

**SEEING THE LIGHT**

Flanders' First World Commemoration Lichtfront lit up the front line and impressed the world

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ENGAGING EVERYONE

The Cera Awards recognises innovative designs by students for fellow students with special needs

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**BEASTLY BRUGES**

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© Natalie Hill

Co-ordinator Tine Dupont with children in the snoezel room at Ter Bank school in Heverlee

An uncommon room

Snoezel rooms in Flemish schools are a safe, calm space for pupils with special needs to explore



Andy Furniere
More articles by Andy \ flanderstoday.eu

Snoezelen is becoming increasingly popular in special education schools as an activity that can stimulate the senses of youngsters with mental disabilities in a calm environment, and many schools are making efforts to install the proper infrastructure. Teachers, however, are not always using the adapted space to its full potential. Students from Odisee University College in Brussels are now offering a helping hand.

Snoezelen is one of those Dutch terms that's hard to translate, the word being a contraction of the verbs *snuffelen* (to explore) and *doezelen* (to relax). The concept was coined by two Dutch therapists in the 1970s, when they set up an experimental sensory tent for people with mental disabilities at a fair.

The tent was filled with simple installations such as a fan blowing paper shreds, ink mixed with water that was projected on to a screen, musical instruments, tactile objects, scent bottles and tasty foods. The purpose was to provide a multi-sensory experience that would entice visitors but also help them to relax.

Since then, this kind of therapy has gradually been integrated into the care for people with mental disabilities and also for others with special needs, such as patients with dementia. Large centres with extensive snoezel spaces have been launched, like Het Balanske care centre in the Flemish Brabant town of Sint-Joris-Winge and the Sens-City centre in Overpelt, Limburg.

The Children's Rehabilitation Centre at Ghent's University Hospital, meanwhile, started a project to help rehabilitate children with brain damage via selective sensory stimulation, to rediscover certain perceptions and to calm down.

But more and more schools are installing their own small snoezel rooms for their pupils. One of them is Ter Bank school in Heverlee, a district of Leuven, which provides special education to toddlers and pupils at primary and secondary level.

"We used to go to Het Balanske with groups of youngsters but decided it would be both financially and pedagogically more advantageous to create our own room for our about 210 students," says Tine Dupont, who co-ordinates the secondary education department at Ter Bank. She also wrote a thesis on snoezelen.

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8,400 lights on Western Front

Torches illuminate the front line in Flanders' most impressive war commemoration yet



Alan Hope

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Ten thousand volunteers carried lit torches over a distance of 84 kilometres last Friday, the entire length of the Western Front line. International headlines over the weekend were filled with praise and admiration for what is so far the most impressive of Flanders' commemorations of the First World War. The Lichtfront, or Light Front, was a spectacle of fire and light staged for an international audience, including delegations from the parliaments of the UK and Ireland. The Light Front stretched, just like the Western Front of 1914-18, from Nieuwpoort on the coast to Ploegsteert Wood, the scene of fierce fighting on the Ypres Salient in 1914-15. The 10,000 volunteers carrying torches to illuminate the line were joined by thousands of spectators, despite an appeal for people to

watch the proceedings on TV or on one of the giant screens installed in 10 local municipalities.

In towns in the vicinity of the Light Front, street lighting was turned off and residents were asked to turn off all their lights so the Light Front would stand out.

"I was moved," commented West Flanders provincial deputy Guido Decorte. "I never expected we would mobilise so many people. It was a success from beginning to end, from Nieuwpoort to Ploegsteert. We wanted to involve a lot of people, and we made a lot of people happy. That's very gratifying."

The event also marked a rare public appearance by Princess Elisabeth, the 12-year-old heir to the throne. Though neither the king nor queen spoke, Elisabeth gave a speech she had written herself in the three national



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languages. "We shall never forget those who fell here," she said. "Even today, war is destroying lives. Fathers, mothers and children are suffering or are separated from each other. But in their sorrow, they also offer us a lesson in courage and dignity. Their gaze challenges us to work for a world of justice

and peace. It is now up to us, the young people, to hold high the torch and form a light front such as we have seen today."

In related news, a new First World War visitors' centre at Nieuwpoort opened at the weekend. Westfront Nieuwpoort, installed under the massive monument to Albert I, tells the war story of the coastal town, close to where the Ganzepoot lock complex played such a crucial role in flooding the Germans out of their position in 1914. The action ensured the safety of Nieuwpoort and established the front line there until the final battles of 1918.

The new centre cost €6 million, financed by West Flanders province and the government of Flanders. The complex was officially opened to the public by minister-president and West Flanders native Geert Bourgeois.

Unions plan national strike on 15 December

The three main trade unions have called for a general strike for Monday, 15 December, in protest at spending cuts planned by the new federal government accord. The unions are angry at what they described in a statement as an agreement "full of blind cuts that will drain social security dry, bring public services to a standstill, destroy our purchasing power and cost us jobs."

All public sector unions are planning to take part in the strike, including the railways. Before that, three smaller actions will be carried out in the provinces. Limburg and Antwerp will see many public and private services shut down on 24 November, while East and West Flanders will see the same on 1 December and Flemish Brabant and Brussels on 8 December.

The last national strike took place in January 2012, also in protest at government spending cuts, that time from the recently installed socialist-led government of Elio Di Rupo.



© Yves Herman/REUTERS

The national strike in January of 2012 was the first in two decades

"People start their lives with cuts, and end them with cuts," commented Rudi De Leeuw, secretary-general of the socialist union ABVV. "It is our moral duty to organise resistance. There is no alternative."

Jo Libeer of Flemish chamber of commerce Voka said it was "incomprehensible" that the unions are rejecting the policies at this early date. "The ink on the accord is barely dry, and it's clear the government wants to take a number of matters under consid-

eration together with the unions and employers. It simply makes no sense to reach for their most drastic weapon at this early stage and threaten to bring the nation to its knees."

Unizo director-general Karel Van Eetvelt agreed, saying that unions "are resisting a number of government measures but are making the problem worse, which will only make the effect of the measures harder".

Unions had rejected talks in the summer with those forming the government and are now rejecting talks again, continued Van Eetvelt. "They're saying: let's hit the economy even harder. I fear the goal might be to cause the fall of the government."

Christine Mattheeuws, chair of the self-employed union NSZ, noted that "what our economy needs most urgently now is co-operation aimed at securing our wealth and welfare." A general strike, she said, should "be the ultimate weapon, to be used only when all else has failed". \ AH

Health minister appoints national Ebola co-ordinator

The new federal minister of public health, Maggie De Block, has appointed doctor Erika Vlieghe as the national Ebola co-ordinator. Vlieghe is the head of the Tropical Diseases department at Antwerp University Hospital.

Vlieghe (pictured) will lead a team in the co-ordination of a national approach in dealing with the dangers of the Ebola epidemic, which is raging in large parts of West Africa. A recent study from Northeastern University in Boston shows that there is about a 40% chance that the Ebola virus will reach Belgium by the end of October through air travellers. Several countries are now home to someone who is suffering or who has died from the virus, including the US, Spain and Germany.

It is also the task of Belgium's co-ordinator to ensure an accurate stream of information to professionals and the public.

Vlieghe immediately announced new measures at Brussels Airport.



Passengers coming from risk countries in West Africa will now be screened for the virus on their arrival in Belgium. Until now, checks were only carried out in the countries of departure.

The screenings include temperature checks to make sure passengers don't have a fever when they enter the country. Those who have a fever will be examined by a nurse and, if necessary, by a doctor at the airport.

Vlieghe also announced stricter monitoring of luggage and the introduction of extensive training programmes for airport staff. The procedures will be regularly evaluated and adjusted. \ Andy Furniere

114,693



students enrolled in university colleges at the beginning of October, 3% more than last year and one-half of all students in higher education



56

priests of foreign origin active in the Catholic church in Flanders, either from abroad or born here of foreign parents, the Catholic magazine *Tertio* reports. In Brussels, the number is 80



€4 million

investment planned by owners Plopsa Group in the Plopsaland amusement park in De Panne in 2015. That comes on top of €16 million already earmarked for the new Plopsaqua water park



168km

of traffic jams every weekday on average in Flanders in 2013, according to a government report, an increase of 25km a day on the previous year, even as traffic volume remained constant



€.02

increase of the cost of a postage stamp for inland mail from 1 January for purchases of 10 or more stamps, bringing the price per stamp to 72 cents. The cost of a single stamp remains 77 cents

WEEK IN BRIEF

The Flemish TV sketch show *Wat als?* and the reality series *Missie Mosango* have both been **ominated for International Emmy Awards**. *Missie Mosango* (Mission Mosango), from production house Geronimo, followed six young Flemish volunteers as they worked for two weeks in a hospital in rural Congo. The series is nominated in the category non-scripted entertainment. *Wat als?* (What If?), nominated in the Comedy category, is a sketch show made by production house Shelter. The awards will be announced on 24 November.

The government of Flanders will pay out **premiums to farmers** to help the sector cope with liquidity problems arising out of the Russian import boycott, agriculture minister Joke Schauvliege announced. Half of each farm's allowance will be paid out on 30 October, while those in line for a suckling calf premium will receive 80% by the end of November. "We're doing our best on every front to help make the situation more tolerable for farmers and growers," Schauvliege said.

A fire that completely **destroyed the church of St John the Baptist** in Anzegem, West Flanders, was caused by a malfunctioning heating installation, the Kortrijk prosecutor's office said. No-one was injured in the fire, but homes in the area had to be evacuated. The 12th-century church was burnt to the ground because of its open medieval construction and large amounts of wood and lime in the roof.

Manfred Sellink has been named the **new director and head conservator** of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp. Dutch-born Sellink is an expert on Pieter Bruegel the Elder and is currently director of Bruges' consortium of museums. Sellink "knows the Flemish museum scene like the back of his hand,"

OFFSIDE Off the rails

If to err is human, to err to the tune of more than €1 billion must be quite superhuman. When the news came out that the national rail authority NMBS was facing savings of €2.1 billion, most people probably just shrugged and put it down to the austerity that's taken over the Western world. The public transport users' group TreinTramBus warned that the savings would cut a swathe through rail services. The planned GEN regional express network around Brussels could no longer go ahead, the group said. In the end, it didn't get worse and now even feels a whole lot better. Last weekend the papers published a correction: Those

commented culture minister Sven Gatz, announcing the appointment. "He enjoys a great deal of credibility and legitimacy at home and abroad and has an impressive network."

Flanders **cut its greenhouse gas emissions** by 8% between 2008 and 2012, allowing it to meet its 5.2% target under the Kyoto Protocol by a wide margin, environment minister Joke Schauvliege said. During the period, Flanders had a maximum allowance of 82.5 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions a year but only used an average of 80 million, and only 76 million tonnes in 2012. "The prognoses for 2013 indicate a further reduction," Schauvliege said.

