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Six Belgians were among the 298 killed in the air disaster

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In the moment

Jacques Sonck's street photographs finally receive due attention, here and abroad



Tom Peeters

More articles by Tom \ flanderstoday.eu

Jacques Sonck's documentary photography has impressed audiences both here and abroad. His first foreign solo exhibition outside Europe is now on view in the L Parkers Stephenson gallery in Manhattan, while the concurrent *Encounters* exhibition in Ostend shows his lifelong soft spot for outsiders.

The individuals in Jacques Sonck's black-and-white pictures don't have names. Neither does the Flemish photographer mention where the photos were taken, although 95% of them were shot in the triangle between his birth city of Ghent, and Brussels and Antwerp, where he worked until he retired a couple of years ago.

With all those other details missing, there's only a date to hold on to. In an ideal world, Sonck (64) wouldn't even give that away. "The images have to speak for themselves," he says, as we explore the *Encounters* exhibition on view at Fort Napoleon in Ostend this summer. "They tell a story and don't ask for an explanation."

The title of the new exhibition is obvious. All his portraits are the result of fleeting encounters and have one thing in common: Sonck's characters all look eccentric, strange or peculiar, often by virtue of a striking physical feature. "You don't meet someone who's worth being photographed every day," he says. "They have to be special."

He points to a picture of a black child. "The boy has a gap between his teeth," he says. "You can't take a picture of a psychological quality – that's nonsense. You can only see the outside, the things that are on the surface, and that's the reason I pick someone."

All this may sound a bit superficial and even voyeuristic, but there's an obvious mutual understanding and respect between the photographer and the outsider(s) in front of his lens. The random circumstances of the encounters, which often take place in the subjects' natural environment, do them justice.

"I don't judge the people on my pictures," Sonck explains. "I just meet them on the street ask them to pose for me, preferably against a neutral background, often against a wall, so the environment is not too distracting, and then we separate. It only takes 15 minutes, max."

These meetings are purely accidental and anonymous. "I have never met these people before, and I don't ask their names. For me, this information is not important, only the image is. If they don't want to pose, I move on." Sonck obtained his formal training at the Brussels Narafi Institute in the 1970s and worked at the Antwerp province's department of culture where he mostly did technical photography for the catalogues of the museums run by the provincial authorities, until he retired in 2009.

"I had to shoot silver and tin for the Silver Museum in the Sterckshof castle in Deurne, diamonds for the Diamond Museum, textiles for the Fashion Museum," he says. "There I learnt to handle the light, crucial for any good photographer."

In addition to working on these technical assignments, in his free time he also began to hit the streets of Flemish cities with his camera in the mid-1970s. "The job gave me the freedom to maintain financial security, while being able to shoot free work as my pastime."

In a lucky coincidence his office was located in the Photo Museum, which



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Belgians among MH17 victims

Passengers on plane downed over Ukraine included 12-year-old boy from Brasschaat



Alan Hope

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Six Belgians were among the 298 victims of the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, the foreign affairs ministry has confirmed.

The flight, from Amsterdam Schiphol to the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur, was brought down last week by a missile over part of Ukraine currently controlled by pro-Russian rebels. There were no survivors. The vast majority of the victims, 193 in all, were of Dutch nationality. The others were from Malaysia, Australia, Indonesia, Britain, Germany, the Philippines, Canada and New Zealand. The Belgian dead were initially numbered as four, but two had dual nationality and were listed on the passenger manifest under their other nationality.

The victims include a family from Brasschaat in Antwerp province. Jan Noreilde (51) and his 12-year-old son Steven were on board with wife and mother Annemieke Hakse (47), a Dutch national. Noreilde, originally from Vichte in West Flanders, was financial director of a Japanese company, and his wife a lawyer in Antwerp.

"They were very hard workers, and that's why they were so look-

ing forward to their holiday," his sister told *Het Nieuwsblad*. The family was planning to fly on from Kuala Lumpur to Bali, a destination Steven had been allowed to choose. The boy's football club in Brasschaat decided at the weekend to retire his number six jersey as a mark of his loss.

Also among the victims was Lili-ane Derden, whose family lives in Brasschaat and Schoten near Antwerp, though she lived in Canberra, Australia. She had moved to Australia with her baseball-player husband, whom she met in Belgium. She worked for the National Health and Medical Research Council, and was on a six-week trip to Europe to visit family. The youngest of nine children, she was also on a visit to say goodbye to her eldest brother, Uwe, aged 69, who has terminal cancer. "She came to say goodbye to me, and now I have to mourn her," he said. "How on earth are we supposed to make sense of that?" She had been on her way to Perth for a first visit to her first grandchild, aged seven months.

Benoit Chardome (51) is listed as being from Namur, though he was brought up in Berchem in Antwerp.



© Robin van Lonkhuijsen/ANP/Belga

Schiphol airport in Amsterdam, where people queue to sign a book of remembrance

After living more than a decade in New Zealand, where he ran a hotel in Auckland and later opened two popular restaurants in Queens-town, he moved to Bali in Indonesia, where he ran a country club. He came to Antwerp in June with his Malaysian partner Puput to get married, and this was to be their honeymoon. Last week he was summoned back to Bali for work, and while Puput visited friends in Switzerland, he set out to fly back with the intention of rejoining him later.

"Benoit was the eternal optimist," an old friend from his scouting days

in Antwerp said. "He was always totally positive, and very enterprising."

The tragedy also struck Rik Schuysemans from Wetteren in East Flanders and his wife, Martine Baele. They had been due to take a holiday touring in Asia together, but Baele felt ill two days before departure and decided to recover and join her husband later. "I'd rather have caught that flight," she said. "Together with Rik is where I belong." Schuysemans was a highly regarded teacher at the trade school in Aalst, teaching French and driving skills. Despite being a

driving instructor, he didn't own a car. "He was very environmentally conscious, and saw that as a good way to save money," a colleague explained. "Money that he enjoyed spending once a year on a major trip."

The last victim has so far been described only as a woman in her 20s from Groningen in the north of the Netherlands, who has double nationality and was originally counted among the Dutch victims. The federal prosecutor in Brussels has opened a formal murder investigation, in order to be able to gather information and evidence that could be useful in any later proceedings. Under the principle of universality, the Belgian justice system may investigate the death of any Belgian abroad that resulted from a crime, and even carry out a prosecution.

Belgium's acting prime minister, Elio Di Rupo, joined his Dutch colleague Mark Rutte in expressing "outrage" at what he called "this terrible crime". He also called on the troops in the region to allow free and unconditional access to the site by international experts, and demanded a "serious and impartial investigation" into the incident.

Reconstruction of Swiss bus crash "shows driver was suicidal"

The bus crash in a Swiss tunnel that killed 22 Flemish school-children and six adults in March 2012 was "no accident", according to independent investigators employed by some of the victims' parents who are unsatisfied by the Swiss authorities' investigation.

At the end of last month, the Swiss prosecutor in charge of the case, Olivier Elsig, officially closed the case with no charges being filed. The accident was the result of the driver losing control for an unknown reason, Elsig concluded, but there was no question of criminal culpability.

A group of parents has never been

satisfied by Elsig's investigation, and after he refused last December to carry out a reconstruction of the crash, they hired their own investigators, the Dutch-based forensic agency Independent Forensic Services (IFS), part of an American parent company.

IFS has now carried out its own reconstruction and reports that driver Geert Michiels, the younger of the two drivers, made two clear movements seconds before the crash, consciously and with the intention of running the bus into the wall of the tunnel. Michiels had been taking medication for depression and the parents allege



© Belga/AFP

he committed suicide.

"The driver at no time lost control of the steering wheel," IFS researcher Selma Eikenboom told Dutch TV. "He made those movements consciously, with some force. Then he drove straight on for several seconds and into the wall. That's not something you do

if you're feeling faint." Asked if this demonstrated his suicidal intent, she said. "That's a conclusion you may draw for yourself. This is technical evidence that speaks for itself."

According to Dutch lawyer Job Knoester, acting for the parents, Michiels' medication, Seroxat or paroxetine, has been implicated in cases of suicide and serious aggression. "If you know that, then the matter has to be investigated," he said. "It seems as if the Swiss didn't want to look into the question at all."

The medical literature limits the effect of increased suicidal tenden-

cies to children and those under the age of 25. Michiels was 35.

The driver's widow, Evy Laermans, continues to defend her husband against the parents' allegations. The IFS report, she said, is "only interested in providing proof for their own prejudices". The reconstruction took place in a different setting, using a different model of bus in daylight carrying fewer passengers and baggage, and less weight, she pointed out. "IFS is giving out no information on all of these elements which can influence the movements of the bus," she said. \ AH

64%



of Flemish people polled said they thought King Filip was doing a good job, almost a year after he took over the throne from his father.



16,559

people in Flanders started a new business in the first five months of this year, slightly down on the previous year, but a smaller reduction than in Brussels (-2.53%)

€320,000



paid out by the Flemish Roads and Traffic Agency for damage caused by potholes and other faulty road conditions, as well as poor signals set out by the agency itself



2,441,000

tax declarations submitted this year through online service Tax-on-Web by the deadline of 26 June, 134,000 fewer than last year. Declarations submitted via an accountant have until 31 October

6,991



ships used the Port of Antwerp in the first six months of the year, a fall of 3.4% compared to the same period last year, despite a small increase in overall tonnage carried

WEEK IN BRIEF

The Constitutional Court has amended one of its own judgments to allow former gendarmerie officers who were approaching retirement age to benefit from **early pension provisions** which the court has overturned for the police in general. The officers concerned risked having to work an extra eight years despite being within sight of retirement under the previous system, which the court struck down on the grounds of discrimination. The former gendarmerie merged with the judicial police and the municipal police in 2001.

A man convicted in 2012 of mutilating his former girlfriend by throwing sulphuric acid in her face is to stand trial in connection with the **murder in 1988 of a 17-month-old child** in Hoogstraat in Brussels' Marollen district. Richard Remes, 59, is serving 30 years for the attack on Patricia Lefranc. The Brussels prosecutor says he will be sent for trial for the 1988 murder, for which the baby's mother served six months on remand before being released.

The Flemish government should set up a fund to pay off the **cost of subsidies for solar panels** over a period of 20 years, to avoid the cost being passed on to all electricity consumers as it is at present, according to Johan Vande Lanotte, the outgoing federal minister for consumer affairs. Vande Lanotte, who made it a crusade during his term to keep electricity prices down, going so far as to impose a legal price freeze, argues it is unfair. Last week the social-economic council of Flanders warned that electricity prices could go up by as much as 30% by 2016. Vande Lanotte's socialist party SPA will not form part of the new Flemish coalition government, however.

Work is due to start in September on the long-awaited **renovations to the former veterinary school** in Kuregem in Anderlecht, to convert the building into a business centre with loft accommodation. The municipality bought the building in 1999 and received EU funding of €3.9 million in 2009 for the project, which for various reasons never got off the ground. The new centre, with six office spaces for rent, a conference centre and cafeteria and loft apartments, is scheduled to be completed in 2016.

The Bruges prosecutor has lodged an **appeal against a decision** to release a 21-year-old, Steven VG, accused of the murder on the Markt square in May of Mikey Peeters, which was caught on security camera. The court agreed VG, who turned himself in to police and claims not to have struck the fatal blow, could be released on conditions. He remains in prison while the appeal is pending. His alleged accomplice, Suleyman B, is reported to be in his homeland of Chechnya, after having been taken by car to Ukraine by his father.

The new season for **Zeeland mussels** started officially last Wednesday, with the new crop smaller than ever. The largest size, Goudmerk, will not be available, traders said, while the second-largest Jumbo will be rare. The season would normally have started two weeks before, but growers decided to postpone to allow the mussels more time to grow.

