the King and Queen and posed for a photo in the palace garden, with coach Marc Wilmots taking place of honour by the King's side and team captain Vincent Kompany next to Queen Mathilde. The members of the squad then stepped out on to the square in front of the palace where hundreds of fans had gathered. "I want to thank everyone in the name of the whole team and the whole staff," Kompany told the gathering, speaking in Dutch and French. "You were fantastic, and above all we did it for you. I hope we can share many more wonderful moments together in the future. Whatever may happen, I hope we stay together," he said. \ AH

Study shows that Flemish children prefer reading to internet

Playing outside and reading books are still more popular activities for Flemish children than chatting online and surfing the internet, according to a study by the University of Leuven.

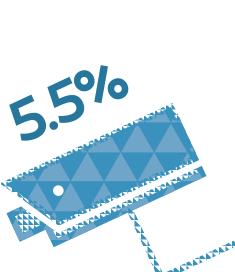
Children were asked to list their favourite free-time activities, with

playing outside listed in the top five by 63% of nine- to 12-year-olds. That was followed by taking part in sport (54%), watching TV (52%) and playing computer games (50%). Reading, at 38%, comes ahead of chatting online (34%) and surfing the web (32%).

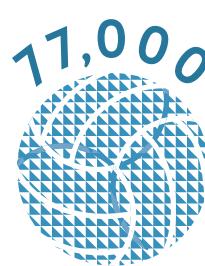
Children were also asked to specify their favourite type of reading, with comic strips (75%) coming ahead of fiction (59%) and informative books (51%). Girls were keener readers of fiction (70%) than boys (49%), a difference not seen for other forms of reading.

However, the popularity of reading dropped off at around the time when children's use of new media started to take off, the study said. Among 12-year-olds, the frequency of reading as well as the total amount of time spent reading was lower than among nine-

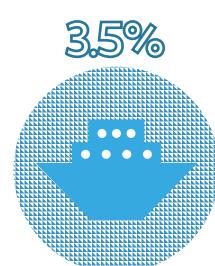
year-olds, with the tipping point coming at around the age of 11. "A connection has been noted, but statistically it has not been shown that one thing is the result of the other," lead researcher Professor Jan Van Coillie said. \ AH



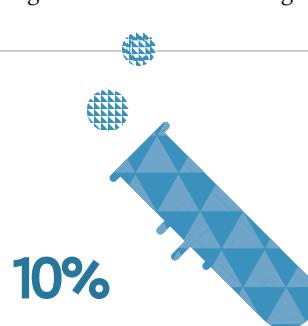
reduction in the number of kilometres travelled by cars if road taxation moves to a kilometre charge, according to the preliminary results of a test project involving 1,000 motorists in the Brussels area



people saw the Red Devils perform in Brazil on the giant screens at the Koning Boudewijn stadium in Brussels during Belgium's run in the World Cup



drop in the tonnage of traffic using the canals in the Scheepvaart system, most importantly the part of the Albert Canal in Flanders between Lanaken and Antwerp in the first six months of this year



of Flemish companies inspected by the environment ministry guilty of releasing waste water into the environment that did not meet emissions limits for phosphorus, nitrogen, heavy metals and organic and biological pollutants



students at Belgian universities made use of an EU grant to study in another country under the Erasmus exchange scheme in the academic year 2012-2013, 9% more than the previous year

WEEK IN BRIEF

During the first four months of 2014, about 500 official reports were drawn up against Belgian bar owners who were **flouting the smoking ban**. About 77% of the bars inspected were declared smoke-free, compared to 78% in the whole of 2013. The federal public health department wants to reduce the number of offenders through higher fines and a possible closure lasting six months.

The Flemish agency for roads and traffic (AWV) has installed **trajectory-control cameras in the Waasland tunnel** leading to Antwerp, and the speed control system is due to begin operating in the autumn, a spokesperson said. The cameras will allow checks on lorries passing illegally through the tunnel, as well as motorists who fail to respect the no-overtaking rule. During a test phase, no fines will be imposed.

A plane carrying 304 passengers from Toronto to Brussels was **held on the ground for five hours at Ostend** last week after being told it was unable to land at Zaventem because of mist. According to company procedure, the Jet Airways flight put down in Ostend; passengers later complained they were given no information, as well as nothing to eat or drink for hours. The flight was further delayed while a new crew arrived.

Scouts and Guides were unprepared last week when heavy rain crossed the country, **washing out many of their camps** in the first week of the summer holidays. According to a Facebook group set up to appeal for help, Scouts and Guides from Antwerp, Knokke, Oostduinkerke and Sint-Amandsberg were forced to abandon tent camps and take refuge in buildings

including local schools.

As thousands of people prepared to take part in Sunday's Big Jump event in favour of clean water, nature conservancy organisation Natuurpunt revealed the 10 **dirtiest watercourses** in Flanders, seven of which are in West Flanders. Last place goes to the Passendalebeek in Moorslede, where the lowest numbers of living creatures are to be found. The stream connects to the Leie river, which is itself polluted by industry, agriculture and built-up areas. One in five households in Flanders discharges its waste water directly into rivers and streams.

More and more people are **leaving their estate to charities** instead of relatives, according to Testament.be, the group that organises bequests left to 110 charities and non-profits. The Foundation Against Cancer saw bequests go up from €8.7 million in 2008 to €14.8 million last year. The Flemish League Against Cancer received €6 million last year, up from €3.5 million three years before. Other examples include Doctors Without Borders, Unicef and SOS Kinderdorpen.

The Flemish Brabant police school in Asse last week unveiled a plaque in **memory of Kitty Van Nieuwenhuysen**, a graduate who was killed on duty by home-jackers in 2007. Van Nieuwenhuysen was still in training with the police of Beersel when she attended the incident and was shot dead by escaping robbers. The school also unveiled a memorial to another former student, Veerle Hamels, who took her own life in 2004.

The Council of State has given the

go-ahead to a plan by the Flemish government to **move a portion of its administrative offices** to the site of Tour & Taxis in Brussels. The case before the council was brought by the developer of another office complex who had hoped to obtain the contract. However, the Tour & Taxis project still has no permit, although the court said it had received sufficient guarantees that one would be granted in time for the move of about 2,000 civil servants in 2016.

The municipal council of Brussels-City has decided to split the award of **contracts for the planned Beer Temple** in the stock exchange building in two: one contract for the planning of the concept, and another for the implementation of the plans. The project would take over part of the now largely unused building at Beurs to create a museum of Belgian beer. The council had decided in May to work with a single contractor, but the project was considered complex enough to warrant splitting.

The outgoing Flemish government has declared a temporary moratorium on prospecting for and **extraction of hydrocarbons** using the technique known as fracking. The moratorium can be prolonged or lifted once more information is available for or against the process, which involves pumping water and chemicals into the ground under high pressure to release gases trapped there millions of years ago. Critics warn that fracking is dangerous to human health and harms the environment. Antwerp province last week issued a negative opinion on plans to use fracking to extract shale gas in parts of the Netherlands bordering on the province.

OFFSIDE

Keep on trunkin'

A few weeks ago, the Flemish employment agency VDAB issued a list of what are known as bottleneck jobs – jobs for which there are insufficient qualified applicants, making it difficult to fill vacancies for positions like chef, accountant or technical staff.

There was no such problem for the vacancy that just came up at the animal park Planckendael near Mechelen. They're looking for an elephant keeper, which is one in the eye for all those who complained during elephant-keeping lessons at school that this would never be of any use in real life.

As *Flanders Today* went to press, shortly after the ad appeared, more than 70 people had applied. The elephants used to live in Antwerp Zoo, in a beautiful replica of an Egyptian temple. That's



© Michiel Dumon/Wikimedia

where Kai-Mook, the most famous elephant in Flemish history, was born in 2009. More than a million people watched his first faltering steps via webcam; in the first four days he was outside he attracted 60,000 visitors. The photo shows him with his family in 2010. So the new keeper's work will be very much in the public eye. Kai-Mook and the other four Antwerp elephants went to Planckendael

in 2012, in a move that took a year of planning. They now have a fine savannah-like field in which to roam.

"You have to be able to handle heavy physical work, that's the first requirement," explained head keeper Ben Van Dyck, adding that 60-70% of the job is upkeep of the elephants' quarters, and each elephant produces 80-100kg of manure a day. "You need to have a lot of passion," he said. "Animals don't work according to a nine-to-five schedule."

The reason for the vacancy: Former keeper Tony Verhulst and his partner, Sofie Goetghebeur, are off to France, where they intend to set up Europe's first rest-home for elephants too old for breeding or for travelling with a circus.

Alan Hope

FACE OF FLANDERS



© Kurt Desplenter/Belga

Marc Coucke

He started the week being tipped to become a billionaire before the age of 50 (he is now 49), and finished it by declaring all such rumours "nonsense". But Marc Coucke didn't seem particularly bothered by the change in his fortunes; in fact he rather seemed to enjoy it. Doing things the conventional way has never been his style.

Coucke was born in Ghent in 1965; he studied pharmacy at the University of Ghent and company management at Vlerick Business School, so it can't have been much of a surprise when he set up Omega Pharma with fellow Vlerick graduate Mario Debel. By 1987 they had brought the company to market, and it now has a turnover of more than €1 billion, 2,600 staff and operations in 35 countries.

The name may be slightly misleading, however. Omega Pharma is not really a pharmaceuticals company, dealing in drugs used to treat medical conditions. The company started off selling shampoo door to door, and still sells its shampoo, together with vitamin pills, sunscreen, pregnancy tests and such over-the-counter goods which might be considered para-pharmaceutical. The big difference is that Omega sells its products in pharmacies, where it can

work with much more rewarding margins than in shops.

For the public, Coucke is best known for his involvement in sport. One of his great loves is cycling, and he sponsors the UCI Pro Tour, as well as the Omega Pharma team. He's a familiar face at races and regularly takes part in TV coverage. The other passion is football, and last year he went from being merely director and main sponsor of KV Oostende to taking over the chairmanship from Yves Lejaeghere.

In addition, he took part in, and won, VTM's version of *MasterChef*, and chaired the jury for the inventions show *De Bedenkers* on the VRT, the first season of which gave the world *speculaaspasta*.

So he's not selling his stake in Omega Pharma, as was rumoured by Bloomberg at the start of the week – a sale that would have made him about €2.9 billion for his shares. The company is not in danger, the half-year figures (not yet released) are looking good, and there is "nothing special to be announced" in the next few months, he said at the end of the week. "Now on to the really important thing," he told reporters. "Winning this stage of the Tour de France." \ Alan Hope

FLANDERSTODAY



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5TH COLUMN

Simultaneous chess

Things don't always turn out the way you expect. Take the case some police unions took to the Constitutional Court. They protested that some officers were unable to enjoy early retirement that others got. Unexpectedly, the court ruled that the exemption for the early retirees should be shelved. As a result, no officers can retire early and some will have to work up to eight years longer than under the previous rule.