A court in Brussels has acquitted a man who **accidentally left his six-month old daughter** in the back of his car when he went to work on a hot day in 2012. The child died, and the man was charged with involuntary homicide. The army lieutenant worked at the Belgian military quarter in Brussels and had forgotten to drop the infant off at the crèche before going to the office. The incident was caused by forgetfulness, the judge ruled, while forgetting is "essentially involuntary" and "escapes conscious control".

Following on the heels of a collapse of exports as a result of the Russian import ban, fruit growers in Limburg are now facing an **infestation of the spotted-wing drosophila** (*Drosophila suzukii*), which is particularly attracted to the area's black wine grapes. The flies, originally from southeast Asia, are thought to have benefited from last year's mild winter to survive in greater numbers.

Ann Van Driessche is leaving her post as **director-general of Munt-punt**, the Flemish public library

and information centre in Brussels, to take up a job as director of marketing, communications and events at the Free University of Brussels (VUB). Van Driessche steered the organisation through its transformation from a library to the multi-use Munt-punt, which opened just over a year ago. She takes up her new post in March, after having overseen the appointment of her successor.

A radicalised Islamist who **worked at the nuclear power plant** at Doel in East Flanders before going off to Syria to fight with jihadi forces has been killed, reports said. Ilyass Boughalab, 26, worked for three years until 2012 for subcontractor Vinçotte, which allowed him access to the most sensitive areas of the installation. He was apparently killed in Syria last spring.

Customs officers in the port of Antwerp have been equipped with a new mobile scanner to allow them to **inspect containers for smuggled drugs**, cigarettes and other contraband, including human traffic. The scanner is fitted inside a simple van and cost just over €1 million, customs said. Last year customs at Antwerp discovered 4.1 tonnes of cocaine and 173 million smuggled cigarettes, three-quarters of them counterfeit.

Actor Matthias Schoenaerts and his mother, Dominique Wiche, have begun legal action for an **interim judgement on the book Schoenaerts** by crime writer Stan Lauryssens, which tells the story of Schoenaerts' father, Julien, and his struggle with bipolar disorder. The action is calling for copies of the book to have a sticker on the cover making it clear that it is not an authorised biography. Lawyer Jos Vander Velzen called the book "a sensationalist fantasy" that damages the name of its subject and his family. A ruling is expected on 23 October.



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savings would not after all amount to €2.1 billion, but only €663 million. Somewhere along the line, things had got confused, and you know how it is, €1,473,000 give or take, it's a mistake anyone could make.

"We got it wrong," a spokesperson for the cabinet of federal mobility

minister Jacqueline Galant admitted. "How the mistake happened, we don't know. There may have been some confusion with the debt of infrastructure agency Infrabel. That happens to amount to €2.1 billion."

Sighs of relief are being heard from rail users – and that's the most brilliant part of the whole story. We can now be thankful for €663 million of spending cuts, as if we'd put on an old jacket and found a tenner in the pocket. Had that been the original news, of course, it would still have been shocking. It's so brilliant, it's a wonder nobody thought of it before.

Alan Hope

FACE OF FLANDERS



Michel Tubbax

Michel Tubbax has been named the new CEO of Vlaams-Brusselse Media, the recently created non-profit that manages the weekly paper *Brussel Deze Week*, local TV station tvbrussel, website brusselnieuws.be, radio station FM Brussel and the trilingual listings magazine *Agenda*. The organisation employs 80 people and is headquartered in the Flagey complex in Brussels.

Tubbax, 58, founded and ran media agency Vizeum in Kraainem, now a division of Aegis Media in London. He then became managing director for employment agency Stepstone, before returning to the media as general manager of Roularta Media, which publishes *Knack* and *Trends*, among other properties.

Tubbax studied at the Flemish Economic University College Vlekho, now merged into University College Brussels (HUB), and later at Vlerick Management School. His CV also includes management training at Insead and the Harvard Business School.

"The board arrived at Michel following a thorough selection procedure," said chair Marc Michils. "We're convinced he's

the right man to develop this organisation further and to ensure that it fulfils its qualitative goals. In particular, his ability to manage a group of creative people was decisive in making our choice."

Vlaams-Brusselse Media was set up in March this year, bringing together the non-profits running *Brussel Deze Week*, tvbrussel and FM Brussel under one roof in order to improve efficiency and extend the media's reach. The organisation is financed by the Flemish Community and the Flemish Community Commission by means of a multi-year co-operation agreement.

"I'm delighted to be able to lead this organisation as it really gets moving," Tubbax said. "The idea is to streamline Vlaams-Brusselse Media into a single powerful media organisation, while maintaining the particular qualities of each of the brands."

The job, he said, would involve keeping an eye on the production as well as the commercial aspects of multimedia publication to be sure that they are "better serving media consumers inside and outside of Brussels with a contemporary media offering." \ AH

FLANDERSTODAY



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EDITOR Lisa Bradshaw

DEPUTY EDITOR Sally Tipper

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR Alan Hope

SUB EDITOR Linda A Thompson

AGENDA Robyn Boyle, Georgio Valentino

ART DIRECTOR Paul Van Dooren

PRESS Corelio AdPro

CONTRIBUTORS Daan Bauwens, Rebecca

Benoot, Derek Blyth, Leo Cendrowicz, Katy

Desmond, Andy Furniere, Diana Goodwin,

Catherine Kosters, Toon Lambrechts,

Katrien Lindemans, Ian Mundell,

Anja Otte, Tom Peeters, Senne Starckx,

Christophe Verbiest, Débora Votquenne,

Denzil Walton

GENERAL MANAGER Hans De Loore

PUBLISHER Corelio Publishing NV

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

Gossetlaan 30 - 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden

tel 02 373 99 09

editorial@flanderstoday.eu

SUBSCRIPTIONS

tel 03 560 17 49

subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu

or order online at www.flanderstoday.eu

ADVERTISING

02 373 83 24

advertising@flanderstoday.eu

VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

Hans De Loore

5TH COLUMN

Don't mention the war

The federal parliament flared up last week right before the new prime minister, Charles Michel, was to deliver the new government's policy statement. Laurette Onkelinx, former vice-prime minister for PS, lashed out at Michel, not because of the government's social and economic choices, which differ radically from those of the previous administration, but at remarks made by N-VA ministers Jan Jambon and Theo Francken about collaboration with the Nazis that Onkelinx found impossible to ignore. In an interview, Jambon had called the collaboration "wrong, but those involved had their reasons". Francken was a member of a group called VNV, the namesake of a collaborating party in the Second World War.

Second World War collaboration is a sensitive issue to this day. Some historians call it Flanders' "unresolved past". Many French speakers see some, or even all, of the Flemish as Nazi sympathisers, (ignoring that there were many French-speaking collaborators as well). This lives on in the stereotype of the Flemish as racists and the French speakers as virtuous anti-fascists.

In Flanders, many see the collaboration as an unfortunate side-effect of the struggle for Flemish emancipation. Those involved were mainly young men, blinded by nationalist and anti-communist ideas (ignoring that many of them did indeed sympathise with the Third Reich ideology).

Within the Flemish emancipation movement, these men are considered victims, as they suffered from a harsh post-war repression.

To this day, a number of politicians active in both N-VA and Vlaams Belang have forefathers who were collaborators/victims. When Onkelinx spoke out, though, she did so mainly to hurt the prime minister, whom she wants to declare guilty by association. In Flanders, Onkelinx's indignation had little effect. The Flemish left has little sympathy for the collaboration past, but, 70 years on, it hardly gets worked up by it.

The Flemish in general have either long been aware of the link between Flemish nationalism and collaboration, including its many historical nuances, or they are too young to care. Both are true of N-VA leader Bart De Wever, a historian specialised in the subject. "I would rather get on with this century's issues", he commented. \ Anja Otte

Marathon policy debate

"A long night" in the federal parliament as new policies debated



Derek Blyth

More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

Belgian MPs sat until the early hours of last Thursday morning debating the new government's policy plans. The marathon session lasting 21 hours began at 10.00 on Wednesday and was finally brought to a close at 7.00 the next morning. The long session was an indication of fierce opposition to the policy plans of the new federal government from the Flemish and French-speaking socialist parties, who are not part of the ruling coalition for the first time in 25 years. By the end of the night, just 50 MPs were still present in the chamber. "It was a long night. This almost never happened in the Flemish parliament, which is just across the street," said Flem-



© Thierry Tronnel/CORBIS

Front: Prime minister Charles Michel (right) and minister of work and economic affairs Kris Peeters during the marathon parliamentary sitting

ish liberal Bart Tommelein, new to the chamber. The parliament convened again on Thursday afternoon to continue debating policy plans. The session began with an apology from Flemish nationalist Theo Francken, now state secretary for asylum and migration, who was criticised for taking part in a birthday party in honour of a Flemish extremist and posting a message on Facebook in 2011 in which he questioned whether there was any economic benefit from migrants from Morocco, Algeria and the Congo.

"I realise that I hurt people by saying this," he told the House of Representatives. "I didn't ever intend to. I want to offer my sincere apologies."

Brussels government to focus on major urban projects

The government of the Brussels-Capital Region will focus on major urban projects, said minister-president Rudi Vervoort in a speech last week setting out his government's plans for the coming four-year term. "The big challenge is to implement, implement and implement," he said.

The government aims to push ahead with several ambitious projects, including the redevelopment of the Reyers site, the former Josaphat rail site, the Tour & Taxis site and the neighbourhoods along the Brussels canal. "These are the areas where we want to create the Brussels of 2025," Vervoort said.

The districts concerned will incorporate a mix of housing, public space, economic activities and leisure. The administration plans to construct 6,500 additional housing units, as well as setting aside €300 million to renovate social housing.

Vervoort also pledged to tackle high unemployment in the capital by creating jobs for residents. "The aim is to turn Brussels into the European capital of enterprise and innovation," he said. Vervoort promised that the government would press ahead with construction of a new metro link to Schaerbeek and the upgrade of the premetro tram line in the city centre into a full metro link. Commuters coming into the city from the suburbs will have a better train service, he promised, with trains every 15 minutes connecting to 30 local Brussels stations. \ DB

New government pledges support for Limburg recovery plan

Flanders' minister-president Geert Bourgeois and federal prime minister Charles Michel have confirmed they will respect pledges to support the revitalisation of the Limburg economy made by previous administrations.

The recovery plan known as Salk was drawn up after Ford Europe announced the closure of its Genk car factory. Some 4,300 Ford workers will lose their jobs when the factory closes at the end of this year, along with an estimated 5,000 people employed by supplier firms.

The Ford factory was the largest employer in Limburg province, which has been struggling economically since the collapse of its coal industry in the 1980s. The Salk plan will provide €317 million in subsidies to support new economic ventures.

Bourgeois pledged continued government support at a meeting in Hasselt last Friday. Flanders' former minister-president, Kris Peeters, was also present in his new capacity as federal labour minister. Peeters confirmed the federal government is still committed to investments in rail projects as well as the construction of a new prison in Leopoldsburg.