Police in the Brussels-Elsene zone have filed an intention to strike on 1 August, in protest at plans for the placing of **security cameras with sound recording** in police stations. The cameras come after a string of complaints of abuse by officers; the three

unions representing officers in the zone says they demonstrate Brussels mayor Yvan Mayeur's lack of faith in police. Mayeur agreed that police officers do a worthy job, but defended his decision.

The Brussels public transport authority MIVB has reprimanded a bus driver after complaints from the Belgian League against Anti-Semitism about **buses displaying a Palestinian flag**. The complaint was investigated and found to refer to several sightings of the same bus, whose driver has been warned. "The MIVB takes its neutrality very seriously," said spokesperson An Van Hamme. "An incident like this cannot be tolerated. Employees are allowed to have their own political and religious opinions, but not while they are on duty."

Thirty children were **rescued from a burning bus** on the E19 close to the Mechelen-Noord exit last week. The children from Antwerp were on their way to a day out at De Nekker sports park when the bus caught fire. The driver took the bus on to the hard shoulder and evacuated children and staff. No one was injured. The fire in the engine was blamed on a technical defect.

Researchers working in the basement of the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren have **discovered a nest of spiders** of a sort never before seen in Belgium. *Oecobius amboseli* is a member of the family of *Oecobiidae*, or disk web spiders, which build small star-shaped webs behind which they hide to prey on insects. The species is native to Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, but has recently been sighted in Denmark and the Netherlands. It is not dangerous to humans. The museum is closed for major renovations and is due to reopen in 2016.

FACE OF FLANDERS



© Radio 1

Jef Neve

A former teacher once described him as "*een alleskunner*", or someone who can turn his hand to anything. And indeed Jef Neve is such a busy bee he would merit a place in Face of Flanders most weeks of the year. He'll be featured in October at the World Soundtrack Awards (WSA) at Ghent Film Festival, but you may be sure that in the meantime, he'll have managed to fit in at least two or three noteworthy achievements.

Neve was born in 1977 in Turnhout, and studied jazz and classical piano at the Lemmens Institute in Leuven, graduating with honours in 2000, then going on to specialise in chamber music. From the age of six, he says, he knew he wanted to be a musician; from the age of 14 he was already playing in bands, as well as composing in a variety of styles from solo piano to symphony orchestra.

"I've always been a lover of piano concertos, and I even composed some short ones when I was 12 or 13," he told *Flanders Today* back in 2009. "I've played in concerti by Beethoven, Mozart, the *Paganini Variations* by Rachmaninov and George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, which is a

sort of concerto." Just days later, in Ghent and then in Brussels, he premiered his first published piano concerto with the Brussels Philharmonic. A second has since followed in 2012, putting him on a par with Chopin.

Since then his projects have ranged all over the musical sphere, working with his trio, with vocalists like Jose James, with other jazz musicians, hosting a jazz show on the radio, composing the soundtrack to the movie *De helaasheid der dingen* by Felix Van Groeningen, and taking part with the Brussels Philharmonic and the Brussels Jazz Orchestra in the recording of the Oscar-winning score for *The Artist*, composed by Ludovic Bource.

He'll be honoured at the WSA for himself, however, and his compositions for the 10-part VRT drama series *In Vlaamse Velden* (In Flanders Fields), set during the First World War. The music for that is a monumental work for orchestra, piano and organ which had to be faithful to the series' time-setting, avoiding jazz anachronisms while not descending into pastiche.

\ Alan Hope

OFFSIDE Creature comforts

It's festival time again, in case you hadn't noticed, when it seems as if every young person (and some not so young) is at, going to or recovering from some festival or other in Flanders, while every musician on the planet is performing at one. Having reached saturation among the human population of the region, there was logically only one way the phenomenon could keep growing: new species.

This year, if you're attending the Dranouter festival in West Flanders, and you want to take your dog with you, because why wouldn't you?, the organisers have everything in hand. No longer will you have to put up with Poochy sitting around rolling his eyes because



© Hollywood Pet Hotels

you're forcing him to listen to an Aeolian harp player he thinks is "lame".

Dranouter, which begins on 1 August, is offering accommodation for canines in a dog hotel. In fact, that's slightly misleading, since overnight accommodation is not provided. Instead the Dranouter Dog Hotel is more like

\ WWW.FESTIVALDRANOUTER.BE

one of those hotels you find in the area of Brussels South station, where the guests are only there to frolic during the day, going back to their owners by night.

Opening hours match the festival, including the pre-event on Thursday, and you can bring your dog to your tent for the night. Each guest gets a goodie bag full of toys, as well as a festival bandana. There's a professional and dedicated hotel staff, provided by the Herdershof kennels in Poperinge, which is a real dog hotel. And guests have their own tent and their own festival meadow to run around in. What's more, the whole thing is free. However places are strictly limited, so get in fast. \ Alan Hope

FLANDERTODAY Flanders State of the Art

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5TH COLUMN

The Landen fallout

When a group of travellers refused to leave some private grounds in Landen last week, the mayor decided to chase them away by playing loud music. The rather disgraceful spectacle was broadcast live by VTM and picked up by the world's media.

In the end, the travellers left after further talks with the mayor. Case closed, one might think, but not for mayor Gino Debroux and his party, the socialist SPA.

"Not okay what is happening in Landen," Freya van den Bossche, parting Flemish minister for SPA, tweeted. Popular Ghent mayor Daniel Termont also reacted strongly. His party leader, Bruno Tobback, sounded more moderate on Twitter: "Not a good idea to chase away gypsies with music. I understand the difficult situation, but I prefer a negotiated solution."

Tobback's response to actions reminiscent of Guantanamo Bay and contrary to the party's egalitarian beliefs seemed rather too lukewarm. "If I had an SPA membership card, I would send it back today. Such an ideological poorness, what a principle-free sadness it (the party) has become," commentator Yves Desmet wrote in *De Morgen*. Forty prominent party members have written a letter asking Tobback for an internal debate on the incident. A motion of distrust, some observers call this.

Tobback's position has been shaky since the May elections, in which SPA got a mere 14% of the vote. The party president is blamed for a lame campaign. SPA's problems run deeper, though. For decades the party has been in government, but for many it has lost its relevance. It is associated more with the unions and its French-speaking counterpart PS, both considered outdated in Flanders, than with the modern, Scandinavian-style socialism it advocates.

At an internal party meeting in June, Tobback's leadership was challenged, but he staved off party elections till June. Last weekend, though, John Crombez declared himself an early candidate.

Crombez, parting secretary of state for the fight against fraud, lacks the cynicism of the current leadership. His ambitions are clear: "We cannot continue this way," he said in *De Standaard*, this weekend. "We can do more and we can do better. If we do nothing, we will only have more incidents like the one last week."



Anja Otte
More articles by Anja \ flanderstoday.eu

Towards a Flanders of 152 municipalities?

Researcher puts forward proposal for new administration



Alan Hope
More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.eu

The Flemish Institute for Economy and Society (Vives) this week unveiled a new method for determining the ideal number of municipalities in the Flanders of the future.

As negotiations continue for the creation of a new Flemish government, the academic research organisation has presented political parties with its own view of the priorities for the incoming administration. Among them is a commitment to an administration on two levels: regional and municipal. However, many

of Flanders' 308 existing municipalities are too small to play a full role in such an administration, so the institute, part of the University of Leuven, argues in favour of fusions where necessary.

To determine which municipalities need to fuse and with whom, Vives has turned to a method used in other countries: analysing the number of daily movements between municipalities. Using that strong link, Vives researcher Stijn De Ruyter has arrived at a total of 152 future municipalities, just under half of the current

number. The average population of each would be 43,500, roughly the same as the average in the Netherlands – 41,000 – where a similar method was put into effect.

The most important round of fusions of Belgian municipalities took place in 1977, when the total for the whole country was cut from 2,359 to 596. That was cut again to 589 in 1983 by a reorganisation of municipalities in Antwerp. Flanders has 308 of those and Brussels 19. The 1977 round brought the average popu-

lation to 16,565 per municipality. The Vives proposal was dismissed by the mayor of Roeselare in West Flanders, Luc Martens. Martens, who is also chairman of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities, says the fusion proposal is "not necessary for improving the performance of the local government level".

The proposal would join Roeselare with neighbouring municipalities Staden, Hoogdele and Ardooie.

Newly formed Brussels coalition sets out aims

The newly formed government for the Brussels region has set out its aims in tackling urban planning, traffic congestion and the housing crisis.

The coalition announced that it planned to build 6,500 council houses as well as improving 10 new urban neighbourhoods in run-down areas of Schaarbeek, Vorst and Sint-Gillis.

Some 60% of the housing is to be set aside for families on low incomes, while the rest will go to those on average incomes. The region is also introducing a new urban planning authority to cut down on red tape. Special attention is being paid to the canal district on the border of Brussels City and Molenbeek, which is to be turned into the "backbone" of the region.

The government also aims to carry out ambitious projects to tackle the city's chronic traffic congestion, including a bold plan to put the E40 and E411 motorways underground to create new boulevards.

There is also good news for cyclists, who are promised dedicated



© Courtesy MIVB

cycle lanes along the entire inner ring. Calls to introduce a congestion charge in Brussels have been rejected, at least under the current government.

Instead, the government wants to invest heavily in the metro system and extend the network to Evere in the north-east and Ukkel in the south-west, as well as extending the route of tram 62 to Brussels Airport.

The metro stations at Beurs, Bockstael and Montgomery are in line for a facelift and timetables are to be extended to provide a better service during school holidays and at night. Some 10,000 extra parking spaces are to be provided for commuters at metro stations and free wifi is to be installed in metro stations. \ Derek Blyth

Welfare budget stalls Flemish government talks

Negotiations on the formation of a new Flemish government stalled last week due to disagreements over the welfare budget. Negotiators Kris Peeters of the Christian-democrat CD&V and Geert Bourgeois of Flemish nationalists N-VA had been poised to meet on Thursday morning to continue talks, but the meeting was called off to allow the parties to consider their position on the funding of the welfare budget and in particular how to pay for care for people with disabilities.

The stoppage came as a surprise following positive reports from both sides that suggested that negotiations were moving ahead steadily. "I am astonished, I don't see any reason why the talks should have come to a standstill," Bourgeois said. "I still hope that we can rapidly reach a good agreement."

Earlier, a statement from the key negotiators had said talks were making "steady progress".

The parties refused to give a date for the completion of the



© CD&V

talks, but Peeters said that "the number of problem areas has been reduced". "If you want to reach an agreement, it doesn't make sense to tell the press about the content of the negotiations or the timing," said Bourgeois.

But the negotiators did say that there had been a "speeding up" in the process. "We are working very constructively," a spokesperson said. "We still have some points to deal with, but they are not insurmountable." \ Derek Blyth

Landen mayor criticised over gypsy expulsions

The authors' and composers' rights society Sabam is to send a bill to the mayor of Landen in Flemish Brabant, who came under fire last week for using a barrage of loud music to chase a group of travelling people from land in the municipality. Socialist mayor Gino Debroux said later he "understood the outrage and would not do the same again".

Debroux's bringing in a DJ to broadcast loud music to get rid of the travellers was compared

to Guantanamo Bay, where loud music was used to quell protests. On social media, the action was compared to the device used to deter mosquitoes.

The travellers had parked their caravans on an industrial estate without permission and were in the middle of talks with police when the mayor took over. While the stunt made the wires of the Associated Press and the columns of the world's press, it failed to have the effect desired. Children

came out of the caravans to dance and one even approached DJ Jos Thijs to play a request, but the camp stayed put.