The same thing goes for politics: Things don't always turn out as you expect. When regional and community elections were introduced, it was believed that this would contribute to political stability. After all, each region and community could decide which policies it wanted, without interference from other language groups with different interests.

However, what actually happened is that one election, be it federal or regional, followed the other so quickly that politics turned into permanent campaigning – hardly a recipe for political stability. "I know exactly what decisions to take, but I do not know how I can win the elections afterwards," Bruno Tobback (SPA) famously said when he was federal environment minister. For this reason, the previous federal coalition decided that federal, regional and European elections should be held at the same time, every five years. The idea was to give governments five years, without having to worry about yet another election.

But things don't always turn out the way you expect. After the first concurrent elections, in May this year, the situation is as deadlocked as it was in 2010, when it took more than 500 days to form a federal government.

One commentator compared the current situation to playing multiple games of chess: Each player is watching several boards at the same time. The formation of a Flemish government is hampered by the insecurity of what will happen at the federal level: Will N-VA enter a federal coalition? Can Kris Peeters become prime minister?

Meanwhile, the federal negotiations are hindered by decisions made at the regional level. On the French-speaking side, PS and CDH have linked themselves, as have N-VA and CD&V on the Flemish side. There may be a way out of this stalemate yet, but for now, no one knows how. Remember, things don't always turn out the way you expect.

Anja Otte
More articles by Anja \ flanderstoday.eu

De Wever confident of Flemish government deal

CD&V warns of "tough negotiations ahead"



Derek Blyth

More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

The coalition parties N-VA and CD&V could reach an agreement early this week on forming a government of Flanders, according to a statement by N-VA chairman Bart De Wever on Friday. But the CD&V leaders are less sure that the end is in sight. The talks between the two parties were suspended on Friday because of celebrations surrounding Flemish Community Day. They resumed on Monday with a view to ironing out the final obstacles. While De Wever appears optimistic that a deal can be reached, some tough issues still need to

be resolved, according to Hilde Crevits of CD&V. The parties have to reach agreement on several new powers recently devolved to the Flemish government, including child benefit and housing subsidies, which bring with them large budgets.

Outgoing minister-president Kris Peeters (CD&V) criticised De Wever for predicting a successful agreement this week, saying "there are still some tough negotiations ahead."

Previously, top negotiators Peeters and Geert Bourgeois (N-VA) met for four hours in an attempt to get the formation of a new govern-

ment of Flanders back on track. The talks have slowed down because of the tight budgetary situation, while press leaks speak of mutual irritation between the two future coalition partners. Before the two met, the talks were mainly held in working groups with representatives of both parties. However, both parties confirm their belief in a joint coalition. "There is trust between us," sources close to the negotiators told *De Standaard*. \ DB/ Anja Otte

Agreement reached on new Brussels government

Six parties came together on Monday to present the new Brussels government. They are, on the Flemish side, socialists SPA, Christian-democrats CD&V and liberals Open VLD; on the French-speaking side socialists PS, Christians CDH and FDF. The three Flemish parties are carrying on from before the election, but without Groen, whose secretary of state, Bruno De Lille, is now out of office.

The Flemish parties began the search for a coalition by refusing to work with the FDF, but those objections have been overcome after guarantees on community matters and the protection of reforms already agreed.

The details are not yet known, but the agreement contains a commitment to create new school places and open a bilingual school, as well as encouraging immersion classes and technical and professional education. There's a plan for fiscal reform in 2017 including heavier taxes on second homes, but the disappearance of the regional tax. Priorities for mobility include the extension of the metro to Schaer-



beek and Evere, as well as a study of the broadening of the North-South link with Ukkel.

One sought-after development that has still to be ironed out is a rent allowance to help those on lower incomes meet the higher rent demands in Brussels, with sums in the region of €150-€200 a month mentioned.

Each of the negotiators must now take the deal back to his or her party for their approval, after which the portfolios will be handed out. Guy Vanhengel (Open VLD) (*pictured with Onkelinx on Saturday*) and Pascal Smet (SPA) seem almost certain to be named as Flemish ministers, with the position of Brigitte Grouwels (CD&V) less clear. \ Alan Hope

Wathelet plan for flight path changes rejected

A plan by federal transport minister Melchior Wathelet to change the flight paths of some flights arriving at and taking off from Brussels Airport has been shelved by his colleagues in the council of ministers.

Wathelet's plan would have diverted some flights which currently pass over the Brussels municipalities of Etterbeek, Oudergem and Watermaal-Bosvoorde so that they instead passed over the E40 and Sterrebeek, Kortenberg and Everberg in Flemish Brabant. In May, the government of Flanders invoked a conflict of inter-

ests, claiming Wathelet was making a decision that would have a serious impact on Flanders without consulting the region's government. That blocked the measures for 60 days, which has now run out.

The core cabinet of top ministers was unable to agree on implementing the package, however, with opposition from ministers from the three Flemish parties in the acting federal coalition, who are also the three Flemish parties in the new coalition for the Brussels region. \ AH

"A more autonomous Flanders has to be a better Flanders"

At the traditional celebration on the eve of the official Flemish holiday, departing minister-president Kris Peeters spoke in Kortrijk, site of the Battle of the Golden Spurs on 11 July, 1302. Peeters referred to this struggle of Flemish farmers, tradesmen and burghers. "712 years after thousands of Flemish stood up for their freedom for the first time, Flanders is more autonomous than ever. But an autonomous Flanders is not one that looks inward. To do that would be a grave mistake."

He therefore advocates a "mature co-operation" internationally and with the federal government, which should

"stick to its main responsibilities".

The Christian-democrat called the sixth state reform a crucial moment for Flanders: "The government of Flanders has to make choices, choices which will make the sixth state reform have a positive impact. A more autonomous Flanders has to be a better Flanders. In the days and weeks to come, we will make those choices."

Peeters also referred to the tight budgetary situation the new government of Flanders faces. "To do more with less will be the motto in the five years to come. The Flemish government can and should be leaner." \ AO

"Sell Belgian share in BNP Paribas"

The Belgian state should consider selling its share in the French banking group BNP Paribas, say an increasing number of politicians. BNP Paribas was recently fined in the US for evading American sanctions over doing business with Cuba, Iran and Sudan. Many find its dealings with Sudan – which received funds even at the time of a genocide – particularly unacceptable.

"The fine is not enough and the bank's reaction does not suffice either. The banking sector must demonstrate that this cannot be tolerated anymore," said John Crombez (SPA), departing secretary of state for the fight against fraud, on the *Canvas* news programme *Terzake*.

Crombez demanded more of a say in the banking group's affairs. If this is impossible, the Belgian state should sell its 10% share, he said. "We must see about the

timing, though," he added. Departing finance minister Koen Geens (CD&V) is due to be heard in the federal parliament's finance commission next Thursday on BNP Paribas and the quashing of the state guarantee for Arco shareholders. The Christian-democrat will shed light on the impact of the \$8.9 billion (€6.5 billion) fine BNP Paribas recently received in the US for evading sanctions over doing business with Cuba, Iran and Sudan. With a share of 10.3%, the Belgian state is the French banking group's largest shareholder. The MPs also want to hear from Michel Tilman and Emiel Van Broekhoven, the Belgian representatives on BNP Paribas' board. Both, however, though appointed by the Belgian government, are independent and cannot be held responsible, financial newspaper *De Tijd* wrote. \ AO



© Belgium Pier

A pier renaissance

Local entrepreneur saw and banked on pier's potential

continued from page 1

Englishman was the first to propose building a pier in Blankenberge in 1873.

But it took another 21 years, and three consecutive proposals, before the city got its pier. Built by the Société Anonyme du Pier de Blankenberge, a private partnership, it was the first and last pier on the Flemish coast. Across Europe, only the pier in Scheveningen in the Netherlands is comparable.

The original pier in Blankenberge was an expression of Belle Epoque optimism and wealth, constructed in iron, wood and glass. A 350-metre promenade on iron pilings jutted out from the shore, with a wide section in the middle where a music kiosk stood. At the end, an octagonal platform supported an elegant pavilion topped by a decorative cupola, which housed a restaurant and ballroom. Visitors bought a ticket at the shore end to walk along the pier.

It was very much a novelty and a treat in those days to visit the pier, and by all accounts the new attraction was a great success. Unfortunately, the pier, like the Belle Epoque society that produced it, disappeared during the First World War. The Germans set fire to the pier in 1914, fearing that England would use it as a landing point. All that was left was a blackened skeleton.

And so it remained for nearly 20 years, until the city drew up plans to rebuild the pier in 1930. The old pilings and foundations were re-used, but the main construction material was concrete. The new pier opened in 1933, with a domed pavilion in Art Deco style.

During the Second World War, the pier escaped destruction at the hands of the Germans a second time when a local commander, Sergeant Karl Hein Keselberg, disobeyed orders to blow it up. He reasoned that the water in which the pier stood was too shallow to be accessible to enemy ships, so destroying it was unnecessary. In 1994, the city of Blankenberge honoured him for his

role in saving the pier.

Between 1955 and 1999, the pier was part of the Meli amusement park, which is now Plopsaland. By the 1980s, the concrete was already showing signs of severe deterioration from constant contact with the sea. Plans were drawn up to begin restoration, but the works only began in 1999, after repeated attempts to have the structure listed as a protected monument.

The restoration of the pier was completed in 2003, the same year that it was finally declared to be part of Flanders' architectural heritage.

to find a successful concession for the pavilion. The first tenant was an attraction called Train City, which folded at the end of 2004. By that point, the self-service cafeteria had already shut its doors after a disastrous summer season.

In 2007, local entrepreneur Francis Vandendorpe took over management of the pavilion. Since then, he has developed a winning combination of tourism and business activities that have put the pier back in the black. Today, the pavilion houses a modern brasserie, an exhibition about storms and a multi-purpose

failed." His approach was to build on the original function of the pier and its connection to the sea.

The *Storms Expo* was another logical extension of the pier's maritime history and setting. The educational attraction was developed with the Royal Meteorological Institute, the coastal division of the Agency for Marine Services and Coastal Affairs, and the World Wildlife Fund. It consists of interactive exhibits on meteorology, weather systems and natural disasters, two storm simulators and a theatre showing documentaries on how to survive a major storm.

According to Sebastiaan Defoort, manager of the pier, about 100,000 visitors have passed through *Storms Expo* since it opened two years ago. Explaining that the exhibition works because it complements the other activities at the pier, he says: "People have a whole day's worth of entertainment – they can go to *Storms*, they can have a drink, they can enjoy the beach, so it's a whole package."

A large part of the pavilion, including the former ballroom, is available to hire for private functions such as weddings and corporate events. Defoort sees a historical link with the pier's past in organising parties with dancing and cocktails where

Blankenberge's high society once wined and dined. The second-floor balcony is especially popular for receptions with its 360-degree view of sea and shore.

The landmark has once more become a popular destination, but its struggle against the elements continues. Last autumn, during heavy storms that buffeted the coast, several wooden planks and part of the metal walkway were torn loose. It wasn't the first time in recent years that the pier had to be partially closed due to storm damage.

