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Mud, sweat and gears

A beginner's guide to the full-on Flemish passion that is cyclo-cross

 **Leo Cendrowicz**
More articles by Leo \\ flanderstoday.eu

The winter-only sport of cyclo-cross is a spectator-friendly contest in which mud-soaked riders twist and turn their way through Flemish trails before shouldering the bike and running up a hill. And Flanders is home to some of the world's champions

“Sometimes I feel like a kid again, when I used to really enjoy just getting completely dirty,” says Bart Aernouts. Aernouts, 32, is a professional cyclist, and former cyclo-cross Junior World Champion.

Mud is part of the cyclo-cross experience as much as wheels are part of the bike. Cyclo-cross is a bicycle race in a mud bath: liquid, sticky, deep, glorious mud splattered all over the bike, the body and the face. “Of course it's dirty, but the mud makes it so much fun,” Aernouts says.

Cyclo-cross is the bastard son of classic cycling. During the October-to-February season, riders splatter through the trails of Flanders, pausing only to dismount and carry their bikes on their shoulders when the hills become too steep or the mud too heavy.

Aernouts, from Essen, Antwerp province, is one of the world's top cyclo-cross riders, a niche but fast-growing sport and one dominated by the Flemish. Other top riders include Kevin Pauwels, Klaas Vantornout, recently retired Niels Albert and the current colossus of cyclo-cross, Sven Nys (*pictured*).

Like many in the sport, Aernouts – currently 14th in the UCI world rankings – started doing cyclo-cross in the winter, when the regular road racing season was over. “But I found that I really liked it, and I was good at it,” he says. “I like that it is more technical. On the road, it's just five hours pedalling. In cyclo-cross, you have to steer, jump, turn. One week it's a fast track, next it's deep, thick mud.”

Aernouts admits that it is tough to ride full-on for the hour that races typically take. “The body suffers,” he says, adding that this is as demanding as any elite sport. “Cyclo-cross is a small world compared to, say, road racing. But the level is physically high. And it has really grown over the past 10 to 15 years, with more sponsors, more races, more teams.”

Often seen as a way for road riders to keep fit in the off season, cyclo-cross is a winter-only sport in which racers repeatedly lap a compact, tight, off-road circuit built around sharp turns, steep slopes, streams, fallen trees and man-made obstacles like bales of straw and even flights of stairs.

Races have massed starts, so there is a scrum to get to the first corner or obstacle before rivals. Then it's a hard slog, often with the course getting more churned up and treacherous as the race goes on.

Although it is an emerging sport, cyclo-cross's roots are nearly



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Save energy to avoid cuts, says government's new website

Government launches site with tips on how to save energy and avoid brownouts



Derek Blyth
More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.OFFON.BE

The federal government has launched a new website aimed at getting residents to cut down on electricity consumption this winter. Belgium faces the threat of brownouts or blackouts this year during prolonged cold spells due to partial shutdowns at two nuclear power plants. The government is trying to reduce the risk by persuading people to change their consumption habits. A controversial contingency plan was drawn up earlier in the year by the Di Rupo government. Its aim was to introduce selective power

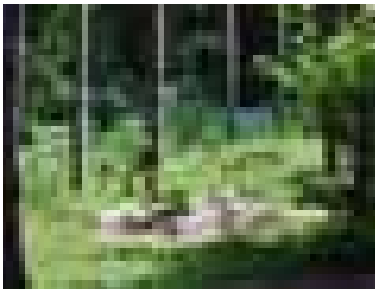
cuts in different areas of the country to avoid a total blackout. But the Michel government believes that cuts won't be required if the population reduces the demand. The federal government website offers a number of tips and guidelines on how to reduce domestic electricity consumption. The website includes an "energy calculator" that shows the level of risk of cuts for a particular time, ranging from orange (risk of energy reduction), through to red (risk of disruption) and finally black (cut announced). The site also shows a forecast for the coming six days.

The website includes handy tips for saving energy, including washing clothes in cold water, keeping fridge and oven doors closed, cooking everything in one saucepan and unplugging electric devices rather than leaving them in standby mode. The government aims to intensify its campaign if the threat of cuts becomes imminent. It could also force big energy-consuming companies to shut down temporarily if the risk of power cuts becomes severe. The campaign organisers hope that people will share the information using social media.



Flemish environment minister looking into natural burials

Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege has announced that she wants to legalise natural, or green, burials, which consist of coffins that are biodegradable and buried in a forested or park-like area. Natural burial sites can, for example, be classic cemeteries that are transformed into parks. "A lot of municipalities want to take this step but lack the knowledge and support," Schauvliege said in a statement. "They will in future be able to receive assistance from the Agency for Nature and Forest." The minister also said that there is a demand for burial forests where relatives can bury an ecologically friendly urn under a tree or scatter the ashes of the deceased. Scattering ashes in natural areas is currently against the law, although forest rangers occasionally find scattered ashes. "People are increasingly more aware of their impact on the environment, including concerning their funerals," stated Schauvliege. "They are looking for environmentally friendly, sustainable ways to be buried." According to



© Courtesy natuurbegraven.eu

the minister, natural burials offer relatives the possibility to remember the deceased in a peaceful, natural environment. A burial forest is managed in the same manner as an ordinary forest. Schauvliege is now starting to look for suitable locations in Flanders' natural and forested areas. The minister is convinced the legislation can be approved by the end of next year. The concept of green burials is common in some other countries. Recent reports in the Netherlands, where such a burial is legal, introduced the concept to the Flemish public. \ Andy Furniere

Rare basking shark sighting in the North Sea

Staff from the Institute for Nature and Woodland Research out on the North Sea last week for a bird census spotted a basking shark near the Oosthinder sandbank, several kilometres off the coast of Bredene. "This is a rare sighting," Jan Seys of the Flemish Maritime Institute told VRT. "In the last five years, basking sharks have only been sighted five times in that area." The shark was a female measuring four metres in length. The basking shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*) is the second largest fish in the sea, after the

whale shark, and can reach lengths of up to eight metres. Despite their size, they are not aggressive and feed on plankton, which they filter out of seawater. The sharks "show up all over the world in polar or temperate climate and often travel great distances, but you don't often see them in the North Sea," said Seys. "The basking shark has no teeth, so it's completely harmless. Humans are more of a danger to this protected animal than the other way around." \ Alan Hope

Sixteen injured in train crash in Linkebeek

Rail services have returned to normal last week in Linkebeek, Flemish Brabant, after an accident in which 16 people suffered light injuries. The accident happened when a goods train collided with a passenger train travelling from Eigenbrakel to Aalst at about 13.30. No official reason for the accident has yet been given, though one suggestion is that autumn leaves made the line slippery. Both trains involved were equipped with the new TBL1+ braking system, which is supposed to go into action if a train is about to pass through a red light, a spokesperson for the rail infrastructure company Infraabel said. "The train stopped in a tunnel, and then suddenly

we felt a shock," one witness told VRT radio. "My head hit the back of the seat in front of me. I saw people fall to the floor and someone whose nose was bleeding." There were 41 passengers on board the train at the time of the accident. Passengers were not seriously injured because the passenger train was stationary and the goods train was travelling at low speed. The injured were taken to hospital in Brussels or Halle, while the rest were transported by bus to Brussels South Station. "Given the speed of the intervention of emergency services and their efficiency, we have decided not to trigger the disaster plan," said acting mayor of Linkebeek Damien Thiéry. \ AH

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staff of Ford Genk will remain after it closes at the end of this year to dismantle equipment and handle administration related to the closure. They will be on three-month contracts, renewable monthly thereafter



12.8%

more long-term unemployed in Flanders at the end of October than the same time a year ago. More than one in four unemployed has been out of work for more than two years

€2 billion



cost to the economy of the trade union protest actions this autumn and winter, according to technology industry federation Agoria, meaning an effective cut in the social security budget of €400 million



1,114

people in Flanders committed suicide in 2012, according to figures from the region's health ministry, a drop of 1% among men and 10% among women



16.15

deadline for examinations at Ghent University in January, so that exams are not disrupted by possible power cuts, while allowing students to get home should a power cut be planned

WEEK IN BRIEF

Dutch dictionary publisher Van Dale is again looking for the **most popular word in the Dutch language**, to succeed the English import “selfie” which won last year. Until 25 November, Van Dale will collect nominations from the public via its website and produce a shortlist. There are five categories: youth, lifestyle, amusement, economy and politics. The word should have made an appearance this year. Van Dale will release the results on 16 December.

<http://woordvanhetjaar.vandale.be>

Working groups from the Flemish and the Brussels regional governments will work more closely together to **help solve mobility problems** in and around Brussels, the governments have announced. Last week Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois met his Brussels counterpart, Rudi Vervoort, to discuss broadening the Ring Road, access to the new national stadium and a project by De Lijn to run trams into the capital from Flanders.

Maggie De Block, federal minister for public health, has come out in favour of a **limited decriminalisation of cannabis**. The three regional organisations representing workers in the drugs and alcohol abuse sector called on the minister to decriminalise cannabis for personal use, together with an increase in resources for prevention and support. According to De Block, the organisations have raised worthwhile issues. “But we need to tread carefully,” she said. “We are talking about addictive substances. But it’s worth looking into.”

Cellist Veerle Simoens has been named as the **new artistic co-ordinator of the Festival of Flanders Ghent**, replacing Isaline Claeys, who is stepping down after three editions to pursue musicology studies. Simoens has wide-

ranging experience with orchestras and ensembles and has also worked with contemporary artists like Jef Neve. She has been the business director of Casco Phil, formerly called the Belgian Chamber Philharmonic, since 2010.

Bombardier, the Canadian-owned tram and train constructor based in Bruges, is looking to **hire out some 150 of its workers** to other businesses. “We’re coming into a quiet period for orders, but we don’t want to lose the talent we have,” explained a company spokesperson. A number of workers are already planning a temporary move to sister company Crespin in northern France next year, and the company is looking for a temporary solution for more, possibly with long-time customers De Lijn and NMBS.

After two decades of remaining steadfastly loyal to Duvel, **Inspector Pieter Van In**, the protagonist in Flemish author Pieter Aspe’s best-selling crime novels, has switched to Omer, the beer produced by West Flanders brewer Omer Vander Ghinste. “I was in a café in Blankenberge and someone offered me one,” Aspe explained. “I was sold right away. The beer is a bit like Duvel, but the taste is more pronounced.” The switch has nothing to do with any commercial arrangement, he stressed.

Federal interior minister Jan Jambon issued an order to prevent the entry into Belgium of the **controversial Muslim speaker Tareq Al-Suwaidan**, who was due to speak at the Muslim Fair last weekend at Tour & Taxis in Brussels. Al-Suwaidan, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait, had been in possession of a valid visa for the Schengen countries and claimed on Twitter that the ban was the result of “pressure from the Zionist lobby”.

Flemish tourism minister Ben Weyts is planning a major new **project centred on the Flemish Old Masters**, and in particular on Pieter Brueghel the Elder. Weyts made the announcement in London, where he was attending the hanging of the Brueghel work “The Adoration of the Magi” in the National Gallery. “For hundreds of years, the Flemish painters have been our best ambassadors,” he said. The project would look at painters from the Flemish Primitives through Memling and Rubens up to artists of today and would include an upgrade for the Groeninge Museum in Bruges, a visitor’s centre at Sint-Baaf’s Cathedral in Ghent and a newly reopened Fine Arts Museum in Antwerp.

A **fire in a diving supplies warehouse** that recently sent a plume of black smoke drifting over the capital is arson, according to a fire expert brought in to the investigation by the prosecutor’s office of Halle-Vilvoorde. The fire started on 2 November in Anderlecht and later spread to premises over the border in Drogenbos, Flemish Brabant. Fire engines from Brussels received back-up from colleagues from Halle, and the blaze was still flaring up on Monday. No-one was injured, but the 3,000 square-metre warehouse building was completely destroyed.

As many as 24 child-minders in the Flemish periphery of Brussels could be at risk of losing their licences because they **do not meet the language conditions** of the new Flemish government decree, according to family organisation Kind & Gezin. The decree stipulates that the director and at least one other child minder must speak Dutch, a condition upheld by the Constitutional Court. However, the periphery has a large French-speaking population. K&G will now guide the 24 crèches through the steps required to meet the criteria, including language tests.

