

**QUEEN FABIOLA
DIES AT 86**

Tributes poured in at the weekend for Belgium's dowager queen, who will be buried this Friday



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ART THAT HEALS

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Racking our brains

A working group dispels myths about addiction and mental disorders



Andy Furniere

More articles by Andy \ flanderstoday.eu

A non-profit and a group of Flemish neurological experts have taken the opportunity during the European Year of the Brain to dispel stubborn rumours about psychological problems and to call for more attention be paid to mental health care.

Although science has already uncovered many of the mechanisms that control how it works, the human brain continues to hold a lot of mysteries. At the occasion of the European Year of the Brain, Flemish experts have put their heads together to analyse the challenges faced by mental health policy and brain research in Flanders. This year was designated as the Year of the Brain by the European Brain Council to raise more awareness around the research into this hyper-complex organ that is the foundation for our personalities, thoughts and feelings. The government of Flanders also gave extra support to the non-profit organisation Breinwijzer, in addition to tasking a steering group of experts with examining the current state of local mental health policies and brain research.

"It's essential to spread accurate and accessible information about the workings of the brain because mental disorders, like depression and dementia, are having an increasingly large impact on our society," says Eva De Vlieger from Breinwijzer. "It's our mission to explain what the government's investments in brain research are used for, with more nuanced information than what you see in popular media." Since 2008, Breinwijzer has striven to improve the dialogue between the neuroscience sector, health-care professionals and the public. The non-profit publishes articles on its website, invites speakers for lectures and organises the annual I-Brain festival. This day-long event aims to attract people of all ages and backgrounds with a mix of accessible presentations and surprising workshops that, involve such things as virtual reality applications.

While Breinwijzer normally only organises one I-Brain festival in Ghent, this year the not-for-profit received funds to stage an additional, two-day festival in Leuven. At the events at both cities, which shared the umbrella theme of creativity, health-care professionals and other visitors were able to try out a unique device that simulates what it's like to suffer from psychosis. This Labyrinth Psychotica is a project of the Dutch-Canadian artist Jennifer Kanary Nikolova. Breinwijzer also co-ordinates the Meeting of Minds for Youth (MOM4Y) project for students ages 14 to 18. This initi-



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Queen Fabiola dies aged 86

Funeral for Belgium's former queen this Friday, as tributes pour in



Alan Hope

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Tributes were paid at the weekend to dowager queen Fabiola, who died at home at Stuyvenberg castle in Brussels on Friday. The widow of King Baudouin, she was 86. The government has declared a period of national mourning until the funeral, which takes place this Friday in Brussels' Sint-Michiels en Sint-Goedele Cathedral. All flags on official buildings will be flown at half-mast.

Fabiola de Mora y Aragón was born in Madrid in 1928, the daughter of nobility. She married Baudouin in 1960 after he had been on the throne for nine years. The couple remained childless; all five of the queen's pregnancies ended in miscarriage. When Baudouin died in 1993, the throne passed to his younger brother Albert.

Fabiola (pictured) then moved to Stuyvenberg, where she lived quietly, outside of the public eye so as not to overshadow the new royal couple. One exception was her annual appearance at the Queen Elisabeth Music Competition, which she continued to patronise.

Fabiola's health declined over the last few years, particularly after a respiratory infection in 2009, from which she never fully recovered. She also suffered from osteoporosis, which made public appearances difficult. She was last seen in public in the summer of 2013 at a remembrance ceremony for her husband.

Her estate – the subject of controversy last year when it appeared her financial advisers had attempted to avoid

paying estate tax – will go to the non-profit Hulpfonds van de Koningin (Queen's Aid Fund). The fund was set up upon her marriage to collect funds to aid the needy and to finance projects that aim to improve the integration opportunities of young people and their families.

"She made our country shine"

Prime minister Charles Michel paid tribute to Fabiola's work in society and the cultural sector. "Belgium has this evening lost a great queen, who made our country shine on the world stage," he said.

The Bishops' Conference of Belgium said that "she wanted to be a mother to all of her countrymen, especially those who had been damaged by life. Our country will forever be grateful to her".

Flanders' minister-president, Geert Bourgeois, added: "It is with sorrow that I learned of the death of Her Majesty Queen Fabiola, and I want to express my condolences in the name of the Flemish government. In the first place my thoughts go out to her family and close friends."

Former federal minister Willy Claes described her as "the ideal partner for King Baudouin, who saw his monarchy as a real vocation. Fabiola was able to motivate him a great deal. She was absolutely the wife he needed. I would almost go so far as to say they were the perfect couple".



© Francois Lenoir/Reuters/Corbis

Brussels approves new car parks despite protests

Brussels-City council has approved a plan to build four new underground car parks in the city as part of the district's new mobility plan – including one under the flea market at Vossenplein, which gathered 15,000 signatures opposing the plan in just a few days.

The meeting at Brussels town hall on Monday was disrupted by about 350 opponents of the Vossenplein car park, as well as several hundred more prevented from entering. Scuffles took place, and one steward was injured.

Opponents of the plan say the construction would force the daily market to move to another location less than half the size and cause serious losses for the businesses established around the square, which are unable to move but are dependent on market visitors. Above all, critics point out, the car park is not necessary; there are sufficient parking facilities in the area. Mobility alderwoman Els Ampe's plan, which is part of the larger plan to pedestrianise much of the capital's centre, includes new underground car parks at Yserplein, Rouppeplein and Nieuwe Graanmarkt, to be built and operated by the private sector. \ AH

Vilvoorde power station ready to make up shortage

A new gas-fired power station in Vilvoorde came on-stream last week and is ready to supply the strategic reserve of electricity required for the winter, said power company E.ON. There is a threat of brownouts this winter due to three of the country's nuclear reactors being out of commission because of defects.

The Vilvoorde plant has in recent months been transformed from closed-cycle to open cycle, which required the construction of a new chimney. The station is now capable of producing

265 megawatts (MW) of energy when required.

The federal government aims to construct a strategic reserve of 850 MW to cope with peaks in demand. The German-owned E.ON would produce 750 MW between its Vilvoorde plant and one in Seraing in Wallonia. The remaining 100 MW would come from large consumers who have committed to reducing their own consumption at peak moments.

Belgium will be dependent on imports

throughout the winter, according to a report produced by the European association of grid managers ENTSO-E. "Each week could be potentially critical," the report says.

The biggest problem will be seen during severely cold weather, when the import requirement will reach 3.6 gigawatts, far higher than Belgium's strategic reserve can handle. The critical moment will be reached at minus six degrees, with wind power operating at only 20%, according to simulations. \ AH

Baby elephant expected this week at Planckendael

As *Flanders Today* went to press, Mechelen animal park Planckendael was expecting the arrival of a new baby elephant. Females Phylo Phylo and her daughter May Tagu were both reported to be pregnant back in October, when May Tagu was reckoned to be first in line to give birth – in her case for the first time.

Both babies were expected in the spring. However, zoo staff last week reported that Phylo Phylo's baby (her fifth) was imminent. Since last Wednesday, keepers have been keeping watch through the night.

The trouble keepers have is in determining when conception took place and how

long gestation could take. An elephant pregnancy lasts anywhere between 18 and 22 months. To make matters more complicated, elephants only ovulate once every three months, and after a first mating between Phylo Phylo and newly arrived bull Chang, Phylo Phylo appeared to show no signs of pregnancy. \ AH

88.52



hours of sunshine in November, compared to the average 66.17 hours. The rainfall of 40.5mm was also very low, compared to an expected 76.4mm

276



9,117



cases of truancy in Flemish schools in the year 2013-2014, 1,017 more than the previous year. A case is only registered if the student is absent without cause for a minimum of 30 half days

bus drivers to be hired in 2015 by the Brussels public transport authority MIVB, which, added to the 274 hired this year, will increase capacity by 20%

25,000



10,000



packets of the sweets known as Ghent snowballs handed out last week by contractors working at the Dampoort transport hub after traffic was disrupted for eight hours when a crane threatened to topple

WEEK IN BRIEF

After nearly a half century, **renovation works on Antwerp's Cathedral of Our Lady** were completed last week, allowing *Antwerpnaars* the sight of a cathedral devoid of scaffolding for the first time since work began in 1965. The works include a new portal, masonry work and stained glass windows. Only restoration work on the organ, delayed by the death last year of the restorer, remains unfinished. That work is expected to be completed in 2016. The total bill for 49 years of work comes to €52 million.