Still, these are temporary setbacks. The pier has survived worse and will likely weather many more storms. Vandendorpe, too, is optimistic about the future and is bent on continuing to develop the pier as a tourist destination. This summer, the pavilion will be transformed into a nostalgic Golden Age cafe with exhibits on the 1950s and '60s, a '70s retro pool hall and a sunset bar. No doubt this will attract more visitors and add to the holiday atmosphere. And yet everything the visitor needs to enjoy a day at the pier is already in place: the sea, the sand, the wide horizon, the wind off the water and the beautiful pavilion, rising like a great round Art Deco castle above the waves.

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The pier has survived worse and will likely weather many more storms

Besides repairing and reinforcing the weakened concrete, additional floors under the level of the platform were built so that the centre of the structure now sits in the water, giving it extra stability.

The physical structure might have been saved, but the pier's troubles weren't over yet. For the first couple of years after it reopened, attendance was low and the city struggled

event venue, while the promenade and the open walkway circling the pavilion remain freely accessible. Vandendorpe says he saw potential in the pier where others saw only financial failure. To him, the problem wasn't the pier itself, but a lack of vision in its development as a tourist attraction. "Trains and sea – they don't go together," he says. "That's a problem; that's why it



© Belgium Pier

In the early days it was very much a novelty and treat for locals to visit the "pleasure pier"



© Belgium Pier

WEEK IN BUSINESS**Airlines \ Lufthansa**

The German airline has announced it will begin offering low-cost flights from Brussels from next year, under the name of Eurowings. It will offer flights to destinations now covered by Ryanair, Vueling and EasyJet.

Biotechnology**\ Argen-X**

Biotechnology company Argen-X, based in Zwijnaarde near Ghent, arrived on the Euronext stock exchange in Brussels last week but ended its first day of trading 60c down on the initial offer price of €8.50. The company, which makes medicines based on human antibodies, raised €40 million with the sale of 4.7 million shares.

Fruit juice**\ Sunnyland**

Staff at the Turnhout base of the fruit juice producer went on strike last week in protest at the company's failure to pay premiums for the group insurance plan for the past three months, unions at the factory said. The company says the payments are on hold during a dispute with the insurer.

Shipping \ 2M

Two major international shipping lines, Maersk and MSC, have reached a 10-year agreement over the sharing of vessels, in a project to be named 2M. The agreement comes soon after the failure of the two companies to bring another shipper, CMA CGM, into a three-party alliance called P3. The agreement covers 185 ships with a total capacity of 2.1 million standard containers. Maersk is based in Denmark, while the Swiss-Italian MSC is about to move its headquarters from Geneva to the Port of Antwerp.

Technology \ Barco

West Flanders technology company Barco has promised measures to cut costs after issuing a warning to shareholders that results this year are likely to be lower than expected. According to the warning, turnover figures to be announced on 23 July will be about 17% lower than forecast at around €500 million.

Travel \ Booking.com

The hotel reservation website is to extend its presence in Brussels from a five-person operation to a new agency employing 20 staff. Last week it was warned by Dutch regulators for suggesting falsely that hotels were almost fully booked.

NMBS technicians strike

Action by staff at the maintenance yard threatens Eurostar and Thalys



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.eu

Staff at the NMBS maintenance yard in Vorst in Brussels began an unannounced strike on Monday morning when half of the night shift downed tools. The morning shift beginning at 6.00 followed. The yard principally deals with maintenance of Thalys (pictured) and Eurostar trains. The workers' aim was to hold trains inside the maintenance sheds; however, neither Thalys nor Eurostar were reporting any delays in the morning on their websites. Later in the day, no problems involving international trains had been reported.

The absence of any substantial disruption will come as a disappointment to unions at the yard, who have already announced a 25-hour stoppage to take place from Monday, 28 July at 21.00. A wildcat strike took place on 2-3 July.

Unions are protesting at plans to get rid of 80 jobs at the yard, from a total workforce of 344,



© Mauritsvink/Wikimedia

with only 20 new recruitments between now and 2017. "We're sick of it," one representative said. "The pressure on us keeps getting worse. There's fewer staff, and still more work, which leads to stress, a higher rate of absence and more industrial accidents."

In related news, the French rail authority SNCF has announced that a new high-speed direct rail

link between Brussels and Strasbourg will come into service in the spring of 2016.

The train will travel twice a day in each direction, via Lille and Paris Charles De Gaulle airport in a trip lasting three hours and 40 minutes. At present there is no direct high-speed link between the two cities, both of which host the European Parliament, other than a single trip chartered by the parliament itself.

The parliament moves to Strasbourg for one week every month and MEPs have complained of the lack of such a link.

Currently, the only link between Brussels and Strasbourg is an ordinary train that travels twice a day and takes five hours, passing through Luxembourg. Earlier this year a decision not to modernise the Brussels-Luxembourg-Basel line was taken by the three rail authorities concerned, which is thought to have influenced the SNCF's move.

Working in Brussels pays 18% more than in Flanders

The average employee in full-time employment in Brussels earns 18% more than someone in the same job working in Flanders, according to figures from the economy ministry.

For 2012, the latest year for which figures are available, the average gross monthly income in Flanders was €3,196; in Brussels the figure was €3,780. The average wage for Belgium as a whole was €3,258.

The differential has been around for a long time: In 1999 the difference was €317 a month in Brussels' favour, and the figure has fluctuated at around €300-€500 ever since.

The main reason for the difference, the ministry explains, is the number of people employed by major companies and international institutions in Brussels. The highest wages in the capital are earned by the better-educated; unskilled workers tend to earn more in Flanders. The figures concern people working in Flanders and Brussels; someone living in Flanders and travelling to work in Brussels enjoys the same advantage as a Brussels resident working in the capital. On average, men still earn more than women



© Courtesy Actiris

Jobseekers at the Brussels employment office Actiris.

in both regions: €3,919 in Brussels for men and €404 less for women; in Flanders men make €314 more than women's income of €2,959.

The highest average wage in Flanders is among workers in distribution of electricity, water and gas, at €3,922 a month. In Brussels the highest pay goes to employees of financial institutions - €4,434 a month before deductions. \ AH

Antwerp's maintenance technician programme a success

The one-year education programme that prepares young job-seekers in Antwerp for a career as a maintenance technician has been a success, with all 18 candidates obtaining their diploma. The programme, which involves practical lessons in the workplace, is an initiative of Flanders' chamber of commerce, Voka, with the Flemish employment agency, VDAB, and the city's adult education system.

Despite the high unemployment rates in Antwerp, some vacancies aren't filled, and the main bottleneck profession is that of maintenance technician. It is estimated that the Antwerp industry needs 200 to 300 new maintenance technicians each year and the regular education system can't fulfil this need.

During the special education programme, the students also had the opportunity to obtain their diploma of secondary education. Not only did all 18 students obtain their diploma, they can also all start immediately at the company where they did their internship. \ Andy Furniere

Unizo warns of "fake" job applicants

Seven in 10 employers have a problem with fake job applicants, with an average of three fakes every year for each employer, according to a poll carried out among 359 companies in Flanders by Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed.

In half of all cases, the fake applicant is applying for a job merely as proof that he or she is available for work in order to qualify for unemployment benefits. Claimants who cannot show they are actively seeking work may be ineligible for benefits. One simple way around that is to apply for jobs for which one is not qualified; employers are obliged to provide proof of an

application to a job applicant who is unemployed and requests one. One in five fake candidates openly admits to what is going on, Unizo said. "But sometimes they go about it more subtly," director-general Karel Van Eetvelt said. "They apply as usual and get their proof, and then they fail to respond to any further calls or selection tests."

The organisation called on employers to report cases of fake applications. At present, 80% of employers do not, despite the cost to them in time and effort; half of them see no point in reporting and a third don't know to whom a report should be made.

According to Unizo, the answer is



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sanctioning any abuses. Unizo also called on the agency to develop a system of rapid feedback to make it easier for employers to report cases, and urged the government to take measures against abuse. "Anyone who applied for a job solely to obtain proof should no longer be eligible for unemployment benefits," Van Eetvelt said.

Trade unions ACV and ABVV called on unemployed people to respond by reporting employers who failed to reply to job applications, and to report cases of age, sex or racial discrimination to the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight Against Racism. \ AH

Understanding asexuality

Flemish researcher lifts scientific taboo around asexuality

Andy Furniere
More articles by Andy \ flanderstoday.eu

While much progress has been made in recent decades to create more openness around different sexual orientations, asexuality remains a seldom discussed and largely unknown phenomenon.

Flemish researcher Ellen Van Houdenhove recently made a first attempt to shed more light on the matter, contacting an online community of asexual people around the world to document their experiences and opinions through surveys and personal interviews.

According to a 2004 British study, one in 100 people is asexual. Van Houdenhove decided to devote her PhD to the subject in 2010, when working on a large survey on the sexual health of Flemings – the Sexpert study by the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) and Ghent University (UGent).

"I found that very little research had been done on asexuality," Van Houdenhove says. "But I also discovered that there was a strong, established community online, in which people from all over the world exchanged experiences and supported each other."



© Tom Morris/Wikimedia Commons

their experiences in in-depth, face-to-face interviews.

Van Houdenhove found several study participants through the global Asexual Visibility and Education Network (*pictured at WorldPride in London*), which also has a separate Dutch-language website.

The difficult search for male respondents convinced Van Houdenhove that a gender gap exists in the asexual community. Only one in four of the survey respondents were male, and only two men were willing to talk to her in an interview. Since this group was too small to draw conclusions from, Van Houdenhove decided to

terms like "demi-sexual", used for individuals who only occasionally experience sexual attraction, and "grey sexual" used to describe people who are still unsure about their identity.

"Asexuality is most commonly defined through the general lack of sexual attraction," Van Houdenhove says, "but I found that people experience different gradations of the lack of sexual attraction."

In her interviews, Van Houdenhove focused on three themes: identity development, views on sex and intimacy, and experiences with love and relations. The respondents' identity development proved to be similar to that of gay individuals. "Many people feel from an early age on that they are different and wonder if they are gay or if they have certain hormonal or personality problems," Van Houdenhove explains. "When they learn about asexuality, it's like the pieces of a puzzle finally fit together."

When it came to sex and intimacy, Van Houdenhove found a wide spectrum of experiences among her interviewees. "Some of them had never kissed; others had sex on a regular basis," she says. She explains that most of the asexual individuals were able to become physically aroused, but they didn't

experience any emotional excitement. "Some asexual people just see sex as a dull chore, but others are very averse to it," she says.

Although the nine interviewees lacked sexual desire, most of them did have a strong wish to be in a romantic relationship. However, only two reported being in a relationship at the time of the interview – one with an asexual partner and the other in a long-term relationship with a non-asexual person. "Finding a partner is one of the biggest challenges in the personal lives of asexual people," Van Houdenhove says.