FACE OF FLANDERS



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Herman Dams

The High Council for Justice has nominated Herman Dams as the new judge of the court of first instance in Antwerp. Dams, a former prosecutor in the city, stepped aside in February last year after receiving a mild disciplinary reprimand for his involvement in the case of a young man who died after being beaten in police custody. Dams studied law at one of the two colleges that would later fuse to become Antwerp University and practiced for four years before joining the prosecutor’s office, where he has remained almost constantly until now. He was first a junior magistrate, then a drugs magistrate and founder of the organised crime section. In 2007, he was appointed chief of staff to Jo Vandeurzen, then federal minister of justice. He stepped down in 2009 (after Vandeurzen had moved to the Flemish government) when it was claimed pressure had been exerted on magistrates investigating the collapse of Fortis Bank. Six months later, Dams was back in Antwerp as the new chief prosecutor. His withdrawal last year arose out of the case of Jonathan

Jacob, a young man who died in a cell after a violent intervention by the Special Support Squad BBT – footage of which was uncovered by VRT’s *Panorama* programme. Dams was accused of being involved in a cover-up of information in the case. Last week eight members of the BBT, a psychiatrist who refused Jacob treatment, the director of the centre where the refusal took place and the head of the police station in Boechout who called the BBT were all committed for trial. The minister of justice, Koen Geens, has 60 days to accept or reject Dams’ nomination. In practice, nominations made by the High Council are rarely rejected. The council was set up in 1999 following the infamous Marc Dutroux case in an attempt to restore public confidence in the justice system by removing judicial appointments from political influence. The council consists of 44 members: 22 judges and 22 non-judges, including lawyers, academics and eight laypersons drawn from other walks of life, all of them elected for four years.

\ Alan Hope

OFFSIDE
Stay, little Valentine, stay

The town of Koksijde at the Flemish coast plans to exhume the remains of Valentijn van Sint-André, currently buried near the former abbey farm of Ten Bogaerde. The goal is to recover Valentijn’s bones, reconstruct his skeleton and put it on display in the Navigo National Fisheries Museum, according to mayor Marc Vanden Bussche. Offside should perhaps mention at this point that Valentijn is, or was, a sperm whale who beached at Koksijde in 1989 (*pictured*), a magnificent 17-metre long, 40 tonne specimen. Koksijde has something of a fatal attraction for whales, who experts think are driven onto the beach there and its district of Oostduinkerke, where the museum is located, by



© Courtesy De Standaard

a combination of sandbanks and a north-westerly wind. They’ve been turning up on a regular basis since the 15th century, but Valentijn is the only one who escaped the rendering plant, where sperm whales provide us with such by-products as spermaceti, used in oil lamps and candles, and ambergris, used in perfume. Valentijn was given a proper burial and recently even a headstone at

his last resting place (as people thought at the time). According to tests carried out by the veterinary faculty of Ghent University, the bones left behind are in good enough condition to be exhibited. The operation is expected to begin next year. Valentijn’s name, incidentally, comes from the date on which he died, two days after beaching on 12 February. Sint-André refers to the name of the beach. The people of Koksijde have a thing about naming their beached whales: The most recent, a specimen measuring 10m who washed up in 2004, was named Windekind, after the surfing club of the same name in Oostduinkerke.

<http://en.navigomuseum.be>

FLANDERTODAY  Flanders
State of the Art

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5TH COLUMN

So much for social consensus

What timing it was. On the day the unions announced a massive protest in Brussels, the Luxleaks story broke. Corporations in Belgium, we learned, did not have to pay billions in tax money because of secret deals in Luxembourg. The companies and families involved in the scheme are among the wealthiest in this country, including AB Inbev shareholders the de Spoelberch family and partly state-owned telecom company Proximus.

The news angered the thousands who took to the streets last Thursday even more, for it seemed to prove their point: The new governments' austerity measures are aimed at families, while the wealthy and corporations are left alone.

But not everyone was on the side of the strikers and protesters. The hashtag #ikwerk-vandaag (I'm at work today), launched by the employers' organisation VBO, proved rather successful on social media. The riots that ensued after the march only reinforced the view some people hold of the strikers as an uneducated mob, not to be reasoned with. Many people believe the cuts to be unavoidable. Further raising the budget deficit amounts to nothing more than a future tax, while lowering labour costs and increasing competitiveness is necessary to avoid a negative spiral like France. Why do the strikers not understand?

This polarisation is unusual for a country with a long tradition of social consensus. Issues such as wage levels and competitiveness are traditionally jointly decided by employers, workers and the government. This "social consultation" has become almost impossible these days, with unions and employers confronting each other head on.

After the march, the federal government invited the unions for talks. Ministers stressed that they stick by the government agreement, with its contested measures such as raising the pension age and freezing the automatic link between wages and inflation. In weeks to come, more industrial actions, including train strikes, have been announced. These will only increase polarisation.

As did more news on 6 November: Flemish business leader Marc Coucke sold his company Omega Pharma for €2.5 billion. Many admire Coucke's sense of entrepreneurship. But just as many are dismayed at the taxes he'll owe on the €1.45 billion profit he stands to make: €0. \ Anja Otte

Violence erupts at union demonstration in Brussels

Twice as many protestors as expected took to streets last week



Derek Blyth

More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

Police used tear gas and water cannons during a clash with demonstrators near Brussels South station last Thursday. The demonstrators were protesting against austerity measures announced by the federal and Flemish governments, which they claim will unfairly affect workers' incomes and pension benefits.

Organisers initially expected 60,000 demonstrators, but the final number was close to 120,000, according to union estimates. The number could have been higher, but many people failed to reach Brussels because trains were filled to capacity. Some trains were delayed later in the morning after police closed North Station because of overcrowding on the platforms.

The march became increasingly violent after a group of about 150 protestors stormed the headquarters of the Belgian Employers' Federation close to Central Station, and another group threw stones at a building belonging to the Belgian rail company NMBS in the Halle-poort neighbourhood. A car was overturned and a police motorbike set on fire during the disturbances. Fifteen people were taken to hospital, the Red Cross said.

The demonstration was the first in a series of actions planned for the coming weeks. Three regional protests are in the pipeline, followed by a general strike on 15 December.

The protest had little to no impact on Flemish companies, according to the head of the Flemish chamber of commerce, Voka. All staff turned up in 90% of companies, so that 1.6 million people were working normally. The majority of demonstrators who marched in Brussels were not from the private sector, Voka said. "Most of them clearly came from trade union organisations or government offices," the organisation said in a statement.

"After the actions of today that brought the



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Nearly 120,000 demonstrators took to the streets last Thursday in protest at government cuts

unions' concerns into the streets, it's important to sit around the table to discuss the plans for the future," federal work and economy minister Kris Peeters told VRT. "I very much understand why workers are upset and that they have questions. Let us as quickly as possible come in from the streets for talks."

Peeters and the full cabinet met with trade union leaders after the demonstration. He called on the unions to resume discussions on the austerity measures, which they agreed to do. Interior minister Jan Jambon said the coalition agreement was a framework that allowed for further discussion.

Opposition support

Flemish Socialist party SPA stood "shoulder to shoulder" with the protesters, said party president Bruno Tobback, describing the austerity measures as "unfair and misguided".

The socialists argue that wage and benefit cuts will lead to a drop in purchasing power, which will have a negative impact on economic growth. In addition, these measures are unfair in targeting workers while not affecting people whose income is generated by property assets. "It is precisely those people who earn their income by getting out of bed in the morning

and going to work who have found themselves under increasing pressure over the past few years," Tobback said.

Flanders' environmental party Groen also came out on the streets in support of the demonstrators. "These governments are trade unions for the rich," said Groen party president Wouter Van Besien.

"Hurting businesses"

"It's going to be a cold winter for families," said socialist union boss Rudy De Leeuw, who spent the weeks before the demonstration touring local union branches and factories to drum up support. "Families and workers are being fleeced. The only ones who escape are those who live off their dividends and bonuses."

A few days before the protest, union representatives carried out a leaflet campaign at railway stations to inform the public of their concerns. In the coming month, further actions are planned in various provinces. Prison officers went on strike on Friday, and more stoppages are expected on the railways. Finally, the protests come to a head with a national strike on 15 December.

Not everyone supported the strike action. Luc Coene, governor of the National Bank, wrote in *Trends* magazine that "the people who go on strike against the austerity measures are saying to their children: 'You can clean up the mess.'" "The consequences of these actions will not be positive for the economy or for business," said Peter Timmermans, chair of the Federation of Belgian Businesses. "This is going to hurt businesses at a time when they need all the help they can get."

In related news, rail authority NMBS came under fire for selling some 80,000 reduced-price tickets to demonstrators who took trains into Brussels. They were sold to protestors as "special event" tickets.

City of Denderleeuw votes itself "ungovernable"

After months of political infighting, the East Flanders municipality of Denderleeuw has declared itself "ungovernable". The situation follows a collapse in the coalition formed by Flemish nationalists N-VA, Christian democrats CD&V and liberals Open VLD.

On Monday, the opposition socialist party (SPA) called for a vote to declare the municipality ungovernable. While N-VA voted against and Open VLD abstained, the motion was carried by a majority comprising SPA and CD&V.

"N-VA is simply too right-wing," CD&V alderman Jan De Nul told *De Standaard*. "I hope that the situation in Denderleeuw is not an omen for what is waiting for us in Brussels," he said, referring to the new centre-right federal

government coalition.

Flanders' minister for public administration, Liesbeth Homans, has now appointed the governor of East Flanders, Jan Briers, to seek a solution to the conflict. Political analysts say that this will probably involve forming a new coalition, possibly made up of SPA and CD&V.

"This is all about personal and emotional conflicts that have been building up steam over many years," Briers said in an interview. "But I hope that everyone realises that they still have a duty to the citizen to organise and run the municipality properly. That has to be the primary concern for elected politicians." Meanwhile, Denderleeuw mayor Jan De Dier (N-VA) admitted in an interview that he might soon have to give up his post. \ DB

Brussels to require integration courses

\ WWW.BON.BE

The government of Flanders is working with the government of the Brussels-Capital Region to make integration courses for foreigners in Brussels compulsory, as they are in Flanders. Brussels hopes to approve the programme by the end of the year, according to the region's minister-president Rudi Vervoort.

Vervoort met with Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois, and the pair agreed that the governments would work together to implement the scheme, since integration courses for newcomers has long been required in Flanders. It will not be a carbon copy of the Flemish system, said Vervoort, "but we do find that, for example, a grasp of the language is very important and should be mandatory".



Integration courses in Brussels are already provided to foreigners on a voluntary basis, via the Brussels Reception Agency for Integration. Vervoort said that there would be sanctions for those required to follow the course who do not show up.

Mud, sweat and gears

Flemish riders have been bossing cyclo-cross since the 1960s,

HTTP://NEW.WIEBOVLAANDEREN.BE

continued from page 1

as old as the bicycle itself, when enthusiasts for new machines would test their ruggedness in the roughest of environments. The key early figure was turn-of-the-century French soldier – and later secretary-general of the French Cycling Union – Daniel Gousseau, who would cycle through the forests alongside his horse-mounted general.

Gousseau enjoyed these outings so much that he invited a few of his friends along, and, before long, impromptu races occurred. In 1902, he organised the first French championship.

Flemish riders began imposing themselves in the 1960s: Eeklo-born Erik De Vlaeminck first won the World Championships at the tender age of 21 in 1966 and then each year from 1968 to 1973. Now Flanders looms over the sport. Twelve of the 21 UCI Cyclo-cross World Cup winners have been from the region – and that doesn't include those who have moved here, like Czech rider Zdeněk Štybar.

Riders in Flanders have also accounted for two-thirds of all the podium places in the two-day UCI Cyclo-cross World Championships.

Sven Nys – known as the Cannibal from Baal or the General – is arguably the greatest cyclo-cross rider ever. He still starts virtually every cyclo-cross race as the favourite, even at the age of 38. In the UCI Cyclo-cross Cup, Nys towers above his rivals, with six titles to his name, even if his last one was in 2009.

Despite cyclo-cross being called a fringe sport, some of cycling's greatest heroes, including numerous Tour de France winners, have used it for winter conditioning. There is little cross-cutting between cyclo-cross and traditional road racing, or mountain bikes, where the rider must be self-sufficient and carry out in-race repair work himself.

By contrast, a cyclo-cross racer is allowed to use up to three bicycles in a race, which can be vital when a clean bike can weigh 10 kilograms less than a muddy one. This has resulted in a highly organised pit-stop system with teams of mechanics working throughout the race to ensure the rider can have a clean, oiled bike once each lap.