Debroux's fellow socialists were among his sternest critics. "Not okay what's happening in Landen," tweeted former Flemish minister Freya Van den Bossche. "Really not okay." Party chairman Bruno Tobback issued a statement saying, "This situation should not have been allowed to escalate so far, that much is clear. We regret

that hard words and actions have resulted. This is not the way we would approach the problem."

In the meantime, police reached an agreement with the travellers. They were allowed to remain on their temporary site for the rest of the day, and left the next morning for a new site in Overpelt in Limburg. By the beginning of this week, however, their location was unknown, and they were thought to be heading for Brussels. \ AH

In the moment

Flemish photographer hits late career milestone

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continued from page 1

can today be found in the trendy Antwerp Zuid quarter, but in the early 1970s it occupied just one floor in the Sterckshof's general museum. "During lunch breaks you could find me in the library, where I discovered the work of acclaimed documentary photographers, such as Diane Arbus and August Sander."

the identical twins Arbus shot in Roselle, New Jersey in 1967 could also easily have been Sonck's work.

"Of course, there are clear distinctions, but the way we look at people is somehow similar," Sonck says, adding that both he and Arbus have a special eye for the eccentric, but without compas-

writes.

Sonck's social documentary photography represents an authentic cross-section of society. He is not interested in any specific social class: He presents working-class kids, their mothers and poodles, but also posh kids in skirt suits and overdressed old ladies with chic handbags and coiffured pets. "I don't categorise people," he says. "They all fit into the bigger picture."

A crucial difference from the younger generation of photographers working today is that he never works in series. "Nowadays, artists often focus on large projects, allowing them to exhibit and publish a book about a very specific topic," he says, adding that he takes a different approach. "I'm not going to follow punks or hippies for a few months, but if a member of such a subculture crosses my path and looks special, I will not hesitate," he says. "I'm only interested in the extremes, those who stand out and attract attention, the archetypes." He points to a photo of a gay cowboy with a JR Ewing T-shirt. "He is an archetype."

Sonck, who describes himself as reserved, had to teach himself a certain level of assertiveness to go up to passers-by. "Someone interesting can pass you by at any time," he says. "Also, when you're not in the mood you have to approach people immediately, otherwise they are gone." Explaining that he carried his camera with him at all times, he says: "You can be sure that the ones you failed to approach are the ones you remember the longest." When Sonck sees someone interesting, he immediately knows if he wants to portray them or not. Circumstances sometimes also help, like the time he took a picture of a curved lady in a white swimming suit and a dandy in ultra-short swimming trunks. Their proud pose on the beach of De Panne (pictured left) made it on to the cover of the Ostend exhibition catalogue.

"After I asked both of them to pose, a man with a potbelly passed behind them, and the moment I clicked my camera he also looked into the lens," he explains. The anachronistic background details and the clothing styles recorded in his images often point to a not too distant but bygone period. Sonck's older photos especially, shot in the late 1970s and early 1980s, are souvenirs of a lost era that is never coming back.

"It certainly documents a time when the world was still small and life seemed so much slower,"



© Jacques Sonck and courtesy GALLERY FIFTY ONE

In the 1970s, Sonck began to venture into the world with his camera in his free time



© Jacques Sonck and courtesy GALLERY FIFTY ONE

the photographer says.

"People are especially interested in the older street photography," Brecht Bosteyn says. He curated the group show *Insight* at the Photo Museum in Antwerp three years ago, an exhibition that would mark a breakthrough for Sonck's career when Roger Szmulewicz from the Antwerp Gallery Fifty One approached him. Those contacts eventually resulted in his first-ever US exhibition, *Jacques Sonck: Archetypes*, currently on view at the L Parker Stephenson Gallery.

"The New York gallery only shows these older pictures, not the studio portraits Jacques has made since the 1990s and which you can also see here in Ostend," Bosteyn says.

In this later phase of his career, Sonck broadened his horizons from the streets to the studio, a move that enabled him to work with artificial light and a medium-format camera.

"Sunlight is often too bright," he says. "My studio portraits are purified. Without background, I can focus more closely on people and faces. Sometimes only body details appear."

But two things will never change: In an ever faster-paced world, Sonck is sticking to film and to black and white. "Colours would only distract," he says. "Black-and-white leaves out the stuff that's not crucial. And in America, where everything is digital nowadays, the reactions are: 'Awesome, you're still shooting on film.' But it's the only way I know." That's why Sonck likes to keep things small and authentic. "Photography is a peculiar medium," he says. "It is closely connected to reality; that's why almost all pictures get better when older, even if they're technically not perfect. The relation to reality never fades."

Until 21 September

Fort Napoleon
Vuurtorenweg, Ostend

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Automobiles \ BMW

The German motor manufacturer has recalled 1.6 million cars worldwide, 46,000 of them in Belgium, because of problems with the airbags. The recall concerns models from the 3-series built between May 1999 and August 2006. The measure is a precaution; no incidents have been reported.

Cables \ Bexco

The cable maker has reached an agreement for the construction of a factory in the Blue Gate Antwerp industry park in what used to be the Petroleum Zuid port. The new plant will make cables for the offshore industry, used to stabilise oil drilling platforms. Bexco, majority owned by shippers Exmar, employs 100 people in Hamme near Dendermonde.

Property \ Unibail

The municipal council of Brussels-City has reissued the contract for the construction and exploitation of the Europa conference and shopping centre on the Heizel site to Unibail. The decision comes after a ruling from the Council of State overturning the original contract award in a case brought by the losing bidder. The council has now made clear its motives for the award as the Council of State required, a spokesperson said.

Railways \ NMBS

A 24-hour strike on 29-30 June cost the rail authority NMBS €1.3 million in unsold tickets, CEO Jo Cornu said, exclusive of other costs such as compensation for season ticket holders and replacement bus services.

Shipping \ Port of Antwerp

The Port of Antwerp is looking forward to another record year based on first-half figures showing shipping traffic at 98.2 million tonnes, up 2.7% on the same period in 2013, itself a record year. Both container and liquid mass cargo were up by 4%; there was a 6% reduction in break bulk cargo.

Sportswear \ Nike

The European logistics centre for the sports clothing manufacturer in Laakdal in Antwerp province was briefly evacuated after 47 workers complained of symptoms including eye irritation and difficulty breathing. Ten were taken to hospital and the others treated on site. The source of the problem is being investigated.

Lower salary cost and create jobs, says KU Leuven study

Reduction of burden on employers could lead to almost 30,000 jobs



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.eu

Cutting the costs of employing personnel by 5% in the construction, transport, electrical and retail sectors could lead to the creation of up to 28,500 jobs, according to a study by two professors from the University of Leuven, Joep Konings and Stijn Vanormelingen. The study was presented by Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed. The sectors involved are all labour-intensive, employ a large proportion of young people and unskilled workers, and together represent a third of all private-sector employment. They have also seen salary costs rise since 2007 by between 10% for the transport sector and 16% for the retail sector. At the same time, produc-



© Michael Rieger

tivity rose more slowly, by only about 5%, thus increasing the salary cost handicap in relation to other neighbouring countries. The number of loss-making businesses has risen as a result to one in three, with small companies with fewer than 10 employees the hardest hit. The reduction of salary costs, in the form of various social benefits paid by employers, would cost the state €1.17 billion, the study says. In return it would earn back in the form of taxes paid by the newly employed, and economic growth in general. The study estimates the returns to be about 40-50% of the cost, meaning each new job would constitute an investment of €20,000.



© Aero Icarus/Wikimedia

Brussels Airlines launches low-cost service

Brussels Airlines is to launch a new four-part low-cost formula in September, entering into direct competition with Ryanair at Brussels Airport.

The Check&Go formula offers return flights to a number of destinations in Europe for €69, including taxes and fees. However, that is for the most basic option, without checked luggage, drinks or food. The next option, called Light&Relax at €110, allows seat reservation, checked bags and ticket modification. Flex&Fast is aimed at business travellers with check-in priority, fast-track security, meals and drinks and seats at the front of the aircraft. Finally, Bizz&Class is the new premium service, with access to new airport lounges, gourmet food, more luggage and a free middle seat.

"The days where the airline made the choice for the passenger are over," said CEO Bernard Gustin, announcing the new formula. "Today our guest wants to choose for himself which service level best

suits his needs. We therefore need to break old habits. More than ever, our strategy consists of differentiating, segmenting and putting the customer at the heart of everything we do."

Last week Lufthansa, a 45% shareholder in Brussels Airlines, announced it would be starting a new subsidiary, Eurowings, to offer cheap flights from Brussels Airport to some of the destinations served by Ryanair, EasyJet and Vueling. Meanwhile, the ombudsman service at Brussels Airport revealed it had received almost 15,000 complaints from the public in April, May and June, considerably more than the 9,770 it received in the whole of 2013.

The majority of the complaints were in connection with the changes to flight plans introduced by federal transport minister Melchior Wathelet in February, which sent more flights over the Brussels municipalities of Elsene, Etterbeek, Schaerbeek and Sint-Pieters-Woluwe. \ AH

Nuclear tax upheld by Constitutional Court

Belgium's nuclear tax is legal and electricity providers Electrabel, EDF Luminus and EDF Belgium must pay it, the Constitutional Court has ruled.

The tax was introduced to claw back some of the large profits made by Electrabel and EDF from nuclear power stations, the cost of which had already been written off. Since the companies were no longer contributing to the cost of the power plants, their profits increased enormously.

The companies asked the court to strike down the law introducing the nuclear tax. They claimed the €549 million bill faced by the producers for 2012 was unfair, since other players in the sector did not have to pay anything. Electrabel also complained that it was being asked to pay €480 million, while EDF had to pay only €70

million. The court rejected all these complaints.

Reacting to the judgement, Electrabel said it would "examine all alternatives" in considering the future of the company's nuclear activities in Belgium unless the nuclear tax was changed. "This decision confirms the principle of a confiscatory and disproportionate charge which jeopardises the viability of the operational activities of Electrabel in Belgium," the company said in a statement.

The company maintains that the tax bears no relation to the income from the nuclear plants. The bill for 2012 is equal to the company's entire profit from nuclear generation, while the €422 million bill for 2013 is higher than the French-owned company's entire profit from all activities in Belgium. \ AH

Number of civil servants with burnout triples

The number of federal civil servants having to take time off work because of burnout has more than tripled in five years, according to a report by Medex, the medical service that monitors the sickness absence of federal civil servants.

"In 2008, 852 people stayed at home due to burnout, and that number increased to 2,816 in 2013," Coralie Stadsbader of Medex told deredactie.be. Medex calls this a worrying trend. "And we are not the only organisation to be concerned; the World Health Organisation expects that by 2020 one in four

employees will have to deal with mental health problems," Stadsbader said.

Federal employment minister Monica De Coninck last year set up a campaign to raise awareness of the problem among employees and enterprises. Absence due to sickness among federal civil servants has stayed more or less the same during this period: on average seven out of 100 working days. That number is lower in the private sector, but sickness absence there has increased in recent years. \

Andy Furniere

A near-perfect ear

Intelligent application improves hearing implant programming



Senne Starckx

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WWW.OTOCONSULT.COM

When you realise that they replace a whole human sensory organ, you realise that cochlear implants are true miracles. Now, thanks to Flemish research, they're on their way to perfection.

Compared to all our other senses, our hearing is probably our most important sensory organ. Hearing is essential to humans' existence. Hearing impairments run through all segments of society and can manifest themselves at different phases in people's lives: They can affect people as they grow old or they can develop with an injury, while others are born with them.

The cochlear implant is the first technological development that offers a radical breakthrough for patients with severe sensory disabilities. As rudimentary and subpar to the healthy human ear as the cochlear implant may currently be, it has already proved essential for the social integration, communicative abilities, and comfort and happiness of people with hearing disabilities.