"The couple with one non-asexual partner had sex at scheduled times and always on the conditions of the asexual person, who is not always able to actually do it when they planned to," Van Houdenhove explains. "For this asexual person, the sex was a way of showing her love for her partner." After the interviews, another person contacted Van Houdenhove to tell her she had found an asexual partner through a specialised dating website.

Van Houdenhove's research also revealed that online forums, social media and dating websites make the daily lives of asexual people easier, but that they often experience a lack of understanding when talking about their asexuality with friends or relatives. "Youngsters especially try to share their feelings, but they often get the reaction that they just have to keep on trying," she says.

Van Houdenhove hopes her PhD can serve as a first step toward more focused research into asexuality so the phenomenon can be better understood.

\ HTTP://ASEXUALITY.ORG

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Pain objectively measured at UZ Antwerp

The University Hospital in Antwerp (UZA) is the first in the world to use devices that can measure pain in an objective way. The devices can also examine how far the pain-reducing system of patients with chronic pain is disturbed. Until now, patients have had to estimate their pain experience on a scale from one to 10. Israeli firm Medoc has developed two pain measuring devices, which are used in Antwerp for the first time, thanks to a long co-operation between the company and the UZA. One, Medasense, can measure acute pain with a sensor on the finger. The device measures on the basis of seven parameters such as blood flow, and determines a pain gradation through a mathematical formula. The other, the CPM, judges whether the pain monitoring system in chronic pain patients is functioning correctly by measuring reactions to big or small temperature changes.

New bacterium found in Flemish patient

The laboratory for clinical biology of the AZ Delta hospital in Roeselare, West Flanders, has discovered a new disease-causing bacterium. *Atopobium deltae* was found in a wound and the blood of a patient with a very serious skin infection. The research laboratory for bacteriology of Ghent University helped analyse the bacterium. "New bacteria are mostly found on plants or animals or in very specific biological environments like deep-sea waters," microbiologist Steven Vervaeke of AZ Delta told *De Morgen*. "Most bacteria are harmless for a normally healthy person; scientists don't often find a new bacteria that can immediately be linked to an infection."

Too few pregnant women vaccinated

Since the start of the month, pregnant women have been able to get a free vaccination against whooping cough from their gynaecologist or doctor. A study by the University Hospital of Leuven among 250 pregnant women demonstrated the need for the measure: 42.8% of pregnant women were vaccinated against the flu and 39.2% against whooping cough. The percentage who were vaccinated against both was much lower, at 23.6%. The government of Flanders wants to see half of all pregnant women being vaccinated by 2020. \ AF

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Youngsters often get the reaction that they just have to keep on trying

For her PhD research, part of a collaboration between KU Leuven and UGent, Van Houdenhove drew up a list of questions, which were answered by 460 respondents, mainly from Europe, the US, Canada and South America. Nine women also agreed to talk about

only interview the nine women. "It seems there are fewer asexual men in general, and they are also less open about their feelings," she says.

One important survey conclusion was that the asexual community is far from a homogeneous one, with



alised approach in the search for a correct patient treatment. After almost two years of working with

\ WWW.INNOVATIVECANCERRESEARCHFUND.COM

the model, we have noticed promising results in terms of its effectiveness. The correlation between success in the lab and success in the patient is much greater than in the traditional model.

How are potential patient drugs typically tested at this time?

Determining a therapy for a patient is now often done via a cell line, which means that tumour cells are grown in test tubes in the lab and researchers study their responses to different treatments. The problem is that about 95% of the drugs that work on the test tube samples don't have a positive effect for the patient. Not only is this psychologically hard on patients, they are also often confronted with severe side effects. \ Interview by Andy Furniere

Q&A

Researchers of the oncology department at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) have established a new fund for cancer research. Professor Frédéric Amant was appointed chair of the new fund

Why was it necessary to establish this fund?

We regularly receive subsidies from, for example, the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO), but only for specific projects. With our new fund, we hope to bring together financial resources for the work of our research team in general. We categorised the donation possibilities into three themes on our website: Our first goals are to collect €150,000 for research, €240,000 for scientific staff and €60,000 for technology. The Leuven-based nanotech research centre imec made the first big donation, of €31,000. We hope to quickly get more funding

by actively consulting our network to find possible benefactors.

The funding will initially be used to implement a personalised cancer therapy model

Yes, via the Patient-Derived Tumour Xenografts project. We essentially plant cancer tissue from a patient into mice and let the tissue grow in the mice until enough of it is available to test how that tissue responds to different drugs. The growing process can take up to a year, but during that time our researchers can map the genetic and other characteristics of the tumour. This makes it possible to apply a highly person-

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Entrepreneurs of the future

iMinds incubator for digital start-ups lauded as one of Europe's best



Senne Sterckx

More articles by Senne \ flanderstoday.eu

\ WWW.IMINDS.BE

In a recent interview with *De Tijd*, Marc Coucke, founder of pharmaceutical company Omega Pharma and one of Flanders' best-known businessmen, complained that the press always portrayed him as an example of successful entrepreneurship. "I've been a textbook case for almost 20 years," he said. "Where's the next generation?"

Maybe these new entrepreneurial faces are to be found in the world of information and communications technology (ICT), more particularly in the rapidly expanding sector of software development. Flanders' digital research centre, iMinds, launched a business incubation programme three years ago to help these digital entrepreneurs and their start-up companies grow.

"Our core business is to help firms and young entrepreneurs, even students, to secure paying customers, to create steady growth and to obtain an international outlook," says Sven De Cleyn, co-ordinator of the centre's iStart programme. "Hence, by entering iStart, they raise their chances of being successful."

So what happens once your company has joined the iStart programme? "We support start-up digital entrepreneurs, people who develop innovative ICT applications," De Cleyn explains. "We give them a leg-up in the form of a large coaching and support package carried out by our experts. This package deals primarily with the development of a working business around one product. We also provide a bit of start-up capital." One of the first iStart participants in 2012 was the digital start-up Ontoforce. Founded in



© nilsblancaert.be
The iStart programme gives start-up entrepreneurs access to a large network of veteran experts

2011 by three Ghent students and currently employing nine people, the company offers a web-based smart search engine called DisQover that can perform semantic queries: In other words, it can take into account the different meanings of a word.

In a world that increasingly revolves around data, a tool like DisQover could help companies search their databases more quickly and thoroughly, and help them separate useable data from nonsense.

"In the first place, we are aiming at pharmaceutical and biotech companies," says Hans Constandt, one of the Ontoforce founders. "With our search tool, these companies can save a lot of time during the first phases of their research programmes for new drugs." The Ontoforce founders

have already sold DisQover to one big pharma multinational and to several Flemish biotech firms. Ontoforce received €100,000 from iMinds in its start-up phase. "But more important was the access to a large group of experienced people, provided by iMinds," Constandt says. "This gave us the opportunity to begin with and speed up the commercialisation of our product. It was only thanks to this expertise – also in marketing and sales – that we were able to reach the next level." With its high ranking in the University Business Incubator index, the iStart programme itself received a significant boost recently. The annual Swedish initiative offers a comprehensive list of more than 300 business incubation programmes around the world. While this was only the first

time iStart had participated, it finished seventh in Europe, and 25th around the world. According to the Swedish compilers of the list, the strength of the Flemish programme relies heavily on proper access to funds and good post-incubation performance indicators. This means that iStart's participants show higher survival and growth rates than the average incubator participant.

Still, it is worth mentioning that not everyone is simply allowed to join the iMinds incubator. "We have rather severe selection criteria," De Cleyn says. "Only one in five applications is approved. Nevertheless, we have given support to more than 50 start-ups since the programme was founded in 2011 – good for more than 150 new full-time jobs in less than three years."

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Students score well in finance test

Flemish 15-year-olds performed remarkably well on financial knowledge in the global Programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa) conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It assesses 15-year-olds' performance in maths, science and reading. In total, 29,000 students participated in the last test, which took place in 2012; detailed results of the financial knowledge test have just been released. In a ranking of 18 countries and regions, students from Flanders came second on financial knowledge to students from Shanghai. More than three in four Flemish students were capable of choosing the most advantageous loan from options with different interest rates, instalments and validities. In Shanghai, more than 90% of 15-year-olds demonstrated this ability.

Weaknesses in medical entrance exam

The entrance exam for doctor and dentist studies disadvantages girls and those who speak a language other than Dutch at home, according to researchers from the Free University of Brussels (VUB), who examined the 2013 results. The president of the exam, Bernard Himpens, has recognised the issues and is willing to make adjustments. The researchers found that girls were less inclined to guess at an answer, and that 40% of participants had highly educated parents who were active in the healthcare sector. The researchers conclude that the exam is extremely difficult and requires much more knowledge than can be acquired in secondary education. In the first exam this year, only 10% of participants passed.

VUB students may get direct vote

The board of directors at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) would like all their students given the right to vote directly in the election of a new rector. A definitive decision on possible reform of election procedures will be made in September. In the rector elections, the student population would have about 10% of the votes; the VUB would be the first university in Flanders to introduce this policy. Students will probably be able to vote directly for the first time in 2016. The board has given its principal agreement; now staff and students can judge the new regulation.

Q&A

PXL University College in Hasselt, Limburg, has appointed psychologist Saartje Kortleven as its first summer coach to help students better prepare for their exam resits

What is the importance of your role?

During the academic year, students can receive a lot of advice from study counsellors and large services like Teleblok – the telephone helpline and chat service of the Christian Mutual. But during the period before exam resits, there was little support available – until now. I will provide this guidance during the summer months, and I will act as a regular study counsellor from mid-September.

What kinds of questions are you getting?

A lot of students struggle to

deal with fear of failure, stress, procrastination and personal problems. But I also get a lot of questions on the best study methods and good study planning to prepare for the exams. Students also ask for tips on how to take the exams, for example, how to answer open questions and how to avoid black-outs. Many of the students wonder where they went wrong in the first exam period. Other students are confused about how the system of learning credits works and how the resits will be organised. The majority of the questions come from first-year students.



How can students reach you?