Belgium is the best performing country when it comes to **women's rights**, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The Social Institutions and Gender Index looks at 14 indicators in five sectors in 160 countries, including matters such as violence against women, civil rights and age of consent for marriage. Belgium "guarantees the rights of women within the family, protects women against violence, offers equal access to resources and grants women equal civil and political rights," the OECD said.

A court in Antwerp has **freed 46 members of an alleged drugs gang** facing more than 1,000 charges, following a procedural error which rendered all evidence from a number of telephone taps inadmissible. The investigation began in 2009, culminating in an operation in 2010 in which 350 police carried out searches at 38 locations simultaneously, seizing large quantities of drugs and cash.

Nine people in Limburg who **ate contaminated wild boar** were admitted to hospital last week suffering from what doctors think is an infection of trichinella, a parasite which can be fatal and that hasn't been seen in Belgium for years, according to a spokesperson for the health agency AZG. The infections have been traced to two restaurants, though the meat is thought to have come from Spain.

The food safety agency has begun an investigation.

The Flemish government is still negotiating with four candidates for the **takeover of the Ford Genk** site, economy minister Philippe Muyters told the parliament's economy committee. One is Punch Metals industrialist Guido Dumarey, whose initial bid for the pressing plant was refused and who submitted an amended plan. "The important thing for us is that the investment leads to sustainable employment," Muyters said. "The business needs to have prospects."

Ghent University has awarded an **honorary doctorate to Breyten Breytenbach**, the South African poet and activist who militated against apartheid from Paris, after he was refused re-entry to his homeland in 1960 for breaking the Immortality Act after having married a French woman of Vietnamese descent. In 1975, he was arrested on a clandestine visit and imprisoned for several years as a terrorist.

Herman Van Rompuy, the first-ever **president of the European Council**, stepped down on 1 December after five years to hand over the position to former Polish prime minister Donald Tusk. Looking back over a time that saw him ridiculed by British anti-Europeans but winning the respect of world leaders with whom he dealt, he said his proudest moment was when the EU won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 – "an award for the world's biggest voluntary peace project," he called it.

The **port of Antwerp** has signed a co-operation agreement with the government of Colombia to prevent drugs trafficking, following a conference in the city last week. Public authorities and the private sector have worked closely over the last 10 years within the port on crime and security issues, leading to six major seizures in only two years.

The **body of a woman found** in the dunes at Zeebrugge in 2010 has been identified as 26-year-old Milena Raycheva, a Bulgarian national resident in the Netherlands. Identification was finally possible when police heard of a Bulgarian mother whose daughter had gone missing. DNA tests provided the missing identity. The investigation into the murder continues.

The Flemish government has granted a subsidy of €1.2 million to **restoration work on the national cycling museum** in Roeselare, West Flanders, heritage minister Geert Bourgeois announced. The works on the interior are due to be completed by 2016, the 100th anniversary of the Tour of Flanders. The museum is housed in a former munitions store and fire station which was destroyed by British bombing in 1917 and rebuilt in 1921.

The Antwerp Hospital Network (ZNA) has called for children in the last year of primary school to be **given lessons in heart massage** and resuscitation, following an experiment carried out by Dr Jan Stroobants of ZNA Middelheim. The project gave the children lessons, then encouraged them to teach the technique to members of their families. "The results were fantastic," Dr Stroobants told VTM news. "The children were able to convince 96% of the people around them to learn more." The lessons would require only two hours of class a year, ZNA said.

The new reformed **Senate still has 273 full-time employees** for a body which in future will only meet in full session eight times a year. In the latest set of state reforms, Senate membership was cut to 60, and the number of committees was reduced to three. Meanwhile an attempt to divert staff to other government bodies has been unsuccessful. "There wasn't enough consideration of the consequences of the reforms," said the body's deputy speaker Karl Vanlouwe.

They give a few examples: a member of the ACV union in his green rubbish bag who came to the assistance of an injured police officer during the demonstration in Brussels; a young Antwerp woman who went up against three teenagers in the metro who were bullying a peer; a 34-year-old man who rescued a family of six Syrian refugees from a housefire. If you know anyone like that – and exceptional courage doesn't always have to mean saving lives, superhero-style – email helden@standaard.be and let them know who. We'll be sharing some of the stories once the nominations start coming in. \ AH

OFFSIDE We need another hero

Last weekend, Luc De Vos, the lead singer of Gorki who died unexpectedly, was described as a "people's hero". De Vos wasn't alone. In the last few days, a search of the Flemish papers reveals, the term "hero" has been used to describe Father Abraham, David Bowie, Sinterklaas, Zwarte Piet and sundry football players.

Sports people and pop stars are often described as heroes, but there the word is being used more in the sense of the protagonist in a drama. Ask people who their real heroes are, and the answer is much more likely to be Nelson Mandela,



a former teacher or Mum or Dad. Do you have a real-life hero? If so, *De Standaard* wants to hear from

"Courage is often something that's missing from our society," the paper says. "That's why *De Standaard* wants to feature people who have shown exceptional courage in the past year." \ AH

FACE OF FLANDERS



Kurt Defrancq

Old actors never die, they say; they simply lose the plot. Of course, old actors do die, and sometimes they have a hard time of it before they do. That's what Kurt Defrancq wants to fix. Defrancq was best known as Eric Bastiaens in the VRT soap *Thuis*, but he stopped playing Eric in 2009. Since then he's appeared regularly in TV series, including *Aspe*, *Zone Stad* and *Danni Lowinski*. He now works mainly in theatre; next month in Antwerp you can see his one-man show *Mannen komen van Mars, vrouwen van Venus* (*Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*).

Defrancq also works half-time as a cultural adviser at Ghent University, where he helps decide what cultural events and activities should be offered to students.

In other words, Defrancq is, at the age of 51, doing well for himself. Others don't have it so easy, which is why he has now set up De Acteurspenning (The Actors' Penny), a fund for the support of older actors in financial straits.

"It is difficult sometimes for actors to make ends meet during

their career because they don't always have a project on the go," Defrancq explained to VRT. "Saving for a pension is made even harder because of that fractured career. The result is sometimes temporary poverty."

The problem, Defrancq explained, is that Flanders produces too many actors for the opportunities available. At the same time, the growth of independent production houses means there is a constant search for new faces, with the older generations being ignored more often than not.

Defrancq presided over De Artiestenpenning in the 1990s, which helped cultural sector workers when they fell on hard times. It received, he said, about 20 requests for support a year, but the donations eventually dried up.

The new organisation has the support of the Norma Joossens Fund for retired actors, part of the King Baudouin Foundation. Anyone wishing to support the fund can visit the website at acteurspenning.be, as can anyone in need of support. \ Alan Hope

FLANDERSTODAY

 Flanders
State of the Art

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EDITOR Lisa Bradshaw

DEPUTY EDITOR Sally Tipper

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR Alan Hope

SUB EDITOR Linda A Thompson

AGENDA Robyn Boyle, Georgio Valentino

ART DIRECTOR Paul Van Dooren

PREPRESS Corelio AdPro

CONTRIBUTORS Daa Bawwens, Rebecca

Benoot, Derek Blyth, Leo Cendrowicz, Katy

Desmond, Andy Furniere, Diana Goodwin,

Julie Kavanagh, Catherine Kosters, Toon

Lambrechts, Katrien Lindemans, Ian

Mundell, Anja Otte, Tom Peeters, Daniel

Shamaun, Senne Starckx, Christophe

Verbiest, Débora Votquenne, Deniz Walton

GENERAL MANAGER Hans De Loore

PUBLISHER Corelio Publishing NV

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

Gossetlaan 30 - 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden

tel 02 373 99 09

editorial@flanderstoday.eu

SUBSCRIPTIONS

tel 03 560 17 49

subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu

or order online at www.flanderstoday.eu

ADVERTISING

02 373 83 57

advertising@flanderstoday.eu

VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

Hans De Loore

5TH COLUMN

The “real” pm minister

An old truth floating around Flemish politics says that the federal government is always more troubled than its regional counterparts. And this coalition is giving us the perfect example.