A cochlear implant operates in a different manner from traditional hearing aids. They provide direct stimulation of the auditory nerve in the cochlea inner ear structure, bypassing all the damaged parts of the ear, while a hearing aid only enhances the sound signals entering the inner ear.

In other words, a cochlear implant doesn't directly deliver sound, but electrical signals that are transported to the auditory nerves. Its external speech processor – usually worn behind the ear – picks up sounds from the environment and converts them into a digital signal.



© Courtesy Otoconsult

But because a cochlear implant stimulates between five and 25 little hairs connected to the auditory nerves in the cochlea, the electrical signal has to be fine-tuned very precisely.

"There are around 100 parameters that can be adjusted," says Bart Vaerenberg, who wrote his PhD at the University of Antwerp on the fine-tuning process or "fitting" of cochlear implants.

Most of these parameters relate to the amount of electrical current delivered to the electrodes and to the signal processing strategy, or how sound is transformed into a digital, electrical signal.

"It's still a major hurdle for audiologists to find the best set of parameter values for each cochlear implant recipient," Vaerenberg says. "To determine which set of parameters is better, the recipient's hearing is assessed psycho-acoustically in different

domains such as audibility thresholds, loudness growth function, spectral discrimination, and ultimately, speech understanding. This is called the outcome and it is assessed repeatedly over time."

During his research, Vaerenberg developed a new software application that assists audiologists during this cochlear implant fitting procedure. This "intelligent" FOX app – the name is a reference to the FOXP2 gene that plays a key role in speech and language development – inspects the current parameter values of the recipient's cochlear implant processor and determines how his or her hearing can be improved, based on the deficits observed.

The remarkable thing about FOX is that it's a cloud-based application, which means that it's capable of learning from the individual cases offered by the entire community using the application. "This allows

the system to constantly improve over time," says Vaerenberg.

Until now, the fitting process has been performed manually by adjusting the parameters in accordance with the patient's feedback.

"This is by definition a subjective approach, usually targeted at auditory comfort – 'does this sound more pleasant or not?' and often not in line with a recipient's auditory performance as it would be expressed through psycho-acoustical measurements," Vaerenberg says. "The use of FOX ensures a systematic approach that drives the recipient towards maximal performance."

The parameters of the cochlear implant moreover need to be readjusted over time, which is a consequence of adaptation and learning effects. This underlines the importance of Vaerenberg's application. The FOX system is already available for the Advanced Bionics implant system, one of four global cochlear implants manufacturers, and it will become available through market leader Nucleus soon.

Vaerenberg is currently working at Otoconsult, a Flemish consultancy firm focused on professional audiologists. He performed his PhD research under the umbrella of a Baekelandt mandate – named after Leo Baekelandt, the Flemish-American inventor of Bakelite. This is a formula in which a private company gets financial support from the Flemish government agency for Innovation through Science and Technology if it "adopts" a doctoral researcher.

Q&A

For his PhD research at Antwerp University, Siegfried Mercelis is researching software parallelism for applications in the audio industry, including 3D audio and self-playing pianos. His research is funded by the Flemish government's Agency for Innovation through Science and Technology and Van den Berghe R&D, an audio technology company in Aartselaar

What is software parallelism and how does it apply to the audio industry?

Up until about 10 years ago if you had multiple applications or tasks running on a typical PC, they would each be executed sequentially on a single processor. Software parallelism allows you to spread the load over multiple connected processors so tasks can be executed simultaneously.

For audio, the additional difficulty is that you have to do it in real time; using parallel processors allows heavy algorithms to be run on cheaper hardware like tablets

and phones. What I'm trying to do is to draw connections between hardware and software. You have capabilities and constraints on both sides and you have to find a match between the two worlds.

How does this apply to 3D audio?

In home cinemas, you have surround sound systems, but in 3D audio you add the height dimension so you have a sphere of speakers all around you. The idea behind the 3D audio coding and decoding program, or codec, is to provide this additional dimension while still allowing you to play the same



audio file on existing 2D systems with as little data loss as possible. The presence of multiple audio channels makes it an ideal candidate for software parallelism. The complex algorithms are also an ideal playground to experiment with various other parallel design patterns and techniques.

And what about the self-playing piano?

The piano action mechanism is surprisingly complex, so self-playing systems are usually made for one specific instrument or require significant modifications to the instrument itself. We are trying to produce a low-cost solution that is highly accurate, which would make self-playing pianos more accessible to everyone. It could even have educational possibilities in the form of digital piano teachers. With 88 keys on a piano, there's a large amount of data to process in a very short space of time. That's where software parallelism comes in; if you want to keep it low-cost you have to do it with low-cost hardware. \ Interview by Daniel Shamaun

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Researcher: toddlers move too little

A PhD researcher from Ghent University has found that 9% of boys and 13% of girls among Flemish four- to six-year-olds are obese. The main cause is that they spend the major part of the day sitting instead of moving, according to Marieke De Craemer. The research is part of the European ToyBox project, which mapped the movement behaviour of toddlers from six European countries – Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Poland and Spain. According to De Craemer's research, 50 to 80% of an average day for toddlers consists of activities during which they sit – reading, watching TV, playing computer games or doing craft activities. Interviews with parents and teachers showed that they consider more movement for toddlers unnecessary.

E-cigarette not gaining popularity

The popularity of the electronic cigarette in Belgium is not increasing, according to the annual smoking survey of the Foundation against Cancer. Only 0.5% of the population use one on a daily basis, while 1% use one weekly or less often. In France, the daily use of e-cigarettes in November 2013 was six times higher than in Belgium. The limited success here can be explained by the much stricter Belgian regulation, the foundation says. Electronic cigarettes with nicotine can only be introduced to the Belgian market if they are registered as a medicine, with strict demands concerning quality, safety and efficacy. The regulation in Belgium will change in 2016, in accordance with a European directive on tobacco products.

Gullet disease is autoimmune disorder

Researchers from the University of Leuven working with German scientists have proven for the first time that a rare disease is an auto-immune disorder. The disease, achalasia, affects the oesophagus of about 1 in 100,000 people and is caused by the unexplained disappearance of nerve cells. The researchers set up a European study in which they assembled genetic material of achalasia patients and examined it for defects. The study shows that, primarily, defects in the immune system contribute to the disease's development. These defects result in the appearance of antibodies against nerve cells and the development of a chronic infection that destroys the nerve cells in the gullet. \ Andy Furniere



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Sticking together

Parents plan to build own care centre for young adults with disabilities



Andy Furniere

More articles by Andy \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.HONK.BE

Faced with long waiting lists for day-care centres and housing for adults with disabilities, the parents of 16 Leuven adolescents recently took matters into their own hands.

With their Honk non-profit, they are hoping to establish their own overnight centre by 2017. The parents are getting help from two other Flemish nonprofits that have recently helped realise several similar housing projects for adults with special needs.

In Flanders, when young people with disabilities turn 21, they are normally required to leave their special education school and find a spot at a care centre for adults instead. "But more than 20,000 youngsters are on the waiting list to get a place at the care institutions for adults," says Lode Verschingel, one of the Honk co-founders. "The stay of youngsters can be extended by two years, but not longer than that."

Verschingel has two children with a disability, one of whom is 23 and consequently won't be able to return to her former school, Ter Bank in Heverlee, near Leuven, in September.

Verschingel's children are part of an extended group of friends who go to school at Ter Bank and the nearby Windekind institution, whose parents also get along well. After repeated conversations about the waiting list problem, the children's parents developed a plan to build their own care centre to keep the 16 friends together after they leave their respective schools. "When they are together, they stimulate each other spontane-



© Courtesy Honk

Honk co-founder Lode Verschingel says the teens light up in each other's presence

ously and you can see them flourish," says Verschingel. "If the youngsters were to be separated, many of them would remain at home and spend a lot of time isolated and doing passive activities like watching TV."

The first step for Honk is to find a temporary solution for the children who will have to leave their special education school next year. One solution would be to have them participate in the activities of day-care centres. The parents will also organise as many activities as possible themselves.

The next step is to find a suitable location in the Leuven area to permanently house the youngsters, by 2017 at the latest. The possibilities include renovating or building a residence, acquiring one through a leasehold, or signing a long-term rental agreement.

At the new centre, the youngsters would be assisted by both professional staff and volunteers, such as their parents or other caregivers.

Organising such a housing project is a complex undertaking. "We have to take into consideration the different needs of the youngsters," says Verschingel. For example, the group includes one person using a wheelchair and youngsters with Down's syndrome and autism. But the challenges go beyond just the technical requirements, says Verschingel. "Some youngsters need a lot of social contact, while others need a lot of structure and tranquillity," he explains.

The parents aren't going it alone; they're getting professional assistance from two Flemish organisations, Gipso and Inclusie Invest. Gipso, short for Guide for Inclusive Projects and Social Entrepreneur-

ship, is offering the parents advice and coaching, while the Inclusie Invest co-operative is providing financial support.

Half the cost of the residence project will be covered by an Inclusie Invest loan, while the other half is to be financed through the sale of €2,000 shares and other types of fundraising.

"We know it's a difficult enterprise, but we feel strongly encouraged by the fact that there are already similar residences that are doing well," says Verschingel, pointing out that the pioneering project of the Think out-of-the-box non-profit in Schilde, Antwerp, is one that has demonstrated good results.

Also helping the cause of initiatives like Honk is a new decree introduced by the Flemish welfare ministry last April. This decree stipulates that institutions for people with disabilities will no longer be the sole recipient of the government's subsidies. Instead, much of the funding will go to the individuals with special needs themselves, who can use it to pay for their care as they see fit.

"Through these budgets, the so-called backpacks, they increasingly become masters of their own care," says Verschingel. "But to make sure that this system works well, the new government will considerably have to raise the help budget for people with a disability."

Verschingel wants the Flemish negotiators working on the government coalition to take these disability budget needs into account.

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Audi and BMW student projects a success

Students from the technical secondary school KTA Pro Technica in Halle have been acquiring new skills at the workplace of car producers Audi and BMW. The trial project has been a success and both the school and its partners want to continue working together. At the Audi factory in the Brussels district of Vorst, 10 students have received 600 hours of lessons in the past school year. Five of them will now immediately start working as installation technicians; the other five will receive extra training to become maintenance technicians from September. BMW also evaluated the project positively and wants to repeat it next year. It provided students of the car technics study stream vocational training programmes of four weeks at the training centre in Bornem, Antwerp province, and two weeks of internships at franchising companies.

Entrance exam for teachers planned

The Flemish government negotiators of the CD&V and N-VA are planning to introduce an entrance exam for students who want to start teacher training, according to *De Tijd*, which has seen a note from the education working group. The measure would raise the level of future teachers and would be part of a general reform of teacher training. The negotiators also plan a "teacher career pact", aimed at making the career of teachers more attractive. Such a pact was predicted to be introduced during the last government.

PipeTech shows promising results

The PipeTech Academy in Sint-Niklaas has presented its results in increasing the number of specialists in pipe-fitting and flange assembly. According to the organisation, these are still bottleneck professions but that could be solved in five years. The founding companies, not-for-profits and government organisations have renewed their co-operation agreement and stated new ambitions. The academy was established five years ago by the companies Bilfinger ROB, Cofely Fabricom, TMS Industrial services and SPIE Belgium in collaboration with not-for-profit Montage, technology industry federation Agoria and Flemish public employment agency VDAB. It provides job-seekers with a six-month education programme in pipe fitting and flange assembly. \ AF

Flemish scientists develop new system to identify lame cows

Scientists at the Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research (ILVO) in Mellebeke in East Flanders have developed a system that allows them to identify cows suffering from the onset of lameness, to a degree of certainty reckoned at 90%.

Just as importantly, the Gaitwise system produces no false positive results, which themselves can be costly for farmers as they cause healthy cows to be taken out of the herd for no good reason.