Cyclo-cross races are generally held on circuits two to four kilometres in length, mixed with paved and unpaved sections, wet areas and dry, and about 85% rideable. The rest is for running. And although cyclo-cross is synonymous with mud, there are times when the temperatures are well below freezing, meaning crunchy and bumpy rides over iron-hard



© Tim de Waele/Corbis

Spectators get close to the action with cyclo-cross legend Sven Nys last month in Ronse, East Flanders

“Cyclo-cross is my profession, but it's also my hobby. I love it, and I get paid for it!

snow and ice.

Unlike in traditional outdoor bike circuits, riders lap the course many times in the hour-long races, so spectators have lots of chances to see the race as it develops. This overcomes complaints of micro-second whizz-pasts that occur

in other bike races and perhaps explains why it has become so popular so quickly: 70,000 people attended the last world championships to take place in Flanders, in 2012 in Koksijde.

Enthusiasts say cyclo-cross riders are among sport's best all-rounders, easily crossing over from fell running and triathlon. They cycle at the speed of elite road racers on firm ground, reaching over 50kph. But once they hit the mud and ditches, anything goes, including BMX-style bunny hopping.

Newcomers are often surprised to discover how similar cyclo-cross bicycles are to road bikes, but with wider tyre clearances, knobby tyres for better grip on slippery surfaces, cantilever or disc brakes and lower gearing. The tyre pressure at 25 PSI is about a quarter of that for a road event.

Cyclo-cross has a particular

appeal to amateurs as it is suited to anyone, no matter previous experience or ability – everyone sets off from the same starting line then settles into their own pace. And they are accessible for families: men's, women's and children's races are often held at the same events, so whole families can go along for the day.

It's a serious physical workout, building arm and upper-body strength and bike-handling skills – and takes up surprisingly little time, since an intense one-hour workout can be more advantageous than hours on the flat. It's also just plain fun, offering the challenge of quick handling and lively feel of the cross bike on the quickest descents and trickiest single tracks.

The chances of serious injury are also slim, especially compared to road racing where top riders

can get to speeds of up to 80kph and fall on a hard surface or even down a rocky slope. In cyclo-cross, the fastest riders get up to about 35kph on soft ground, and when they fall, it's on mud. Aernouts says the worst he's had is a broken rib.

Aernouts is full of passion for the sport, recalling his junior world title triumph in 2000 as “something that will be with me for the rest of my life, something to tell my children and grandchildren”. For all the cold, the toil and the pre-race nerves, he still sees himself as incredibly lucky to be a professional in the sport.

“Sometimes I see it as just a job, like any other: There are good days and bad days. But I've been doing this 21 years, and I still enjoy it,” he says. “Cyclo-cross is my profession, but it's also my hobby. I love it, and I get paid for it!”



© Maarten Thys/Wikimedia

Bart Aernouts, a former world junior champion who is still full of passion for the sport



© Koch, Eric/Fotocollectie Anefo/Nationaal Archief, Den Haag

Celebrated Flemish rider Erik De Vlaeminck in action in 1970

WHERE TO CATCH A RACE

The cyclo-cross season runs from October to February, with top events in Belgium's Superprestige championship, the BPost Bank Trophy, the UCI Cyclo-cross World Cup and many others. This month sees Superprestige events at Gavere, East Flanders, on 16 November, followed by the UCI World Cup at Koksijde on 22 November.

Cyclo-cross's most intense period

runs from mid-December until the first week of January, when the race calendar for elite and master racers is packed. The season traditionally ends with the UCI World Championships, which are being held this year in Tabor, in the Czech Republic, from 31 January to 1 February. For more information and a calendar, see the website of the Flemish Cycling Federation (*above*).

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Diamonds \ Kardiam

The Antwerp-based diamond trading company is under investigation by the UN for money laundering and handling blood diamonds from the Central African Republic.

Energy \ Katoen Natie

The logistics group in the port of Antwerp, which has diversified into the generation of green energy, has acquired more than 5% of Elia, the country's electricity grid operator.

Media \ Bhaalu

The online TV streaming and recording service developed by the Antwerp-based Right Brain Interface company is to be suspended following a court decision. Several Flemish broadcasters, including VRT, VTM and SBS, had sued the company on competition grounds.

Floor coverings \ Desso

The Derdermonde-based carpet and synthetic turf manufacturer has been sold to the French Tarkett group. Desso was established in 1939 by the Desseaux family.

Holdings \ GBL

The Brussels-based holding company, controlled by financier Albert Frere, is investing €75 million in the French Merieux Développement pharmaceuticals investment fund.

Insurance \ Fidea

The Antwerp-based insurance group has been sold to the Chinese Anbang Insurance company by its owner, the US-based JC Flowers investment group.

Scrap \ Galloo

Europe's largest scrapyard, located in the port of Ghent area, has won the contract to dismantle six French Navy ships, including the Commandant Riviere and Duperre frigates. It is also in the process of scrapping the Royal Navy Fearless, which saw action in the Falklands conflict.

Supermarkets \ Delhaize

The Brussels-based supermarket group has sold its 66 US Bottom Dollar Food stores, active in the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh areas of the US, to Aldi for \$15 million (€12 million). The move is part of the company's restructuring, which also includes closing up to 14 outlets in Belgium.

Telecoms \ Proximus

The Brussels-based telecommunications company has sold its British Telindus Limited affiliate to Telent Technology.

Companies implicated in secret Luxembourg tax deals

Proximus is one of 26 Belgian companies involved in "LuxLeaks"



Alan Hope
More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.eu

State-owned telecommunications utility Proximus has denied any wrongdoing in connection with the use of secret deals made in Luxembourg to avoid paying Belgian corporation tax. The denial comes after the revelation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists that multinationals were avoiding tax in their home countries by using Luxembourg to report income.

The consortium is composed of journalists from various countries who work together on large and complex cases. They were previously responsible for the dossier known as Offshore Leaks, and the latest scandal has been christened "LuxLeaks".

The Belgian journalists who took part in the six-month investigation are Lars Bové of *De Tijd*, Kristof Clerix of *MO** magazine and Xavier Counasse of *Le Soir*.

Among the other names implicated in the scandal are Ikea, Amazon, Guardian Media Group, BNP Paribas, Volkswagen, Heinz and Apple. There are 26 Belgian companies named in the 28,000 pages of evidence concerning 548 agreements, as well as a number of wealthy families, including the De Spoelberch family, associated with AB InBev, and Fernand Huts, CEO of Katoen Natie.



© Courtesy Proximus
Proximus CEO Dominique Leroy earlier this year at the launch of the new Proximus brand

The construction enables multinationals to route income through Luxembourg and tax havens like Gibraltar and the British Virgin Islands, in return for which they can benefit from a minimal tax rate. As a result, the Belgian exchequer is estimated to have missed billions in tax revenues.

"You can't hold it against us that we offer telecom services in Luxembourg," Jan Margot, spokesperson for Proximus (previously known as Belgacom) told VTM News. "We have a wholly owned subsidiary which is active there. If Proximus in that way pays a little less tax but also makes more profit, then the Belgian state is also a winner."

"We condemn these fiscal practices as unacceptable," prime minister Charles Michel told the federal parliament. Michel was in Luxembourg on Wednesday for talks with his counterpart, Xavier Bettel, about financial transparency and exchange of fiscal information.

Bettel held a press conference to stress that the Grand Duchy's tax regime was "in line with international laws". His finance minister, Pierre Gramegna, also defended the system. "This is not a Luxembourg speciality. Various other European countries do the same," he said.

"This cannot be allowed; we are not going to just let this go by," Belgium's finance minister, Johan Van Overveldt told VRT radio. "This is exactly the sort of financial malpractice that we intended to avoid with the introduction of the Cayman Tax." The Cayman Tax allows the government to inspect information on trusts and other fiscal constructions and, if appropriate, impose a tax on them. The law, Van Overveldt said, is "specifically intended to catch up with methods of evasion that allow large companies to escape paying tax". The government would introduce the law "as quickly as possible," he said.

The parliamentary committee on finance will hold a series of hearings on 26 November about the matter.

Omega Pharma sells for €3.6 billion

Omega Pharma, the company founded by colourful Flemish businessman Marc Coucke, is on the verge of being sold to the American pharmaceuticals group Perrigo for €2.5 billion in cash and €1.1 in debt, according to financial daily *De Tijd*.

The deal will bring Coucke, known for being an enthusiastic supporter of cycling and football, a profit of some €1.3 billion. The majority of the remainder of Omega shares are in the hands of investment fund Waterland and several smaller funds.

About 20 senior managers, including Coucke in his capacity as CEO, also have a holding and can also look forward to a tidy Christmas bonus this

year.

Omega, based in Nazareth, East Flanders, has been on the market for a few months, 27 years after being set up by Coucke and university friend Yvan Vindevogel, selling shampoo and later tanning lotion through pharmacies. The two split in 1994, and Coucke became sole owner. Waterland bought a share in 2012.

Perrigo, meanwhile, is a 127-year-old company employing 9,000 people, with sales last year of \$4 billion (€3.2 billion) and profits of \$567 (€453) million. The company recently bought Ireland's Elan for €7.6 million. Omega Pharma has sales of €1.2 billion and employs 2,500.

The sale will move Coucke, 49, into the very

select club of Flemish billionaires. According to *De Tijd*, he will continue to manage Omega as the new European hub of Perrigo, a company relatively unknown on this side of the Atlantic. It specialises in over-the-counter health care products such as decongestants and antacids, as well as prescription medicines.

Coucke recently took stakes in technology firm Option and drinks company Fountain. He is also the majority shareholder in KV Oostende, a major sponsor of the cycling team Omega-Pharma QuickStep, and since September, he's a shareholder in the French football club Lille. The expectation is that the Omega sale will lead to a spree of new investments. \ AH

New team takes over editorship of De Morgen

Lisbeth Imbo and An Goovaerts are the new joint editors-in-chief of Flemish daily newspaper *De Morgen*. The pair said their goal is to continue the renewal effort begun 18 months ago, which both had been involved in and which produced a radical new look for both newspaper and website.

Imbo, 38, was named deputy editor of the paper in June 2013. She came to *De Morgen* from Flemish public broadcaster VRT, where she presented current affairs programme *Terzake*. *De Morgen's* former editor, Yves Desmet, stepped aside last April year to focus on writing, and Imbo has been acting editor since then.

"We have to deliver on what we

have promised our readers," said Imbo. "That means making the right choices on content every day, informing our readers objectively and providing them with the best-written articles available."

Goovaerts has been news editor since 2011, when she joined *De Morgen* from the business magazine *Trends*. "Lisbeth and An personify the values that drive *De Morgen*: swimming against the tide not for shock value but in order to listen and bring people together," commented Paul Daene, publishing director of De Persgroep, which owns the paper. "They are able to translate those values daily in their choice of content and offer leadership to the newsroom." \ AH

Belgian businesses sitting on €240 billion cash

Businesses in Belgium have cash in hand of at least €240 billion, which they are on the verge of investing, according to a study by the consultancy Deloitte. B-information, which collects financial data, delivered findings to Deloitte that show, according to 2013 tax returns, that the business world is sitting on a mountain worth €222 billion. Taking the remainder of undeclared companies into account, the total will certainly exceed €240 billion, Deloitte said.

Last year, companies paid out €485 billion to shareholders – €139,000 for each business on average, considerably higher than in 2012 (€113,000) and almost as much as the record in 2007, pre financial crisis, at €140,000. Deloitte surveyed European business leaders as to their intentions for the cash. Seventy-seven percent said they would maintain some liquidity, while 60% said they were prepared to make investments in the coming 12 months. "We have reached a turning point," according to Deloitte managing partner Olivier de Groote.

Investments are likely to be in new markets, training personnel, new technology and mergers or partnerships, said Deloitte. Among Belgian companies, export markets were a major attraction in the short term for 60%, in particular the Asian-Pacific and Latin America. \ AH

Solar power for all

Gloww offers free solar panels and charges for the electricity used



Daniel Shamaun
More articles by Daniel \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.GLOWW.BE

Renewable energy company Enfinity has launched a solar energy company called Gloww that provides low-cost green energy to homeowners in Flanders, by installing free solar panels.

Solar energy is often seen as an energy source for the well-off. The level of investment required to buy and install solar panels simply forced out most homeowners, even those with a desire to go green.

“Gloww is opening the market. Everybody who owns a house can now generate solar energy

Now, however, things are changing, and concepts like Gloww are making solar energy a more financially viable option for green homeowners around the world. The idea was first seen in the US, used by energy companies such as the Arkansas-based SunCity. It was adopted by Enfinity,



Excess power generated by the free panels goes back into the grid

ity, based in Waregem, West Flanders, to create its sister company. However, Gloww has a twist.