From the start, the federal government, led by prime minister Charles Michel (MR), has had to cope with one incident after another. Among French speakers, Michel I is not at all popular, which is no surprise, as this government lacks a French-speaking majority in parliament. Moreover, many French speakers feel uneasy about the dominance of the Flemish nationalists N-VA, whom they suspect of separatism and right-wing sympathies.

On top of that, there is the social unrest, with unions protesting the austerity measures and demanding a tax on capital gains. This makes CD&V very nervous – and an unpredictable coalition partner.

As if all that isn’t enough, economic prospects last week were adjusted downwards, as Belgium continues to suffer from the international slowdown.

Fortunately, Michel has one very faithful supporter: Bart De Wever, mayor of Antwerp and leader of N-VA, Flanders’ largest party.

Last week, the men stood side by side, addressing an audience of employers at a Voka event. De Wever also comes to the rescue whenever Michel seems to lose control over his government.

We saw this last week when the demand to tackle the generous fiscal treatment of company cars – and the ensuing mobility problems – gained momentum. Federal finance minister Johan Van Overtveldt (N-VA) promptly announced that the topic could be discussed as part of the tax shift.

But his own party president, De Wever, would not hear of this. We will stick to the government agreement, which does not mention company cars, he said. For Michel, that meant one less thing to worry about. Critics interpreted De Wever’s intervention slightly different, though. It is not unusual in Belgium for party presidents to have more power than ministers, but here there is more at play.

Everyone knows that De Wever has more electoral weight than Michel and is, therefore, the real strong man in Belgian politics. So the question raised last week was this one: Who is Belgium’s real prime minister? Some believe he does not reside in Wetstraat 16, but rather, in Antwerp city hall. \ Anja Otte

Celebrities and scientists call for prosecutions for “climate crimes”

Klimaatzaak will take four governments to court if demands aren’t met



Derek Blyth

More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

\ WWW.KLIMAATZAAK.EU

A group of 11 Flemish scientists, artists and business leaders has threatened to bring a legal action against the federal government, as well as Belgium’s three regional governments, for “climate crimes”.

The group (*pictured*), which includes filmmaker Nic Balthazar, artist Koen Vanmechelen, climate ambassador Serge de Gheldere and actor Francesca Vanthielen, announced their intention at an event in Ghent last week.

Spokesperson De Gheldere – CEO of the Leuven-based Futureproofed, a consultancy for improving industry’s environmental impact – said that the governments are failing to do enough to meet their obligation to cut carbon emissions by 40% by 2020.

“There is no discussion among scientists and politicians regarding the fact that we have to keep



© Courtesy Klimaatzaak

global warming under two degrees Celsius,” said De Gheldere, who is a climate ambassador under Al Gore’s programme. “Belgium has engaged on an international level in order to take measures, but it has done little to deliver on those promises.”

Flanders’ environment minister, Joke Schauv-

liege, responded by pleading personally “guilty” to the charges but stressed that the government had already done a great deal to cut emissions. “It’s a positive sign that people are discussing climate change,” she wrote in *De Morgen*. “The government definitely has a responsibility, and no one is denying that, but individual actions and free choice also play a role.”

The “climate crime prosecution” is modelled on similar legal cases brought in the Netherlands and the US. “The longer we wait, the worse it gets,” the organisers argued.

They plan to launch an action in the courts in January if the four governments fail to respond to their demands. They also ask that citizens join them in the case. As *Flanders Today* went to press, the paperwork to join the action had been downloaded more than 12,000 times.

Flemish Parliament plans new strategy to connect with residents

Flanders’ parliament wants to focus on “increasing contact with citizens” and to create “a digital strategy,” according to its latest policy document. The plan, which covers the coming four years, provides for the creation of an interactive visitor centre and a dedicated YouTube channel.

The parliament said it plans to invest €1.5 million to create and run a “modern and multimedia” centre to be located in the space known as De Loketten in the parliament building.

The parliament recently closed down the exhibition and event space in De Loketten, due to the high cost coupled with falling visitor numbers. It hopes the new visitor centre will draw 40,000 people a year.

Parliament also wants to make it easier for people to follow plenary debates by posting clips on YouTube. Cameras are also planned in four committee rooms to allow residents to witness focused debates. \ DB

Migration secretary proposes new fees for foreigner registration

The state secretary for asylum and migration, Theo Francken, has proposed charging a fee to foreigners who settle in Belgium to cover the administrative costs involved in granting residency. The charge could be between €100 and €300, which is in line with rates in neighbouring countries, he said.

Francken added that the charge wouldn’t apply to everyone. “Victims of trafficking and asylum seekers, along with EU citizens, wouldn’t have to pay,” he said. The Council of State has said that the proposed charge could be in conflict with Belgian, EU or international law.

Francken also reassured parliament that it is not government policy to enter schools and pick up children when they are threatened with deportation. He was responding to criticism following a case in which a father and two children facing



© Courtesy sofiebracke.be

deportation were taken into custody in Lier on their way to school.

Francken said that, as the children were not picked up during school hours, the arrest was legal, but said that he felt it would be better for the police not to take children into custody on the way to school. He plans to send out an official circular to clarify the situation. \ DB

Prime minister delivers first speech in Flanders to Voka

As unionists were putting the final touches to Monday’s provincial strike, which affected Flemish Brabant and Brussels, Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever (CD&V) hit out at strikers during a meeting with the Flemish chamber of commerce, Voka. The meeting last Thursday, which drew 1,000, was sponsored by the Antwerp-Waasland chapter of Voka.

De Wever insisted there was no alternative to the government’s austerity policy. At the same meeting, prime minister Charles Michel (MR), in his first official address to a Flemish audience, said he understood that people were worried by the government’s reform programme but called on all sides to behave responsibly. “This is a social government because we’re investing in jobs,” he said. “But I understand and respect that people are concerned.”

Michel stressed that the cuts would affect everyone and that employers had an important role to play in the recovery. “We have a social model that cannot exist without wealth creation and the efforts of thousands of entrepreneurs,” he told Voka.

© Courtesy Het Nieuwsblad
From left: Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever, Voka-Antwerp chair Stéphane Verbeeck, prime minister Charles Michel and Voka-Antwerp director-general Luc Luwel

De Wever said that Belgium was facing its greatest challenge since the Second World War and that there was no alternative. He criticised opposition parties and unions for failing to accept the need for painful reforms. But he reserved his harshest words for “a large part of the media”, which, he said, portrayed him as cruel and insensitive.

The N-VA leader said he was determined to

cut government expenditure, reduce taxes and reform the pension system. “It is only by pursuing these policies that we can provide the next generation with a future,” he said.

The third in a series of provincial strikes this week hit Brussels and Flemish Brabant. Public transport in Brussels was completely shut down, while one in 10 buses in Flemish Brabant was operating. Many of the roads into Brussels were blocked by pickets, including the E19 and N1 from Mechelen, the E411 at Oudergem and the N9 from Asse.