Via our website, students can ask for an individual appointment to

get advice in person. A survey we carried out among our students indicated that there was a large need for personal consultations. But students can also talk to me from their own rooms during daily one-hour chat sessions or via my Facebook page, on which I also post study tips. I will also be present in person at the library where students can study in groups or individually, so they can ask me questions then, too. Students can also participate in *leerateliers* or learning workshops. In these sessions, I work with groups on topics such as study planning, exam preparation, taking exams, fear of failure and stress in an interactive way. \ Interview by Andy Furniere

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Brussels Boat Tour

Discover Brussels by water on a guided cruise along the Zenne Canal between Molenbeek and Anderlecht. **20 July, 10.00-13.30, Havenlaan 6, reservations required, €6 for adults, €5 for ages 3-12**

\ WWW.RIVERTOURS.BE

Expo Dino Adventure

Fifty huge realistic dinosaurs have gathered at Antwerp's Central Station for the summer. Activities include scavenger hunt and fossil dig. **Daily 10.00-17.00 until 31 August, closed Mondays except 21 July, Kievitplein, €12.95-€14.95**

\ WWW.EXPO-DINO-ADVENTURE.BE

Legends and Folk Tales walk

A two-hour guided nature walk with a storyteller in the beautiful Voerstreek, a corner of Flemish Limburg bordered on all sides by the Netherlands and Wallonia. **In Dutch. 19 July, 16.00-18.00. Voerstreek visitors' centre, Pley 13, 's-Gravenvoeren, adults €1, under-12s free**

\ WWW.VOERSTREEK.BE

Medieval arts and crafts

Learn about arts and crafts in the middle ages this summer at Historium in Bruges. Demonstrations of lace-making, calligraphy and painting, plus live music played on medieval instruments. **Daily 10.00-18.00 until 31 August, Markt 1, adults €11, children €5.50. For information on art workshops email sien@historium.be**

\ WWW.HISTORIUM.BE

Retro Bike Race

Bring your pre-1980 road bike and vintage racing togs for a fun contest with lots of nostalgic atmosphere. There's also a slow biking contest, live music, food and entertainment. **21 July, race starts at 14.30, Huysmanshoeve Eeklo provincial centre, Bus 1, Eeklo, register online**

\ WWW.EEKLO.BE/RETROKOERS

Belle Epoque picnic

Celebrate the birthday of Antwerp Zoo with old-fashioned games, historical dance lessons and live music. Contest and prizes for best Belle Epoque costumes. Picnic baskets available to order in advance via the website. **20-21 July, 10.00-19.00, €17.50-€22.50**

\ WWW.ZOOANTWERPEN.BE

Vintage sounds

Recording studio in Antwerp does it all the old-fashioned way



Marc Maes

More articles by Marc \ flanderstoday.eu

\ WWW.BOBONNERECORDS.COM

It may sound a bit odd: In this digital era, why would anyone start up a fully analogue recording studio complete with vintage microphone and collector's-item eight-track tape recorder? The answer can be found at Bobonne Records, a small creative label in Ekeren, just north of Antwerp.

The throwback theme is reflected in the name: Bobonne is an affectionate nickname in Belgium for an elderly woman. In this case it refers to founder Guido Op de Beeck's grandma – since what was once her house is now the home of the label, the musicians and a new studio.

The idea to start working in the analogue domain came up three years ago, when Op de Beeck finished the first record with his band Matt Watts & The Calicos. "The record label came first;



© Marc Maes
Op de Beeck and Gimenez in the recording studio that was once Op de Beeck's grandmother's home

Barcelona, came in as sound engineer. "I was charmed and tempted by the analogue idea," he says. "Recording without overdubs, no

Op de Beeck bought from a collector in the Netherlands. Bobonne is probably the only studio in the Benelux recording on eight-track. With only eight tracks to record on instead of 16 or 24, he says, "choices and compromises are key."

Recordings are made with a D&R Triton console, a Dutch-manufactured mixing desk. "The big advantage is that the guy who designed it in the early 1990s is just one phone call away and available for questions or any adjustments we'd like to do," says Gimenez.

A vintage RCA microphone is the crown jewel of Bobonne's collection. "The microphone's excellent sound quality is crucial," says Op de Beeck. "Artists who record here have to make their choice from our microphone range before the recording process starts – once you've made that choice, you save

time in mixing the music."

Op de Beeck and Gimenez have kept the look of the house wherever possible, only now a 25cm thick acoustic glass wall and a solid steel door separate the studio's live room from the control area. The original room's acoustics add to the value of the recording, and the adjacent garage is sometimes used as natural reverberation. As Op de Beeck says, "Why should we use a digital reverb plug-in if the natural reverb is so much better?"

Bobonne opened the studio in March, and both Op de Beeck and Gimenez attend concerts and festivals to inform artists about the possibilities of analogue recording. "The first reactions came from artists with a long pedigree rather than from new bands," explains Op de Beeck. "Last week we had (Flemish band) Laïs recording vocals here – they know how to work with microphones and appreciate the technology and atmosphere." He says most young bands are familiar with the analogue concept but fear that it will be more expensive. Gimenez: "An artist like Jack White, who records on eight-track analogue, opened up the floodgates – more and more bands are challenging themselves to record in a studio with few overdubs."

Finally, a digital converter brings the analogue sounds into the 21st century; although they are both vinyl aficionados, Op de Beeck and Gimenez are well aware that transferring musical content to iTunes, MP3 and other platforms is essential.

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Rule number one is:
No cellphones, iPads or laptops in
the studio – focus on the music

we wanted to establish a platform for young artists to release their material," he says. "Then came the studio. In my opinion, the analogue recording process seemed so much more logical than working with digital equipment." Op de Beeck teamed up with Joan Gimenez, who, after two years' audio engineering training in

safety nets; it's a process that fully captures the musicians' spontaneity. They have to concentrate so much more during the sessions." "And that's why rule number one is: No cellphones, iPads or laptops inside the studio – stay focused on the music," adds Op de Beeck. At the heart of the studio is a Studer A80 eight-track tape recorder that

BITE In which we preserve

Judging by the buzz surrounding fermentation on the internet these days, you might think it was the Latest Big Thing. In fact we've been doing it for thousands of years.

Say the word and most people – especially in Belgium – think of beer, but there's more to fermentation than turning barley into bliss. It's omnipresent in the kitchen – cheese and bread are both products of fermentation, as are yoghurt, olives, *zuurkool* (sauerkraut) and pickles. It's the perfect method of preserving fruits and vegetables in season for those times when they're no longer available, as was the case in most of human history and is still the case if you're concerned about the carbon footprint of, say, your asparagus.

Unlike the fermentation that takes place in the brewery, this sort produces no alcohol, or not enough to be concerned with. Instead of using yeast to consume starch and produce ethanol and carbon dioxide, this type of fermentation uses lactic acid to preserve foods, while also substantially changing their flavour. Fermented foods contain beneficial enzymes, vitamins and probiotics that aid

digestion.

Lacto-fermentation takes place in the presence of a brine – a solution of salt in water, with the addition of aromatics like pepper, coriander seeds or herbs, and the optional addition of some liquid whey, which is easily obtained from supermarket yoghurt strained through a cloth overnight – with the added bonus of some thick, Greek-style yoghurt as a by-product. With vinegar, the food becomes a pickle, but the process is substantially the same.

By stumbling from one internet recipe to another, I've had varying results with



© Ingimage

fermented garlic, radishes, baby turnips, carrots and cucumbers, as well as pickled radishes, spring onions and dill pickles. Then I went looking for the next level, and thanks to the Brussels library system I was able to sample a whole shelf full of books on this subject, before coming across one which is far and away the most useful. It's called *Ingemaakt* (Potted), by Geraardsbergen-born sisters Els and Iris Debrremaeker, who have been running their blog The Yummy Blog-sisters since 2010. Els is also a personal chef. The book contains recipes for chutneys, preserves, pickles and other preparations like potted cherries, aromatic oil and vinegar and versions of Indonesian *sambal* or chilli sauce, Middle Eastern preserved lemons and Japanese *umiboshi* (pickled plum sauce). Not to mention the old favourites. Any one of the recipes could be tarted up in a pretty bottle or jar as a gift. \ Alan Hope

Ingemaakt by Els & Iris Debrremaeker is published in Dutch by Manteau.

Underneath the varnish

Conservators are peering beneath the layers added to van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece



Diana Goodwin

More articles by Diana \ flanderstoday.eu

One of Flanders' greatest art treasures and cultural artefacts is undergoing a dramatic transformation. It may never look the same again – and yet it may soon more closely resemble the original work as intended by its creators.

The conservation team currently working on the physical investigation, cleaning and restoration of Jan van Eyck's "The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb", also known as the Ghent Altarpiece, have announced an important discovery. After removing yellowed layers of varnish, conservators were able to determine that large areas of the painted surface are in fact overpaint or retouching, added perhaps hundreds of years after van Eyck.

Treatment of the Ghent Altarpiece began in October 2012 and is being carried out in stages. Currently, the back panels of the two side wings, designed to be visible when the altarpiece is closed, are undergoing analysis and cleaning at a conservation laboratory at the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent. A glass window allows visitors to watch the conservators in action. The remaining panels continue to be on view at Sint-Baaf's Cathedral.

The overpaint affects large areas of all six panels and covers the garments of the depicted donors, the robes of the Archangel Gabriel and of the Virgin Mary, architectural elements in the background, and the grisaille depictions of Saint John the Evangelist and Saint John the Baptist. The repainted areas were difficult to distinguish from the original paint layer with the naked eye, especially when covered with thick, discoloured varnish.

The conservation team was able to determine with great certainty which areas have been repainted, using technology developed by scientists at the University of Antwerp (UA) and Delft University in the Netherlands. They created a mobile scanner that lets investigators know exactly what non-organic materials make up the different layers of paint covering a two-dimensional surface. The device has also been used to examine paintings by Van Gogh, Rubens, Rembrandt, Hans Memling and Jackson Pollock.

X-ray fluorescence, or XRF, has been used for years to analyse the chemical compounds present in each layer of paint. Art historians and conservators use this data to determine when and how different pigments were used. But

until recently, this type of investigation was hampered by the fact that it could only be performed *in situ* using a small, focused X-ray device. Single points of the painted surface could be analysed, but this method yielded only fragmentary data about the work as a whole.

Large-scale XRF can be performed by a scientific device called a synchrotron, which is a type of particle accelerator the size of a warehouse. There are only a handful of these facilities in the world, and bringing fragile paintings to them for analysis can be risky. The Macro-XRF scanner invented by professor Koen Janssens (UA) and professor Joris Dik of Delft University, on the other hand, allows the entire painting to be scanned at once, one tiny area at a time, and the resulting data can be mapped over the surface as a whole. In this way, separate pigment maps can be created for each element and superimposed on the original work, yielding information about the artist's methods as well as later interventions and damage to the paint surface.

The Macro-XRF device is also portable, allowing it to be brought to works of art wherever they are. There are currently two such devices built by the Flemish-Dutch team; in addition to the one used on the Ghent Altarpiece, another has been travelling in the United States, on loan to institutions such as the Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

The data obtained from the XRF scan of the van Eyck panels confirmed the conservators' observations about later overpainting to the altarpiece. In the case of the portrait of female donor Elisabeth Borluut, there seemed to be a second layer of red paint covering her original gown. Chemical analysis of a microscopic paint sample



Conservators at work on van Eyck's "The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb" in Ghent

confirmed that the upper layer incorporates the pigment azurite, which contains copper.

The copper distribution map

texture and shadows consistent with other works by van Eyck. Pigment analysis of the crimson overpaint layer also revealed the

Last autumn, the Ghent conservation team convened a panel of international experts to present their preliminary findings from the cleaning and analysis of the altarpiece. Art historians, painting conservators and museum curators responded enthusiastically to the new data and agreed that the overpainting should be removed. The next phase of the treatment process will reveal even more of Van Eyck's original masterpiece.