The European Union has agreed to provide more than €500,000 from the European social fund to support workers seeking new jobs as a result of the Ford closure. \ DB

Flemish Parliament receives British and Irish delegation

A group of representatives of the seven parliamentary assemblies in the UK and Ireland travelled to Flanders last week to take part in First World War commemorations, including Lichtfront, a new event involving light installations, designed to commemorate the tactical flooding of the plain of the IJzer river (see p2).

"The Flemish Parliament has sent delegations to visit the British and Irish parliaments in the past, and we have built up good relations with them," said Dries Bergen, the parliament's international relations manager. "We decided to start with them in what will be the first initiative of the new parliament in the context of First World War commemorations. We will organise similar invitations for other countries over the next four years."

The dignitaries took part in a ceremony with the steering committee of the Flemish Parliament and children from the International School of Flanders in Waterloo reading war poems. They also

toured an exhibition of photographs of memorial sites by Jimmy Kets, on show in the parliament building.

On Friday they toured Bruges before moving on to the Memorial Museum at Passchendaele and the Menin Gate in Ypres, culminating in the Lichtfront event at Diksmuide.

The 17-member delegation at the time of going to press included Lord John Sewel, chairman of committees of the House of Lords; Jim Hood MP representing the House of Commons; Dame Rosemary Butler, presiding officer of the Welsh Assembly, and commissioners Sandy Mewies and Rhodri Glyn Thomas; John Scott MSP, deputy presiding officer of the Scottish Parliament; Mitchel McLaughlin, principal deputy speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and members Anna Lo and Peter Weir; Sean Barrett, speaker of the Irish parliament; Paddy Burke, chairman of the Irish Senate; and officials and private secretaries. \ Alan Hope

Bourgeois visits the Netherlands for talks on trade mission

Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois made his first official visit to the Netherlands to meet Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte. The two leaders agreed to finance a joint trade mission next spring along the same lines as the Dutch-Flemish trade mission to the United States last year. The leaders will decide on the destination at a later date, Bourgeois said.

Bourgeois met Rutte for a working lunch in the prime minister's official residence, known as the Catshuis. "It was a very good meeting, and I received a warm welcome," Bourgeois said. "The policies we are pursuing in our two countries are very similar."

The talks focused on strategic co-operation between Flanders and the Netherlands. The leaders aim to put the finishing touches to a treaty next year to improve the canal linking Ghent and Terneuzen, which passes through Dutch territory. Financing still has to



Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte (left) meets with Geert Bourgeois in the Catshuis

be agreed, but some financial support is expected to come from the European Union.

The talks also touched on cultural co-operation between Flanders and the Netherlands. The leaders plan to hold a summit next year in Flanders to mark 20 years of cultural co-operation. \ DB

An uncommon room

More and more schools in Flanders are installing their own snoezel spaces

continued from page 1

For the design of the snoezel room, Ter Bank entered a contest run by the TV programme *Huizenjacht* (House Hunt) on VT4, through which the school received the help of a specialist architect. They relied on sponsorship and donations to pay for the snoezel room, which cost about €32,000.

The first thing the children at Ter Bank do when they enter the snoezel space is take off their shoes, which immediately instills a sense of cosiness. They can then explore the different spaces in the room, which can be softly lit in relaxing colours.

"We have clearly noticed that the room encourages that important sense of wonder that is so healing but that we often lose as adults," says Dupont (*pictured below with one of her pupils*). "But we also had the impression that snoezelen was too much of an activity in itself, instead of a means to achieve certain developmental goals with the children. So we set up a project for pupils to create specific learning tools. One tool could serve to help a child with autism break out of a position of isolation, another could help to calm down a youngster who is normally hyperactive."

research, since I'd never encountered it during my previous internships and didn't learn much about it in class," says De Grève. "We discovered that many of the teachers at Ter Bank were also a little in the dark about the precise purpose of snoezelen."

According to the students, the children were mostly free to roam around snoezel spaces, without much structure in the activities. "It sometimes felt like it was just used as an expensive indoor playground, with children throwing around the balls from the ball pond," De Grève says.

So the students decided to focus on creating an information brochure to clarify the purposes of snoezelen and to provide practical tips on improving the multi-sensory experience for students.

"We don't mean to say that children cannot explore in a snoezelen room on their own, but it's good to have some variation in the activities," explains Wauters. "It should also be possible to have structured snoezel sessions in which there is a focus on one of the separate senses or a particular body movement. At a playground, children want to try everything at once and get excited instead of calming down. That is not what snoezelen is about. A snoezel room should invite children to explore and should surprise them."

One of the practical tips that De Grève and Wauters mention in their brochure is to create a ritual to make it clear to youngsters that

The room features a water bed, a ball pond, a quiet corner with mirrors, a virtual aquarium, a column with bubbles that change colour if a button is pushed, glowing cords and other materials that are nice to look at or touch. The room also has a projector and a sound installation, to play music or relaxing videos such as scenes of nature.

Children enter in small groups of up to eight, so it is never too crowded. Individual sessions can also be valuable for the development of certain students.

“The room encourages that sense of wonder that we often lose as adults

This project was taken up during the last academic year by two students in orthopedagogy at the Odisee University College, previously known as Brussels University College (HUB). It served as the Bachelor's thesis for Sophie De Grève and Eleja Wauters.

However, when the two students observed the methods of the teachers at Ter Bank, they quickly realised that their original plan was too ambitious; they had to lay a better foundation for snoezelen first.

"I had little knowledge about snoezelen when we started the



Photos © Natalie Hill

A ball pool, mirrors and brightly coloured toys in the snoezel room encourage youngsters to explore, while the coloured lights and cushioned floor help calm them

class is over and they are going to the snoezel room.

"Children with mental disabilities often benefit from repeated actions that provide structure to their schedules," explains Wauters. The students suggested singing a particular song whenever they were going to the room or giving them a specific doll in class when making the transition.

The students also made certain proposals for new materials in the snoezel room. "Professional snoezel equipment can be very expensive," says De Grève. "But it's actually not so difficult to create your own tools." A sensory play board can be made with a simple wooden board and everyday objects like a sponge, brush and washcloth, for example. "There actually is a lot of information available," says Wauters. "We got a lot of theoretical background and practical tips from the authors of *Het Grote Snoezelboek* [The Big Snoezel Book]."

All the information and tips that the students gathered is summarised in an easy-to-use guide for the teachers at Ter Bank. "But this brochure can also be of help to other schools or teachers with similar challenges," says Wauters.

She has received several requests for the brochure – one, for example, from a Fleming who was going to teach in Peru.

Thanks to the project, teachers at Ter Bank are making more efforts to improve the sessions in their snoezel rooms. "Many teachers now use rituals and take along extra thematic materials to bring more variety into the snoezelen activities," says Dupont.

But the project at Ter Bank is far from finished. Two more students, also from Odisee University College, will this year try to develop the learning tools for specific developmental goals for youngsters – as was the original plan last year.

"I also hope to establish a separate working group at the school soon, which should focus on expanding the scope of the snoezelen activities in our room," says Dupont. "We could set up a project to involve parents more in snoezelen, since they know best the needs and preferences of their child. That way, we can adapt the experience further to the personal needs of each student."

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Apparel \ Mer du Nord

The ailing clothing and apparel stores group operating under receivership has attracted two takeover bids from the French Les Bourgeoises group and from the local JBC distributor. Both offers entail major job losses and the closure of most of the brand's outlets.

Banking \ Dreefog

The Brussels-based private banking and assets management group is to pay €460 million to acquire the local Petercam bank which manages €14 billion for its wealthy clients. Up to 20% of the merged workforces of 1,400 are to be made redundant.

Banking \ Delta Lloyd

The Dutch insurance group has shelved the sale of its local banking affiliate due to a lack of interest from potential buyers. Delta Lloyd Bank will continue operating and will seek to develop the private banking operations it acquired when taking over the local Bank Nagelmackers.

Cars \ Tesla

The California-based high-end electric car manufacturer had registered 361 vehicles at the end of September on the local market at €90,000 each.

Energy \ Colruyt

The controlling family of the Halle-based discount retailer is to invest €10 million to acquire a leading stake in the French Eurowatt energy group operating wind farms in France, Poland and Portugal. The Colruyt family already owns stakes in local offshore wind farms.

Energy \ First Utility

The largest independent gas and energy distributor in the UK is considering expansion in Belgium and Holland and may seek a Brussels stock market quotation.

Fast food \ Burger King

The US-based chain has created a Brussels-based co-ordination centre to manage and develop the operations of its affiliates in Italy, Greece, Romania and Poland.

Leisure \ Plopsaland

The theme park in De Panne is to invest €4 million next year in addition to the €15 million already earmarked for the building of an aquatic park.

Plastics \ Solvay

The Brussels-based chemicals group is to supply Apple with high-performance Peek (polyether ketone) plastic for its iPhone6 range.

Katoen Natie wins Flanders' Enterprise of the Year award

Logistics company impresses with rate of growth and staff development



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.eu

Katoen Natie, the privately owned shipping and logistics company based in the port of Antwerp, has been named Flanders' Enterprise of the Year for 2014. The prize, now in its 20th edition, is organised jointly by consultants EY, BNP Paribas Fortis and financial daily *De Tijd*. The prize was handed over by King Filip at a ceremony on Tuesday evening. "Katoen Natie has followed an impressive route to arrive here, with priorities like growth and staff development," said jury chair and industrialist Paul Buysse. "Staff motivation has ensured a constant and daily development of new initiatives, markets and products."

Katoen Natie, which began in 1854 as a consortium for the import of cotton from the US, now handles every sort of cargo, with 400 units worldwide, including 150 shipping terminals.

The company, which employs more than 10,000 people, is the sole property of CEO Fernand Huts, who has been in charge since 1981. Huts is known for his headstrong and idiosyncratic methods, someone who makes headlines by, for example, threatening to pull out of Antwerp because of a clash over fees. Nevertheless, he is widely regarded as a brilliant entrepreneur. Turnover in 2013 was more than €1

"Katoen Natie is a successful company on every level, not driven by one man, but carried by hundreds of enthusiastic colleagues," Buysse said.

At the same time, Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois handed over his government's prize for the Most Promising Enterprise to CMOSIS of Antwerp, which produces imag-



© Jasper Jacobs/BELGA
Fernand Huts (left), pictured with his son Karl Huts, celebrates his win as Flanders' Enterprise of the Year

ing sensors. The company, founded in 2007 and employing 69 people, "shone in the area of technological excellence, has great growth potential and is a very worthy as an ambassador for enterprise in Flanders," the jury said.

Antwerp and Shanghai ports to work more closely

The port of Antwerp is to work more closely with the port of Shanghai in China, the largest port in the world, Antwerp Port Authority has announced. During a mission to China by the city authorities, including mayor Bart De Wever, the two port authorities signed a new memorandum of understanding. The two ports have maintained close relations ever since a co-operation agreement was signed between them in 1985, an agreement which was renewed in 2004 on the occasion of a royal trade mission. "Most importantly, Antwerp's maritime know-how is tightly embedded in the port of Shanghai, with no fewer than 240 Chinese professionals who were trained by APEC, the training centre of the port of Antwerp," the port authority said in a statement.