Within Brussels, rubbish went uncollected, and 19 people were detained after a blockade on the Administrate shopping street prevented pedestrian access. Unions later claimed a high level of participation among private sector workers at AB InBev, Bosch, Duracell and Akzo Nobel. More disruption is expected: On 11 December, NMBS will strike for 24 hours starting at 3.00, with no rail service across the country. A massive national strike is planned for next Monday, 15 December, which will shut down transport and many businesses across the country. \ DB

Racking our brains

Group of experts is providing proposals for dealing with mental health issues

continued from page 1

ative allows teachers to request a kit with information on the functioning of the brain. To enter the MOM4Y competition, their students have to select one subject, compile a list of research questions and present them to an expert. Their report and a short film they're asked to make about the results are then evaluated by a jury. The three best teams get to compete at the MOM4Y festival in March during the Brain Awareness Week, which includes workshops around improvisational comedy. Another crucial step taken by the Flemish government as part of the Year of the Brain was to task a steering group of experts with drawing up an advisory report. This document will be used as the foundation for an action plan around mental health policies and brain research in Flanders. The team of experts included representatives from Flemish universities, governmental organisations and other stakeholders. Their memorandum will be presented during a symposium in the Flemish Parliament on 12 December. According to the president of the steering group, retired paediatric neurologist Paul De Cock, one of their major findings was that disproportionate attention is paid to brain disorders that mainly occur in the last stages of life, such as Parkinson's disease and dementia.

"But many brain disorders develop in earlier life stages, even before

today are not able to deal with this situation, so these patients usually become dependent on disability benefits."

The experts also urge for additional measures to improve the active participation of the elderly in society, since this has been shown to prevent or decelerate the development of brain disorders like dementia.

Asked which mental disorder is the most common in Flanders, De Cock's answer is brief – stress. Citing the recent Health Survey organised by the Scientific Institute of Public Health, he says: "One in three Belgians reported problems with anxiety, chronic stress or sleeping."

One of the experts' more positive findings was that many excellent neurological scientists are at work in Flanders. Aside from the various research groups at local universities, pioneering work is being done at, for example, the cross-university research initiative Neuro-Electronics Research Flanders and the pharmaceutical company Janssen Pharmaceutica.

The government's Flanders' Care programme, moreover, supports the development of health-care innovations. One example is the development of technology that allows patients to live independently and the elderly to stay longer in their own homes.

Still, stumbling blocks remain. "One problem is that there is still too little investment in very



€1,029 per resident.

According to the steering group, the high prevalence of neurological disorders in this country has not been matched by resources, since less than 10% of the health-care budget currently goes to mental health-care initiatives. In addition to such general observations, the researchers on the committee also pointed to specific challenges and innovations. Koen Demyttenaere, a psychiatry professor at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) stresses that more attention should be paid to mental health-care in medical schools. "It is remarkable how under-represented this domain is in the current curricula of medical students," he says.

Demyttenaere also points to important research innovations, like the insights from epigenetics, the study of heritable changes in our genomes. Such research has demonstrated that both traumatic and very positive childhood experiences can influence our genes, offering new explanations

for the occurrence of depression, for example.

At Antwerp University, psychiatry professor Geert Dom is an expert in addictions and what are known as "double diagnoses". "It is little known that about five out of 10 people with an addiction also suffer from a psychiatric disorder," he says. "It is a big misunderstanding that addictions are solely the fault of the patients. Many addicts are vulnerable partly because of a certain sensitivity in their brains."

Dom pleads for awareness-raising initiatives to reduce the stigma of addiction so that people are encouraged to see a doctor or psychologist earlier.

Frank Van Overwalle is a specialist in the field of social neurosciences and works at the psychology department of the Free University of Brussels (VUB). He examines the ability of the brain to implement social processes and behaviour, such as its capacity to perceive other people's feelings.

"This enriches our social interac-

tion with people," he explains. One of his current research projects focuses on the differences in the brain activities of people who have autism, suffer from depression or have had a stroke.

Paul Boon, director of the Institute for Neuroscience at Ghent University, is an expert in neuromodulation therapy, which applies electric impulses to the nervous system. Such treatments have been used to relieve the suffering of patients with brain disorders like epilepsy, depression and Parkinson's disease.

"To limit the impact on the patients, we are developing innovative techniques that do not require risky surgery," Boon explains. In magnetic neuromodulation, for example, magnetic fields produce only small electrical currents.

Neuropsychologist Christophe Lafosse, director of strategy and scientific policy at KU Leuven and a specialist at the Rehabilitation Hospital RevArte in Edegem, Antwerp province, also emphasises the importance of neuromodulation. But he also urges for more scientific recognition for non-medical techniques like mindfulness.

"Our scans clearly show that mindfulness has an effect on brain activity," says Lafosse, "and is useful in the treatment of depression and burn-out."

In Lafosse's opinion, more awareness should be raised around the brain's vulnerabilities. "The brain is a fantastic organ, but it should be protected against the excessive stimulations of today's hectic world, like the constant need to adapt to new technologies," he says. "Instead of pleading to stimulate the mind, as is so often done, I would advise to also protect it."



© Photos courtesy Breinwijzer

Breinwijzer's I-Brain festival brings together students, health-care workers and other professionals for lectures, workshops and, this year, the chance to use the Labyrinth Psychotica, which simulates psychosis (pictured above).

“One out of three Belgians report having problems such as anxiety or chronic stress

birth," he says, pointing out that many parents-to-be don't realise the extent to which tobacco, alcohol and drug use during pregnancy is harmful for the development of babies' brains – as are stress and depression.

In their report, the group also emphasises difficulties faced by adolescents with intellectual disabilities in today's society. "There should, for example, be more investments to adapt the learning conditions in schools to their needs," says De Cock.

To improve the social integration of adults with neurological disorders, the experts argue for a labour system with more flexible working conditions and for incentives for employers to hire such individuals. "Patients have periods during which they can work well and other periods when they find it impossible to be productive," De Cock explains. "Most companies

concrete applications to improve the health-care provision in Flanders," De Cock says. "Another is the lack of close co-operation between Flemish research teams."

Several of the steering group experts stress the need for increased co-operation between research groups. The steering group's memorandum will therefore recommend establishing a platform to stimulate the exchange of neurological expertise in the region. The experts also agreed that the need for increased investments in mental health-care research is backed up by the data. Statistics compiled by the World Health Organisation in 2004, for instance, show that brain disorders were responsible for 35% of all diseases in Europe. The data also showed that 2.9 million, or roughly one in three Belgians, suffered from a brain disorder, which carried economic cost of

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air \ Ryanair

The Irish low-cost carrier announced that it is planning to launch trans-Atlantic flights connecting Brussels Airport with up to 12 destinations in North America from 2018.

Cars \ Cardoen

The used car dealership chain, which sells up to 25 different brands, has launched an internet sale platform with a virtual showroom containing up to 1,000 vehicles at any given time.

Chemicals \ Solvay

The Brussels-based chemicals and plastics group has finalised the sale of its US Eco Services affiliate for €750 million. Meanwhile, the company has plans to increase the capacity of its special polymers resins production facility in Panoli, India, by 25%.

Construction

\ Regulations

All workers on construction sites will in future be obliged to wear a badge to help prevent undeclared work, under a proposal from Bart Tommelein, secretary of state for the fight against fraud. A badge has been mandatory for Belgians on sites since 1 October, while it remains optional for foreigners.

Electronics \ Barco

The Kortrijk digital electronics group is under enquiry in China over contracts to supply and distribute large video screens from 1997 to 2009. The company's local general manager is been prevented from leaving the country while customs authorities are investigating.

Energy \ Elia

Belgium's high-voltage electricity transmissions operator has signed a contract with the British Ofgem energy regulator to build the €630 million Nemo 1,000-megawatt link between Zeebrugge and Ramsgate. The deal is a further step in the growing interconnection of national electricity grids within Europe to increase the security of energy supplies. Work is expected to start in 2017 and last for two years.