Gaitwise uses a six-metre sensor over which the cows pass twice a day on the way from being milked (pictured). "Each time we register at least 30 variables in the cow's steps, such as pressure, distance between steps, regularity, breadth, rhythm and so on," explains ILVO researcher Annelies Van Nuffel.

"That allowed us to create a mathematical model that can distinguish with a high degree of accuracy between normal and abnormal steps, while at the same time excluding incidental differences."

In fact, changes to a cow's normal way of walk-



© Courtesy ILVO

The scientists created a mathematical model that can distinguish between normal and abnormal steps

ing can be brought about by many factors other than the medical problem of lameness. The weight of the calf being carried by a pregnant cow near the end of her term can influence the length of a pace and the relation between the placing of the fore and rear hooves. Older animals walk more slowly and less symmetrically, placing their rear feet more widely apart than their fore feet. The state of the ground also influences a cow's steps, as does the level of

light.

The Gaitwise system detects such incidental effects and excludes them from its calculation of a diagnosis of lameness. It is also able, its developers say, to distinguish serious cases of lameness from minor cases, achieving an 88% detection rate for minor cases.

The system is close to being brought to market by ILVO, with the technical research now being followed by an economic study to determine at what point it becomes economic for a dairy farmer to invest in a lameness detection system to tackle a problem that is not only an issue for animal welfare but also a financial question: Lame cows produce less milk and therefore generate less income for the farm.

In related news, another ILVO researcher, Liesbet Pluym of Ghent University, has been named Young Animal Welfare Scientist of the Year by the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, for her work on a detection system for lameness in sows. \ Alan Hope

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Midsummer picnic

Choose between two options: an afternoon picnic with a children's show at Provincial Park De Gavers, or an evening picnic with Music in the Park. Both picnics include regional specialties like Breydelham and *mattentaartjes*. Reserve your picnic basket via the Geraardsbergen Tourism Office by 25 July on 054 43 72 89. 30 July, Geraardsbergen, picnics €13-€15 per person

\ WWW.TOERISME-VLAAMSE-ARDENEN.BE

Brussels Tour for Kids

Children in Brussels and Ostend were asked to introduce their respective cities to each other and the results were made into a book, *BXL Aan Zee*. The book and accompanying map are available to borrow at Muntpunt for a unique kid's-eye view of the city. 27 July-29 August, Munt 6, free.

\ WWW.MUNTPUNT.BE

Biking in Green Ghent

On the last Sunday of the Gentse Feesten, the whole family can enjoy a day of cycling from farm to farm in the countryside around Ghent. Four starting points in Drongen, Wondelgem, Desteldonk or Zwijnaarde and eight routes between 25 and 80km long. Regional food and drink specialties, entertainment and kids' activities. 27 July, starting between 8.00 and 15.00, €3

\ WWW.BUITENBAND.BE

Hot Air Balloon Meeting

Dozens of hot air balloons in a variety of colours and shapes will fill the air over the Meetjesland during the biggest ballooning event in Flanders. Live music and carnival rides. Reservations for balloon rides can be made on 0477 34 09 23. 26-27 July, municipal sports hall, Burgemeester Lionel Pussemierstraat, Eeklo, free admission

\ WWW.MEETJESLANDSE-BALLOONMEETING.BE

Leuven SunTrain

Tour the main sights of Leuven's city centre by solar-powered train, a first in Flanders. Several departures a day from Monseigneur Ladeuze Square with stops at Park Abbey, the Great Begijnhof and Stella Artois. Daily Wednesday-Sunday until 30 September, €10

\ WWW.ZONNETREIN.BE

Walk with the animals

Antwerp and Natuurpunt offer guided tours of wildlife in the city



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.ONTDEKNATUUR.BE

The city isn't really a place for wildlife, you might think, unless you'd just been awoken by cooing pigeons, or had your binbag ripped open by a fox, or the cats had caught a mouse or a bat and presented half of it to you proudly. In short, the city is more of a place for wildlife than we imagined.

That's the theme of a summer campaign in Antwerp by the nature conservancy organisation Natuurpunt. The organisation has taken over part of the KBC Tower at the foot of the Meir, still occupied by the bank, to install a pop-up shop and offer visitors the chance to enjoy a view from the panorama room on the tower's 26th floor.

The mascot of the campaign is the sparrowhawk, a bird of prey who lives in conifer woods next to open land where he can hunt. In recent times, he's been known to take up residence in city parks, and this spring was spotted in the heart of Antwerp, as well as peripheral municipalities Mortsel and Borsbeek, and in the Hobokense Polder.

The Hobokense Polder is one of seven areas that feature in the free Antwerp walking guide, each one themed around nature and wildlife. Others are Ekeren and North Antwerp, Mortsel, Antwerp centre and the old port, Edegem and the Kleine Struisbeek valley, Fort Bosbeek and the left bank of the Scheldt.

The guide is available at the shop and covers a wide range of habitats in and around the city, with attractions ranging from wild orchids to 300 types of butterfly. Did you know that the Oude Landen to the north of Antwerp,



© Natuurpunt

A pop-up shop offers panoramic views from KBC Tower's 26th floor

partly owned by Bpost, is home to both nightingales and Galloway cattle? That walk is only 4.5km long, open all year round and close to public transport.

The Hobokense Polder walk is specially designed for children, under the watchful if myopic eye of Whoppie, a mole who acts as guide. Kids are armed with a backpack full of gear for their trip and have to solve puzzles along the way. There are Galloways here too – they do an excellent job of keeping the wild nature under control, it seems – as well as 360 kinds of mushroom, salamanders and *Pseudonapommyza hobokensis*, a fly found nowhere else on the planet. The walk is 3.5km long and starts in the Taverne De Schorren in Hoboken, and is open all year except Mondays in winter.

The shop itself is sparsely supplied, when we visited at

least, with a few stuffed toys, some bird houses and beehives you can put up in your own garden to encourage bees to come together. The areas covered by the walking guide get some explanation (although the guide itself is pretty comprehensive). And there's an exhibition of aerial photos by Wouter Pattyn showing some of the effects of nature in Flanders. We'd have appreciated some explanation of what exactly we were looking at and where the photo was taken.

The trip to the 26th floor with a guide to explain what you'll see all around you is bound to be a highlight. Unfortunately KBC has only granted access on certain dates, and the day we visited

wasn't one of them. The remaining open days are 26 July and 9 and 23 August. Entry is free but you have to reserve.

Other activities include: Have a photo taken with a deer, fox or wild horse on 30 July and 13 and 27 August; pick up a bunch of flowers for Mum on Antwerp's own Mother's Day on 14 and 16 August; enjoy a free cup of fair-trade coffee with a coupon downloaded from the site. The closing event takes place in Het Steen on the riverfront on 28 September, when there's also a Natuurpunt-themed trip on a river boat, for members only. Membership costs €24 a year for the whole family.

Until 23 August

KBC Tower
Meir, Antwerp

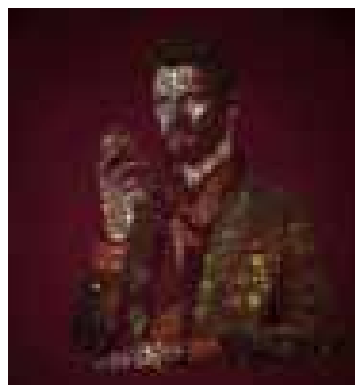
BITE

Gentse Feesten goes organic

WWW.BIOSMAAKT.BE

Organic producers in Flanders don't have it easy. Despite the growing popularity of chemical-free food, industrial producers can be a hefty bunch to compete with. But Flanders' Agricultural Marketing Board (VLAM) is fighting the good fight.

In an ongoing effort to promote the organic market, VLAM is putting on an all-organic festival this weekend during the Gentse Feesten. So if you tire of mojitos and Spitburgers, head to the Laurentplein where Biosmaakt.be – with support from the EU and the government of Flanders – will transform the square into a green place with a great atmosphere and, of course, plenty of organic food and drink to go around.



© courtesy Biosmaakt.be

The Biosmaakt.be campaign to promote organic kicked off earlier this month with TV spots in which Flemish actor Pieter Embrechts uses his impossible good looks to promote healthy organic lifestyle. A website competition gives you

the chance to win boxes filled with organic goodies. Finally, the grand finale is Ghent's Organic Festival, which is worth a visit for more than healthy food alone.

Pose with fun props made by Ghent illustrator Eva Mouton in the Biomatique and take the strip of silly photos home with you for free. From 15.00, enjoy live concerts by Tin Soldier in the Underwoods (a mix of country, blues, jazz and gospel), indie rocker Jesse Ashfield, "poetry band" Ten Adem, Doberman, folksy Flemish duo SerVaaS and sweet Dutch singer-song-

writer Maaïke Ouboter. Finally, at 23.15, Embrechts, the face of the campaign, rounds out the night with a performance by his band.

On the organic menu are burgers (meat or veggie) by Swedish chef Asarby, founder of SmartMat, made exclusively with local products and served with a summery salad, crispy fries and freshly made herb mayonnaise. Wash it all down with a bottle of organic beer or lemonade and seasonal fruit granita, a slushy, refreshing dessert.

\ Robyn Boyle

26 July

Laurentplein
Ghent

Screening the city

Nova Cinema takes its films outdoors once again for its open-air festival



Ian Mundell

More articles by Ian \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.NOVA-CINEMA.ORG

It's been a frustrating few years for pleinOPENair, the outdoor festival organised in Brussels by the Nova Cinema. In 2012 it was driven indoors when local authorities withdrew, at the last minute, permission for the festival to set up in the shadow of South station. And in 2013, similar wrangles, plus torrential rainfall, resulted in an outright cancellation.

But this summer, pleinOPENair is back in its original form – mobile and outdoors – with a mix of films, concerts, workshops and other activities calculated to explore hot topics in the urban environment.

This weekend the festival pitches camp below the Justice Palace in the Marollen district of Brussels. This is the perfect place to screen *Le Chantier des gosses* (The Kids' Building Site), a film shot in the neighbourhood during the mid-1950s by self-taught director Jean Harlez.

Inspired by the Italian neo-realists, Harlez built his story around local children running wild on wasteland being prepared for redevelopment. The long-forgotten film was revived by the Nova earlier this year, but this chance to see it in its natural environment should not be missed. It plays on July 25, with English and Dutch subtitles.

On Saturday there is original Italian neo-realism in the form of Vittorio De Sica's *Il Tetto* (The Roof, 1955), the bittersweet tale of a poor couple trying to put a roof

over their heads in Rome, at a time of social and economic upheaval. And if you turn up early in the evening, you can dance to gypsy jazz in the Bal Flamenco-Manouche.

For its second weekend, the festival moves north to the Modelwijk or Model District, a monumental social housing project dating back to the 1958 World Expo. Conceived as a self-sufficient community, its subsequent history has not always been pretty, and a programme of renovation is currently under way. Meanwhile, the adjoining Heizel plateau is awaiting a major redevelopment known as the Neo project.

The films selected dwell on such utopian projects. On the Friday there is *Barking Dogs Never Bite* (2000), about an unemployed Korean teacher who reacts badly to canine disturbances in his apartment building. This little-seen debut feature by Bong Joon-Ho (*The Host*, *Snowpiercer*) screens with English subtitles.

On the Saturday there is the more random choice of *Conversations in Milton Keynes*, a documentary feature in which Brussels-based filmmaker Ingo Baltes visits the eponymous British model city.

On its third and final weekend, the festival moves out to Haren on the periphery of Brussels,

where the films selected reflect plans to build a new mega-prison in the neighbourhood. On Friday there is Jacques Becker's masterly escape drama *Le Trou* (*The Hole*, 1960), which screens with English subtitles, followed on Saturday by *Scum* (1979), Alan Clarke's violent account of life in a British youth prison. While Haren is easy enough to reach by public transport, there will also be a free shuttle bus from the centre of Brussels.