The port of Shanghai is the largest in the world, with 776 million tonnes of goods handled last year, including 33.61 million containers. By contrast, Europe's number two port, Antwerp, handled

190 million tonnes of goods and 8.6 million containers in 2013, which was a record year. "We want to attract more traffic from China," De Wever told VTM News. "At the moment we're not the biggest destination for them, as we are for other parts of the world. So there's still room for growth." In the meantime, Antwerp faces aggressive competition from French and Dutch ports, the Belgian ambassador to China, Michel Malherbe, said. The memorandum of understanding engages the two ports to exchange information, take part in joint promotion of their activities and train maritime professionals. Antwerp's full-time representative in Shanghai, Jan Van der Borght, was given a Golden Magnolia Award last month for his contribution to the city's economic development and international image. Van der Borght received the Silver award two years ago and is only the second Belgian, and the first representative of a foreign port, to receive both awards. \ AH

VRT chair says there is a limit to cuts

The Flemish public service broadcaster VRT spent €445 million in 2013, the equivalent of €46 for every resident in the region, according to chair Luc Van den Brande, presenting the VRT's annual report to the media commission of the Flemish Parliament.

Last year's budget included a cut in government funding of €8.5 million, said Van den Brande. Due to Flemish government funding cuts announced this year, the public broadcaster faces losing another €18 million. "It's possible we could save even more, but at some point the limit will be reached." Thanks to a mixture of better budgeting for programmes, administrative simplification and improvement of procedures, the broadcaster finished the year €500,000 under budget.

More than half of the total outlay in

2013 of just over €445 million was spent on television; radio accounted for €89.5 million and support services

€49 million. The rest was divided up among the launch of new third network OP12, mobile apps, research and development, support services and line extensions.

"We saved more than €100 million over the last few years," Van den Brande, a former minister-president of Flanders, told the committee. "We've already done our share of the work. That doesn't mean further efforts can't be made, but only in a responsible manner that allows us to carry out our mission."

In related news, VRT intends to move into newly built quarters on the Reyers site by 2020. The new premises will offer 55,000 square metres of offices and studios, at a cost of €105 million. An announcement for development bids has been issued, and a shortlist of five developers is due to be announced this week. \ AH

THE VRT IN FIGURES

97%

of Flanders watched at least one of the broadcaster's channels

1h55min

spent by the average person watching VRT television per day

2,095,935

people watched one of the news bulletins on average per day

64.3%

of programme in prime time were Flemish productions

94.7%

of programmes were subtitled

Jan de Nul and DEME win €1.6 billion Suez Canal contracts

Two consortia involving Flemish dredging companies Jan De Nul and DEME have been awarded contracts to carry out works for the widening of the Suez Canal. The plans involve making the existing canal deeper and broader, as well as constructing a second canal running parallel to the original. The Suez Canal was built to link the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea and was completed after 10 years of construction in 1869. The canal allowed shipping between Europe and Asia to avoid circumnavigating the African continent, reducing the voyage from England to India, for example, by about 7,000 kilometres. These days, more than 17,000 vessels pass through the canal, oper-

ated by the Egyptian state, every year.

The contract awarded to the consortium that includes Aalst-based Jan De Nul is worth €1.2 billion, evenly divided among four members, and involves constructing 50km of canal running parallel to the existing canal, to allow ships to pass each other, as well as making certain sections of the canal wider and deeper. DEME (Dredging, Environmental and Marine Engineering) and two other partners will also carry out widening and deepening works over 25km, dredging to a depth of 24 metres. That contract is worth €421 million. DEME is based in Zwijndrecht, Antwerp province, but, like Jan De Nul, operates worldwide. \ AH

Can maths change the world?

Ingrid Daubechies, Flanders' most famous mathematician, believes it can



Senne Sterckx

More articles by Senne \ flanderstoday.eu

Last year, mathematicians worldwide were stunned – as were many non-mathematicians – when the US-based Breakthrough Prize Foundation announced that it would award five prizes of \$3 million each to honour the world's best mathematicians and support their endeavours. The laureates will be presented with their trophies at a ceremony next month.

To the barrage of journalists seeking to document their impressions, the five prize-winners said they hoped to use part of the money to benefit the mathematics community.

That was all the encouragement needed by Ingrid Daubechies, president of the International Mathematical Union (IMU), to suggest a particular cause to which the donation of a small part of their prize money would mean a great deal.

The Limburg-born mathematician steps down from her office as president of the IMU at the end of this year. During the four years of her presidency, she's devoted herself to helping gifted people from many countries in the developing world pursue their dream: to become a mathematician.

"We have to act now or we risk the extinction of ecosystems that are still present in many developing countries," Daubechies said last month at the Heidelberg Laureate Forum, a high-level conference where young maths researchers from all over the world can network with top scientists in their fields.

By "ecosystems", Daubechies means the higher education struc-



© Heidelberg Laureate Forum Foundation / C Flemming 2014

Flemish mathematician Ingrid Daubechies speaks at last month's Heidelberg Laureate Forum

tures that many developing countries have inherited from a former coloniser that are now under severe pressure. "In countries like Cambodia, Ecuador or Sudan, even the brightest minds simply can't afford to become professional mathematicians or maths teachers," explains the star of Flemish mathematics. "Universities often have a few good maths professors, but in most cases they don't have the money to hire or train assistants. So when they retire, there's no one to follow them."

Doing a PhD in a developing country isn't expensive from our point of view. "For €250 a month, you can pay for a student to do a PhD in his or her country," says Daubechies. "That's also why I wrote those emails to the Breakthrough Prize winners. I'd read in the newspapers that they wanted to spend a part of their prize money on a good cause. Well, I gave them one."

And they responded enthusiastically. The Breakthrough Prize

winners have agreed to donate \$100,000 each to the IMU to be used for the programme. "We have to create a critical mass," continues Daubechies. "The granting of generous scholarships for the gifted to come and study in our universities is great on an individual level, but it doesn't create a surplus value in their home country. That's the big difference of the €250 sponsorship programme." During her presidency of the IMU, Daubechies also expanded the Volunteer Lecturer Programme, which offers universities in the developing world lecturers for intensive three- or four-week courses in mathematics at the advanced undergraduate or Master's level.

"We make a list of all possible lecturers, and we provide funds for all living and travel expenses. The host university doesn't have to pay anything, but we do ask that they provide a local assistant and that the course becomes part of a

regular degree programme." These programmes have taken place in Africa, Central America, southeast Asia and the Middle East.

"Everything starts with a good education," Daubechies says. This is proved, she believes, by the observation that countries where people attach a lot of value to simply going to school are much more resilient.

"In South Korea, for example, everyone agrees that proper schooling is one of the key drivers of their prosperity. During the first years after the Korean War, many people were living in tents, but they were all sending their children to quickly improvised schools.

"Also, the Koreans show respect for teachers. This was also the case in Flanders in the 1960s and 1970s, when I was at school. It's a cultural thing. I don't see it in the US, where I live now."

Closer to home, what does Daubechies think of the ongoing issue of encouraging Flemish girls to study technical subjects such as maths and science, including one suggestion to segregate classes by gender?

"Separation between boys and girls in technical directions; indeed, that's a problem," she says. "When I went to school, at the Lyceum in Hasselt, it was still strictly separated. I found that quite artificial. But when my own children grew up, I considered sending my daughter to a girls' school. Girls and boys develop at a different pace. Girls have more self-confidence if they're in girls-only schools, studies say. Boys want to be the best in their class – and this is even more so in mixed schools."

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Drone knowledge centre opens in Genk

A consortium of Flemish companies and knowledge centres, supported by the government of Flanders, has launched the expertise centre Euka in Genk to assist the development of the Flemish drone industry. Euka, short for European UAV knowledge area, will collect information on global developments concerning the use of drones and support enterprises wanting to create new business models in the sector. One of Euka's priorities is research on applications in the security sector. By equipping drones with observation cameras, certain inspections can be carried out more cheaply.

UZ Leuven gives baby new cardiac valve

Surgeons at the University Hospital Leuven (UZ Leuven) have succeeded in placing a new cardiac valve in a one-year-old baby via a catheter in the liver, a world first. Just after birth, the baby received a new cardiac valve via open-heart surgery, but this valve quickly broke down. "A second open-heart operation would entail severe health risks, so we had to consider surgery via a catheter," explained cardiologist Marc Gewillig in a press statement. Normally, surgeons put the catheter through a vein in the groin or the neck to the heart. "But these veins in children who weigh less than 10kg are too small for such a catheter," said Gewillig. The surgeons therefore installed the catheter via the liver. The baby is now back home and is in good health.

STEM academies draw 4,000 students

Eight months after the STEM academies were launched, about 300 initiatives have been set up across Flanders, with more than 4,000 school students participating. The STEM Platform, launched earlier this year, is an independent group of experts that advises the government of Flanders and its STEM steering committee on the action plan to encourage students to enrol in studies in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. According to the STEM Platform, almost one-quarter of the 308 Flemish municipalities now have a STEM academy, a network of organisations that organise after-school activities around science and tech for children and youngsters up to 18 years old. \ Andy Furniere

Q&A

Antwerp-born Gunter Pauli is the founder of sustainable products company Ecover, initiator of The Blue Economy and has launched the Zero Emissions Research Initiative (Zeri), a global network that promotes sustainable business models.

You founded Zeri 20 years ago; since then, 200 projects have been implemented. What's your favourite?

I have favourites on each continent. In Asia, it's the production of paper with waste from the mines. In Latin America, it's the regeneration of the rainforest in Colombia. In Africa, it's a maggot farm in Benin. And in Europe, it's the reconversion of a petrochemical facility into a bio-refinery where thistles are processed. But one that's really in my heart is the farming of mushrooms on a bed of coffee waste – which happens all over the world now.

Do you have a common procedure by which businesses are set up?

Our starting point is an inventory of the opportunities. We asked ourselves what we can undertake here and now. After all, we pursue an inherently positive approach in which we embrace opportunities of cascading resources, like coffee used as substrate to farm mushrooms, or convert unused resources into a portfolio of products, like extracting six products from thistles using the infrastructure of a defunct petrochemical facility. We try to redirect available resources to generate jobs (like the substitution of one industrial



bakery with 6,000 local bakeries generating 12,000 jobs while eliminating 100 at the factory).

Do we need stronger incentives for sustainability, like more expensive oil or a higher tax on waste?

I don't think we need additional incentives. We need the elimina-

tion of all the barriers, the excessive regulations and the unreasonable requirement to tender all purchase efforts by public and large-scale private institutions. What we really need is total transparency of the business models, the revenue models and the benefits that are generated through these new rules. We can only redress the confidence in the economy if we know "how much is enough".

Because you give lectures around the world, you've earned millions of air miles. Do airlines offer you special treatment?

I compensate all my emissions by planting new rainforest. That feeling of equilibrium feels better than any stress-free treatment a very frequent flyer can get when boarding a plane. \ interview by SS

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Game on

KU Leuven graduate makes technology accessible to special school pupils



Senne Starckx

More articles by Senne \ flanderstoday.eu

Children and youngsters who are mentally or physically disabled get special care at Windekind, a Leuven-based multifunctional centre that includes a number of special schools. Obviously, the centre tries to provide its pupils with the best care. But good care is not always enough.