Special effects \ GIMV

The Flemish government's investment company has taken control of the German Mackevision, which develops 3D computer-generated imagery and is responsible for the special effects in the hit series *Game of Thrones*. Meanwhile, GIMV has sold its 25% stake in the Ghent European Bulk Terminal company to Sea Invest.

Mediahuis takes over NRC

Price paid for Dutch daily not yet announced



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.eu

Mediahuis, the joint venture between Flemish media houses Corelio (*De Standaard*, *Het Nieuwsblad*) and Concentra (*Gazet van Antwerpen*, *Het Belang van Limburg*) has announced an agreement to take over NRC media group, which publishes the Dutch daily newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*. The deal includes the newspaper, as well as NRC Media and NRC Lux. No price has been revealed. NRC employs 350 people, and employees were assured there were no plans at present to carry out a reorganisation. When Mediahuis was created in 2013, it led to the loss of 205 jobs – about 20% of the workforce. Mediahuis is 62% owned by Corelio, which also publishes *Flanders Today*, and 38% by Concentra.

“Once the deal is complete, the parties will likely get together around the table to see how they can best work together,” said Mediahuis communications manager Frank Jaspers. “But there’s been no talk of reorganisation.”

“NRC Media is a profitable and healthy company with competent staff,” Mediahuis CEO Gert Ysebaert told VRT Radio. “We want to ensure

continuity but also to see where we can add competence.”

The editor-in-chief of *NRC Handelsblad*, Peter Vandermeersch, said he was “cautiously positive” about the takeover. Vandermeersch, who is Flemish, previously edited *De Standaard* before moving to Rotterdam in 2010 and subsequently overseeing the paper’s move to Amsterdam in 2012. “Of course NRC belongs in a media environment and not inside a private equity group,” he said. “Above all, the DNA of Mediahuis and NRC are very similar, and I ought to know.”

The deal, he pointed out, still has to go before the enterprise board and the NRC editorial council for their opinions. “There is an agreement between buyer and seller,” Vandermeersch told *De Standaard*. “Now the consultations begin. There are many questions to be answered, including the scope of the editorial staff, its independent status and the status of the editor-in-chief.”

The Dutch competition authorities also have to give the green light for the takeover. The deal is likely to be completed definitively in the New Year, Jaspers said.



Antwerp takes action against proliferation of night shops

Antwerp city council has announced plans to take action against the growth of night shops because of their negative impact on the image of the city and its commerce. Starting next month, anyone who wants to open a night shop in the city will have to pay a one-time fee of €6,000, followed by an annual tax of €1,500. The new tax would also apply to existing shops.

The measure also covers other kinds of small businesses designated by the city council, including betting shops, video stores, smoking bars, club cafés, telephone shops and sex shops.

The youth wing of Open VLD described the measure as “a form of hidden racism” pointing out in a statement that “this kind of business is often run by people of migrant origin”.

Parent party Open VLD governs Antwerp together with N-VA and CD&V. “We should be encouraging this kind of enterprise, which shows people are

participating actively in the Belgian economy,” said Jong VLD chair Anthony Pierards.

According to Jong VLD, the nuisance associated with such shops is most often caused by patrons rather than the shops themselves.

The organisations NSZ and Unizo, both of which represent the self-employed, also expressed concern at the plan. “The aim is to avoid nuisance and other problems, but where do you draw the line?” asked Luc Ardies, director of Unizo’s retail council. The problem, he said, would be better tackled by concentrating on those establishments where police are aware there are irregularities. Antwerp’s alderman for business, Koen Kennis (N-VA), told Radio 1 that the purpose of the measure was to see the income of night shops reduced to zero. “It might sound harsh, but there are some shops we’d just rather not see in Antwerp,” he said. \ AH

Agfa Graphics receives essenscia Innovation Award

The graphics division of digital imaging products company Agfa, based in Mortsel, near Antwerp, has won the essenscia Innovation Award with a new kind of sustainable ink and accompanying inkjet print technology.

The prize, worth €30,000, is awarded every two years by essenscia, the Belgian umbrella organisation for the chemistry and life sciences sectors, to an innovative solution to contemporary problems.

Unlike industrial inkjet inks, the new “low-migration ink” (pictured) can be easily printed on surfaces such as plastic drinks bottles and butter tubs. This makes the ink very safe to use on delicate packaging for food.

Furthermore, less ink is necessary than with other cartridges, so production can be speeded up. If food products are labelled faster, they can be more quickly delivered to shops, which increases the time they are available to customers.

Agfa CEO Luc Delagaye received the award from Princess Astrid during a ceremony at the Academy Palace in Brussels. Agfa Graphics’ project was chosen out of 25 submissions. \ AF

“Macho culture” among causes of Wetteren train crash

The train crash at Wetteren, East Flanders, in May of 2013, which led to toxic chemicals being leaked into the environment, the death of one person and the evacuation of 2,000 homes, was partly caused by a “macho culture” that prevents drivers from admitting to fatigue, according to a report from the OOIS, the body that investigates incidents on the railways.

On 4 May last year, a goods train derailed near Wetteren. Seven of the 18 wagons derailed, and three leaked the toxic chemical acrylonitrile. One resident in the immediate area died in the following hours from toxic fumes. Others were forced to leave their homes, in some cases for weeks.

The accident happened when the train ran through an S-bend at 84kph, where a limit of 40kph was imposed. The driver said he had seen



a warning signal, but took no evasive action. The report points to the “extremely likely effect of driver fatigue on the origin of the accident” and recommends the introduction of a security management system for fatigue risks, such as is used by various companies in the aviation

sector.

“It appears from our talks that, in practice, drivers very seldom report a high degree of fatigue,” the report says. “This is mainly due to the professional culture of the job. Thanks to that culture, described by many drivers as ‘macho’, you’re not allowed to admit that you’re tired because that’s an indication that you’re in some way weak. In that context, it seems inappropriate to allow the matter of judgement and management of fatigue to be one for the driver alone.”

The accident cost an estimated €13 million, the report says, with environmental damage costing €3.8 million, and infrastructure costs reaching €3.3 million. Fire service costs were €1 million, but the costs of police, civil protection services and the collection of soil and water samples have not yet been counted. \ AH

The healing power of art

A debate on the role of art in doctor's surgeries and hospitals



Daan Bauwens

More articles by Daan \ flanderstoday.eu

For more than 200 years, physicians, psychologists and artists have agreed that art heals. Not just those in need of existential solace, but also those recovering from physical injuries or sickness. However, art does not yet have an established role in rehabilitation.

Ghent-based non-profit association DAVID is doing all it can to change that. In its upcoming symposium, I am Hurt, prominent psychologists, psychiatrists and artists will discuss how art can claim its much-needed role in the way we care for those who've been hurt.

"You cannot escape it," says Astrid David, the eponymous founder and artistic director. "Sooner or later in life, each person will get hurt. In many ways: losing a job or losing a loved one, a road accident or by falling ill. It is the human condition. We are passionate about art, and we believe art is an effective way to deal with this inevitability."

DAVID did not start as a project striving to bring art to patients as such. "When we started – back in 2007 – the organisation was actually meant to discover and promote young artists," David says. At the end of 2009, however, things changed: David was diagnosed with leukaemia and underwent treatment. Her non-profit veered in a different direction.

"While organising exhibitions remained our main purpose, we decided to concentrate more on the function of art, especially with regard to patients," she explains. "In the first edition of I am Hurt in 2011, we exhibited works focusing on injuries and vulnerability.



© Courtesy Dirk De Wachter

DAVID spokesperson Nathalie De Neve with psychiatrist and KU Leuven professor Dirk De Wachter in De Wachter's practice, where he has placed a series of artworks he has specially made for the benefit of his patients

Lectures focused on how images and creative expression could relieve pain."

But David took an extra step. In 2011, she suffered a relapse and needed a stem cell transplant. She has been undergoing a difficult rehabilitation since 2012.