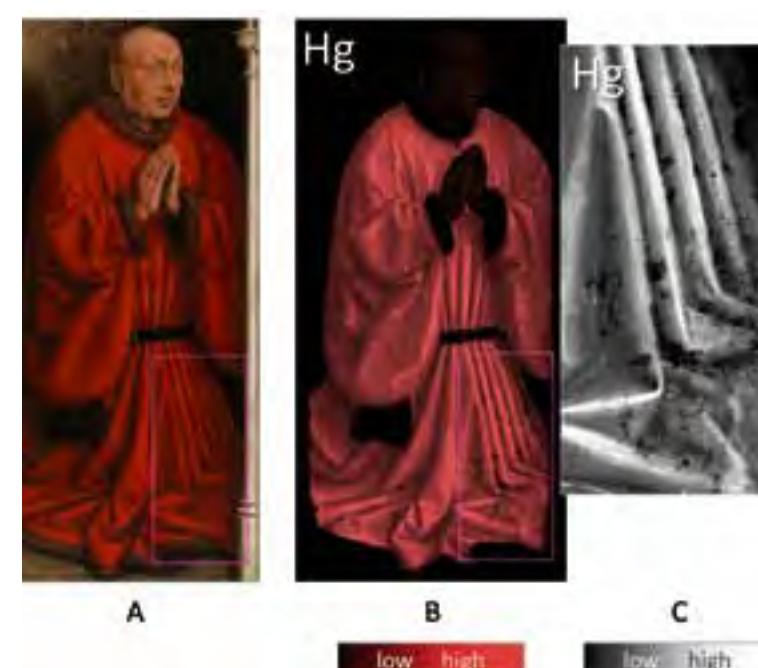
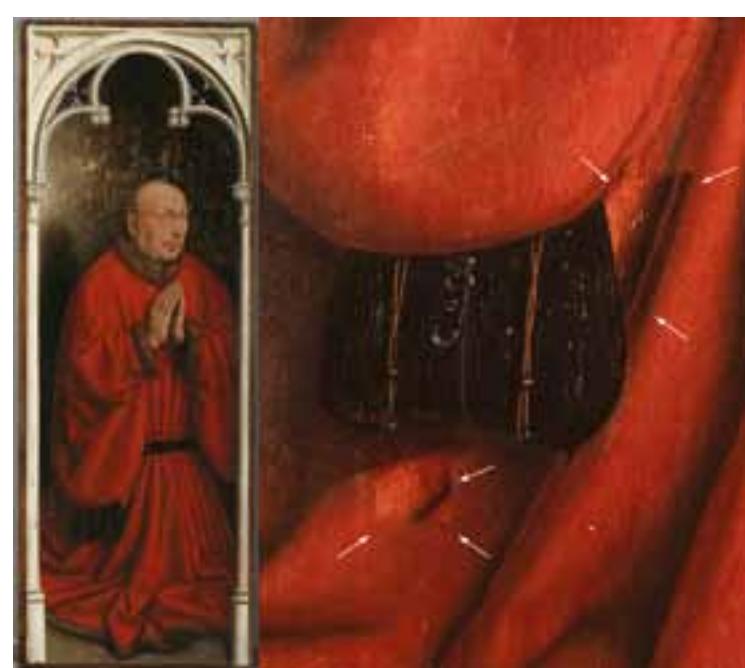
An exhibition about the restoration of "The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb" is on at the Caermersklooster cultural centre in Ghent. In addition, a website allows users to zoom in on high-resolution images of each panel and see the results of the original conservation assessment. The restoration is expected to be finished in 2017.

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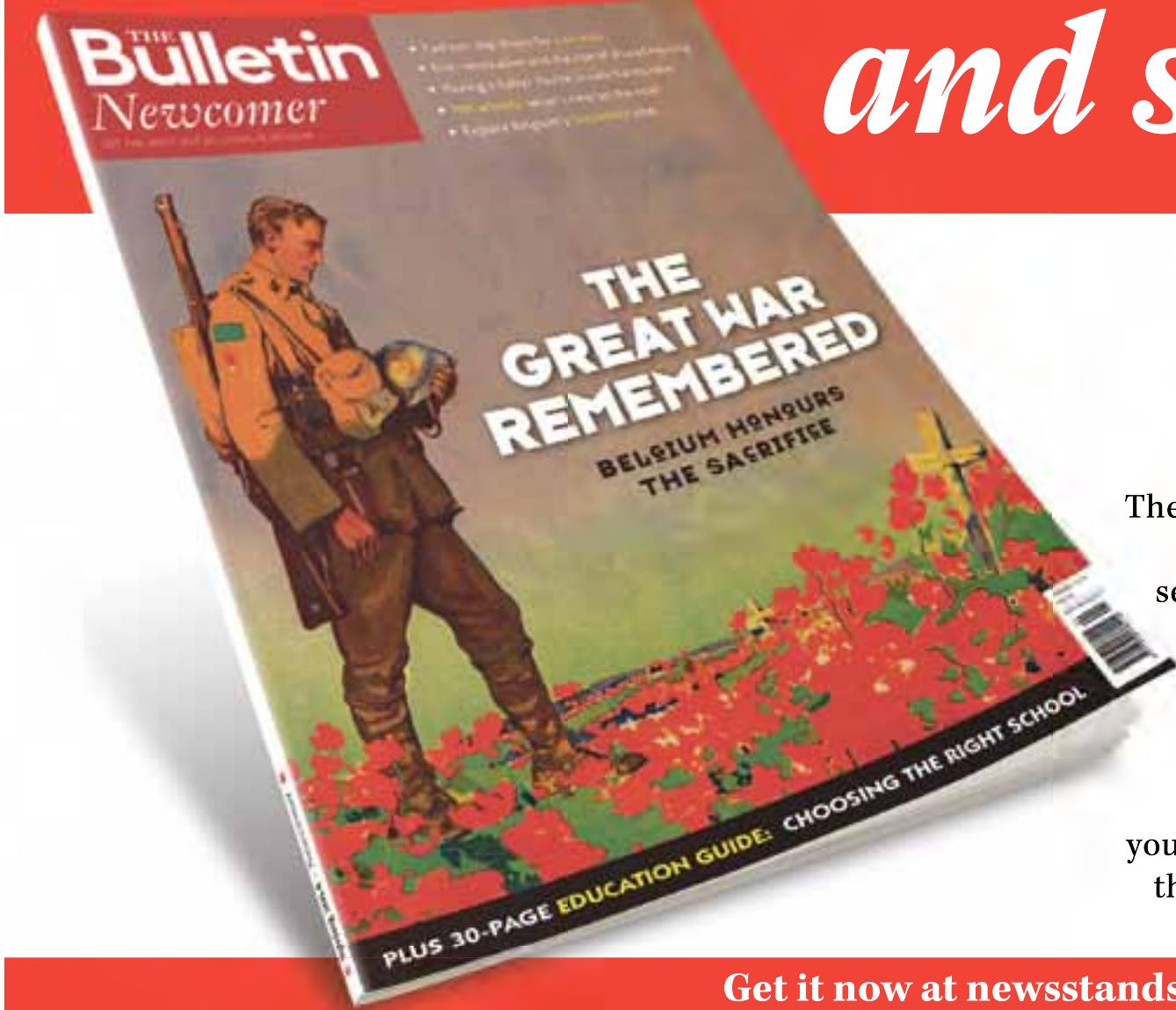
Art historians, conservators and museum curators agreed that the overpainting should be removed

created by the Macro-XRF scanner showed that a small test area, cleaned of the upper paint layer, contains no copper. Thus, it is possible to clearly differentiate between van Eyck's painting and the later overpainting. The original painting revealed beneath the cleaned area shows a more delicate and nuanced handling of

presence of kermes, an organic dye derived from dried insects and widely used in the middle ages. In the 1600s, cochineal from the New World replaced kermes as the source of crimson dye in Europe, so conservators are confident that the overpainting can be dated to before the middle of the 17th century.



Latest guide to life and schools



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A personal touch

Mechelen's Photo Event exhibition displays images of innocence lost

 Tom Peeters
More articles by Tom \ flanderstoday.eu

Mechelen's summer exhibition, *Photo Event*, displays the work of local talent alongside internationally acclaimed visual artists. This year, its stars include fast prints by Hans Op de Beeck, staring children by William Ropp and damaged women by Klaartje Lambrechts.

In organising *Photo Event*, the Centrum Voor Beeldexpressie (CvB) – the Flemish centre for amateur visual arts – always tries to push the boundaries between the professional and the amateur, as well as the local and the international. All works can be seen this year at two splendid locations: on the top floor of Mechelen's cultural centre and in the centre's venue De Garage. This year's selection features three top names along with four local talents trying to develop careers in the arts. Also, for the first time, five members of the CvB were given the chance to exhibit. While this amateur selection is hanging downstairs in the hallway of the culture centre, it remains a way for the CvB to support the amateur landscape and encourage their members to strive for the quality seen elsewhere on the exhibition walls. Indeed, the amateur artists complement their professional counter-

parts upstairs. It is striking to see how the images of Lis Antognoni (1991), Frederik Haegeman (1981) and Sylvia Konior (1972) illustrate the human condition, often surrounded by elements of nature – one of the overall themes here – and yet distil a very personal record or comment on a society they have difficulties fitting into. In the way they have to cope with these contrasting emotions and search for a moment of silence, they do not differ so much from the established photographers.

The French photographer William Ropp (1960) is known for illustrating the more mysterious aspects of human nature, photographing girls in between trees or details of the human body. Two years ago, the artist impressed audiences with retrospectives in Charleroi and Paris. This time, he is displaying a mix of black-and-white shots and new material in colour.

There is an element of coyness in his young faces with wide-open staring eyes that somehow convey no innocence at all that makes one wonder what is hiding behind. The most explicit images on display are shot by another French photographer. In the work of Magnum member Antoine D'Alata (1961), you can definitely feel the influence of Nan Goldin and Larry Clark, artists D'Alata met when he was



© Lisa Carletta
Childhood inspiration is the through line in Lisa Carletta's universe

studying in New York in the early 1990s.

It is not how a photographer looks at the world that is important, but their intimate relationship with it, he claims. As a result he takes on taboo subjects, expressing carnal lust between decaying bodies, craving satisfaction. For D'Alata, photography is a weapon to face reality, and the sexually explicit is a means to get closer to this goal. "I am drawn to the flesh as a place of resistance," he explained previously. "I am drawn to the other, as long as he represents a threat." Compared to these intense and harshly coloured pictures, the selection of the four local talents is far more subdued, though they also tell an intimate story. Take the clean, white studio photos of young females by Klaartje Lambrechts (1976). Behind the purity and innocence of pale skin, blonde locks and white dresses, small details – in blood red – disguise hidden bruises and injuries.

"There is always something beneath the surface," explains Lambrechts. Two years ago she swapped her successful career as business director of the Antwerp fashion company AF Vandevorst for a more uncertain life as a professional photographer. The new series she displays in Mechelen is accompanied by the poem *Ademloos* (Breathless). "The face of my models is often covered, by hair, by hands," Lambrechts says, as if their breath is taken and they are ashamed of a hurt they are trying to hide.