As technologies such as social media, apps and gadgets advance rapidly, only a very limited amount of the innovation reaches this part of society, which could benefit so much from its applications. This is why Cera, a Flemish co-operative partnership that invests in welfare projects, set up its annual awards in 2011; some readers might remember that the former CERA bank was absorbed by KBC. The Cera Award is meant to encourage social profit organisations that have used technological innovation as a tool to improve their overall functioning. The slogan of the awards reads "Technological innovation in social profit: it is possible!"

To emphasise the bottom-up aspect of technological innovation, the Cera Awards are meant for secondary school pupils who have worked on a socially orientated project during the past academic year. For the year 2013-14, Cera rewarded 11 pupils, among them Gerrit Andreo y Sanchez.

The University of Leuven student graduated in industrial sciences last summer. His Master's thesis involved the project for which he was given the Cera award: the design and development of an electronic music game for children with multiple limitations.



Anne Gelin of Windekind with University of Leuven graduate Gerrit Andreo y Sanchez, inventor of a musical game designed for Windekind's pupils (pictured below)



From the start, Andreo y Sanchez worked with the teachers and caretakers at Windekind to learn about its pupils' exact needs and how he could steer his project based on this information. "Computer games are very popular among teenagers and young adults," he says. "But most of these games are not suitable for people

with a mental or physical limitation. So sadly enough, these people are excluded from participating in often exciting and instructive games. My goal was to develop a computer game specially adapted to the youngsters at Windekind." Andreo y Sanchez worked with pupils aged between 13 and 17. "All of them have multiple limitations, which means they are both mentally and physically disabled," says Anne Gelin, a paramedic at Windekind. "These limitations can be very different. It's our goal to guide our pupils towards an optimal ability to manage for themselves, to prepare them for an adult life in a protected environment. Technology can play a really important role in their autonomy." What particular type of computer game Andreo y Sanchez would have to develop was not clear until he had immersed himself in daily life at Windekind. He attended

classes, spoke to the pupils and even joined in G-badminton, the Special Olympics version of badminton. In this way, he learned what the group's overall interest was and to what particular level he had to make technological adjustments to overcome their limitations.

Armed with all this information, Andreo y Sanchez started designing and building an entirely new electronic music game. In the game, the player taps a series of buttons to get into the rhythm of a song. As long as the player follows the rhythm more or less correctly, he or she stays in the game.

Andreo y Sanchez also designed an animation that moves synchronously with the music, which supports hand-eye co-ordination. After observing the first gaming sessions, he decided to incorporate a picture of the actual player on the screen.

"They really liked this," he says. And they really liked the game, Gelin confirms. "This is mainly due to the musical element and the fact that it's so easy to control."

Now Andreo y Sanchez is gone – he has found a job in the computer industry – the pupils at Windekind still use the game he invented especially for them.

And there's more, Gelin says. "We are thinking of using the control panel Gerrit developed for other computer applications because a regular keyboard and mouse are not suitable for our pupils."

Windekind won Cera's Organisation Award, given to a social profit organisation that is an example to the sector in terms of technological innovation.

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Dutch lessons popular among EU expats

Nearly 3,380 expats have registered for Dutch language classes this year at the Huis van het Nederlands (House of Dutch) in Brussels. The total number of Dutch language students in the capital is 16,660, meaning about one in five are expats. In its 11 years, the House of Dutch has seen its group of expats grow steadily. "EU citizens here in Brussels see Dutch mainly as an extra asset on the labour market, as they clearly experience that Brussels is a multilingual city," said Gunther Van Neste, director of Huis van het Nederlands. The largest group of expat students studying Dutch are from Germany, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy.

Council of State allows student to wear turban

The Council of State has ruled in favour of a student of Indian origin in Sint-Truiden who wants to wear a turban at school. The Flemish Community education network (Go!) had prohibited this last year as part of the general ban on headscarves. According to the Council of State: "If a school wants to ban religious symbols, it must be able to supply a very concrete reason for doing so." A Go! spokesperson told *deredactie.be* that the ruling is contradictory. "On the one hand, the education sector has the authority to impose the prohibition, but on the other, the prohibitions are cancelled in these particular schools," she said. Go! will now examine the case with their jurists. The general prohibition on headscarves remains in place.

KU Leuven receives 13 sexism complaints

The contact point for gender and diversity at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven), which was founded last academic year, has already received 13 complaints of sexism. Heidi Mertens of the contact point told student magazine *Veto* that the number of complaints does not reflect the reality and that many cases of sexism are actually not reported. KU Leuven vice rector Katlijn Malfliet said the rectorate was aware of the importance of the problems but pointed out that inappropriate behaviour between professors and students occurs far less frequently than in the past.

\ AF



Q&A

Filip Van Droogenbroeck, a researcher at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), examined the causes of burnout among Flemish teachers who are older than 45.

How common is burnout in teachers over the age of 45?

Previous research by our team showed that a large group of teachers end their careers before the regular retirement age and that in many cases, burnout is the main reason for this decision. We were interested in finding out the reasons for this prevalence of burnout and how it could be prevented. We focused on four aspects in our survey among 1,878 older teachers: the role of interpersonal relationships, autonomy, teaching-related workload and non-teaching-related workload.

How do relationships affect teachers' work?

We found that the relationship with the students is of major

importance. That shouldn't come as a surprise; earlier research shows that most teachers chose the profession to help youngsters in their development, and this gives them the most satisfaction if it goes well.

Solidarity between colleagues can also protect teachers against emotional exhaustion, since it's essential to feel like you are part of a team working towards the same goals. It's a little surprising that the relationship with parents seems to have no effect at all, but it is true that teachers only have contact with parents a few times a year.

What did you conclude concerning autonomy?

Teachers definitely need to feel like they're involved in the decision-

making process at a school and that they have the freedom to use their own initiative. We found that the role of the director in this respect is crucial.

Is there a lot of work for teachers outside the classroom?

More and more, we believe. Teachers increasingly have to justify

their methods, and many teachers feel too much emphasis is put on paperwork. The role of the director is again essential, as they must translate policy decisions to the day-to-day school context and should protect teachers against unrealistic demands and expectations.

What is your advice towards policymakers?

Decision-makers should make sure that accountability demands and paperwork have a clear added value, so teachers don't become demotivated by this workload. We also propose to pay more attention to the non-teaching-related workload in teacher training so that the new generation of teachers is better prepared. We also want to see an additional training programme for school directors, to ensure they don't overload their teachers.

\ Interview by Andy Furniere

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Red Dog Family Festival

An international programme with activities for kids in every age group, including films, workshops and performances. At festival headquarters in Park De Bruul, you can find information about all events, eat pancakes, watch a magic show, play DJ at the outdoor roller disco or get a cool haircut. *25-28 October, Leuven; most activities free*

\ www.rodehond.be

Holiday Circus Park

A circus-themed park for kids, where they can dangle from a trapeze, play in a real circus tent, try juggling, unicycle-riding or stilt-walking, explore the Magician's Caravan and more. *25 October to 2 November, 13.00-19.00, Familieliepark De Sierk, Vosseslag 42, De Haan; €8*

\ www.desierk.be

Pumpkin regatta

Teams of four compete in a relay race, paddling hollowed-out giant pumpkins over a 100m course. Separate divisions for men, women and children, with prizes in each category. Pumpkin-hollowing starts at 10.00, races at noon. *26 October, Ark Van Noë, Arkstraat 6, Kasterlee (Antwerp province); €5 per team to enter*

\ www.pompoenregatta.be

Nieuwpoort Oyster Fair

Enjoy raw oysters on the half shell with a glass of champagne, or sample other seafood such as baked oysters, Nieuwpoort shrimp soup or fresh fish. Oysters will also be available to buy and take home. Free shuttle between the fish market, tourist office and International Boat Show, happening the same weekend. *24-26 October, Vismijn, Nieuwpoort; free*

\ www.verassendmari-temnieuwpoort.be

Vikings!

During the school holiday, kids can participate in activities held in conjunction with the exhibition *Vikings!* in the Gallo-Roman Museum. Make a sword, string a necklace or build a miniature Viking ship, play archaeologist with a spade and trowel, or go on a photo scavenger hunt. *25 October to 2 November, 10.00-18.00, Kielstraat 15, Tongeren; €7 for adults, €1 for kids*

\ www.galloromeinsmuseum.be

Old timers on air in Olen

A remarkable museum and repair shop beckon to lovers of vintage



Toon Lambrechts

More articles by Toon \ flanderstoday.eu

\ WWW.RADIOMUSEUM-OLEN.BE

You've probably never heard of Olen, let alone its Radio Museum. But a visit to the folky museum in southern Antwerp province is a must for anyone with an interest in old-fashioned technology and design, or even with a thing for vintage. What began as a private collection of radios has become a compilation that spans 70 years of radio history. Nothing betrays what treasures are hidden behind the nondescript facade of the Radio Museum. But inside, room after room is filled with old radios, from the beginning of the 20th century to the late 1970s. Most of them are simply pieces of art, particularly the oldest ones, beautifully and thoughtfully made wooden constructions.

One of the first devices you see takes you directly to the early days of radio. It dates from 1901 and is in fact no more than a coil, an amplifier and headphones. Leon Schyvaerts, one of the people behind the museum, let me put on the headphones, and, to my surprise, I hear music. However, there is no plug attached to this primitive radio. Schyvaerts explains that it works only on the energy of the radio waves. Even if the electric current gets cut in Olen, there will be radio playing in the museum.

Schyvaerts points to one of the less prominent radios in the collection. Radio number one, as he explains, the device that started it all. It is the first piece of the collection ever obtained and comes, as one might hope, with a story. Radio number one dates back to just before the Second World War. When Nazi troops occupied Belgium, all Jews were required to hand over their radios. A Jewish family from Antwerp gave their device to the aunt of Pieter van Opstal, the founder of the museum. Many years later, he repaired the radio and began the collection. In 1992, Van Opstal opened the Radio Museum, first in the garage of his home and later here in a house he bought and converted to the museum of today. His passion for radio infected others, and today a group of volunteers runs the museum and the related workshop. "You have to do something after you retire," Schyvaerts so succinctly puts it.

One of the radios comes with an old black-and-white photo, taken somewhere in Aarschot in the 1920s. A family poses with a car and a "portable" radio, which is on display in



© Toon Lambrechts

Check out the radios your grandparents listened to at Olen's Radio Museum

the museum. A huge battery, lights, a circular antenna of about half a meter in diameter and a set of speakers. To carry such a radio, the whole family needed to help.

Next up is a wonderful Art Deco radio, decorated with images of a local church. This cannot be factory made. It is one of the radios that people used to construct themselves. It was cheaper, explains Schyvaerts, because the cost of buying a radio was astronomical until the 1930s. It was then that the so-called cigar box radios came on the market, small devices affordable to the middle class.