"During that time I have been confronted with a total absence of art," she says. "Rehabilitation means long hours of waiting, spending months in a hospital and, when finally released, spending long hours in waiting rooms for therapy and countless check-ups. I was put in clinical environments where there was practically no art. But art is the one thing that gives hope for more in life; the one thing that gives us a way to keep on fighting."

Consequently, this edition of I am Hurt focuses specifically on the role of art in the waiting room, in

both its basic and its metaphorical sense. "It might seem superfluous, but it is anything but," says DAVID spokesperson Nathalie De Neve. "Patients suffering from psychological or physical pain might well be the people who are in most need of art's therapeutic effects. But at the moment, it seems they are the people least likely to be exposed to art."

De Neve uses the commonplace painting in the doctor's room as an example. "More often than not it will be a meaningless still life, against the backdrop of muzak," she says, "while in the meantime the waiting room is filled with people who might be confronted with intense events and heavy emotions; often the people in the waiting room are being

13 December

confronted with death in one way or another. Why shouldn't we replace all this with pieces of fascinating art?

"But how can we do that? How can we encourage hospitals to take artistic policy serious? That is what we want to explore in the upcoming seminar."

Last year's edition – supported by the late Ghent art pioneer Jan Hoet – inspired DAVID to initiate the art project I am Heart, aimed at patients with kidney disease at the city's Maria Middelares hospital.

"While undergoing dialysis, patients look into a miniature art exhibition in a box," De Neve says. "They can choose their favourite art objects, after which a psychologist enters into dialogue with them on the meaning of the object for them personally.

"Art is a form of care. It is these kinds of projects – shown to have positive effects on pain, fear and fatigue – that we want to initiate, support and disperse on a large scale. But first we need to ask ourselves the question: What's the best way to do this?"

This edition of I am Hurt features a debate with David, art psychologist and author Charlotte De Groote, psychiatrist Marc Calmeyen, oncologist Marc Broens, odour artist Peter De Cupere and curators Christophe De Jaeger and Sandrine van Noort. The debate will be followed by a speed-dating session led by philosopher and mindfulness trainer Alex Klijn, and a workshop with performance artist Merlin Spie.

Zebrastraat
Zebrastraat 32, Ghent

WEEK IN INNOVATION

VUB and Erasmus launch popular science site

The Free University of Brussels (VUB) and the city's Erasmus University College have launched a website devoted to popular science for a general audience. wtnschp.be offers science news, guest blogs and an agenda of scientific activities in Brussels that are open to the public. Currently on the website are articles (in Dutch) about how the dinosaurs died out, whether insects have brains and can think, and the future of smartphones. The government of Flanders had asked the region's universities to create a "culture of science" targeting diverse groups and to implement programmes that increase young people's participation in the sciences.

Eddy Merckx Cycles and UGent improve bike stability

The department of materials science and engineering at Ghent University is working with Eddy Merckx Cycles to determine how the measurements and proportions of a road racing bike's fork influence the stability of the steering. The fork is the part of the bicycle that surrounds the front wheel. The goal is to improve the safety and the performance of both cyclist and bicycle as a whole. Two tests will take place this month on the Eddy Merckx bicycle track at the Blaarmeersen recreation domain in Ghent; a group of cyclists will cover a fixed tour, during which the steering geometry will be altered.

Rest homes should use fewer antidepressants

The use of antidepressants, sleeping pills and sedatives in rest homes could be decreased considerably through proper training of staff and family members, according to the Leiehome rest home in Drongen, East Flanders, and researchers at Ghent University. Their study started last year, with the goal of administering psychopharmaceutical drugs more efficiently and effectively. Psychoactive drugs make elderly people less alert, which decreases their quality of life in general and increases the risk of falls. Experts provided training concerning the use of this kind of medication to doctors and nurses in rest homes, including extensive advice on how to treat certain complaints without medication. \ AF

Q&A

Roel Denckaerts is a mechanical engineer at the University of Leuven, who developed a mathematical model that can detect, and sometimes even predict, epileptic seizures.

Electrical stimulation of the cranial nerves is already used to suppress epilepsy. What's new in your approach?

Stimulation of the cranial nerves is a passive technique; it sends electrical pulses continuously to the nerves. But a large number of seizures can't be controlled by this technique. So I focused on an active method, in which pulses are only sent when a seizure is actually occurring – or is about to occur.

Did you experiment on real patients?

No. I developed a mathematical model to simulate the two most common epileptic scenar-

ios: absence seizures, in which a patient loses consciousness, and mesial temporal lobe epilepsy [MTLE] seizures, which disturb the sensory, emotional and cognitive functions.

The start of a seizure is usually marked by a massive firing of neurons in specific parts of the brain. By studying the interactions in this firing process, we could detect when a seizure was coming on. So a system that connects this detection with a stimulation technique could neutralise the seizure.

Can it also prevent seizures, and thus control epilepsy?
Predicting a seizure would, of



course, be better than just detecting it. But because of the abrupt start of absence seizures, this isn't possible. However, for MTLE seizures this might be possible. This kind of seizure is preceded

by a particular activity of the brain. If we optimise our system to detect that specific activity, we can prevent patients getting an MTLE seizure without them even knowing.

How does an engineer like you end up studying epilepsy?

The original idea was to make a mathematical model of one part of the human brain. But during a neurology course, I learned about a patient with Parkinson's who was able to walk again, thanks to brain stimulation. So I asked my supervisor to look for a more specific range of applications. Epilepsy is a serious illness for which successful alternative treatments still have to be developed. I liked the fact that I could contribute to this. \ Interview by Senne Starckx

The Top 20 for 2014

Handpicked by your *Flanders Today* shopping experts, these gifts are among the cutest, quirkiest and chicest you'll find in Flanders and Brussels this holiday season

1 Beanies

Ten years ago, *Antwerpenaar* Ellen Kegels started knitting as a hobby. Now she has created LN Beanies, a collection of 100% Peruvian baby alpaca winter accessories, with a range that spans beanies, mittens, scarves and vests. All handmade in Belgium with help from a team of fun-loving grannies (beanies: €45-€115)

Buy it at: LN Beanies

You can buy them online anytime, but an LN Beanies pop-up store is also open until the end of the year.

It offers a wide range of Kegels' seasonal knitwear as well as her books. DIYers can also score pure alpaca wool here *Nationalestraat 79, Antwerp*, www.lnbeanies.com



2 Soup mugs

Winter is upon us: keep your loved ones warm and cosy until the spring with Hantang ceramic soup bowls, which come with handles, matching covers and attachable spoons. Black with yellow, blue, green or orange lettering, and at a bargain price (€3 per bowl)

Buy it at: Saha

This slightly hidden shop tends to lure in passers-by with its beautiful window display of Asian lanterns and scarves. Step inside and you'll find a unique collection of Asian and African jewellery, shoes, candles and ceramics, not to mention one counter devoted exclusively to Moroccan edible specialities like nuts and dried fruit *Pensstraat 1, Leuven*

3 Corkor cork bags

The innovative brand Corkor creates eco-friendly products made of Portuguese cork. There's coin purses up to large handbags – incredibly soft to the touch – as well as wallets and smartphone and tablet covers (€27 to €76)

Buy it at: Boetiek Ruth

Open since May, Ruth's wood-and-concrete boutique looks as if it was designed by Japanese star architect Tadao Ando. Over two floors, the shop offers exclusive clothing and jewellery by local and international designers *Sint-Jacobsstraat 55, Bruges*, www.boetiekruth.be



4 Christmas beer

"The best gifts come in bottles," the saying goes, and who are we to argue with that? Think special, full-bodied Christmas beers (like X-Mas Zinnebir by the Brussels brewery Brasserie de la Senne) or old geuze (by Cantillon, say). The latter makes a great apéro, too, on its own or mixed with bubbly (+/- €3)

Buy it at: Malt Attacks

This new specialist beer shop has a large choice of Belgian and foreign beers and even a selection of beers on tap. If one of your New Year's resolutions is to start brewing your own, you'll find all the equipment you need to get started at the back of the shop *Jean Volderslaan 18, Brussels*, www.maltattacks.com