These pure images of damaged girls evoke not so much a physical pain, but rather a fragile mental state. What a contrast with the decorative abundance of Lisa Carletta

(1982), who is creating her own fictitious and colourful characters – wearing wigs, surrounded by cats or eating muffins on the couch. But, one notices, in her universe there is also a great deal of childhood inspiration, and as a visitor you equally get the feeling that this abundance is hiding something, though you can't easily put your finger on what. Julie Calbert (1985) has also been given an exhibition room, but she chose to only use one wall, filling it with picture frames, evoking a teenage bedroom or even a diary, filled with visual memories. A bed, nostalgic wallpaper, a birdcage, long hair and trees: There is not much tangible information here; everything looks trite. But Calbert expresses herself through the feelings, the space and the mystery her images impersonate, stressing the complexity of it all.

Kurt Stallaert (1969) comes from the world of fashion and publicity photography. In a darkened room, he presents one of his "moving stills", combining film and photography. In the middle, there's a large triptych of a bathing woman and against the wall there are portraits. But much more unsettling is a picture of a vintage room with a table between two empty chairs, as if we are waiting for a psychologist and a patient to take a seat. In De Garage, a space for contemporary art, Flemish multidisciplinary visual artist Hans Op de Beeck (1969) makes a comment on society today, not merely by showing a

selection of his photographic work since 1998, but also by the way it is presented.

The images, cheap but smooth prints of the originals, are attached on the wall with thumbtacks. And visitors are encouraged to take home two of the prints.

The fast prints emphasise the improvisational and temporary character of the exhibition, of contemporary photography, and of even the world today. This contrasts sharply with the meticulously staged images by the artist, shot on location and in his studio. One room of De Garage is filled with stylish black-and-white images. The dark is rising on the images, but the light, masterfully directed by the photographer and entering gracefully through windows and shutters, plays the leading role here.

The other room is more colourful, but also alienating – for instance, the bright image of a wedding buffet Op de Beeck staged in 2008 in a Phoenix desert. "I was making a film there while teaching at Arizona State University," he recalls.

"The image shows how ridiculously artificial our presentations of rituals like weddings are. Look at the hilarious, temporarily kitsch table, contrasting with the timeless and uncompromising desert landscape." Here again we see the innocence of a child, dressed up as a pink princess, used as a witness to a tragicomic scene of adult life.



© Klaartje Lambrechts
One of Klaartje Lambrechts' damaged women

Until 24 August

Culture Centre,
Minderbroedersgang 5, Mechelen
De Garage,
Onder den Toren 12A, Mechelen

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

De Maan theatre co-founder dies

Louis Contryn, co-founder and honorary director of Mechelen city puppet theatre De Maan, has died in hospital in Duffel at the age of 85. Contryn's father, Jef, ran a puppet theatre, which grew into the city puppet theatre in 1965. Contryn became artistic director and later general director of the theatre at the foot of the Saint Rumbold cathedral tower. He retired in 1995, when the theatre took the name De Maan (The Moon). His son Paul carries on the family tradition, working as house scenographer for the theatre.

New Tomorrowland investigation

The organisers of the Tomorrowland dance festival have said they are "very surprised" at the announcement by the Antwerp prosecutor's office of a new investigation into the festival's affairs, this time in connection with free tickets granted to members of Antwerp provincial council. The investigation is the automatic result of a complaint filed by lawyer Griet Cnudde, who represented local residents in trying to have the festival's second weekend this month cancelled. The start of an investigation does not signify that criminal offences took place, the prosecutor said. Antwerp province later granted Tomorrowland an environmental permit for 20 years, something organisers said a court had already ruled was in order.

Dirk Bracke's novels to become film

Black and Back, two novels for young adults by Flemish author Dirk Bracke, will be the basis for a new film, called *Black* and directed by Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah, former students at Sint-Lukas art school in Brussels and directors of *Bergica* (2012) and *Image* (2014). Shooting on the film, the story of a girl member of a street gang who falls in love with a member of a rival gang, will begin this month in Brussels. The screenplay is by Nele Meirhaeghe, who also scripted 2010's *Bo* and the TV series *Danni Lowinski*. The actors were found by streetcasting.

15,000 play MIVB game
More than 15,000 people have downloaded the free Time-Jump game for smartphones, launched by the Brussels public transport authority MIVB last month to mark its 60th birthday. In that time, 200 people have completed all levels of the game, which can be downloaded free for Android or iPhone.

Rave and resist

Jan Beddegenoodts releases two documentaries about Palestine



Bjorn Gabriels

More articles by Bjorn \ flanderstoday.eu

\ WWW.JANBEDGEENOODTS.COM

Palestinian youngsters are often called a generation of hope and despair. The latest escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a further reminder, if one was needed, of how the historic dispute permeates every aspect of their existence. Hope and despair are also at odds in two youth-centred documentaries by Antwerp filmmaker Jan Beddegenoodts, recently released on DVD (with Dutch and English subtitles).

Shortly after his return from a screening tour in Israel, 26-year-old Beddegenoodts told us about the strenuous years making and distributing these films. "It all started in 2011, when I went to Israel to expose how Dexia's Israeli affiliate financially supported illegal settlements there," he says. "But Dexia collapsed the week after I left Belgium. I then got involved in a very contradictory experience, as I went back and forth between Palestinian protests and large rave parties on the Israeli side."

Beddegenoodts' debut, *The Taste of Freedom*, reflects this. It's a dialectic trip, fuelled by pounding beats and violent confrontations. Interviews with friends he made while partying and protesting evoke the conflicting experience. "We struggle to live, they struggle to enjoy their lives," one of them says.

Yet *The Taste of Freedom* tried to embrace a positive perspective. "The film ends with a montage of portraits I made of both Palestinian and Israeli friends," says Beddegenoodts.

"The conflict is about huge military and economic interests, while all these people just want to live their lives. So, I absolutely tried to offer hope. But, as this was my first film, *The Taste of Freedom* is perhaps also somewhat naive in that sense."

Gripped by what he saw, Beddegenoodts then worked with collabora-



A still from *Thank God it's Friday*, which examines the relationship between a Palestinian town and the neighbouring Israeli settlement

rator Niel Iwens on *Thank God it's Friday*, which documents the relationship between the Palestinian town Nabi Saleh and the neighbouring Israeli settlement Halamish.

With its green pastures and colourful flowerbeds fenced off from the surrounding hardship, the latter seems paradisiacal. Certainly in comparison with tattered Nabi Saleh, which is regularly invaded by Israeli forces and where children's play is infected by the atrocities they have had to endure from

protest is useless.

"*Thank God it's Friday* has a different tone to my first documentary," says Beddegenoodts. "The Israeli settlers I interviewed were not my friends and the film is far less hopeful than *The Taste of Freedom*. It ends with the reactions of some of the settlers on the film. 'There's no hope when you look at this', one of them says."

Nonetheless, the feedback from both sides was crucial to Beddegenoodts. "*Thank God it's Friday* was a lengthy project in which

“

People in Israel often don't want to see a film by yet another foreigner about their situation

a young age – even in their own backyard.

Every Friday, the Palestinians protest. Their demonstrations are met with teargas and rubber bullets, and, at some point, one of the protesters is killed. The settlers respond uncomprehendingly. In their eyes, the weekly ritual of

we also showed a man dying. And you have to be aware that making a film entails personal choices. From every hundred images you shoot, only one makes it into the film. You put those together and select the music.

"After all these personal filters, we just wanted a reality check. We

decided it would be fairest to show the film to the people involved first and incorporate their reactions into the film."

Later, YouTube decided to delete the trailer of *Thank God it's Friday* after an Israeli complaint. "It was staggering to see that an independent filmmaker can be silenced like that," says Beddegenoodts. "But I've received a lot of heart-warming reactions from other directors, journalists and so on. And we've toured extensively with the film." Beddegenoodts refused to back down from the challenge of showing his documentary throughout Israel. He hoped to reach a mixed crowd of Palestinians and Israelis, as he had done before with a screening tour of *The Taste of Freedom*.

"*Thank God it's Friday* drew full crowds, but not of Israelis. Unfortunately, we didn't manage to reach a mainstream Israeli audience. People in Israel are often fed up and don't want to go see a film by yet another foreign filmmaker about their situation. And part of me understands that. But we keep trying. The DVD will be released there as well and we're still in talks about screenings at Israeli universities. But it's a very difficult climate right now."

Beddegenoodts adds that the heavy subject matter took its toll. "*Thank God it's Friday* is my grimmest work so far. So, in all honesty, I had been longing for a smaller, more joyous project." That has turned out to be the documentary *Charlie Goes to Burning Man*, "about my encounter with an 81-year-old professor on his first visit to one of the most challenging festivals out there." The film premiered at a special screening in Antwerp on 4 July.

Thank God it's Friday and *The Taste of Freedom* are distributed by Dalton Distribution.

Colourful new book looks on the bright side

The result of a collaboration between a handful of editors, photographers and graphic designers, *The Bright Side of Belgium* comes as the latest evidence of a growing but still subdued sentiment that it's time for locals to drop the act, and their innate modesty, and just say it – Belgium is worth it. Writers Sigrid Vandensavel and Hadewijch Ceulemans consequently don't beat around the bush in their introduction to their book. "It's time for an enthusiastic declaration of love for the most beautiful cities and regions in all of Belgium," they write. "We should be incredibly proud."

Their 500-page coffee-table book zooms in on 10 of the country's most interesting and vibrant cities and regions, with Brussels, Antwerp and the coast getting the lion's share of the avowedly positive attention. Each chapter covers the same themes – architecture, parks and squares, art, culture, shopping, food, accommodation and an "outside the city" section that highlights noteworthy spots just a bit further down the road.

The book's stunning photos are beautifully complemented by colourful and cheeky typographical illustrations that help readers make sense of the wealth of information,

and are the work of graphic design duo Sanny Winters and Tim Oeyen. Every chapter also includes interviews with key players who have a significant say in what that city's local fashion, arts and culture scene serves up. For Brussels, that includes pioneering Dansaert fashion store-owner Sonja Noël, while for Ghent the writers sat down with Flemish foodie and rock'n'roll chef Jason Blanckaert.

At times the writers seem a bit too concerned with all things hip and snazzy, and it could do with more of a critical voice, but that seems like an irrelevant observation for a book that is so upfront about its desire to



give this country's reputation a bit of tender loving care.

\ Linda A Thompson

The Bright Side of Belgium (€39.95) is published in English by Uitgeverij Luster

Dancing in the streets

Gentse Feesten

18-27 July

Across Ghent

\ WWW.GENTSEFEESTEN.BE

Fourteen festival squares across the city, thousands of concerts, hundreds of buskers, theatre, book and flower markets, public debates and – rain or shine – lots of dancing and drinking. Every year, the Gentse Feesten takes over the historical city centre of Ghent and changes it into one of the world's largest festival zones.