Another device is multimedia, even before the term was invented. A screen sits atop the 1948 radio, and a 16 mm projector is attached to the side. On the other side is a record player. It is one of only three such models left in the world. The last room in the museum takes the visitor to the '70s, where the collection stops. The transistor radios from that time are quite beautiful, but the grandeur of the old wooden devices with their smooth shapes is just a bit more

impressive.

In the back of the museum, in a small building, it is considerably busier. A dozen men are busy tinkering with old machines. Serious concentration weighs in the air. The workbench is a chaos of bulbs, wires, tiny parts and electrical diagrams. The sound of a radio playing oldies fills the room, mingled with the creak and squeak of devices that are not quite yet fixed. In the hall is a rack full of old appliances waiting for repairs. Schyvaerts says that in recent years there is renewed interest in getting old radios working again. Vintage is hip, a fact that here in Olen has not gone unnoticed.

People take the radio from their grandparents' attic, for instance, and come along here to get it in working order. That doesn't always work out, but often it does, says Schyvaerts. The museum has built up a large collection of radio bulbs and other components over the years. So for anyone who wants to hear what their old radio actually sounds like, you know where to go.

BITE

Autumn appetite

\ WWW.DIJLELAND.BE

Autumn is about brisk forest walks: scarves wrapped around the neck, boots shuffling through the leaves. There is nothing quite like earthy smells and nippy air to work up a mighty appetite.

Apparently someone over at Tourism Dijleland knows the feeling because their latest organised nature walk culminates in an exclusive three-course meal at Spaans Dak (pictured), one of the region's best restaurants.

The Smullen van Meerdaalwoud walk takes place in Dijleland, a little-known green and hilly area in Flemish Brabant just seven kilometres south of Leuven. In Meerdaalwoud in Oud-Heverlee, a dense pack of trees that can be navigated via idyllic winding dirt paths, a guide will happily reveal the secrets of the forest – from a beautiful 17th-century baroque chapel and its Maria statue with healing powers, to a mysterious freshwater spring.



At the edge of the forest, nestled between several small ponds, is Spaans Dak, a restaurant known for fine cookery. Here, visitors are treated to an extensive post-hike lunch – don't forget to bring a pair of spare shoes – starting with the requisite drink and appetisers. The three-course feast includes fish as a starter, pheasant as a main and

a delicious dessert.

The culinary philosophy behind Spaans Dak has been described by Flanders' best food bloggers as "modern, with playful accents" (Culinair Atelier), "beautiful, refined cuisine" (Be-Gusto) and "pheno-me-nal" (Le Gourmand Belge). Expect creative, colourful dishes, pure products, bold flavour and texture combinations with seasonal ingredients, perfectly tuned to the weather outside – rich, nutty, earthy and warmly spiced.

The best part about Spaans Dak (besides the food obviously) is that it's family-owned and run. Chef and owner Michel Uyttendaele has been there for more than 20 years, and his two sons have now joined the team, Jonathan as cook and Kristof as sommelier. \ Robyn Boyle

Reservations can be made until 22 October and include a guided walk, aperitif with appetisers and a three-course lunch, excluding drinks

The haunted houses of Bruges

In the spirit of Halloween, Flanders Today has done a little ghost hunting



Diana Goodwin
More articles by Diana \ flanderstoday.eu

With Halloween right around the corner, there's no better time for a good, old-fashioned ghost story. Have you ever heard the legend of the Spookhuis, or Ghost House, in Bruges? The tale spans centuries and involves a beautiful nun, a murderous monk, hauntings and séances.

At the end of the 15th century, there was a convent in Bruges in what is now Spanjaardstraat. On the other side of the canal was an Augustinian monastery, and the priests there would visit the nuns to administer Communion and to hear confessions.

An Italian monk at one point fell in love with one of the nuns. He eventually discovered an underground passage linking his cloister to the convent.

One night, he used it to seek her out while she was at prayers and begged her to run away with him. Although she shared his feelings, she refused to break her religious vows. The monk became enraged and stabbed her in a fit of passion, then buried the body in the tunnels.

“
I did love him.
I couldn't help it

Some time later, the nuns moved to another location, but the house (*pictured*) was already haunted. Residents reported seeing a female figure dressed in white, her lips moving silently as she drifted through the halls.

At other times, a priest with a grim countenance was seen here and there. Neither of the two was hindered by locked doors or solid walls, and they were never seen together. At midnight, the apparitions would disappear. But this house, it appeared, was host to more spirits than these. In the 19th century, the house was inhabited by an English couple. The woman's sister, a British spiritualist and novelist named Florence Marryat, reported seeing a ghost in her bedroom during a stay



© Peter Willems

The lovely façade of Bruges Spookhuis belies a tragic legend

in the house.

Marryat recounted the story in the 29 August, 1879 issue of *Spiritualist* magazine and again in her 1891 book *There Is No Death*, in which she wrote that the figure "was quaintly attired in a sort of leathern bodice or jerkin, laced up the front over a woollen petticoat of some dark colour".

Earlier that year, the writer had accompanied the famous spiritualist William Eglinton to Bruges, where he conducted a series of séances in the house. Marryat recounted how, on several occasions, Eglinton seemingly was possessed by the spirit of the monk, who re-enacted his horrendous crime through the medium – stalking the young nun, stabbing her to death and hiding the body.

On another occasion, Marryat and her sister

communicated with the nun and learned her name – Hortense Dupont – and the year of her death, 1498. She told them: "I did love him. I couldn't help it."

The nun also told them that she was 23 years old when she died and that her murderer was 35. Eglinton's spirit guide told the group that they had been brought to Bruges to help free the spirit of the monk, who had been bound to the scene since he committed his crime. It would seem that they succeeded, for the ghosts of the monk and the nun were never seen again, although the house continued to be inhabited until after the Second World War.

The Spookhuis on Spanjaardstraat wasn't the only haunted house in Bruges, however. In 1870, an article in the newspaper *De Stan-*

daerd van Vlaenderen reported that a house in Nieuwe Gentweg found it impossible to keep tenants for long because of a strange apparition that lived there.

"It is said that every evening and during the night, a cat with a goat's beard and flaming red eyes comes and sits on the table, while doors are opened and closed by spirits," the journalist wrote. Attempts to catch the cat proved fruitless because it managed to disappear through locked doors and windows. So the next time you visit Bruges and admire its picturesque streets, think of the strange happenings that have transpired behind those peaceful, seemingly innocent facades. You can still see the Spookhuis at Spanjaardstraat 17, although no trace remains of the convent or its ghosts.

HALLOWEEN EVENTS THIS MONTH

This Halloween, get into the spirit of the season with one – or more – of these spooky events across Flanders.

Halloween Festival • Brussels

An annual tradition at the Brussels' Museum of Fantastic Art, this week-long event for both kids and adults involves a scavenger hunt in the museum, with its collection of art and artefacts related to all that is strange and surreal. Along the way, you'll encounter the Elephant Man, Spider Woman and Cyclops Mummy. Upon successfully solving the mystery, participants receive a sorcerer's diploma. There are creepy refreshments for the kids and Belgian beer for the parents.

On Halloween night, all goblins and ghouls gather at the nearby Pilgrim's House, where they must solve the witch's riddle and sample the witch's brew (pumpkin soup). A parade

kicks off with a fireworks show and ends at the museum, where the Halloween Man throws treats from the balcony. Whoever finds the silver finger in one of the balls will be the guest of honour for the evening. The festivities continue with a free party on IJskelderstraat. *25 October to 2 November, 14.00-17.00, Amerikaansestraat 7, Brussels; tickets €6*

\ WWW.FANTASTIC-MUSEUM.BE

Halloween in Puyenbroeck • Wachtebeke
A big outdoor event on the grounds of a provincial park outside Ghent, this one-day festival includes loads of activities for kids in the big tent, a cyclo-cross course through a graveyard, ghost train rides, go-karts, craft workshops, face painting and more. When darkness falls, there will be a big bonfire to kick off the torchlight fright walk – a spooky

journey through the park with strange scenes and creepy figures along the way. *26 October, from 15.00, Wachtebeke (East Flanders); tickets €8*

\ WWW.PUYENBROECK.BE

Herfstkriebels (Autumn Shivers) at Bokrijk • Genk

Although it falls during the first weekend of November, this two-day event at the Open-Air Museum in Genk is completely in keeping with the Halloween spirit: Ghost stories, a trick-or-treat challenge, creepy makeovers, a ropes course, craft workshops and a monster's ball with DJs, music and dancing. What's more, the ghostly residents of Bokrijk have decided to elect a new mayor. The election must be held during Halloween because only then are the ghosts visible, and they need the support of the living. There's just



© Courtesy sfeermakers.be

Autumn Shivers at Bokrijk is frightening fun

one problem – the current mayor can impose a test on anyone wishing to become a candidate, and the tests are so difficult they can only be completed with the help of children. *1-2 November, 10.00-18.00, Herkenrodeplein 1, Genk (Limburg); tickets €10-€12*

\ WWW.HERFSTKRIEBELS.BE

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Fifteen minutes of fame

Flemish writer Paul Mennes finds humour and tragedy in Pittsburgh

 **Rebecca Benoot**
More articles by Rebecca \ flanderstoday.eu

In his latest novel, Flemish author Paul Mennes transforms his 2011 writer's residency in the US into a dark but thoroughly entertaining exploration of modern life. In *Niets bijzonders*, Andy Warhol and his cohorts make a surprise appearance and invite reflections on artistic fame, nihilism and 21st-century fragmentation

Paul Mennes is one of those Flemish writers often compared to Brat Pack authors like Brett Easton Ellis and Douglas Coupland because of the way he incorporates satire, ambivalence and the shallowness of consumer culture. Now, 20 years after his debut novel *Tox*, Mennes has published a book inspired by his stay in the US city Pittsburgh during a 2011 residency exchange programme through the Brussels literature house Passa Porta. Initially, Mennes (pictured) intended to work on another book during his time in Pittsburgh. "But when I got there, I felt that what was happening around me was a lot more interesting than the book I was working on, so I decided to start over," he says. "There was just too much going on: the Warhol museum was close by, they were shooting a Hollywood movie, my neighbours were people who had had to flee their country because of their work... I would have been crazy not to use all this material." *Niets bijzonders* (Nothing Special) then is the story a writer in Pittsburgh to work on his new novel, a hospitalised man who thinks he is the late Andy Warhol and the former inhabitants of The Factory,



© Laura Mustio
Paul Mennes' residency in Pittsburgh altered his new novel irrevocably

Warhol's famous New York studio. All these stories are intertwined, which creates an interesting twist on the concept of 15 minutes of fame, so that *Niets bijzonders* is definitely not as banal as the title suggests. Mennes' novel is a collage of Facebook conversations, hospital records and the poetic ponderings of a (Mennes-like) author look-

ing for inspiration. It also includes short monologues from former Factory stars and has Warhol wake up in present-day Pittsburgh, his hometown. "Collage gives me the opportunity to try out different techniques, to try and give every character or scene their own voice and atmosphere," he says. "The 21st century is very fragmented, so I try to repre-

sent that in my writing. It's inevitable."