Where the American companies would typically charge a standard rent for the panels, Gloww charges homeowners for the electricity they use. When the solar installations generate too much power (for example, on a sunny day), the surplus is injected into the power grid, turning the homeowner's electrical meter back.

“Every kilowatt injected into the power grid is a kilowatt that's not taken into account on your next energy bill,” explains Dieter Van Huffel of Enfinity. It's also a clean source of electricity that someone else on the grid can use.

In the Gloww concept, the customer pays for the installation of solar panels (€356 to €615) and then pays a bi-monthly bill for the electricity they generate and use. Insurance, maintenance and monitoring for 25 years are bundled in with the installation costs, so the panels are guaranteed for a quarter of a century.

“The generated electricity is up to 15% cheaper than the electricity from your utility company,” says Van Huffel. “Furthermore, you won't have to pay distribution taxes because the energy is generated on the homeowner's roof.”

There is also potential for solar panels to be incorporated during construction. “For new construction projects, it's wise to invest in sustainable energy technologies. In the long run, these provide great savings in costs and energy,”

says Nathalie Van den Broecke, manager of Gloww.

This could have great benefits not only for people building new homes, but for businesses that have a large amount of roof space and find themselves needing to reduce their carbon footprint, whether for legislative or publicity reasons.

This kind of opening of solar energy to new markets is part of a larger trend concerning the rise of renewable energy. Michio Kaku, the American poster boy of theoretical physics, said in a video on bigthink.com that there is currently “a battle between different kinds of energy sources that'll go on for 10 to 15 years”.

He continues: “I suspect that in about 10 years or so, the rising cost of fossil fuels will intersect with the falling cost of renewable technology. At that point it'll be economical to go solar.”

From the consumer's perspective, solar energy is already far more economical, even though the cost of panels is not yet easily affordable – they are still in the area of €5,000. “With this energy concept Gloww is opening the market. Everybody who owns a house can now generate solar energy,” says Van den Broecke.

Now that energy companies have found a way to provide a solar service without the large initial investment, it is clear that Kaku's idea of the near future is already being formed.

Poultry housing causes health problems for employees

When the European Union brought in a ban on battery cages for hens in 2012, it was seen as a major advance in the field of animal rights and a major development in the way we treat farm animals. Since then, however, the move has revealed another side: Good for the animals, but not so good for the people who work in egg-producing facilities.

Poultry is an important part of the agricultural sector in Flanders, with a value of €500 million a year, or 9% of the region's total agricultural income. Most of the poultry farmed in Flanders, either for eggs or for meat, is concentrated in Antwerp province.

Hens used to be caged in tiny spaces, barely able to move. Under the new regulations, they can now walk about a little, particularly in the volière system, where their movement is virtually unimpeded.

However, a volière has now turned into a health hazard for

humans, with 15 times more dust in the atmosphere than in even the previously improved cages. Because the hens move around, flapping their wings, they're constantly raising clouds of dust, which gets into workers' mouths and noses, leading to respiratory problems.

The problem is being investigated by the Poultry Test Farm in Geel, where they've advised poultry workers to wear face-masks, according to poultry researcher Ine Kempen. “Prevention is better than cure,” she says.

At the same time, they're testing possible methods of cleaning the air in a state-of-the-art volière, one of two test environments installed in May at a cost of €5 million, financed by the government of Flanders, Antwerp province and the poultry sector.

The most promising direction so far, Kempen says, seems to be ionisation, using a device containing a rod with a negative



© Proefbedrijf Pluimveehouderij/Province of Antwerp

Hens moving freely around the volière test environment

electrical charge that attracts airborne particles. The technique is commonly used in air purifiers in hospitals to combat airborne infection. However, the system being tested at the Test Farm, which must deal with particles much heavier than microbes, is

currently far too expensive to be used by farmers.

“We have to look into whether a simpler system is available because it is, after all, an economic question for the sector, and they have to pay attention to costs,” says Kempen. \ Alan Hope

WEEK IN INNOVATION

€80,000 grant for Vito researcher

A project by the Flemish Institute for Technical Research (Vito) has been selected as a laureate of the Grand Challenges Explorations, an initiative financed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Researcher Patrick De Boever will receive a grant worth about €80,000 to work on a saliva test that could trace the consequences of stress on children's neurobiological development. “Stress at a very young age initiates biological changes in the body of a child, which could lead to abnormal neurobiological development,” Vito explained. “The goal of this research is to examine whether saliva can serve as a new, non-invasive and suitable source for the creation of an extensive biological profile showing the effects of current and past exposure to stress.”

Professor wins award for 3D printing

Flemish professor Jean-Pierre Kruth has won the 2015 Bower Award and Prize for Achievement in Science, one of the most prestigious science awards in the US. Kruth leads a team in the University of Leuven's mechanical engineering department, within the production engineering, machine design and automation section. He has been pioneering research on 3D printing – also called additive manufacturing – since it emerged in the 1990s. The award is conferred every year by the Franklin Institute to a distinguished member of the international scientific community for work in a specific discipline, which changes annually. The award comes with a cash prize of \$250,000 (€200,000).

Experts call for climate knowledge centre

Local climate experts are asking the federal government to create a “climate knowledge centre” in Belgium. According to local media, a group of experts wrote to prime minister Charles Michel about the matter. Among the signatories are climatologists, glaciologists, carbon cycle experts, geologists, geographers and mathematicians from universities and research institutions across the country. They say Belgium's climate research projects are too fragmented. A knowledge centre would centralise the results and data of fundamental research, making it easier to consult. It should also objectively inform and advise policymakers, industry and the public.

\ Andy Furniere



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Crevits presents five-year vision

Policy note includes better connection between school and work



Andy Furniere

More articles by Andy \ flanderstoday.eu

New Flemish education minister Hilde Crevits has had an eventful start to her term, with the raising of enrolment fees for higher education and other savings measures leading to a fierce debate in the media and to student demonstrations. However, her strategy focuses on more than just cutting the sector's budget. In her policy note, "Building up education full of confidence and in dialogue", Crevits presents her main strategies for the next five years. Every Flemish minister has to explain their vision in a policy note to the parliament and to the public. From 24 November, Crevits will tour the five Flemish provinces to clarify her plans to school directors.

One of the striking features of the policy note is that Crevits is focusing on improving the connection between education and the job market through *werkplekleren* (workplace learning). This means that students, especially those in professional and technical education, should gain more knowledge and practical experience by learning and working in a real-life work environment.

How the workplace learning will be implemented is not explained in detail in the policy note, but it's certain that students will be widely encouraged to take up internships. Crevits says she will quickly appoint a Task Force for Internships, with representatives of education and business who should work together to develop concrete schemes. The legal framework for internships will be adjusted and the administrative procedures simplified.

She also wants to re-evaluate,



© Ingimage

The new policy note means students should gain more practical experience of work

with minister of work Philippe Muyters, the existing dual learning programmes in which students combine their studies with work. One example is the *leertijd* (learning time) programme, in which students follow classes at school one day and receive hands-on training at a business four days a week. At the beginning of the year, Flemish media reported that the system now attracts only about 3,000 students aged 15 and older, while that figure was as high as 7,000 a decade years ago.

Crevits is now bringing such programmes together in a fully fledged education trajectory, called Learning and Working. Concrete goals target the improvement of the screening of work-floor learning possibilities, result-driven financing and simpler regulations for participating enterprises.

At the end of the term of the previous education minister, Pascal Smet, influential leaders in the education sector criticised the level of teacher training

and raised the need to thoroughly examine the knowledge of students interested in becoming teachers. Crevits is answering this call by promising an obligatory but non-binding entrance exam for students who want to start teacher training. If the results are positive, similar exams could be introduced for other disciplines in higher education.

In her policy note, Crevits also stresses her appreciation for the work of school staff – teachers, directors and assistants – and says she is aware that they have to deal with challenging situations on a daily basis. To help, Crevits says she wants to combat all forms of undue red tape and exaggerated regulation which limit staff in their focus on core tasks. For example, she says that she wants to make the *eindtermen* – the final requirements for school-leavers – less specific so that schools have more freedom to develop their own policies.

However, she makes an exception for the *eindtermen* of

English, French and German courses. These will be stricter and more ambitious, which means language exams in secondary education will become more difficult. Crevits will also encourage primary schools to provide language initiation in English, French and Dutch.

This plan was criticised by professor André Mottart, head of the education commission of teacher training at Ghent University, who felt it was time to update the *eindtermen* and examine which courses should be given priority. "We act as if French is still the second language in Flanders, but that is English today," he told *De Standaard*. He said that French no longer played a big role in the daily lives of Flemings, except those living along the language border.

In its election memorandum in February, the Flemish Education Council (Vlor) advised making the infrastructure problems in the education sector a priority. "The capacity problem is so large and important that the next government cannot lose time and should immediately develop a long-term vision," Vlor said at the time. Crevits has shown that she is aware of the urgency of the problem and will address the needs by developing a Master Plan for School Construction.

She also expressed her hope of creating one public education network that unites the current networks of the Flemish Community (Go!), the municipalities, cities and provinces. Although she cannot impose increased collaboration, she will make efforts to encourage schools from different networks to work together more.

WEEK IN EDUCATION

KU Leuven brings back the K

The University of Leuven has reinforced its connection with the Catholic church, three years after putting some distance between the university and its church-based origins. In 2011, at the height of the scandal of sexual abuse of children by priests, in which the bishop of Bruges admitted abusing his nephew over a period of years, the university decided to change its name from the Catholic University of Leuven to the University of Leuven, while still using the moniker "KU Leuven". The "K" refers to Katholiek. Then-rector Marc Waer said at the time that the reports of abuse were not the reason for the rethink, but did "provide an opportunity for discussion". However, in a mission statement approved by the university governing council this week, the connection has been re-established.

Antwerp works on truancy action plan

Antwerp education alderman Claude Marinower is working on an action plan for truancy, with a separate plan for students who are already 18. According to *Gazet Van Antwerpen*, 28% of 18-year-old students, who are legally adults, have problems with truancy. "Flanders stops counting when the student is 18, but it is important to assist this group," Marinower told the *Gazet*. "These are often students who leave school without a diploma." In Antwerp, one in four students leaves secondary school without graduating. Marinower discussed the issue with Flemish education minister Hilde Crevits last week "to see which region-wide actions could be taken and if we could help with our knowledge acquired in Antwerp".

PXL launches tech and care programme

PXL University College in Hasselt has started a project called IC4LIFE, a multidisciplinary programme focusing on technology and caregiving. For one week, about 40 students from departments in the faculties of healthcare, business, IT and technology will work together intensively to generate ideas and develop products that can improve quality of life. Ideas will be turned into a finished product by technology students, and the teams get the rest of the year to develop the project. The students of PXL-Business then focus on the marketing and financial side. \ AF

Q&A

Frank Neven, professor in computer science at Hasselt University, recently pleaded in the media for the integration of computer science courses in primary and secondary curricula. This is one of the goals of the Forum for Computer Science, which unites computer science experts and amateurs in Flanders.

Why should children be encouraged to develop computer skills?

Though it's not our goal to train all children for a future career as an ICT specialist, we feel it's essential that youngsters understand the underlying functions of computer systems as digital technology increasingly dominates our lives, and software systems are evolving very quickly. Youngsters will only be able to adapt if they acquire basic skills, through courses in programming, for example. We therefore request the integration of related courses throughout a child's education. Those with a special interest should be able

to focus on a specific discipline from the second year in secondary school on.

What would the goal of such courses be?

One of the main goals is to develop youngsters' programming skills. Programming helps to give an insight into the fundamental working of computer technology. Children can, for example, start by programming robots from a very young age and later learn textual programming. From a broader perspective, programming helps youngsters develop problem-solving skills. The popularity of initia-



© Kris Hermans

tives like CoderDojo shows there is an interest in these activities.

How is the government of Flanders supporting this initiative?

In a recent report by the European Schoolnet organisation, the Flemish education department

said that it wanted to introduce a programming course in school curricula from primary education. That is good news, but we also feel there is a certain hesitancy because of practical problems. One is the integration of computer science in teacher training, so that future teachers are equipped with the necessary skills to give classes on the subject.

It's also a pity that support for computer sciences is not explicitly mentioned in the STEM action plan, as we feel that focusing on the field is essential for Flanders' knowledge economy. We are now waiting on a report from the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Sciences and Arts, which we hope will include advice that can convince the education minister to take action quickly.