Each evening in the festival also features short films, often exploring local issues, and concerts before and sometimes after screenings. Performances include free jazz from Yöki, eclectic brass from Alimentation Générale and electronica from Glü. Then there is Fantazio, a kind of avant garde cabaret rockabilly bass player, appearing with indo-punks Indus Bandits.

Screenings are free, with drinks and vegetarian food for sale from 19.00 each night. On the final weekend, the food is partly prepared using plants gathered in the Haren neighbourhood. If you want to explore this wild cooking further, there is a workshop on the topic on August 9, in Dutch or French. Check out the programme for other debates, walks and events between the weekends.

25 July-13 August

Across Brussels



Le Chantier des gosses and *Scum* are two of the films showing in related locations as part of Nova Cinema's pleinOPENair series

Urban magic: Antwerp gets its 10th comic strip mural

HTTP://STRIPMUREN.BE

Anyone who often walks around Brussels will have seen plenty of them: *stripmuren*, or comic walls, large murals dedicated to one of the many cartoonists this country has produced. But Antwerp also has its comic walls. The 10th one was recently inaugurated, based on Nero, the most famous of Flemish artist Marc Sleen's creations.

The Antwerp comic walls are an initiative of the people behind Mekanik Strip, a comic shop and gallery in the city. Initiator Linda Torfs says the idea of the comic walls in Brussels inspired her to do the same in Antwerp.

"With the latest comic wall, our trail along different murals in the centre of the city is completed," she says. "Maybe we will make more of them later, but for now we're focusing on promoting them." The organisers have put together a two-hour walk along the murals



© Brecht Evens

that now runs from Central station to the city's student area. "We have mapped out a walk, and the city guides of Antwerp have picked up the trail," she says. "Another new walk leads visitors along both the

comic walls and walls with poetry on them."

The city of Antwerp is participating in the project, since the walls contribute to the image of Antwerp as an artistic and crea-

tive place. "But the neighbourhood is also happy with the paintings," Torfs says.

"People come to us spontaneously to tell us when maintenance is needed on one of the drawings. It adds colour; it breaks the greyness of blank walls in a city. And the graffiti community respects our comic walls. We have little trouble with tags or graffiti on our drawings."

This country is the home of comic strips, so there is plenty of choice for inspiration to brighten up a wall. How hard is it to choose from the overwhelming number of potential artists? "We do indeed have the luxury of choosing from a huge range of artists, so we change our approach from time to time," says Torfs.

"Sometimes we choose to present the work of more alternative artists such as Jan Bosschaert or

Jan Van der Veke; other times that of mainstream comics artists like Willy Vandersteen or Marc Sleen. Usually it's the artists themselves who create something special for their wall. But then we also look for a nice image that fits into the neighbourhood."

Torfs explains that the wall itself, and the surrounding neighbourhood, define what the mural will look like. "It's important to melt into the atmosphere of a neighbourhood," she says. "A medieval quarter is different from a modern district, and that's something we always bear in mind in our work."

"In this way, a grey, dull, nondescript wall ends up as a nice corner. It's urban magic in my eyes. But equally, we want to promote the medium of comic books. Comics are really the ninth art."

\ Toon Lambrechts

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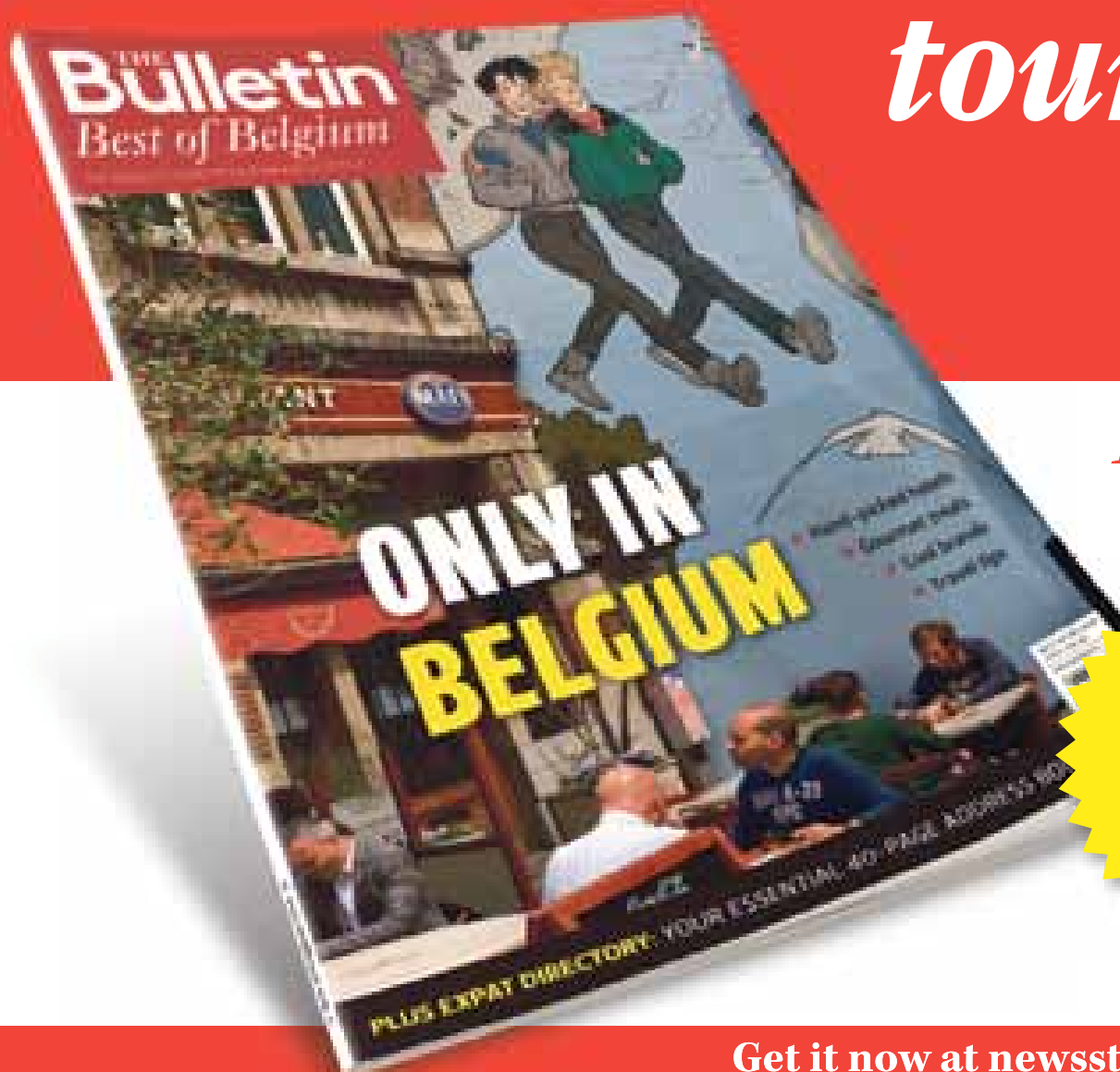
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Hotel Neverland

Eric de Kuyper's *Drie zusters in Londen* shares family tales from the First World War



Christophe Verbiest

More articles by Christophe \ flanderstoday.eu

"I'm always surprised when I hear people call me the 'the Flemish writer' Eric de Kuyper, but then it dawns on me: Indeed, I've written more than 20 books." But de Kuyper has also directed films and plays, worked in the world of visual arts, been a journalist, an academic and the deputy director of the Dutch Film Museum. A man for all seasons, though here we focus on his books, one of which has been republished and is to become a film.

Flemish writer Eric de Kuyper's novel *Drie zusters in Londen* (Three Sisters in London) begins at the outbreak of the First World War, as the Belgian and French employees of the British South Eastern Railways are shipped to London. Among them are the Cornellie family: three (almost) teenage girls – Jeannot, Julianne and Marie-Jeanne – their pregnant mother and their father. They spend the whole of the war in the Cannon Street Hotel. Despite the war and German Zeppelin raids on London, for the girls this exile is almost like living in a fairy-tale. One of the guests compares the place to Neverland, where Peter Pan lived.

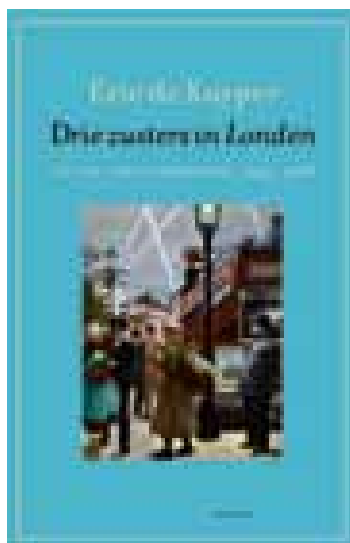
The middle girl, Julianne, is Brussels-born de Kuyper's mother. He recounts her and her sisters' stories in this series of tender vignettes, written with a meticulous eye for detail. As the author concludes his epilogue to the book: "Arriving they were still children; as adults they went."

Drie zusters in Londen first appeared in 1996 and has now been reprinted. Like the majority of the 16 books de Kuyper published between 1988 and 1998, *Drie zusters in Londen* isn't avail-

able anymore, "often not even in libraries", says the writer, who now lives in Germany. "This new publication ties in with the centennial of the First World War. Moreover, the idea is to turn the book into a film." Part of the screenplay is included in this new edition. For de Kuyper, who made four films in the 1980s, it's a homecoming to an old love: cinema. Though he probably won't direct the film himself. "As a filmmaker I like to experiment," he says. "This film requires a craftsmanship that I lack. A good English or Flemish director who has an affinity with a child's world and – very important – is skilful in creating an atmosphere should do the job. But I hope to be able to collaborate on the film."

“Writing in the first person would have been a bit too close for comfort

One of the directors who spring to mind is Briton Terence Davies. "I think our worlds are quite close, indeed. But he's a director who writes his own screenplays, so he might give priority to projects he has initiated himself." Still, de Kuyper is making a comeback as a feature director, as for the moment he's working on a "no-budget film", *My Life as an Actor*, in which he also plays a role.



Back to the book: De Kuyper didn't alter one word in the text, not even a comma. "If you start changing, you end up rewriting the whole book. I didn't want to do that, since I'm pleased with how it is. Moreover, the desire to change things was smothered by the fact that I could work on the screenplay, which at times departs from the book."

The three sisters died before de Kuyper started working on the book. He based the novel on the stories he had heard as a child, but he also had some help from his cousin Liliane and his brother Jan. "Both are more than 20 years my senior, so they heard these stories in the 1930s and could add some memories I didn't know about." Apart from that, he used information he had read about life at the time. "I was surprised by the quick communication between England and the battlefields. In the book, one of the hotel guests sends champagne to the front and a few days later the soldiers are already drinking it. That's no exaggeration!" Although it's based on an oral history, de Kuyper didn't shy away



© Stef Verstraeten

from fictionalising some events, such as a scene that takes place in a bomb shelter. "It has always intrigued me that the war was completely absent in the stories my mother and my aunts told, as if it didn't exist. Or, I wonder, did I forget those stories because they didn't appeal to me as a child? Also, they almost didn't mention my uncle Louis, who was born in London. There, too, I had to use my imagination to fill in the gaps." Still, most of it is written down as truthfully as possible. This is even

truer for the five books de Kuyper wrote some 25 years ago, from *Aan zee* (At the Sea, 1988) to *Bruxelles, Here I Come* (1993): his autobiographic cycle in which he describes his life from childhood until, at the age of almost 20, he entered film school. They are among the greatest books written in Flanders in the last quarter of the 20th century: heart-wrenching but not maudlin, nostalgic but not sentimental.