Solitude and ennui are the common denominator among

“
It was a little unnerving to inhabit these characters

Niets bijzonders' cast of disconnected characters, who all revolve around Warhol in one way or another. "Warhol is someone whose presence is very tangible in ads, art, etc," says Mennes, "but initially I wasn't really interested until I went to the *Warhol: A Factory* exhibition in Brussels in 1999. Suddenly, I was captivated." Mennes brings the pioneering pop art figure to life with warmth and sympathy – a strategic move, he explains. "I intended to write a reparation for Warhol because you often read stories about how he destroyed people, and I don't agree. The Warhol superstars who died an early and nasty death had problems before meeting Warhol." But Warhol isn't the only character whose trials are alternated with that of the other central protagonist, writer Kasper Lazarus. Real-life Factory stars like Nico, Freddy Herko, Ondine, Edie and Candy also make appearances. "It was a little unnerving to inhabit these characters," Mennes admits.

"Some you sympathise with, like Nico. Others, like Ondine or Edie, less so."

Multimedia and visual culture are important markers in both Warhol and Mennes' oeuvres. They have the effect of creating a contemporary feel now but will also account for a dated one in the future. "Everything fades away and changes," Mennes responds. "Few authors are still read 10 years after their death. I personally don't care what happens to my work after I'm gone." This 2011 snapshot in the form of a book is transient, he explains, just like The Factory was. The title of Mennes' new novel refers to a quote by Warhol – "The great unfulfilled ambition of my life: my own regular TV show. I'm going to call it *Nothing Special*." The title offers a reminder that although technology has evolved since the 1960s, humans haven't.

"I write about what I see, and nihilism, decay and pretence are themes that are all around us, even now," says Mennes. "It's not a happy world, but that doesn't mean I can't write a funny book about it. It's my goal to write entertaining novels about serious subjects."

Niets bijzonders is a stylistic masterpiece, a web of cultural references and intentional chaos that focuses on the temporality and emptiness of fame and the loneliness buried deep inside.

It is also an interesting look at Warhol's eclectic and experimental oeuvre. In the end, *Niets bijzonders* is an ironic look at the present-day world by an author who is known for his visual flair and heightened sense of reality.

FRESH FICTION

Kaddisj voor een kut
(*Kaddish for a Cunt*)

Dimitri Verhulst •
Atlas / Contact

Flemish author Dimitri Verhulst's breakthrough novel *De helaasheid der dingen* (*The Misfortunates*) is a semi-autobiographical tale about his troubled childhood in small-town Flanders. Now he explores the time he spent in juvenile detention. The first section of this short novel offers an indictment of the church's hypocrisy and is focused on the funeral of Gianna, a beautiful girl who commits suicide at the institution. The second section shines a light on two ex-detainees who kill their children to spare them a bleak future. Dark, condensed and eloquent, *Kaddisj voor een kut* is trademark Verhulst. ★★★★

En toen schiep God
Kevin (And God
Created Kevin)

Bart Debbaut • Lannoo

Former thriller scribe Bart Debbaut has taken a novel turn in his new book – an indictment of the human race. God is convinced that humanity needs salvation, but His beloved son is unfortunately too busy to take action. He decides to send a new saviour, Kevin, an ordinary boy born into an ordinary family who sees the light as a teen. Persuading Kevin of his calling was difficult enough, but convincing the rest of the human race? Now there's a challenge. Debbaut's parable about faith offers an ironic and entertaining look at the gullible and superstitious, the atheists and the

god-fearing. But above all, it explores what makes us believe.

★★★★

Kom hier dat ik u
kus (Come Here So
I Can Kiss You)

Griet Op de Beeck
• Prometheus

Journalist Griet Op de Beeck's debut novel *Vele hemels boven de zevende* (Many Heavens Above the Seventh) became an unexpected bestseller in Flanders and will soon be made into a movie. In her second, she follows Mona from the loss of her mother at the age of nine to the loss of her father at the age of 35. It is a beautiful, funny portrait of a courageous woman who fears making mistakes while following her

heart, as well as a tale about a peculiar family, talented artists and egotistical men. *Kom hier dat ik u kus* is a novel to be savoured.

★★★★

Kwikzilver (Quicksilver)

Ann De Craemer •
De Bezige Bij

Ann De Craemer's third novel offers a nostalgic portrait of the writer's grandmother, a widow who lives in the West Flemish countryside, until, one day, she has to vacate her house because developers are going to industrialise the area. De Craemer looks back on her life, its hardships and her unique bond with her granddaughter. Based on bittersweet memories, *Kwikzilver* is a warm and intricately detailed portrait



that will bring a smile to your face with its familiar-feeling mix of love, trust and cosiness. ★★★★

“A women’s season”

Flemish painter Karin Hanssen pushes at art world’s glass ceiling

\ WWW.ROBERTOPOLOGALLERY.COM



Christophe Verbiest
More articles by Christophe \ flanderstoday.eu

With a new book and exhibition, it looks like Flemish painter Karin Hanssen is finally receiving the critical attention that has long eluded her – and many other female painters of her generation.

With figurative, narrative paintings in subdued colours with people that show little and often no emotion, Antwerpse Karin Hanssen has for a quarter century been steadily building an oeuvre that's immediately recognisable.

The individuals in Hanssen's paintings often have their faces averted. "Because I don't portray characters but extras in a social spectacle," she explains. "Since they're exchangeable, I leave their identities blank. Hence, the spectra-

tors can project themselves in the paintings. For the same reason, I don't like to depict existing persons because that's a form of history painting."

At first glance, the works look like unremarkable scenes lifted from everyday life. Yet, when you look at them more closely, you sense their ominous undercurrent. They're enigmatic *tableaux* that leave a chilling, disturbing aftertaste, one that partially springs from the empty spaces in the paintings. That much becomes clear when you leaf through *The Borrowed Gaze*, a beautifully edited, 240-page book that offers an overview of Hanssen's artistic output over the last three decades.

But the underlying tension in her oeuvre becomes even more appar-

ent when you visit her *A Room of One's Own* solo exhibition, currently on view at the Roberto Polo Gallery in Brussels. "I want my paintings to be layered," the artist, 54, tells me while showing me around the exhibition, which spans three floors. "I keep on working on them until I tap into that ominous layer. Since they are very simple at their core, they would look very trite otherwise."

Focused on works that Hanssen created between 2008 and 2014, *A Room of One's Own* is named after the 1929 classic essay by Virginia Woolf in which the British writer examined the position of female writers in the then male-dominated world of literature. Hanssen came across the seminal essay some years ago. "Round the same



Works like "Recreation Room" focus on seemingly unremarkable domestic scenes but are marked by an ominous undertone

moment, I discovered a copy of *Life* magazine from the 1950s or '60s with two photos of a woman sitting in a fancy interior."

The interplay between Woolf's essay and the two magazine photos inspired the artist to paint 22 works. At the centre are two large canvases, "Living Room" and "Recreation Room". These two works are each surrounded by smaller paintings that present a close-up, so to speak, of the master shot.

“When you isolate a part of an image, you find another meaning

oeuvre and age that merit a solo show in a museum, she still hasn't had one. "I wouldn't decline the offer, of course, but not many women painters get that chance."

In fact, a number of male painters of the same generation as Hanssen, and some even younger than her, have had their museum retrospectives. "I'm glad you noticed that," she says, the roar of her laughter filling the gallery space. "Because it sounds pitiful when I make this remark myself."

The position of female artists is a point of concern for Hanssen. In 2011, she created the Facebook page Contemporary Women Artists in Belgium to push their work into the limelight. "I hesitated a long time because I didn't want to give the impression of creating a pasture full of cows that don't get enough attention. I persevered because I really wanted to counter the stereotypical arguments of 'We don't know them' or 'We can't find them'."

With concurrent expos by Flemish and Brussels artists like Berinde De Bruyckere, Ana Torfs, Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, Kati Heck, Arpaïs Du Bois and many more, some people have called this autumn a "women's season". "The fact that people call it that proves my point. Because it has always been a men's season, right?"

In thinking about this issue, Hanssen realised the lack of gender equality is a complex, partly generational problem. "Yet there is unmistakeably a glass ceiling; the high-profile exhibitions are seldom granted to women. And yes, there are more women curators nowadays, but the Flemish museum directors are mostly all men."

The Borrowed Gaze is published by Lannoo / Robert Polo Gallery

Still, they're much more than just cutouts. "When you isolate a part of an image, you find another meaning. This show is built around the idea of space, framing and the influences of the context on the meaning of an image."

In her groundbreaking essay, Woolf pointed out that women write differently than men. Is that also true for painting? "I think their art is perceived differently," says Hanssen. She gives the example of a German painter. "When Gerhard Richter paints a child, people assume it's layered with meanings. When a woman does so, it's easily viewed through the lens of motherhood. I don't think there's a difference between male and female art, no more than between Flemish and international art. Good art surpasses identity."

Although Hanssen today has an

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Lebeaustraat 8-10, Brussels

The books are back

Boekenbeurs

31 October to 11 November

Antwerp Expo
\ WWW.BOEKENBEURS.BE

The Boekenbeurs, Flanders' largest book fair, is back at Antwerp Expo to tantalise readers for 12 days with a vast selection of fiction, non-fiction, children's books ... not to mention all kinds of book-related knickknacks and author appearances.

More than 110 booths from Flemish publishers and bookshops will sport new releases and signing sessions with many of Flanders' top authors, including Pieter Aspe, Bart Moeyaert, Dimitri Verhulst, Tom Lanoye, Stefan Hertmans, Saskia De Coster, Herman Brus selmans and Marnix Peeters just to name a few.

But there's also a wide array of international writers on hand: Nicci Gerrard (half of the duo known as Nicci French), the British *Shopaholic* scribe Sophie Kinsella, *Girls* creator and star Lena Dunham and many, many more. This ensures a fair share of English, in both presentations and books on offer. There will also be performances, workshops, live VRT radio recordings and multiple theme days such as Fantasy, War and Peace, Be Original and Wel in je vel (Healthy in Your Skin). Kids and teens haven't been forgotten; they can listen to or sing and make cool stuff with their favourite authors and TV personalities.

The overarching theme this year is comics, clearly present in the ad campaign to which illustrator Serge Baeken incorporated a whimsical wink to Batman. The hunt is on for Flanders' favourite comic, as well as a comics quest for kids, an auction and an opportunity to have your beloved comics appraised. These are just a few topics in an action-packed agenda honouring that perfect harmony

between illustration and the written word.