\ Interview by AF

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Art Day for Children

Nearly 300 activities offered by 180 cultural organisations for kids and their families across Flanders and Brussels. Performances and workshops in the visual arts, dance, music, theatre, crafts, poetry and more. *16 November; free*

\ <http://kunstendag-voorkinderen.be>

House of Sinterklaas

It should come as no surprise that the city of Sint-Niklaas goes all-out for the holiday of its namesake. The main attraction is the saint's house, a grand townhouse where children can see how he and his helpers live and work. *12 November to 6 December. Stationstraat 85, Sint-Niklaas; free*

\ www.stadvandesint.be

Folk Dance Ball

An evening of traditional folk dances from Flanders and from around the globe, including jigs, polkas, tarantellas, mazurkas and line dances. Each dance is taught beforehand so everyone can participate. Live musical accompaniment. *15 November, 20.00, CC Zomerloos, Sportstraat, Gistel (West Flanders); €7*

\ www.hovelingen.be

Nature Day

Two days of organised volunteer work in Flanders' nature reserves and parks. Join a work team and help with mowing, clearing and other outdoor activities that maintain the natural ecosystem. It's hard work but rewarding. *15 & 16 November, across Flanders; free*

\ www.natuurpunt.be

Mineral, Gemstone and Fossil Fair

A fair geared towards the hobbyist and casual visitor as well as professional gemologists and dealers. Raw stones, jewellery, artwork, tools and literature as well as demonstrations and expert advice. *15 & 16 November, Kinopolis Event Center, Groenendaallaan 294, Antwerp; €4*

\ www.acam.be/fairs

Guided heritage walk

In 1919, the first garden district in Belgium was created, based on similar planned communities in England. Batavia was the model for other neighbourhoods in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent. Reservations recommended via 051 26 96 00. *16 November, 14.30-16.30, Roeselare (West Flanders); €2.50*

\ tinyurl.com/Batavia-walk

Landmark makeover

Brussels' famous slaughterhouse market is undergoing a transformation



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.eu

Visitors to the regular market on the grounds of the slaughterhouses of the Brussels district of Anderlecht will soon be able to enjoy the view out over the local farm, and even dine in a restaurant amid the fresh produce being served on their plates.

The canal zone is one of the most industrial areas in Brussels, but a farm is still on its way. It will be built on top of the new fresh food market, which will stand alongside the listed monument that is the original market hall. With its 19th-century iron construction and its two steel bulls standing proudly at the entrance, that hall has long been a landmark of the capital's canal zone.

There is also a new fresh food market hall on the way, and Paul Thielemans says the opening should take place next May, which is slightly later than originally planned. He's in charge of public relations at Abattoir, the company that has been running the entire slaughterhouse site since it took it over from the council of Anderlecht in 1983.

According to Thielemans, the reason for the delay was quite simply a change in plans. Cutting the food hall down from two floors to one, he explains, necessitated a new building permit. "It's not such a big problem," he said. "We're still well within the timing for the subsidies we obtained."

The Abattoir overhaul project is subsidised by the European Regional Development Fund, which provided €7.4 million of a total budget of €16.4 million.

According to the master plan for the site, the new food hall will offer both fresh produce and meat and will thus take over from the existing meat market, which has become dilapidated. At present, the market operates in the mornings on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, teeming with everyone from homemakers to chefs, moving between the mountains of chops, shanks, cutlets, fillets and parts you may not wish to know the name of. If you've never visited, there's still time.

The revamped food hall will take up 10,000 square metres of space and offer accommodation to 45 traders, including 17 selling fresh meat. A selection procedure to choose who gets



© Courtesy Abattoir NV

With a rooftop garden, an airy restaurant and brand new market hall, Anderlecht's abattoir will be a whole lot more appealing

to stay is ongoing. First in line for consideration will be ambulatory traders – those whose entire business is selling at weekly markets around the city and the country.

"That was the purpose of the subsidy we received, which allows us to build the food hall in the first place," Thielemans explains. "Each month those who rent a shop receive a reduction in the rent, so that the subsidy is returned to them over the years."

For the produce and other fresh food sellers, the procedure is the same, but their chances are slightly different. Those who now sell at the much larger outdoor market can stay, though for some of them, there's the choice whether to take up a space in the cleaner, brighter and more customer-friendly food hall. There, they can make use of a range of shopping centre amenities, including sanitary and communications connections, refrigeration and, above all, fixed premises.

On top of the food hall comes the Urban Farm, and Abattoir is currently in talks to find a commercial partner to operate both the farm – which will include both open-growing and greenhouse produce – and the rooftop restaurant, which Thielemans says has attracted the interest of a number of Brussels chefs.

The problem of finding a partner, Thielemans explains, is that there are not many companies in Belgium with the expertise of running an urban farm as an on-going concern, but one is currently exploring a possible partnership. "At this moment, they're looking to see if they can find the necessary investors to make it possible to start this project here in Anderlecht. They have the know-how."

Construction started in September last year, and the rough construction should be finished in about a month. Meanwhile, technical installations are already being installed inside the building. "That leaves about four months for those who will be renting shops to do their interior work," says Thielemans, "so we're close to the finishing line now".

Further in the future, the plan for the site also includes an apartment building with shops at street level and a new slaughterhouse with entirely new facilities and a surface area of 10,000 square metres.

"If that is accepted by the Brussels Region, we might consider those additions in 2020, not earlier. The priority for us is to keep an abattoir in the city."

The market hall, as a listed landmark, will stay right where it is.

BITE

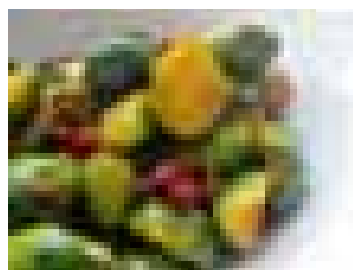
"Eat your Brussels sprouts"

"Eat your Brussels sprouts!" has somehow become the battle cry of parents everywhere who in vain try to get their kids to eat vegetables. But how these delectable mini cabbages got such a bad reputation is beyond me.

They're sweet and nutty, with a subtle flavour not unlike that of green beans or broccoli. And their fork-tender texture is made up of layers that are pleasantly complex on the tongue.

As winter approaches, many of the sprouts still hang on stalks in fields across Flanders, just waiting for the first frost to be harvested. Periods of frost turn the starches in the plant into sugars, resulting in less bitter sprouts.

They're at their best between the months of October and mid-



December, which is convenient because Brussels sprouts go great with a number of comforting autumn dishes and pair well with rich, earthy products like pork belly and chestnuts.

Once boiled or steamed, the little sprouts are best tossed in a pan and sautéed with a knob of butter, a little salt and pepper and a pinch of freshly grated nutmeg. They really don't need more than that.

However, if you wish to get more inventive, perhaps during the holidays, try this simple recipe for festive Brussels sprouts.

Spruitjes met kastanjes (Brussels sprouts with chestnuts)

1kg Brussels sprouts
250g chestnuts
250g smoked pancetta (or any thick, smoked bacon)
60ml Marsala wine
50g butter
Ground black pepper

Bring a pot of water with a pinch of salt to the boil. Meanwhile, cut off the very bottom and carve a cross into the base of each sprout to speed up the cooking time. Tip the sprouts into the boiling water

and cook for 5 minutes or until tender. Rinse with cold water, and then drain in a colander.

Grease a frying pan using the bacon rind. Cut the bacon into small cubes and sauté until slightly golden and crispy. Remove the bacon from the pan, and then fry the chestnuts in the bacon grease over a high heat, using a wooden spoon to press each one open.

Once the chestnuts are piping hot, add the Marsala wine. Allow to cook until you get a slightly thick sauce.

Finally, return the bacon to the pan, add the sprouts and the knob of butter, and warm through. Season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Serves four.

\ Robyn Boyle

Old traditions, new ideas

Flanders' food celebration Week van de Smaak returns with a focus on sustainability



Julie Kavanagh
More articles by Julie \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.WEEKVANDESMAAK.BE

Now in its eighth year, the Week van de Smaak, or Week of Taste, is bursting at the seams with more than 700 events across Flanders this month. Co-ordinated by the Brussels-based non-profit Vol-au-vent, it has become a mainstay of the culinary calendar in a society of self-confessed gourmands.

Under the tagline "sustainable imagination", this year's edition is as likely to find inspiration in banquets with leftovers as it is in fine dining. "We want people to think more about their food," says Eef Rombaut of Vol-au-vent.

She emphasises the participatory and practical nature of the packed programme. "We hosted an inspiration website, a sort of virtual brainstorming group encouraging people to give it their own twist."

The mouth-watering variety of the events in schools, cultural centres, squares and restaurants spans urban planting, communal harvesting, vegetable preserving, old-style pickling and reinvented conserving, with old traditions and new ideas blending into a contemporary culture of sustainable food.

Also on the agenda and definitely for the more adventurous are a number of events to promote the eating of insects and insect-based products, following last year's move by the federal government to approve 10 insects for consumption.

Entomophagy, the eating of insects, forms part of the diet of two billion people across the globe and has come to be seen as a major source of nutrition for the world's population in the future.

ticket.

In 2013, Week van de Smaak celebrated the bitter *witloof*, the national delicacy "discovered" in the 1850s at the National Botanical Garden in Brussels. Fish is the flavour of the 2014 edition, and it's one that fits well with the focus on sustainability. Still, Rombaut says, "sustainable fish can mean different things to different people, which can be confusing to consumers, so we prefer to talk in terms of local and seasonal fish."

A central experience of Week van de Smaak is sure to be the return of the Smaakboot, or Tasteboat, the gastronomic barge voyage. The Smaakboot will be launched by environment and agriculture minister Joke Schauvliege on 13 November and will stop off at 11 locations across Flanders.

Each day, 40 guests will be welcomed on board and treated to a floating feast, as 11 chefs take it in turn to serve up their signature twist on fish cuisine. Chefs include Flemish foodie Olly Ceulenaere of Publiek in Ghent, Karen Keygnaert of A'Qi in Bruges and rising star Vilhjalmur Sigurdarson, who runs the kitchen at Souvenir in Ypres. Keeping with the emphasis on local produce, beer rather than wine will be served on the Smaakboot. On-board beer sommeliers Sofie Vanraefelghem and Luc de Raedemaeker have also paired a trio of beers as the perfect accompaniment to each three-course meal.

Prefer to savour the delights of the Fish Tour on solid ground? The Smaakmobiel (Tastemobile, pictured above), a flashy red converted caravan, is the answer.



and co-operation as central to its success. "While it is undoubtedly about food, it's ultimately about bringing people together," says Rombaut. "The spirit of the shared table is at the heart of what we do." Nowhere is this spirit better represented than by Antwerp organisation Food For Foodies, which will run the workshop Cooking With Your Own Harvest, offering sustainable ways to use and conserve foods. Instructor Daphne Aalders plans to use the remains of the Harvest Tower project that started with some vegetable bins in the reading garden of the Permeke library and led to a shared harvest celebration by local residents. Aalders describes the Harvest Tower as a "cultural project with a social dimension". Kaba, a social grocery store in Bruges, sources surplus food from supermarkets, food auctions and local growers, giving it a second, or sometimes even third, life since the food that doesn't sell in the social supermarket is processed by two local schools to make soup or jam.

Running a social grocery store gives the team behind Kaba ample inspiration for the Week van de Smaak. As well as running two cooking workshops, they will launch a recipe book.

Katrijn van Bouwel, Flemish improv actress and thrift shop diva, is also a fan of leftover cooking. As an ambassador of the Week van de Smaak, she'll be sharing a blog of her best tips and recipes. On 21 November, children in primary schools will take part in the Lost Friday event to find out the best ways to use left-over food. Overripe fruit blitzed to smoothies, leftover veggies transformed into soup and stale bread given new life as *verloren brood* –



© Photos: Courtesy Week van de Smaak

Whether you choose the Smaakbook or the Smaakmobiel, fish will be a big part of your Week van de Smaak experience

French toast to English speakers. One lucky school will have a helping hand as Ketnet presenter and singer Sien Wynants drops in for a visit.

The folks at Recyclart, housed in what was once Brussels' Kappellekerk Station, are organising a

compost drive under the principle "nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed". For three days, they will be handing out vegetables in exchange for compost waste.

“The spirit of the shared table is at the heart of what we do

With European consumers often squeamish about creepy-crawly cuisine, the inclusion of Bugs on Your Plate workshops on Week van de Smaak's programme is a bold move. Wouter De Vriendt of MiniFood in East Flanders organises tastings and provides catering services for parties. He says it's time to abandon the misconceptions. "You have to taste bugs to realise how good they are," he insists.