"In those books I have tried to be as truthful as possible. Of course, memories can be partial or vague," he says. Surprisingly, in those books de Kuyper writes about himself in the third person. "Writing in the first person would have been a bit too close for comfort. By writing in the third person I tried to create a character about whom I could be more critical and distanced. Because that distance really existed: While writing I wasn't that little boy or teenager. It wasn't *me* anymore, but *him*."

If the new version of *Drie zusters in Londen* the movie, the book might be translated into English. That would be a first for him, though you can already read him in French, Italian or Hungarian as well as Dutch.

FRESH FICTION

De jongste zoon (The Youngest Son)

Bart Meuleman • Querido

Poet, playwright, director and essayist Bart Meuleman publishes his first novel, *De jongste zoon*. At least, that's how his publisher coins this book. But the subtle mix of memories – from primary school until he leaves home after film and theatre school – and essayistic musings about artists who helped shape his world view and aesthetics is first and foremost a coming-of-age book that brings to mind, despite the stylistic differences, the (semi-)autobiographical writings of Leo Pleysier and, yes, Eric de Kuyper. I don't know how much of *De jongste zoon* is fiction and I don't care. It's written with gusto and I read it with joy. ★★☆☆



Bloeiende Agatha (Flourishing Agatha)

Frank Vande Veire • Het Balanseer

With *Bloeiende Agatha*, philosopher and essayist Frank Vande Veire embarks on a real *tour de force*: a pornographic novel with literary ambitions. And he succeeds, but the goal is akin to that of Lars Von Trier's film *Nymphomaniac*: Not aimed at arousing the reader, but rather pushing them face down in a sour and dour world, where sexuality and power games are implacably intertwined. It's a marriage made in hell that the novelist spices up with Catholic imagery. A jolly read it certainly isn't, but – as with a proficient horror film or the novels of Chuck Palahniuk – long after you've finished the book, it's difficult to get rid of some haunting scenes. ★★☆☆

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Bret Easton Ellis to chair Ghent Film Festival

Novelist Bret Easton Ellis will be this year's chairman of the Ghent Film Festival, which begins on 14 October, organisers announced. Ellis made his name with the yuppie novel *Less Than Zero* in 1985, before courting controversy with *American Psycho*, the story of a brutal serial murderer. His books have all been filmed, with other credits including a script and co-production credit on Paul Schrader's *The Canyons* with Lindsay Lohan. He also directed and appeared in the short *All That Glitters* in 2010.

Jokes complaint unfounded, regulator says

The Flemish media regulator VRM has declared a complaint against comedian Alex Agnew unfounded. The complaint about jokes regarding Jews in Antwerp and the so-called GAS fines was filed by four individuals after extracts of his stage show *Interesting Times* were broadcast by Vier in the programme *Comedy Kings*. The regulator pointed out that the content of a comedy show must enjoy "a large degree of freedom of expression" which could only be limited "for exceptionally weighty reasons". Agnew had shown no desire deliberately to incite hatred or violence against Jews, the regulator ruled.

Music ensemble co-founder dies

Dirk Snellings, co-founder and artistic director of the Capilla Flamenca music ensemble, has died at the age of 55. He had been ill for some time after being diagnosed with a brain tumour. Snellings sang as bass in the four-man ensemble, which specialised in Flemish polyphonic music from the 14th to 16th centuries. The ensemble took its name from the group of musicians Charles V took with him from Flanders when he returned to Spain in 1517. The group has won numerous awards for performances and recordings. Snellings is survived by a wife and four children.

Being Eric

Honest documentary shadows aspiring musician in small-town Flanders



Linda Thompson

More articles by Linda \ flanderstoday.eu

An award-winning film digs into the the year's big issue in Flanders as it follows an aspiring musician from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and explores what it means to look different.

If the reviews and TV guide blurbs are to be believed, *What About Eric?* is one of those warm, uplifting coming-of-age stories about an aspiring music artist trying to find success, and his place in this world.

But about five minutes into the movie, when the eponymous character describes his relocation to a small Flemish town as a teenager, it becomes clear that directors Lennart Stuyck and Ruben Vermeersch have higher aspirations for this film that won the award for Best Belgian Documentary at the Docville film festival in May.

In that early voiceover, 30-year-old Eric Kabongo narrates how he and his five siblings first settled into a social housing project in Waregem, West Flanders, after migrating from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Five years later, circumstances pushed Kabongo, then a young man, to again move into the same apartment block.

"Sometimes I just feel like I was made to stay here," he says in an empty, matter-of-fact tone as the camera pans to his cramped, dilapidated apartment, which swiftly becomes a symbol for the socio-economic ladder he has failed to ascend, giving viewers a first hint that this documentary is about to touch on themes of poverty, belonging and race in a way that few other Flemish films have.

"We didn't want to make a film about racism. That was absolutely not our intention," says Stuyck, 27. "That just happened to us while filming, so we said: 'Well, we can't keep ignoring this.'"

The directors, graduates of the RITS film school in Brussels, initially planned to follow Kabongo, who goes by the stage name of Krazy-E, as he pursued his dream of becoming a hip-hop artist.

But over the three years during which they shadowed him, the directors gradually realised that any honest portrait of Kabongo had to address the force that hangs heavy over his life – that of racial prejudices, discrimination and at times plain racism.

"If you want to tell Eric's story as honestly as possible, that's a large part of his life. That has to be in there," says Vermeersch, also 27, who met Kabongo when he was looking for a director for one of his music videos.

The documentary comes after a series of incidents that have pushed questions about race in Flanders to the forefront, with, for instance,



Eric Kabongo and his friends at the Waregem horse race, which he'd wanted to attend since childhood

recent reports about endemic racism in the Antwerp police corps; with a prominent VRT journalist speaking out against "a racist undercurrent in Flanders"; with KVS ending its 10-year collaboration with *De Morgen* following the paper's publication of a sports column the arts centre deemed bigoted toward Africans; and with leading N-VA politician Liesbeth Homans' statement that racism is "a relative notion" and "today mostly used as an excuse for personal failures".

“We didn't want to make a film about racism

The film, partly realised with funding support from Flanders Image and the Flanders Audiovisual Fund, follows Kabongo at a crossroads in his life – haunted by financial debts and mistakes from his past, but determined to make a fresh start with his music.

The directors attended rehearsals, recording sessions, video shoots and concerts and tagged along to concerts and meetings with his agent.

At the same time, the film has Kabongo recount tales from his teenage years, many of them evoking the small, day-to-day particularities of being black and poor in a middle-class, mostly white environment.

His classmates' taunts that blacks don't become doctors or lawyers in this country, for instance, convince him of his limited horizons early on, while his mother's inability to buy him flashy new trainers at the start of the school year becomes an excuse to steal them, a misdemeanour that paves the way for later felonies like drug-dealing and violent assault.

Even in the present, Kabongo's inability to find a parking spot in front of his building can become a sudden, maddening reminder of how trapped he feels, sending him into a blind rage. The film shows all this without much explanation and, but for a couple of scenes that feel all too staged, to great fly-on-the-wall effect.

If at times it seems like there's a sharp disconnect between Kabongo's pensive, insightful storytelling and his dark past, that's because there is – something the directors themselves struggled to understand. "And then you notice that it's those very little things that begin to trigger you and can cause you to veer from a certain path very quickly," Vermeersch says.

"When you don't feel welcome somewhere, when you're not at home somewhere, when you're always seen in a certain category, perhaps you even begin to act accordingly."

Yet the directors, who say they wanted to make a film for precisely those people who would normally walk away from documentaries, feel ambivalent about having their first feature labelled as a film about racism, instead describing it as one about Kabongo first and foremost, and the vicious circle racism creates in him second.

"It gives him the feeling: 'I'm not welcome here,' so he fights against it, but because he fights against it, he creates even more resistance against himself," Stuyck says.

For the directors, that's also why Kabongo so obstinately pursues a music career, why he scrambles back up following setback after setback, why he won't give up even when nagged by doubts that maybe he's just not that talented. Kabongo isn't after money, fame, or success, Vermeersch says: "For Eric, it's much deeper than that. That music is a way to be somebody."

One of the most powerful – but hardest to watch – scenes comes toward the end of the movie and takes place at the Waregem horse race, an annual Flemish fixture and

an event Kabongo had wanted to attend since he was a kid.

In spite of their dapper tweed suits, complete with trilby hats, Kabongo and his two friends stand out from the rest of the well-heeled crowd in the VIP section of the stands. The tension mounts as they make their way through the crowds to place their bets; the camera breathes down Kabongo's neck so the viewer sees what he sees, resulting in an almost physical experience of what it's like to look different in a small West Flemish town.

Visitor after visitor stares at Kabongo as he walks past, their faces a mix of curiosity, humour, contempt and sometimes outright hostility. "Will.i.am," one person says laughing and pointing, referring to the African American pop artist. "Isn't Carnival over yet?" another woman mutters under her breath.

From afar, a male voice can be heard telling Kabongo to return to where he came from. The camera quickly spins and becomes unsteady, until suddenly, we see Kabongo wrestling with a man at least a head taller than him, one of his friends trying to pull them apart as a female bystander screams for them to stop. Finally, the camera stops moving and focuses on the man, blood smeared over his chin.

The aftermath of that August day in 2011 was a mandatory anger-management course, a €1,000 fine and a three-year prison sentence on probation for Kabongo.

But however deleterious the consequences for Kabongo, the event also offered affirmation for the directors at what they say was the most difficult moment in the shooting process, when it felt like not much was happening in Kabongo's life.

"For us, it was a moment that we realised that we were doing something right," Stuyck says, "that there was something there that we could and *had* to narrate."

What About Eric? will be released on DVD by Dalton Distribution in October.

Discoveries guaranteed

Sfinks Mixed

24-27 July

Boechout

\ WWW.SFINKS.BE

When Sfinks Mixed saw its subsidies plummet last year, the music festival made a surprising choice. Instead of raising its ticket prices, Sfinks Mixed decided it wanted to broaden its audience and became a free festival.

Granted, Flanders is not lacking in free festivals. But they tend to take place in cities, with subsidies from the communal – and sometimes other – authorities. Even in the Antwerp region, where every hamlet seems to have its own musical summer festivities, a free festival in a field is highly exceptional.

Sfinks Mixed's gamble paid off.

Hordes of new, mostly young visitors found their way to Boechout, the festival's home turf. So, how did they swing it without subsidies? By adding a fourth day and allowing more visitors – 70,000 spread out over the four days – the catering revenues rocketed.

There was a downside, though: The musical programming was less adventurous than we were used to from Sfinks Mixed, the place where, over the last decades, scores of new names from the world music scene (and I use that in the broadest sense of the term) have made their Belgian debut.

This year, confident that the new formula works, Sfinks Mixed



© Tim Sallé

appears to have taken more risks with the line-up. Of course, it is impossible to predict who of the new names will be the real discovery. Amongst the established names, two Cuban bands – the versatile Orquesta Aragón and the highly danceable Septeto Santiaguero – as well as the mesmerising Tuareg ensemble Tinariwen are absolute musts.

But Sfinks Mixed offers much more than just music. On its market you can buy clothes, musical instruments, jewels and much more from all around the globe. You can also visit stands from several humanitarian organisations. And with the exotic food – from sushi to kefta – on offer, it is a festival that aims at your legs, head, heart and stomach. \ Christophe Verbiest

VISUAL ARTS

From America with Love!