Even in Europe, the Gentse Feesten is almost unparalleled. Only Munich's Oktoberfest and Las Vallas in Valencia come close. But still, not quite.

Despite its success in recent years, this year's edition will see some drastic changes to the schedule.



© Stad Gent

After complaints by some inhabitants, the lush Baudelo park – the most romantic spot of the Feesten, with the Mirror Tent offering softer, more intimate concerts – will have to close at 2.30 each morning.

To compensate for the early closing, the cosy nearby Sint-Jacobs concert square – the place where the festival was reborn about 40 years ago – will reclaim its pivotal role and stay open two hours longer, until 5.00. The Vlasmarkt – nicknamed the Flash Market or the Fish Market by locals – will stay open until 8.00 as usual.

At that hour, the city's cleaning trucks will move into the Vlasmarkt and spray cold water on the

feet of the remaining party-goers, of whom there are usually a couple of hundred still going strong. But the Gentse Feesten is not just about drinking, dancing or falling in love. The city's amateur and professional artists come out of their medieval cellars. Soulful dancers, musicians and entertainers from all over the world move into the city. The world's best

street theatre companies gather to astound the public at the international festival MiramirO. The refined and the gaudy are represented equally, as are the young and the old. But one thing is shared by everyone within the city walls: They celebrate humour and the gift of laughter in every way possible, all day and all night long. \ Daan Bauwens

CONCERT

Knokke-Heist

King Jazz: Knokke's open-air concert series Knokkie Totsie rolls on with this week's featured entertainers King Jazz. The trio play jazz (of course) and smooth pop standards that the whole family can enjoy. *20 July, 17.00, Van Binnenplein, free*
WWW.CULTUUR.KNOKKE-HEIST.BE

VISUAL ARTS

Antwerp

The Enclave: Richard Mosse's acclaimed multimedia installation comes to Belgium. The Irish photographer documents the ongoing violence in the DRC and creates a stunning piece of contemporary art in the process. *Until 3 August, FotoMuseum, Waalsekaai 47*
WWW.FOTOMUSEUM.BE

Ghent

Out to Sea? The Plastic Garbage Project: This design exhibition of recycled and repurposed plastics recovered from the world's oceans was initiated by Zurich's Museum für Gestaltung. *Until 12 October, Design Museum Gent, Jan Breydelstraat 5*
WWW.DESIGNMUSEUMGENT.BE

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Ghent

10 Days Off: This 20th edition of the Ghent music festival formerly known as 10 Days of Techno is also its last. DJs from around the world are coming to celebrate the life and death of the well-loved event. *17-27 July, Vooruit, Sint Pietersnieuwstraat 23*
WWW.10DAYSOFF.BE

Leuven

Zomer Van Sint-Pieter: The 13th edition of this summer-long festival offers a break from the ordinary. The programme is made up of dozens of 35-minute classical concerts held at lunchtime in one of Leuven's historical churches. *Until July, Sint-Michielskerk, Naamsestraat 57A*
WWW.ZOMER-VAN-SINT-PIETER.BE

Sint-Jan-in-Eremo

Polderfest: This free local shindig is on its third year. At its heart is a barbecue of epic proportions but there's also plenty of entertainment, including concerts by Dutch garage rock group Traumahelikopter and more. *20 July, Sint-Jansstraat 122*
WWW.POLDERFEST.BE

CONCERT

Backstreet Boys

20 July, 17.00

Beach, Ostend

\ WWW.GREENHOUSETALENT.BE

Last year the Floridian pop group Backstreet Boys marked 20 years of hit-making and hip-swinging by reuniting all five original members and releasing the album *In A World Like This*. The fans evidently approved, buying not just albums but enough concert tickets to keep the quintessential boy band on the road for the better part of a year.

\ Georgio Valentino



MUSIC FESTIVAL

Blues Peer

18-21 July

Deusterstraat, Peer

\ WWW.BLUESFESTIVAL.BE

One of Belgium's most famous summer festivals turns 30 this year. Since its inaugural edition in 1985, Blues Peer has brought some of the biggest names in blues and rock to this modest Flemish town on the furthest fringes of Limburg province. Thousands of music-lovers are expected to descend on the festival's campgrounds for an extended weekend of Dionysian revelry – or at least heavy drink-



VISUAL ARTS

Felix De Boeck

Until October 2015



FeliXart Museum's collection is centred, unsurprisingly, on the building's namesake. Flemish painter Felix De Boeck helped pioneer abstract modernism in the inter- and post-war years but unlike many of his peers, De Boeck never left his home town of Drogenbos to seek his fortune in New York, Paris or even neighbouring Brussels. This made him something of a local hero and,

following his death 1995, the FeliXart Museum was established in his honour. The exhibition *Surrounded* presents De Boeck's experimental paintings alongside archival documents and biographical information, which places the work in the context of not only the artistic upheavals of the day but also the personal history of the painter, his family and his community. \ GV

FILM

Federico Fellini

Until 31 August



Brussels' Cinematek joins forces with Film Fest Gent and the Italian Institute of Culture to make your summer a bit more cinematic. The film archive and other venues around the capital are paying tribute to one of the 20th century's great filmmakers, Federico Fellini, with a months-long programme that includes not just the man's own work but also collaborations

Cinematek, Brussels

\ WWW.CINEMATEK.BE

and documentaries about him and his work. Fellini was at the cutting edge of post-war Italy's Neorealist movement and went on to produce some of the country's best-known films, including the 1959 screen classic *La Dolce Vita* and a surreal adaptation of Petronius's decadent eyewitness report of life in Imperial Rome, *Satyricon* (1969). \ GV

Talking sports

What Brazil did for the Red Devils



Leo Cendrowicz

More articles by Leo \ flanderstoday.eu

Among the two billion or so people who watched Germany beat Argentina in last night's World Cup final were the Belgian squad. Whether at home with family or out with friends, they were watching, and it is certain that every five minutes or so a pang of regret would have coursed through them as they thought, "That could have been us!" Who knows if a different game plan, or different players, or even a different bounce of the ball could have changed the course of Belgium's quarter-final against Argentina on 5 July? It offers countless debates among fans and pundits, but it remains speculation. Vincent Kompany, Kevin De Bruyne and the other Red Devils will remain haunted by their missed opportunities for a long time to come. They will also have wondered how they might have fared against the Netherlands in the semi-final – formidable opponents, but beatable, as they were in a friendly in Brussels in August 2012 when Belgium won 4-2. And of course against Germany, whose 7-1 demolition of Brazil seemed to establish them as the world's new football masters before the final had begun.

Belgium did as well as was expected before the tournament began. They were fifth favourites, and lost to fourth favourites Argentina, so all as bookmakers might have predicted. They lost, but so did 31 of the 32 teams who played in Brazil.

What made it hard was that they seemed to have some wind in them just at the moment they were knocked out. Having emerged with three unconvincing wins from the group, they produced a truly exhilarating game when they beat the United States in the second round.



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Just as significant was the reaction back home: Belgian flags bloomed across the country as Dutch- and French-speakers cheered their team in unison. Even people who voted for the Flemish separatist N-VA cheered for the Red Devils. As Johan Vande Lanotte (SPA), the federal economy minister and deputy prime minister told me, it is part of Belgium's complex sense of identity.

"We can vote one week for a party that wants to split the country, and another week we can wave the Belgian flag for the football team," he said. "Yes, it is strange, but then we were the inventors of surrealism." Qualifying for the 2016 European Championships in France begins in September. The Red Devils were one of the youngest squads in Brazil, but they have grown after their experience, and they will continue to grow together. They left the party sooner than hoped, but they have already entertained and inspired millions in Flanders, Belgium and beyond.

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

Marlies Deforce @miespaties

Feel like living in a rain forest: 94% humidity in #belgium right now. <https://vine.co/v/MP0FzFEWK7t>

Michiel Reuvecamp @mreuvecamp

Brugge you ain't too bad on the eyes during the morning run. #brugge #belgium @ Brugge Canals <http://instagram.com/p/qLwCdcCgJR/>

saleh alhumaid#BEL @salehSSH

Still can't get over that #Belgium are out of the World Cup pic. twitter.com/ceddcqtbQY

Nina @NinaSeventeen

My mom and I are on our way to #Ypres for the start of the 5th @letour stage! #excited #Tdf

Sophie Fenelon @Blue_eyes2462

Wanting to be in #Ypres right now watching #TDF

Alexander Lobrano @AlecLobrano

Magnificent train station in #Oostende makes me wonder why we can't/dn't build like this anymore #Belgium <http://instagram.com/p/qOjGfvDSM4/>

Joeri Lissens @jlissens

Thank you for the music, the songs I'm singing. Thanks for all the joy they're bringing #steenokkerzeelzingt #vlaanderenfeest

Jarrett Reckseidler @jarrettreckse

Congrats #Belgium...2 out of the top 3 places! "The 100 most congested cities in Europe & N America" <http://gu.com/p/3qy7k/tw> via @guardian

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Poll

Ghent alderman Tom Balthazar has suggested letting students live in empty shops and offices. What do you think?

a. Great idea. Students don't mind roughing it a bit, and it keeps them from disrupting the housing market	54%
b. Worth a try. If nothing else it might give someone inspiration for a sitcom	31%
c. Ridiculous idea. Students have just as much right to a decent place to live as anyone else	15%

A fairly convincing result in favour of letting students set up house in empty shops and offices, which Ghent alderman Tom Balthazar says will keep them from upsetting the housing market by pushing up rents for family homes. Most of you probably remembered

your own student digs and recognised a student's gift for sleeping in any old kind of tip, so a converted shop – a pop-up bedsit if you will – wouldn't be much of a hardship. Meanwhile, family homes can be occupied by families. Only a handful thought students

deserve better. More interesting was the support for a sitcom based on Balthazar's idea, a cross between *The Young Ones* and *Are You Being Served?* perhaps, but without the 1970s stereotypes. That could be the best idea ever to come out of Ghent city council.

\ Next week's question:

A new book aims to highlight everything that's good about Belgium. We've come up with four great things about Flanders. Which would you say is most important?

Log in to the new-look Flanders Today website and click on VOTE to select your favourite

THE LAST WORD

Shop around

"We advise everyone to check their information beforehand, and especially if you live near a border, check the prices in a nearby store in the Netherlands or France."

According to Test-Aankoop, sale prices in one Ikea store can be four times higher than in another store not far away

And also the modesty

"Everyone was fit and there were guys with much better six-packs than mine. I bet it was my charm and sense of humour that did it." Tuur Roels from Aalst won a contest to find the first Belgian Coca-Cola Light hunk for a new poster campaign

La vie en rose

"Opponents underestimate us, and that gives us a mental advantage. We've been champions twice in a row."

Michiel Abeel, captain of Ghent football club the Pink Flamingos, explains the bright side of playing in pink strips like the new Anderlecht kit

Under threat

"I've had everything thrown at me over the last weekend. Including death threats."

Ruddy Callewaert, spokesperson for the police union Sypol.be, is being blamed for a court ruling which will oblige some 35,000 police to work up to eight years longer