5 Orange Deanflowers vase

Are you one of those forgetful types who neglects to water thirsty plants? Xerophytes survive even in the harshest of environments and with these small, recycled glass pots and vases, your plants will shine for years to come. The Deanflowers line focuses on simple shapes in a variety of soft colours (€31)

Buy it at: Deco 48

Discover an eclectic bonanza of authentic Chinese lanterns, feathered headpieces from Indonesia and ancient Indian cow bells at Deco 48. Everything on sale was collected by owner Pierre Van Damme on his many transcontinental voyages, chosen according to his delightful, very idiosyncratic taste. Deco 48 is also the exclusive distributor of Baobab scented candles in Ghent *Onderbergen 46-48, Ghent*, www.pierre-vandamme.be

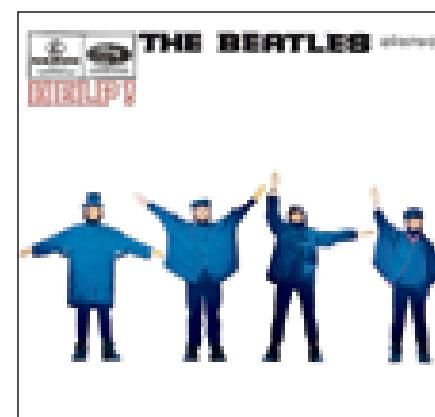


6 Vintage vinyl

Digital music is great and all, but as a gift it hardly quickens the pulse. With vinyl, you know you've been given a present: it looks fantastic, feels real, and there's a timeless rush as you hear the needle hit the groove. Let yourself be swayed by the record's artwork, track listing or exclusiveness. Choose *Help* by The Beatles and you've got all three covered (€75)

Buy it at: Coffee & Vinyl

With a café-cum-gallery in the front end and a record store in the back, this is Antwerp's own little Greenwich Village. The store stocks an extensive selection of new and second-hand vinyl, across all genres, starting at €10 *Volkstraat 45, Antwerp*, www.coffeeandvinyl.com



7 Fairy hand cream

Cold hands, warm heart – or so they say. But how about soft hands? This gentle and loving Mains de Fée, or "fairy hands", cream by the Brussels beauty brand Delbôve Cosmetics works wonders. Its pink, creamy texture coats hands and leaves them silky smooth. Perfect for cold winter days (€32)

Buy it at: Boutique Sorcière

Find the entire range of Delbôve Cosmetics products at the beautiful Boutique Sorcière in Brussels' Elsene district. The shop was named after the brand's two key products, Crème and Eau Sorcière, developed by Roger and Marion Delbôve in 1965 *Abdijstraat 67, Brussels*, www.delbove-cosmetics.com

8 Monkey pillow

While many of us may dream of going to Africa, so very few ever make it. With this bright monkey pillow, you can have the continent right on your lap (€34.50)



Buy it at: Le Petit Cirque
Selling design and second-hand items, and serving coffee and cake, Le Petit Cirque is the new kid on the block. Don't miss the extensive catalogue of vintage wallpaper in the back of the store *Burgstraat 147, Ghent*, www.petitcirque.be

9 Face plates

If you get tired of looking at all those relatives during holiday dinners, eat up fast, and you'll be delighted to see someone brand new in front of you. Feel free to strike up a conversation (€29 each)

Buy it at: Goûts et couleurs

This store specialises in fine Scandinavian interior decoration. Young shop owner Ester De Vestele also provides tailor-made advice on interior colour, home decoration and styling *Ezelstraat 16, Bruges*, www.gouts-et-couleurs.be



10 Magpie espresso set

Magpie's tableware has a distinctly British edge, nostalgic but with a keen eye for detail and design, not to mention a steadfast love for the Isles' flora and fauna. With this espresso set, artist Carola Van Dyke has created this season's most fashionable cups in town (€32)



Buy it at: Akoteé

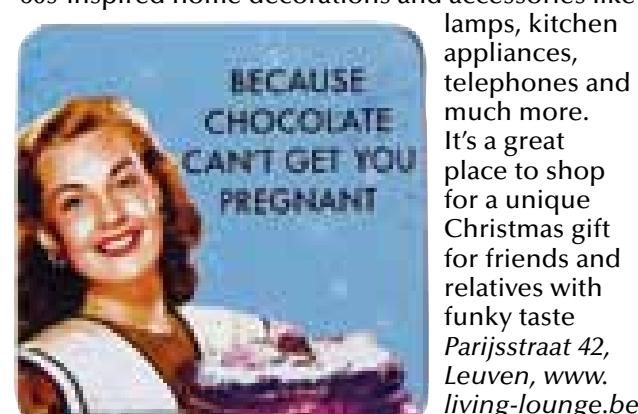
Open since 1973, this one-of-a-kind store is a gold mine of funky knick-knacks, colourful housewares and great gift ideas you never knew existed *Melkmarkt 30, Antwerp*, www.akotee.be

11 **Iconic Retro Coasters**

Stuff your friends' stockings with these retro coasters this year. Every one sports a clever, light-hearted aphorism, sure to bring laughter and charm to any coffee table (€2.50 each)

Buy it at: Living Lounge

This retro shop carries all kinds of funky 1950s and '60s-inspired home decorations and accessories like lamps, kitchen appliances, telephones and much more. It's a great place to shop for a unique Christmas gift for friends and relatives with funky taste



12 **Dis/order necklace**

Dis/order is a Ukrainian design studio that specialises in conceptual jewellery. Made of polypropylene and laser-cut, these pretty, graphic necklaces come in all shapes and colours and are sure to brighten up any outfit (+/- €50)

Buy it at: Yawn

Nab your necklace at Yawn, a new concept store in the centre of Brussels with a focus on fashion and design from Russia, Georgia and Ukraine, but nothing so clichéd as nesting dolls or fur hats. Anything but boring, we're sure you'll agree

Oude Graanmarkt 65, Brussels, www.yawn.cool

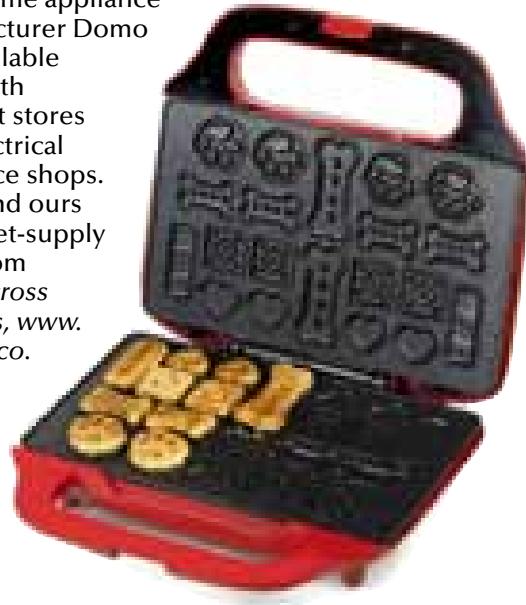


13 **Dog cookie maker**

Yes, you read that right. Spoil your four-legged friend with homemade biscuits from this smart appliance that makes up to 20 snacks per batch. Extra perk: The baking session can make a great winter activity to share with kids (€50)

Buy it at: Tom & Co

The cookie maker is from home appliance manufacturer Domo and available from both local pet stores and electrical appliance shops. We found ours at the pet-supply chain Tom & Co Across Flanders, www.tomandco.be



14 **Polaroid cameras**

Take a selfie like it's 1985 with a Polaroid camera, courtesy of the Impossible Project. Launched as an initiative to preserve instant film photography after Polaroid finally succumbed to digital, the project refurbishes 600 Series cameras and produces a range of film (cameras €59 and up, film €20/pack)