Until 31 August

Bakkerijmuseum, Veurne

\ WWW.BAKKERIJMUSEUM.BE

With the Great Famine at the beginning of the First World War, Belgium's national food supplies were dwindling at an alarming rate. This exhibition shows how millions of men, women and children struggled to put food on the table during this dark period in Belgian history. It also lays out how the Americans, under Herbert Hoover, took the lead in an unprecedented global campaign called "Poor Little Belgians", distributing foodstuffs to the masses at a time when they needed it most. After the war was over, many Belgians decorated American flour sacks, which they sold as souvenirs or sent back to America as an expression of gratitude for the food they

received. These flour sacks, as well as haunting photos, stories and much more, are on display until the end of summer at the Bakery Museum in West Flanders. \ Robyn Boyle



FESTIVAL

Kunstenfestival Damme

Until 14 September

Sint-Janshospitaal, Damme

\ WWW.KUNSTENFESTIVALDAMME.BE

The charming, medieval village of Damme tends to be overshadowed by its neighbour, the *epically* charming, medieval Bruges. But this summer's Kunstenfestival is Damme's opportunity to shine in its own right, with two months of diverse events from concerts to workshops to lectures to guided walks to a massive exhibition. The festival marks the centenary of the publication of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, a watershed event in literature whose import is inextricably linked with that other watershed event of 1914 – the outbreak of the First World War. Festival offerings revolve around these two themes: history and literature. The guided Proust walk escorts visitors to all of Damme's bookshops and most of its historical sites. All roads lead to the ancient Sint-Janshospitaal, where more than a dozen Flemish and international visual artists exhibit works about memory. \ GV



VISUAL ARTS

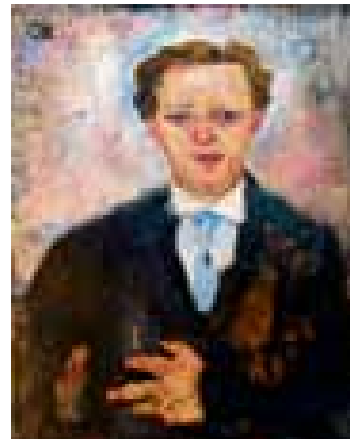
Kokoschka and Gauguin Unravelled

Until 25 January

Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels

\ WWW.FINE-ARTS-MUSEUM.BE

Nothing lasts forever, not even our favourite works of art. So the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium are collaborating with the VUB and Lumière Technology to develop new conservation technologies, including multispectral image analysis. This new exhibition puts two famous paintings, Gauguin's "Portrait of Suzanne Bambridge" and Kokoschka's "Trance Player" (pictured), under the multispectral microscope to show you what's going on beneath the surface. The technology deconstructs the colour palette, penetrates unseen layers of paint and sometimes even reveals hidden paintings underneath the visible composition. All this does more than just help us appreciate



the works and their artists; it's a crucial new tool in the restoration and preservation of cultural heritage. \ Georgio Valentino

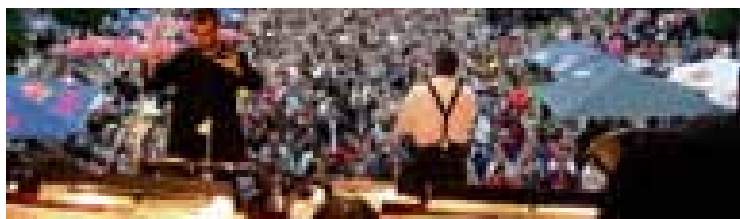
MUSIC FESTIVAL

Beleuvenissen

25 July and 8 August

Across Leuven

\ WWW.LEUVEN.BE



Beleuvenissen is no mere one-off city festival. The ambitious multi-block party is so nice, Leuven hosts it thrice; two editions remain. The thing encompasses two grand open-air stages and occupies nearly the entire city centre. The main stage is erected on Leuven's postcard-perfect Oude Markt. This is where Flemish superstars Arno and Axelle Red perform. The second stage, on the Grote Markt,

showcases rising talent like *Voice van Vlaanderen* alumnus Paulien Mathues. Finally, the Vismarkt is Beleuvenissen's open-air discotheque, where DJs spin soul, swing, samba and more. If you need a breather from all the partying, the neighbouring Hogeschoolplein, De Layensplein and Muntstraat are designated oases of relaxation and refreshment. \ GV

VISUAL ARTS

Antwerp

Ponte City: The latest project of two photographers, the South African Mikhael Subotzky and the British Patrick Waterhouse: a project based on a single monumental apartment building, Ponte City, the five-storey building that dominates the skyline of Johannesburg, one of the architectural icons of the city and the perfect witness to a society in constant change. *Until 11 November, FotoMuseum, Waalsekaai 47* \ WWW.FOTOMUSEUM.BE

Brussels

Titanic – The Artifact Exhibition: Experience the wonder and tragedy of the world's most famous ocean liner and discover the touching stories of lives that were lost in the world's most famous shipwreck. *Until 30 September, Brussels Expo, Belgiëplein* \ WWW.EXPO-TITANIC.BE

FAMILY

Lommel (Limburg)

Family Day: Fun free concerts and activities for the whole family, including performances by Boembox, Bandits and Urbanus & De Fanfaar. *24 July, 14.00-17.00, Marktplaats Lommel, Dorp* \ WWW.LOMMEL.BE

ACTIVITY

Roeselare

Brouwen en Fietsen (Brew and Ride): Bicycle ride combined with a guided tour of Rodenbach brewery. *Until 28 August (every Tue at 14.30 and Thu at 10.00, except 29 July), Toerisme Roeselare, Ooststraat 35* \ WWW.ROESELARE.BE

CONCERT

Ghent

Daithi Rua: Irish folk singer-songwriter (pictured) who grew up along the Shannon river before moving to Belgium in 2000. *24 July 21.00, Muzikantenhuis, Dampoortstraat 50* \ WWW.MUZIKANTENHUIS.BE



Talking Dutch

Shot in the foot



Derek Blyth

More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

You may recognise the name Axelle Despiegelaere. Or you may not. The 17-year-old briefly became one of the off-field stars of the World Cup after she was photographed in the stands with the Belgian colours daubed on her cheeks and a Red Devils hat on her head. But then it all went wrong.

It started a few weeks ago during the game between Belgium and Russia, according to *De Morgen* journalist Sofie Vanlommel. *Axelle daalt met vriendin Benedicte de trappen af om het nationale elftal van dichtbij te kunnen bekijken* – Axelle walked down the steps with her friend Benedicte to get a closer look at the national team.

Ze zijn blond, jong en uitgedost in tricolore – they were young, blonde and decked in the national colours. *Ze lopen recht in het vizier van de wachtende fotografen* – they walked straight into the lenses of the waiting paparazzi.

Flemish photographer Yorick Jansens happened to be standing in the perfect spot to get a shot. *Toevallig kwamen ze mijn kant uit. Ze vielen meteen op door hun uitbundige gedrag* – They happened to come



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in my direction. I noticed them because of their exuberant behaviour.

Jansens' photo went viral. Axelle was voted the "most beautiful fan" of the competition. A Facebook page was created in her name. *Verzamelt in een mum van tijd 200,000+ likes* – it gathered more than 200,000 "likes" in a matter of minutes.

Axelle was suddenly the most famous Belgian on the planet. *Ze heeft de cover van Het Laatste Nieuws gehaald, en alle andere populaire kranten en tv-stations* – she made it on to the cover of *Het Laatste Nieuws*, and other popular newspapers and TV stations. *Er zijn huwelijks- en andere oneerbare aanzochten van wildvreemde mannen* – she received

offers of marriage and other indecent proposals from strange men. And finally, as the icing on the cake, she landed a contract with the French cosmetic firm L'Oréal. But then Axelle did something stupid. She posted a series of holiday snaps just before the Belgium-US game showing her posing with a rifle next to a dead gazelle. She added the caption (in English): "Hunting is not a matter of life or death. It's much more important than that.. this was about 1 year ago... ready to hunt Americans today haha."

Many people didn't find this funny. Axelle was suddenly the most hated person on the planet. Her online life came to an end. *Openbare profielen zijn afgesloten* – her public profiles were shut down. *Weg met de 235,000 Facebook-fans* – gone were her 235,000 fans. *Uit met de pret* – the fun was over. Axelle's contract with L'Oréal lasted just three days. *Het was een one shot contract* – It was a one-shot contract, a spokesperson said. You might add that this was a one-shot career for poor Axelle.

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



Ale Centurión @alessiin

It is not Tomorrowland but it is also amazing!* #Gentse-Feesten #PoléPolé @ Graslei, Gent <http://instagram.com/p/qmx196lGhA/>



Andreea @onfoodandwine

how did I miss this? every Thursday public bread #baking in the heart of #Brussels – and it's free! :) <http://fb.me/33JfriMcP>



Emily Dredd @actionem

Cell phone charging station in #Brussels airport. Ride to charge. #cycling #itselectric #lovethis pic.twitter.com/jjm9mnFi28



Valentino Fontolan @ValeFonto

The first sun in #Brussels! At 6PM but it is still sun! #ValeAtBrx pic.twitter.com/R26kJOFBiK



Daniel Demoustier @dandemoustier

Last weeks to see the fantastic @michaëlBorremans expo @ Bozar As Sweet as it Gets #art #Brussels <https://www.bozar.be/activity.php?id=13204&...>



Nicholas @RamblingFeet

There's more than one place to party this week besides @ tomorrowland <http://myramblingfeet.com/2014/07/14/ghent-feesten-belgium/> ... #Ghent #GF14



Peter Feather @Peter_Feather

Only one day left! Then #10daysoff #birthday #tomorrowland #gentsefeesten Eat sleep rave repeat.



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Poll

A new book highlights all that's good about Belgium. Which of our top things about Flanders is most important to you?

a. There's a host of places to discover: posh Knokke, dreamy Damme, trendy Antwerp, boisterous Aalst, party town Ghent...

11%

b. Flemish history is around every corner, it's well looked after, and museums are always busy

22%

c. The Flemish are proud of their artists and writers, past and present; they know and appreciate their work

44%

d. The food and drink here is unbeatable. And the beer is world-class

22%

There's no accounting for taste, but we'd expected food and drink to be the thing most people appreciate about living here, what with beer, chocolate, mussels and fries all being included. But no. Food and drink ranked alongside historic surroundings and museums in the

list of things you think are great about Flanders.

The book, *The Bright Side of Belgium*, offers a huge variety of things its authors think are worth cheering. We gave you four options, and the biggest vote, nearly but not quite half of you, went to the

respect and appreciation given to writers and artists, which indeed is surprising for a Brit or an American to witness. Consider the crowds who turned out for the funeral of Jan Hoet not so long ago, or the veneration for writers like Hugo Claus or Louis Paul Boon.

THE LAST WORD

Spin doctor

"They asked me if I would take care of the music at a party in the autumn. They need two days of music from 10 in the morning till 10 at night. I said yes."

The DJ at the centre of the travellers expulsions controversy in Landen is now booked by the same travellers he was supposed to be chasing away (see page 4)

Profit of doom

"If e-reading keeps on growing, there will be no writers left in 10 years, because there will be no money to be made any more."

Best-selling writer Pieter Aspe is pessimistic about the prospect of a growth in e-readers, as *Standaard Boekhandel* launches its new e-reader

Open house

"We expect nothing in return, and it's certainly not a way of luring people in to church. It's an extra service for residents and tourists in the city, who want to catch their breath."

The Our Lady of Good Hope church in the centre of Vilvoorde will open on hotter days to allow visitors to cool off inside, Paul Huenens of the church fabric committee said

Careers advice

"I've now decided that my life is one long holiday, and I'll go to work from time to time. A philosophy I can commend to everyone."

Stany Crets, actor-writer-producer-director, has a new outlook on life as 50 approaches

\ Next week's question:

A researcher at the University of Ghent says Flemish children need to move about more. What do you think?

Log on to the Flanders Today website and click on VOTE to send us your view