Fussy eaters be warned – insects are on the menu at events in Zwijndrecht, Denderleeuw, Roeselare, Knokke-Heist, Maldegem and Beveren-Waas. Fancy chocolate might sweeten the crunch? The Crickets with Chocolate workshop at the Museum of Cocoa and Chocolate in Brussels might be just the


Making pit stops in Ostend, Bruges, Oudenaarde, Riemst, Arendonk, Roeselare and Ghent, each day will see a different chef reinvent the fast-food classic fish-and-chips and serve it up to the public for free.

A jury headed by food journalist Marc Declercq has tasted all seven versions of the dish. Will Michelin star winner Angelo Rosseel send their taste buds into a swoon, or will the spicy, African-inspired entry from the social restaurant Toreke in Ghent perhaps have the winning edge? All will be revealed as the winning chef works culinary magic in the close confines of the Smaakmobiel.

While a little healthy competition is part of the mix, the Week van de Smaak values community

13-23 November

Across Flanders



You're the boss

The Bulletin Business Guide 2015 is on newsstands now

As the definitive guide to working in Belgium, the Bulletin's latest publication provides expert advice on freelancing, setting up a business and full- and part-time employment. Besides practical guides and a business directory, it includes features on finding a job, networking, online branding, education, co-working and personal finance for women, as well as interviews with entrepreneurial expats. Find it on newsstands or download it from our webshop.

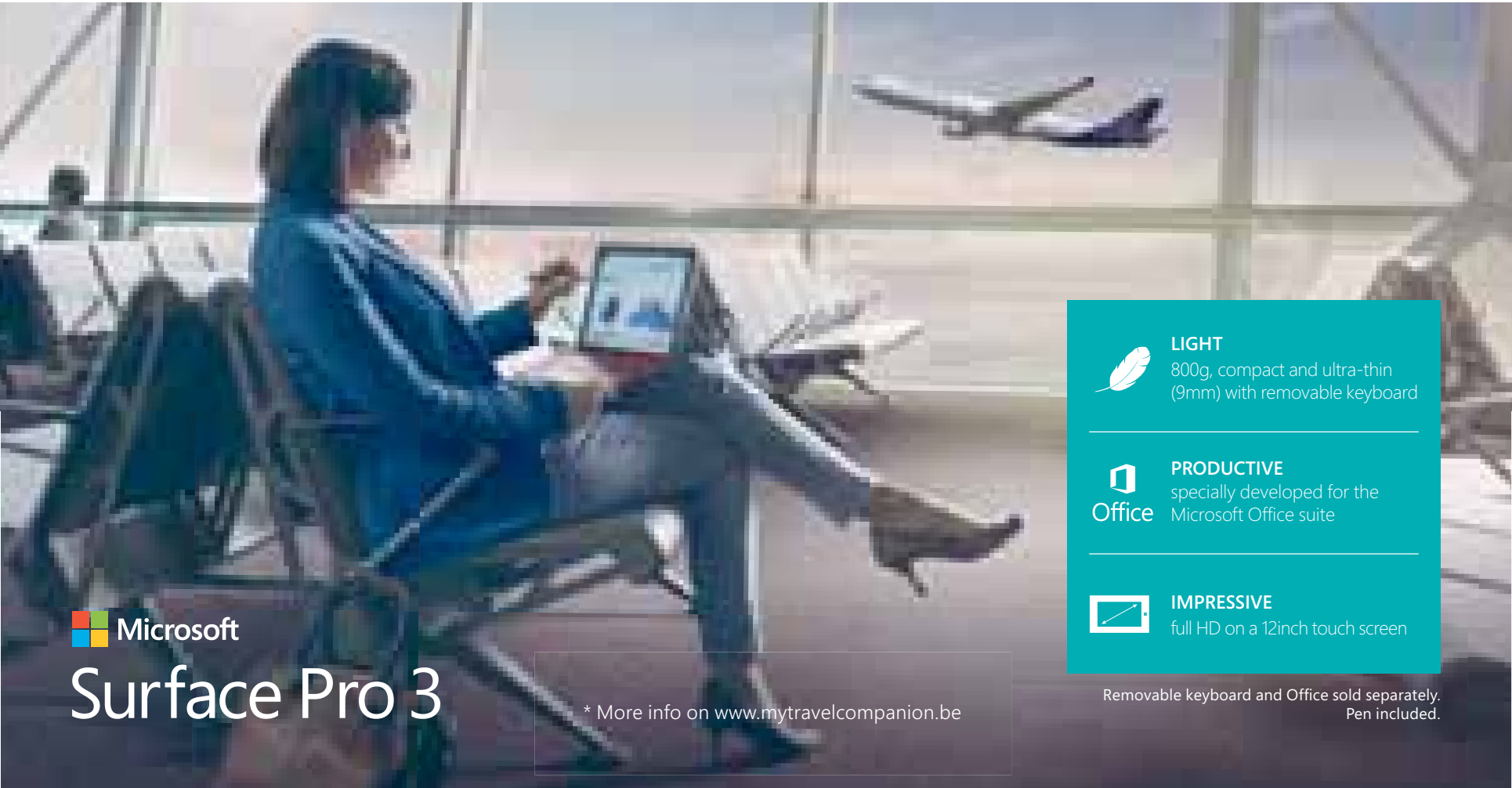
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A labour of love – and death

Liesa Van der Aa has delivered one of Flanders' most ambitious albums ever



Christophe Verbiest
More articles by Christophe \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.LIESAVANDERAA.BE

With her new triple album *WOTH*, Liesa Van der Aa has delivered one of the most ambitious records ever made in Flanders. The record is based on an ancient Egyptian text, but don't let that put you off. *WOTH* is pop music, just not as you know it. For her debut album *Troops*, singer and violinist Van der Aa did as much as she could herself. The new record saw her working with between 70 to 80 musicians, including a choir of 42 singers. "I liked the contrast," she smiles. "But in the end, I often remained alone: I'm not a band, so all the responsibility rested on my shoulders." Still, she readily embraced the challenge. "It had to be *my* album, but I made it with a lot of help from my friends."

“There's loads of things I'd like to do, and if I don't do them, I'll regret it

You can take that "help" quite literally since *WOTH*, mainly recorded in Berlin, was an expensive album to produce. Though Van der Aa, a *Brusselaar* who today lives in Antwerp, received financial support from the Flemish Community and several community centres, she points out that numerous collaborators on the album worked for free. "It was a labour of love," she says. *Book of the Dead* is a collection of ancient funerary texts from

Ancient Egypt. Between 1500 and 50 BC, the dead were sealed in their tombs with the texts, which were meant to protect them in the hereafter. One of the ritual judgments described in the *Book of the Dead* is "the weighing of the heart".

With its title an acronym for that ritual, Van der Aa's album centres on this ceremony. It's not the stuff pop songs are usually made of, but in the end, the ritual became a very personal story. "And that's good," she says. "The power of pop music – look at Patti Smith or Leonard Cohen – is its personal character. "Different ideas led me to the *Book of the Dead*," the singer continues. "What's the truth and who decides what the truth is? These questions have been haunting me for quite some time. But I'm also really scared of death. And I often can't choose: The musical history is so rich that it's difficult to opt for one style I want to work in."

The three CDs – three chapters of *WOTH* – each have their own musical identity. The first has a stronger beat and feels more electronic; the second is subdued, with a shade of baroque, while a 1970s pop wind blows through the final one. "On the first CD, the heart is too heavy; the feelings are strongly controlled, egocentric and also more destructive," Van der Aa explains. "The second part is the opposite, much more light-hearted and naive – flying

to the sun, looking for paradise. But that, too, is not realistic. On the third one, the balance is

reached: music that everyone can understand, almost sing-along songs."

Van der Aa, 28, is fully aware of the risk that adopting such a broad musical spectrum entails.

"Classical musicians see this as pop music, but fans of pop music might sometimes wonder what they're listening to," she says.

Calling Van der Aa a busy bee would be an understatement. In addition to writing music – both for herself and for others – she also writes for theatre and is an actress; she played in the VTM drama series *Cordon* this year.

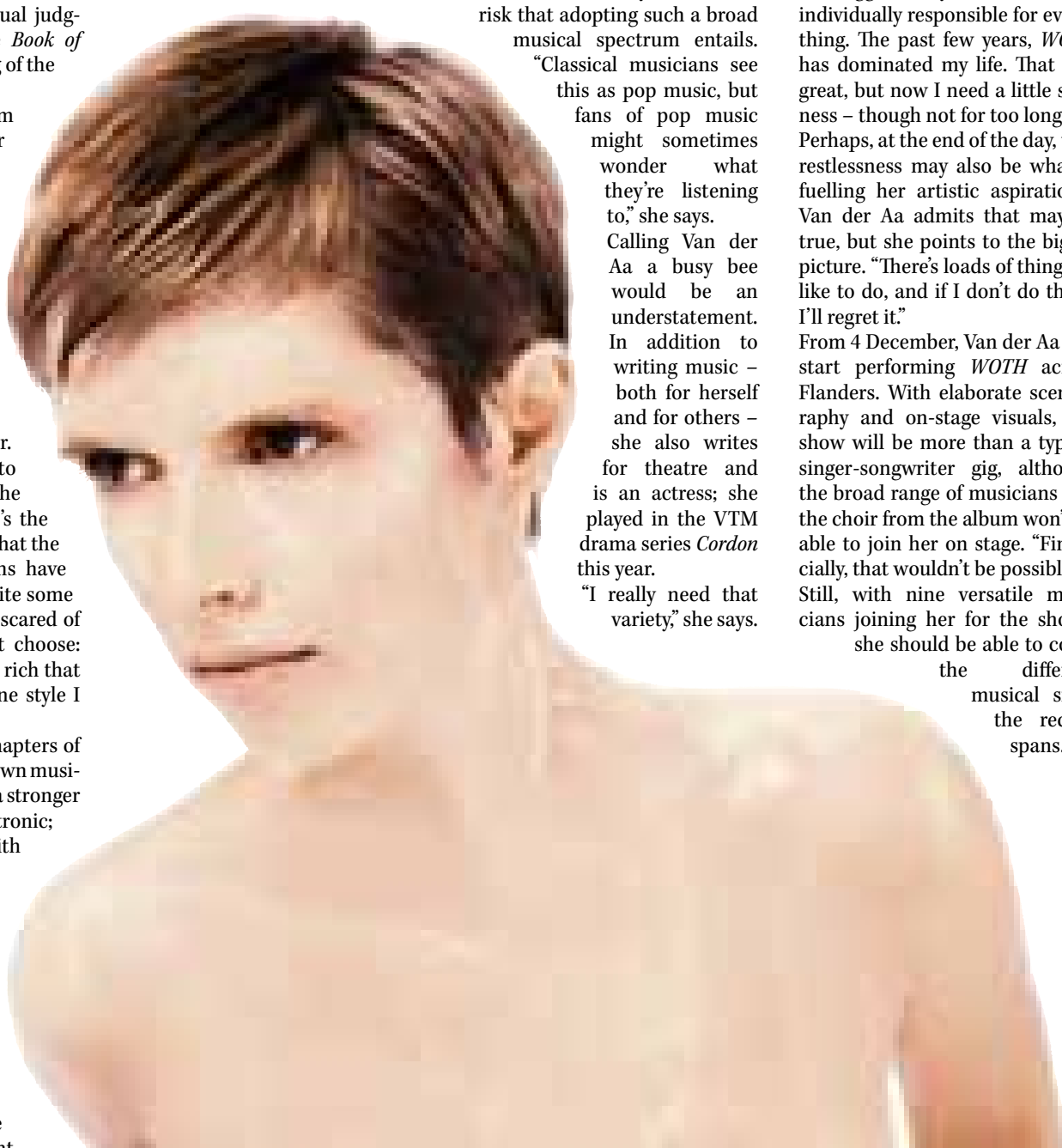
"I really need that variety," she says.

"After the shows for *WOTH*, I hope to get the chance to act again. Now and again, I like to be part of a bigger entity instead of being individually responsible for everything. The past few years, *WOTH* has dominated my life. That was great, but now I need a little stillness – though not for too long."

Perhaps, at the end of the day, that restlessness may also be what is fuelling her artistic aspirations? Van der Aa admits that may be true, but she points to the bigger picture. "There's loads of things I'd like to do, and if I don't do them, I'll regret it."

From 4 December, Van der Aa will start performing *WOTH* across Flanders. With elaborate scenography and on-stage visuals, the show will be more than a typical singer-songwriter gig, although the broad range of musicians and the choir from the album won't be able to join her on stage. "Financially, that wouldn't be possible."

Still, with nine versatile musicians joining her for the shows, she should be able to cover the different musical sides the record spans.