There's never a dull moment at Boekenbeurs, really, so whatever tickles your fancy, whether it's e-books, history, ecology, psychology or science fiction, you'll definitely find hours of browsing pleasure in Antwerp. It's an ideal day out during the autumn school holidays. \ Rebecca Benoot

CONCERT

Xeno & Oaklander

28 October, 20.00

De Kleine Hedonist, Antwerp
\ WWW.DEKLEINEHEDONIST.BE

Brooklyn analog-electro revivalists Xeno & Oaklander are in the middle of a European tour in support of their latest album *Par Avion*. The duo – real names Liz Wendelbo and Sean McBride – formed in 2004 around their shared passion for old-school synthesizers. They've consistently eschewed the current millennium's new-fangled digital hardware in favour of the warmth and warble of yesteryear's analog keyboards. If it seems quixotic, let's not forget that this is exactly how electronic music pioneers like Kraftwerk founded the genre. And it doesn't sound bad either. The duo have earned a wide following on both sides of the Atlantic. \ Georgio Valentino

FILM

Violet

26 October, 15.00

Bozar, Brussels
\ WWW.BOZAR.BE

Flemish director Bas Devos' feature debut is heavy. *Violet* begins with a teenager's violent death in a Brussels shopping mall and goes on to document the aftermath from the point of view of the victim's best friend (and eyewitness) Jesse. The experience alienates the 15-year old protagonist from his parents, his circle of BMX-riding friends and, ultimately, himself. Although this screening is *Violet*'s Belgian premiere, the film has already won international accolades, including the Berlin Film Festival's Generation 14plus Grand Prix and the film critics' prize in Montreal. (In Dutch with French subtitles) \ GV

VISUAL ARTS

Brussels in Shorts

Until 7 December

Brussels Comic Strip Center, Brussels
\ WWW.COMICSCENTER.NET

Last year the capital's international house of literature Passa Porta presented the first edition of *Brussels in Shorts*. The exhibition and collectible anthology is equal parts pop art and Brussels boosterism. Ten comic-strip artists from Belgium and beyond were invited to submit a 12-page graphic novella set in the city. This time, however, artists were asked to focus on Brussels' hospitality industry, specifically its hotels. Flanders' own Steve Michiels is in the mix, which also includes guest artists from across Europe and include the UK's Woodrow Phoenix. \ GV



MARKET

Farmer's Market Nokere

26 October, from 10.30

Domus Magna, Nokere
\ WWW.HETVOEDSELBOS.BE

Think global, buy local. It's a wonderful ideal but easier said than done. Harried on all sides by work and other obligations, we consumers haven't much time to seek out local alternatives to cheap and ready supermarket goods. That's why the activists of Voedselbos (Food Forest) have organised a farmer's market in the Nokere district of Kruishoutem, East Flanders. This day-long event features East Flemish producers that often have a hard time finding their way to the supermarket. Know-how is also exchanged, all in an idyllic country setting. Additional atmosphere is provided by live music and games for the kids. \ GV



CONCERT

Gistel (West Flanders)

Elliott Murphy: Concert by the Paris-based American rock'n'roll artist with more than 30 albums under his belt, and who is often referred to as the "new Bob Dylan". 25 October 20.00, CC Zomerloos, Sportstraat 1

\ www.gistel.be

CLASSICAL

Bruges

Toshio Hosokawa: The master contemporary composer is at Concertgebouw for a selection of his string quartets, the Belgian premiere of his unusual concerto for string quartet and the wholly unique *Drei Engel-Lieder*, a work in dialogue with Luc Tuymans' painting "Angel", which hangs in the venue. 24-26 October, Concertgebouw, 't Zand 34

\ www.concertgebouw.be

VISUAL ARTS

Brussels

Bart Ramakers: Strangers in the Night: Exhibition of racy, highly stylised *tableaux vivants* by the Flemish photographer. Until 26 November, Hotel Le Berger, Bergerstraat 24

\ www.bartramakers.com

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Berlare (East Flanders)

Het Kleinkunst Festival: Flemish and Dutch folk music festival featuring Elly and Rikkert, De Vaganten and Bart Herman. 25 October 20.00, CC Stroming, Dorp 101

\ www.suchanight.be

FILM

Brussels

Ocean Film Festival: Inspiring, beautiful and educational films about the ocean by directors from Belgium and around the world, shot from both above and below sea level. 25 October, Wolubilis, Paul-Henri Spaakplein 1

\ www.oceanfilmfestival.be

INFO SESSION

Ghent

LLL Prenatal Gathering: La Leche League Vlaanderen presents an information session for expectant mothers and their partners around the practical aspects of breastfeeding (in Dutch; reservation in advance via cindy.coppens@lalecheleague.be). 25 October 10.00-12.00, De Biotoop, Groot-Brittanniëlaan 72-74

\ www.lalecheleague.be

Talking Dutch

If at first you don't succeed



Derek Blyth

More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

It used to be easy to watch television. You turned it on. You chose a channel. You watched anything that moved. But in the digital age it's so much more complicated.

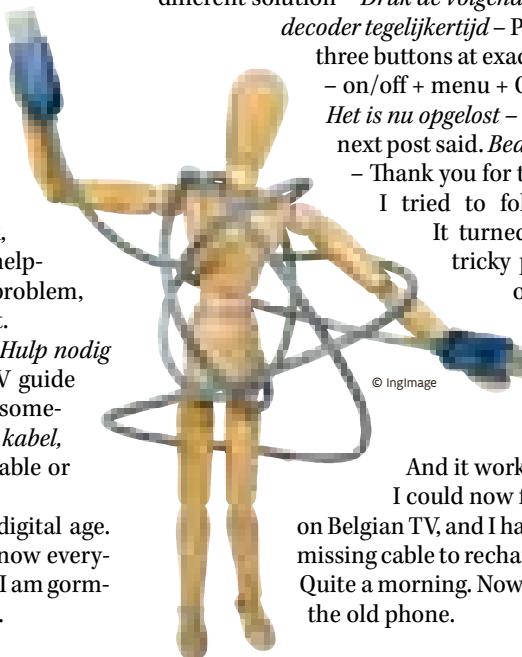
I now have a decoder and three remote controls and a tangle of wires at the back, including one that doesn't seem to be connected to anything (which I eventually realised is the missing cable to charge my old phone). Many things can go wrong with such a complicated system. But you don't need to worry because there are dozens of internet forums where people go to discuss problems and offer solutions.

So that's where I went one Sunday afternoon when my digital TV guide suddenly stopped working. My first step was to call the helpline number, which prompted a recorded message that helpfully told me to call back during office hours. So I tried going online.

TV gids werkt niet – TV guide doesn't work, I typed into Google. There were dozens of helpful Belgian forums devoted to this single problem, which was comforting. And then again not.

I clicked on a link that looked promising. *Hulp nodig aub, TV gids werkt niet* – Help needed, TV guide doesn't work, someone had posted. And someone else had answered – *Werk je met UTP kabel, of via ruckus/plc?* – are you using a UTP cable or are you going through ruckus/plc?

This is of course another problem of the digital age. The world is divided into the geeks who know everything and the gormless who know nothing. I am gormless, so I have no idea if I have a UTP cable.



I turned to another forum, where some anonymous Good Samaritan of the internet had set out instructions for restoring the decoder's TV guide: *Probeer eens je decoder te resetten – netstekker 15 tal seconden uittrekken en dan terug steken en dan volledig laten opstarten* – Try to reset your decoder by pulling out the plug for 15 seconds and then plugging it back in and then starting everything all over again.

This is advice I can understand. But: *Heb ik geprobeerd, maar helpt ook niets* – I tried all that but it didn't help, was the response. Someone else then suggested a different solution – *Druk de volgende 3 knoppen op de decoder tegelijkertijd* – Press the following three buttons at exactly the same time – on/off + menu + OK.

Het is nu opgelost – It's now fixed, the next post said. *Bedankt voor de hulp!*

– Thank you for the help!
I tried to follow this advice. It turned out to be quite tricky pressing all three of the buttons unless you were a skilled concert pianist, but I finally did it.

And it worked.

I could now find out what was on Belgian TV, and I had also located the missing cable to recharge the old phone. Quite a morning. Now I just have to find the old phone.

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VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



In response to: Delhaize strikes continue today

Claire Masson

I have always been a loyal Delhaize shopper, but these strikes have only strengthened the other stores.



In response to: Snoezel rooms, a safe, calm space for special-needs pupils

Lily Picasso

Snoezelen is a great idea, I'm grateful to the people involved in starting something helpful that has a positive influence on people with mental disabilities. Thank You



In response to: Talking Dutch, if at first you don't succeed

Trung Hieu Hoang

I am fighting with Dutch right now but it seems that Dutch will win sooner or later.



Irene Lorenzo @IrenLC

Very inspired after #TEDxWWF talk #Brussels. Especially loved seeing the work @BarefootCollege is doing. Beautiful!



Paul Reed @sommecourt

Amazing image of Tyne Cot: more than 11,500 graves with a candle in front of each one. #Lichtfront #LightFront #WW1



Manon @anothrmndpalace

I really want to thank @FilmfestGent because tonight was one of the best evenings of my life!

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Poll

Flanders' resident happiness expert has said that the main task of schools is to make children happy. Do you agree?

a. Creating a positive environment can teach children to be happier. It doesn't have to cost anything, and it's worth a try

83%

b. Educational standards slipped the more pleasant schools became. Do the math: Bormans has got it backwards

0%

c. The job of schools is to teach basic educational skills. That's the top priority; making kids happy is a parent's job

17%

The readers of *Flanders Today* have spoken. We haven't had an overwhelming consensus like this before: almost unanimously in favour of schools seeking to make the classroom a happy place, in keeping with the advice of Leo Bormans, a philosopher and "happiness expert", as well as the

former editor of education magazine *Klasse*.

Bormans has published a new book about children's happiness, where he claims that the top priority for schools should be to ensure that pupils are content. Kids learn best, he argues, when they're happy. You might also add: Why not?

Nobody's suggesting the children should be lying around in hammocks, but is there any good reason why memories of school shouldn't be good ones? Some of us recall when school was rather less pleasant than it is today. That was no Golden Age, seriously.

\ Next week's question:

Unions have called a national strike for 15 December (see p2), which will disrupt transport services and shut down a great number of businesses. What do you think?

Log in to the Flanders Today website at www.flanderstoday.eu and click on VOTE

THE LAST WORD

Less than zero?

"It seemed like some sort of artefact from the '90s, like an antiquated idea of male behaviour. That's just not how guys behave." Novelist Brett Easton Ellis, chair of the jury of the Ghent Film Festival, has reservations about *The Loft* by Flemish director Erik Van Looy, which opened the festival last week

Proud Mum

"When I saw Bram standing among all those important people, only then did I really realise what he'd achieved. I know what he gave up. He hasn't been home for Christmas the last three years."

Liliane Wagemans of Leuven was present to see her son Bram, 35, who helps Mexican farmers get the best yields for maize and wheat, awarded the World Food Prize

Childhood sweethearts

"He's been running after me since 1999, and since 2004 I've been head over heels. I'm still in love with my best friend, and that's not going to change." Katrin, 25, has agreed to marry Red Devils footballer Dries Mertens, 27, 15 years after they first met

Bowing out

"Given the challenges facing the VRT, it's a good idea to appoint a new CEO."

Former VRT CEO Sandra De Preter, who has been on leave since last November, has confirmed she is being treated for a brain tumour