Liesa Van der Aa weighs her heart across Flanders next month

MORE NEW ALBUMS THIS MONTH



Aranis

Made in Belgium II • Home

Even after six albums, it's difficult to offer a clear description of the music of Aranis. And *Made in Belgium II* proves that's a good thing. It's been two years since the Flemish band's last album, and they once again adapts works by contemporary local composers. But *Made in Belgium II*

(pictured) doesn't retrace familiar ground. Chamber music forms the cornerstone of the 13 songs, but Aranis also embrace folk, tango and punk, albeit with a mix of klezmer in the last case. The result varies between wildly ecstatic and subdued serenity. Another reminder that Aranis are a highly underrated outfit. ★★☆☆

Buurman

De kus in ruil voor een koninkrijk • Universal

Less melancholy than its predecessor, *Mount Everest*, Limburg trio Buurman's third album reveals a highly romantic artist's soul. Still, singer and lyricist Geert Verdickt isn't one to wallow in that romanticism, which receives a musical pendant in the form of graceful arrangements that

enfold the songs on *De kus in ruil voor een koninkrijk* (*The Kiss in Exchange for a Kingdom*). But the band are at their best when they opt for a seemingly impromptu approach, placing the lyrics – and especially Verdickt's intriguing voice – centre stage. ★★☆☆

Dans Dans

3 • Unday

Just six weeks after guitarist Bert Dockx released his first solo album in Dutch as Strand, he's back with a new album, this time courtesy of one of the bands in which he plays. 3 is – you guessed it right – the third album by Dans Dans, an instrumental trio that includes bass player Fred Lyenn and drummer Steven Cassiers in addition to Dockx. Their jazz noir is more indebted

to psychedelic rock and avant-rock than to Duke Ellington, whose standard "Fleurette Africaine", incidentally, they mould until it sounds like one of their own songs. ★★☆☆

Steppe

Still • Rumoer

Don't judge a book by its cover. For years, Lies Steppe has filled her radio show, *Laika* on Klara, with the weirdest spaced-out music, but as a singer she doesn't venture out quite as far. The proof is in the second album by her band Steppe, which includes her multi-talented partner, Patrick Steenaerts. *Still* contains 11 sweet pop songs that vary between laid back and lively, though Steppe are clearly at their best when the lead singer's voice receives all the space it needs in songs like "Break Away". ★★☆☆

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

First solo show for Koen Vanmechelen in UK

Flemish artist Koen Vanmechelen's first solo show in the UK opens this week in the Crypt Gallery of London's St Pancras Church. The labyrinthine tunnels of the 200-year-old crypt will host *Darwin's Dream*, a collection of the multimedia artist's work. Central to the exhibition is Vanmechelen's on-going Cosmopolitan Chicken Project, which entails the cross-breeding of chickens from a variety of countries in a statement on the benefits of diversity. The exhibition also includes a "living jungle", a miniature lake, video, photography and sculpture. A panel discussion will take place on 14 November between the artist and experts in a variety of fields related to sociology, genetics and physics.

www.cryptgallery.org.uk

Expat Survey 2014 launches online

The London-based I-World Research group has launched The Expat Survey 2014 and is asking expats across the world to fill it in. The survey is in three parts, and the first, ready now online, is on migration and lifestyle. Later surveys include retail and finance and travel and health. Survey results are handed over to consumer organisations to better serve and market to expat communities around the world. Those who take part in the survey have the chance to win cash prizes and Amazon.com vouchers. Participants who complete the survey, which takes about 20 minutes, can also nominate an expat publication in one of several categories, including Best Expat Blog, Best Expat Radio and Best Expat Newspaper. (Don't hesitate to remember Flanders Today at this time.)

www.theexpatsurvey.com

M HKA director to curate Moscow Biennial

Bart De Baere, director of the Antwerp Museum for Contemporary Art (M HKA), has been invited to curate the Moscow Biennial in 2016. De Baere has accepted the invitation, despite strained relations with Russia at the moment. "That's why this is exactly the moment to ask if we want to abandon our commitment," De Baere said. "It is better to retain a public space for contemporary art in which the future can be planned, rather than to let it disappear under the currents of the moment." The theme of the event is "A progressive Europe", with an emphasis on Moscow as a meeting place between Europe and Asia.

Kortrijk's secret passions

Show in Lille features private stash of 18 West Flemish art collectors



Christophe Verbiest

More articles by Christophe \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.LILLE3000.EU

"The vast majority of the works in their collections have never been shown before, but they wanted to share them," says Caroline David. David is the head of visual arts at Lille3000, the organisation set up after Lille, just across the Flemish border in French Flanders, was selected as the European Capital of Culture in 2004.

One of the focal points of its programming is staging contemporary art exhibitions at the Tripostal, a former mail sorting centre next to the Lille Flandres railway station. The latest exhibition, *Secret Passions*, features works from unique private collections in Kortrijk, which is just 30 kilometres north of Lille.

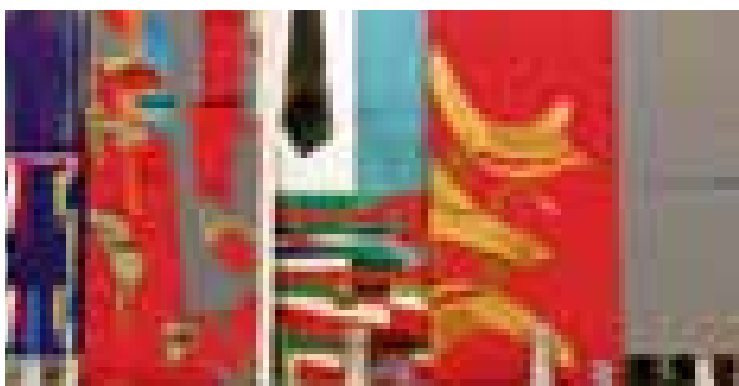
"For several years now, we have been presenting a cycle of exhibitions dedicated to huge private collections," David explains. She and her team previously delved into the holdings of Frenchman François Pinault, who owns one of the biggest collections of contemporary art in the world, and British advertising magnate and self-declared "artoholic" Charles Saatchi.

A couple of years ago, after a meeting between Lille mayor Martine Aubry and her then Kortrijk counterpart, Stefaan De Clerck, the idea grew to invite art collectors from the Kortrijk area for a dedicated exhibition.

"I started with visiting four, five collectors and quickly realised there were a lot more," David remembers. She ultimately ended with a list of 18. The idea, she continues, "is to show the dynamism that characterises these collectors. It's a phenomenon that's strange to us here in France. Of course we have art collectors, but you find them in Paris or in other big cities."

The exhibition catalogue points out that art collecting is a widespread, century-old tradition in Belgium. But the question remains: Why does Kortrijk have such a high concentration of collectors? David never found a conclusive explanation, but she says that a number of influences may have played a role.

In the 1980s, Kortrijk was frequently referred to as the "Texas of Flanders" because of its bustling flax and textile industries and its status as one of the richest areas in Flanders. This means that one prime prerequisite for art collecting, financial means, was covered. The influence of the late Jan Hoet also played a role: The Ghent museum director and curator was a tireless defender of contemporary art, even when it wasn't as fashionable as it is today.



© Photos: Maxime Dufour Photographies

Masters of contemporary art are on show in *Secret Passions*, including Wim Delvoye (*Trophy*, 1999, top), Wade Guyton and Kelley Walker (*Detail from Untitled installation*, 2008, above left) and Annette Messager (*Mes vœux sous le filet (cœur)*, 1999-2000, above right)



Add to the equation some of the private and public institutions that helped educate the collectors, such as the Deweer Gallery or the now defunct Veranneman Foundation, and the picture of Kortrijk as a collectors' playground begins to make more sense.

Still, David stresses that other cities like Ghent and Bruges feature a similar concentration of collectors.

The 18 collectors whose works are shown in *Secret Passions* together possess some 4,000 works. A few have rather small collections, but most include vast troves of artworks. One collection, for instance, consists of nearly 1,000 works, while another comprises some 600 items.

"Their houses are filled with art – the living room, the hallway, the bedroom, the toilets, you name it. They live between their works," David says. This can be seen in some of the pictures that London-based photographer Gautier Deblonde took of their homes, which are shown between the artworks in the exhibition.

David also says she saw a degree of emulation between the collectors. "Not that they all know each other – on the contrary – but there are some groups of three, four collec-

tors that have contact with each other," David says. "I think a collector wants to see what others are looking for."

David has selected 150 works for the Tripostal, a place that's well equipped to show large sculptures and installations. As part of *Secret Passions*, you find works by Flemish sculptor Berlinde De Bruyckere and American artist Dan Graham, for instance. But it also has rooms suited for works of a much smaller scale, such as the miniature paintings of Flemish artist Robert Devriendt or a number of works on paper by Fleming Michaël Borremans.

The exhibition comprises an impressive list of artists, with international figures like Louise Bourgeois, Danh Vo, Anselm Kiefer and Juan Muñoz. Of the Flemish artists, there are both established figures, like Wim Delvoye and Luc Tuymans, as well as rising stars, like Rinus Van de Velde and Ruben Bellinkx.

David says that "two, maybe three more exhibitions" could be staged with the works that *didn't* make the cut. The works that were

included in *Secret Passions* run across different thematic lines, the curator explains. "One was the representation of women. Loads of works evoke a very diverse view of women. The strong presence of American artists or artists that criticise the United States also intrigued me. So I put that into focus, too."

Mirrors are also strongly present in the selection, as are Belgian artists, who account for 25 of the 80 artists represented. "It was an ideal opportunity to give them a platform, since there are loads of Belgian artists who aren't much known in France: Lili Dujourie, Jan Vercruysse and Jacques Verduyn, to name but a few."

Are you still wondering who the 18 Kortrijk collectors are whose works are being shown? You're out of luck, since their names aren't mentioned anywhere in the *Secret Passions* exhibition or in the accompanying catalogue.

"Anonymity was part of the concept," explains David. "A few of them have stepped into the spotlight, but the vast majority really wants to stay out of it."

Until 4 January

Tripostal
Avenue Willy Brandt, Lille (France)

When art gets away from you

Allegory of the Cave Painting

Until 7 December

Extra City, Antwerp

\ WWW.EXTRACITYKUNSTHAL.ORG

Until 29 March

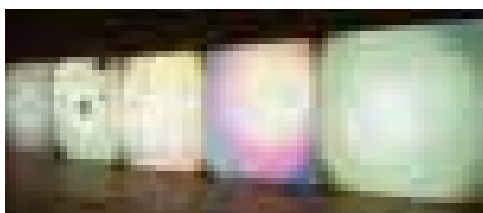
Middelheim Museum, Antwerp

\ WWW.MIDDELHEIMMUSEUM.BE

In 2010, scientists found that prehistoric cave paintings in north-western Australia had been colonised by red bacteria and black fungi. These living pigments contributed to the vividness of the paintings while etching them ever deeper into the rock. The paintings were alive, continually changing and renewing themselves.

This story has inspired the people at Extra City in Antwerp to put together a large, diverse exhibition that explores notions of change and instability in art, along with a host of related ideas. These include colonised images, art that collapses in on itself or work that somehow escapes its creator.

Allegory of the Cave Painting requires some time and effort to explore, yet contains many intriguing lines of thought. There are even one or two



© We Document Art

simple pleasures.

One highlight is Gustav Metzger's "Liquid Crystal Environment", in which slide projectors heat and cool thin layers of liquid crystal, tinting the light they throw with subtly shifting colours (*pictured*). The five projectors are arranged in a back room of the gallery, formerly an industrial launderette, evoking Plato's allegory of the cave, another of the exhibition's touchstones.

Among the simple pleasures are "Unfinished

Measurements" by Miklós Onucsán, which features rocks engraved with their weight before engraving changed that weight, and photographs of a 1975 happening in which Pier Paolo Pasolini was persuaded to sit still while his film *The Gospel According to St Matthew* was projected onto his chest.

The exhibition continues at the Middelheim Museum's Braem Pavilion, where works have been chosen to interact with the Antwerp museum's sculpture collection and park. This occurs most directly in Ciprian Mureşan's "Dead Weights", in which "old" sculptures are used as weight in a press to make new engravings.

Meanwhile in Michèle Matyn's "Les Faux", chemical processes have been set to work on large nature photographs, transforming images and paper alike. \ Ian Mundell

CONCERT

Sleater-Kinney

21 March, 19.30

Trix, Antwerp

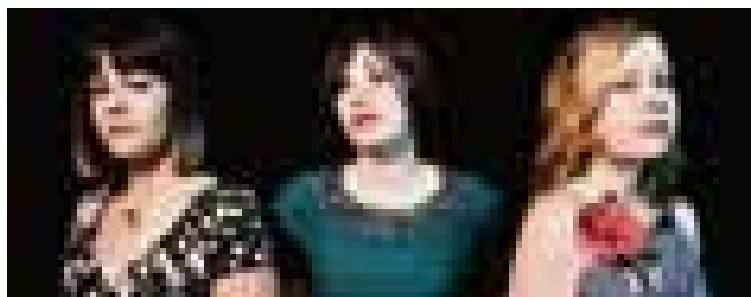
\ WWW.TRIXONLINE.BE

GET TICKETS NOW

Alt-rock fans in Flanders rejoice. Not only have the pioneering American group Sleater-Kinney reformed to record a new album, they are also touring Europe. The trailblazing trio formed in the Pacific Northwest in the early 1990s and quickly won a following for their aggressive, punk-inflected musical style

as well as their unapologetically progressive political bent. Press and peers alike hailed Sleater-Kinney as the most important band of the decade. Their current reunion follows nine years of inactivity. The band's London concert sold out in short order, so buy now.

\ Georgio Valentino



FOOD&DRINK

Cantillon Public Brewing

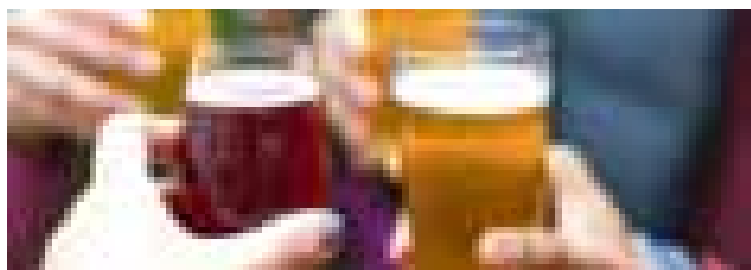
15 November, from 6.30

Cantillon Brewery, Brussels

\ WWW.CANTILLON.BE

Yes, Belgium is recognised the world over for its fine beers. No, there isn't any particular trade secret. The master brewers at the Brasserie Cantillon, for example, are more than happy to show you how one of the most quintessentially Belgian beers – gueuze – is made. This all-day open house showcases know-how and

hardware that go back generations. The family-run facilities have hardly been updated since 1900. You'll be guided through the entire process from brewing to filtration to hopping to cooking to pumping to cleaning the ancient barrels. The most important stage – drinking – hasn't been neglected either. \ GV



THEATRE

SuperamaX

13-14 November

Vooruit, Ghent

\ WWW.VOORUIT.BE

Ghent's own contemporary dance company Superamas has been blurring the line between choreography and everyday life for 15 years. Its latest production takes the genre-bending practice to the max. No longer content to direct a humble, subsidy-sucking arts organisation, the Superamas team go corporate and cast themselves as neoliberal entrepreneurs specialising in niche products. "Alternative" culture gives way to "alternative" capitalism, which the characters hope will yield maximum profits. (Note: The very premise invites cheesy marketing punnery; hilarity can't help but ensue.) (In English) \ GV



DANCE

Souls

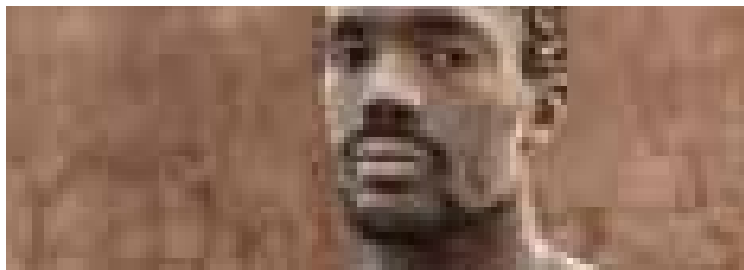
15 November, 20.30

Hallen van Schaarbeek, Brussels

\ WWW.HALLES.BE

Contemporary French choreographer Olivier Dubois presents a powerful statement on the postcolonial situation. In *Souls*, six African dancers stir and rise from the earth. Literally. The action takes place on a square patch of sandy terrain. They progressively liberate themselves from the element, then proceed to kick it up, throw it

around and generally defy the laws of gravity. Dubois describes his performers as "athletes of chaos". The piece, produced by an alliance of French and African institutions, premiered in Egypt last year and has since been staged in a dozen cities. Now the production comes to the capital for a one-night stand. \ GV



CONCERTS

Brussels

Jack White: Detroit's finest rock'n'roll export celebrates the release of his latest solo album, *Lazaretto*, in a show of his wildest and most eclectic songs yet. 16 November 20.00, *Vorst Nationaal*, Victor Rousseaulaan 208

\ www.livenation.be

Ghent

The Bony King of Nowhere: Extra try-out concert (following a quickly sold-out date) for the latest album by Flemish pop-folk hero Bram Vanparys. 21 November 20.00, *Club De Loge*, Nieuwe Vaart

\ www.democrazy.be

VISUAL ARTS

Ghent

Love Letters in War and Peace: The visual traces of famous and lesser-known romances, from Victorian society through to the front-lines of the First World War, in recordings, paintings, photographs and, of course, hand-written correspondence. Until 22 February, *Museum of Fine Arts*, Fernand Scribedreef 1

\ www.mskgent.be

OUTDOORS

Meise

Herfstkleurenwandeling (Autumn Colours Walk): Temporary walking route along the trees in the National Botanic Garden, highlighting the colourful autumn leaves. Until 12 December, *Botanic Garden Meise*, Nieuwelaan 38

\ www.plantentuinmeise.be

FAIR

Brussels

GO International: Fair about going abroad to work, study or learn a language, with information on more than 40 countries and workshops and seminars on subjects such as expat life, international careers and the importance of multilingualism. 14-15 November 10.00-19.00, *Autoworld*, Jubelpark 11

\ www.gointernational.be

FOOD&DRINK

Hoogstraten (Antwerp province)

Hoogstraten Festival: Hoogstraten closes out two years as Ambassador of Vlaanderen Lekker Land with a celebration of its local food and drink, featuring 25 restaurants, cafés, hotels and B&Bs, including strawberry specialties and a family brunch. 16 November 11.00-20.00, *Veiling Hoogstraten*, Loenhoutseweg 59

\ www.hoogstratenambassadeur.be

Talking Dutch

Lost in Translation



Derek Blyth
More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

It's tempting when you're learning a language to use Google Translate. You just type a sentence into a box, and Google comes up with the translation. Simple, *nee*?

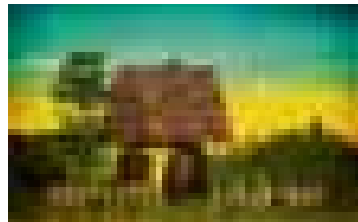
I tried it out for a few weeks to see how helpful it really was, starting with a headline in *De Standaard* – Bret Easton Ellis verontschuldigt zich voor zware uithaal naar 'The Loft' – or, according to Google, "Bret Easton Ellis apologises for heavy swipe at *The Loft*."

Not bad, I thought, although it sounds as if he socked someone in the face. Maybe he did.

A few days later, I read the headline in *De Morgen*: Belgische jobmotor sputtert. So I typed it into Google to see what came up. "Belgian jobmotor sputters," it said. OK, but what is a *jobmotor* anyway?

Then I came across a business story – *Stroom tot 30 procent duurder dankzij put van 1.7 miljard door groene stroom*, which Google translated as: "current up to 30% more expensive thanks pit of 1.7 billion green power."

I was beginning to see the weakness in Google's technique. It can directly translate words from one language to another. But it strug-



© IngImage

gles when it comes to expressions. One headline it really couldn't handle was: *Kan de baksteen in de maag blijven zitten?* – which Google translated as "Brick in the stomach can remain."

Which is, taken literally, pretty correct. But it doesn't even begin to hint at what the sentence means. If you live here, though, it's a phrase you hear often. *Elke Belg wordt geboren met de baksteen in de maag* – Every Belgian is born with a brick in the stomach.

The expression means that every Belgian wants to build their own house. You can see the results of this when you drive through any Flemish suburb. Every house is different from its neighbour. Some look like French renaissance castles. Others resemble Texas ranches with a touch of Barbie's dream house.

Google was again no use at all with another headline I read in

De Morgen – *De baksteen in de maag van de Vlaming is niet aan het verpulveren, maar wordt kleiner* – "The brick in the stomach of the Fleming is not the crush, but smaller," the mighty search engine suggested.

The article that followed was based on a study of changing lifestyles in Flanders. *Daaruit blijkt dat het droombeeld van een grote lap grond met een eigen ferme, pastoriewoning of designarchitectuurwoning stilaan aan het vervangen is* – This shows that the dream of a large piece of land with a private farmhouse, vicarage or design architecture house gradually getting replaced, Google translated, a little incoherently.

The article continued: *De droomhuis van de Vlaming is vandaag redelijk compact, energiezuinig, ligt in de omgeving van gemeenschappelijk groen en gemeenschappelijk vervoer*. Google handled this fairly well – "The dream house of the Fleming today is relatively compact, energy efficient, situated in the area of common green and common transport."

So it's getting there. But, still, Google has a lot to learn about Flemings and their stomachs of bricks.

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



In response to: *Pack of Arctic wolves stranded in Limburg*
Sheri Boyle

Oh sad, on ballot in MI to make it legal to hunt them here! To think they were almost extinct! They are so beautiful!



In response to: *Save energy to avoid cuts, says new government website*

Miranda Martin

Local authorities also have their part to play. Around where I live in Flemish Brabant, there are miles of country lanes which are lit up with street lighting all night



In response to: *insects approved for human consumption*
Arzel Gunfford

Looking at the picture on top, makes me wanna vomit. Imagine if all the countries were to do this, I bet majority of the people, if not all would go on a diet



Benjamin Campbell @BennyOKC

Incredibly humbled and excited to be among a talented group of Okies representing @OK_Creativity at #CWF14!



T Magazine @tmagazine

Tour the ranch home of Brussels-based designers set amongst the remote beauty of Mexico <http://nyti.ms/1sjEwK3>



Lena Dunham @lenadunham

To my Belgian readers, so very sorry to miss the Antwerp Book Fair today but I can't wait to come back and eat fries with you. Much love.

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Poll

Motoring organisation VAB says Flanders isn't ready for a driverless car. Would you take one for a spin?

a. Sure. I'd have no trouble getting in one if the technology is ready. Why not? You get in a taxi knowing nothing about the driver

30%

b. I can see allowing them, but I'll stick to driving my own car for the time being, thanks

40%

c. They should never be allowed. Computers are no replacement for human judgement. It will be chaos

30%

According to the motoring organisation VAB, the Flemish are not psychologically ready to embrace driverless cars. Even if the technology was there, residents here are too independent and want to make driving choices themselves rather than let a computer do it for them. Driverless cars are being tested and could wind up on Europe's roads

sooner than we think. The cars are equipped with precision mapping systems that allow them to detect both immovable and movable objects and get you to your destination all by themselves.

Our readers are all over the place on this one: 30-40-30 is about as evenly split as it gets. Between those who prefer to wait and see

before committing themselves, and those who consider the very idea to be of the Devil, it appears the time is not quite ripe for this seemingly space-age advance. (Whether that opinion is influenced by readers' experience on Belgian roads when the cars do have drivers is a question best left to the individual.)

\ Next week's question:

One-quarter of Antwerp's students don't graduate from secondary school. Who is responsible for tackling this serious problem?

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

THE LAST WORD

Master chef

"I was allowed to clean the mini-potatoes, prepare a cabbage crunch, help dress the plates, open the sea urchins, make juice and help with cleaning up."

Fourteen-year-old hotel school student Cedric Borgonjon from East Flanders was accepted for a kitchen internship at Noma in Copenhagen, largely considered the world's best restaurant

Recipe for success

"And to think I'm not actually a chef. I never followed a training. I was always just an ordinary housewife who made up recipes for other housewives."

Wiske Vercammen, whose cookbooks for Colruyt have sold more copies than all of the top chefs, is retiring at the age of 61

Conversation stopper

"We have to remain neutral. If a client votes for SPA, for example, and one of our hairdressers supports another party, that can lead to a discussion, and that's something we want to avoid."

An executive points out that staff at hairdressing chain Olivier Dachkin are not to discuss politics

Old dog, new tricks

"I want the viewer to see right away that we're offering something new. We've done everything there was to do in that old set. It's time for a change."

Gert Verhulst, boss of Studio 100, is making a new series of *Samson & Gert*, the first new episodes of the popular kids' show in a decade