Buy it at: FoMu Shop

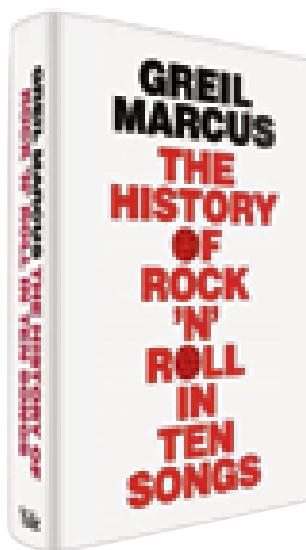
Stacked with books about photographers and catalogues from recent exhibitions, this shop at Antwerp's FotoMuseum takes a more frivolous approach when it comes to cameras, with items such as the Impossible Project Polaroids and the playful La Sardina camera range from Lomography Waalsekaai 47, Antwerp, www.fotomuseum.be

15 **The History of Rock'n'Roll in 10 Songs**

For 40 years now, American music journalist Greil Marcus has been writing captivating books about rock music and its links to popular culture. His latest, *The History of Rock 'n' Roll in Ten Songs* – and mind you, he didn't go for the usual suspects – is another gem (€20)

Buy it at: Sterling Books

This independent English bookshop in the heart of Brussels moved to a much smaller location, just across the street, this summer. Still, it remains a treasure trove for both fiction and non-fiction readers. *Wolvengracht 23, Brussels, www.sterlingbooks.be*



16 **Wordius**

Take a classic word game like Scrabble, give it a new, unexpected twist, and you get Wordius. Instead of placing words on a traditional board, players begin with loose tiles and have to create their own board as the game proceeds. Guaranteed fun (€20)

Buy it at: Demo-Spel

You are likely to feel overwhelmed as soon as you enter this store, which carries all kinds of board, card and dice games for all ages and tastes. Demo-Spel also hosts game nights several times a week. You can find the schedule on their website *Sint-Hubertusstraat 3, Leuven, www.demo-spel.be*

17 **Diaper bag**

The creators of the Froy & Dind home deco brand clearly know that a stylish yet practical diaper bag is a must-have for every new parent. Made of organic cotton and available in a variety of rousing retro prints, these bags are sure to withstand the test of time (€65)

Buy it at: Froy & Dind

Whether you're looking for a new dress, notebooks or something cute for your little one, Froy & Dind's trademark style will put a smile on your face with its fun, old-fashioned and vivid prints

Nationalestraat 76-78, Antwerp, www.froydind.com

18 **Vanilla ice**

You might think you know what vanilla ice cream tastes like. But you don't until a cone from Comus & Gasterea caresses your taste buds. It feels like "an angel peeing on your tongue," as the Flemish would say. Ice cream boxes can survive room temperature for up to an hour, time enough to get to that holiday party (€13)

Buy it at: Comus & Gasterea

This ice cream parlour looks like a run-of-the-mill canteen, but don't let that fool you. The artisanal ice cream maker delivers top-notch quality. Besides the usual vanilla, strawberry and chocolate, you'll find exotic tastes, like three peppers, lavender and eggplant. *Baksteenkaai 86, Brussels, www.comusgasterea.com*

19 **Pocket Atlas of Remote Islands**

Books are nice enough as a gift, sure, but the trick is to come up with something original. Lucky for you, Bookshop Copyright can help. How about a book on post-war architecture in Milan? Or what about the 10 things nobody ever told you about creativity, revealed in *Steal Like an Artist*? We took a particular fancy to Judith Schalansky's tiny atlas on islands she has never visited and never will (€17)

Buy it at: Copyright Bookshop

If you can name it, you won't find it here at this store that focuses on art books and literature's hidden gems. You can even nab copies of *In Praise of Shadows* by Japanese author Jun'ichiro Tanizaki and *How to Dress Well* by the visionary Austrian architect Adolf Loos. *Jacobijnestraat 8, Ghent, www.copyrightbookshop.be*

20 **Turning leaves mobile**

Turning leaves mobiles aren't just for babies. Grownups can just as easily become enchanted with the slow and unpredictable movements that resemble leaves falling. Instant relaxation guaranteed (€42.50)

Buy it at: Callebert

This design store offers thousands of items for the whole family, from babies to grandparents, and for the kitchen, bathroom and garden. Life should be tasteful and at a good price. *Wollestraat 25, Bruges, www.callebert.be*



This gift guide has been brought to you by Daan Bauwens, Rebecca Bennoot, Samantha Clark, Katrien Lindemans, Ian Mundell and Christophe Verbiest

YOUR DAILY NEWS



The screenshot shows the homepage of The Bulletin website. At the top, there is a red navigation bar with links for 'HOME', 'MAP', 'EVENTS', 'FEATURES', and 'WEATHER'. Below this is a white header with the 'THE BULLETIN' logo in red and black, and a sub-headline 'Powered by expatnews'. To the right of the logo are social media icons for 'Follow Thebulletin.be' (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, RSS), a search bar, and a 'SEARCH' button. The main content area has a red banner for 'The Bulletin Business Guide 2015: On sale now!' with a 'BUY NOW' button. Below this are several news sections: 'HEADLINES' (with a photo of a yellow train), 'WORK' (with a photo of a person working), 'QUESTIONS & ANSWERS' (with a photo of a guitar), and 'REAL ESTATE' (with a photo of a building). There are also 'TIP' sections for 'Xmas Tree' and 'train ticket compensation'. On the right side of the page, there is a sidebar with the 'Bulletin' logo and the text 'Your daily newslink to Brussels and Belgium'. Below this are three news cards: one about Brussels opposing new car parks, one about a new Vliscoele power station, and one about average business rates in Brussels-Capital Region.

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THE
Bulletin

Not feeling the love

Portuguese expert advises on rekindling Flanders' science fire

 Senne Starckx
More articles by Senne \ flanderstoday.eu

In an ideal world, knowledge stands alongside nature, labour and capital as a driver of economic growth. But in spite of several action plans from the Flemish government, the love for science and technology and the belief in strong R&D seem to have become diluted among Flemings. How can we put Flanders back on track?

Several scientists, thinkers and policymakers puzzled over this question at a conference organised by the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts in Brussels last month. To make the question even harder to answer, the participants were presented with some worrying facts and figures.

For example, although gross expenditure on R&D has risen over the past 10 years, at 2.4% of GDP, Flanders is still way below the "magic" 3% threshold. And the situation is far from rosy in education: Less than 18% of all higher education degrees are in the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths). That's way below the EU average. Innovation – often a good indicator of progress in becoming a knowledge society – is falling behind. In 2013, for the first time in a decade, there were more companies in Flanders that weren't implementing an innovative measure than that were.

According to Irina Veretennicoff, a physics professor at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) and one of the organisers of the conference, the root of the problem is to be found in the lack of affection among the Flemish for the exact sciences, and for technical competences in general.

"How can we give science, and all her derived disciplines, a common place in the inner self of the Flemish people?" she wonders. "And how can we give science and technology a more prominent place in business and in the Flemish economy? The easy answer is that we need a change of mentality. However, only the difficult answer can tell us how to trigger this mental flip."

To help to find that answer, Veretennicoff invited José Mariano



Engineer and former science minister José Mariano Gago inspired a cultural shift in the way Portugal sees the subject

Gago, who served three times as minister of science and technology in Portugal, to address the conference. Gago, an engineer, brought about a cultural shift in his country with his Ciência Viva (Living Science) programme. In particular, he created 20 "knowledge pavilions", spread around Portugal, where teachers could get free support and anybody with an interest could experiment in a special lab area, similar to the hands-on science centre Technopolis in Mechelen. Suddenly, science became really hot in Portugal. And the repercussions for the economy were felt: R&D in companies doubled and gross expenditure on R&D tripled.

The architect of this shift was invited to the conference by Veretennicoff as a "thinker in residence", to share his ideas about how to do the same in Flanders. We asked him the key question: What's his advice for Flanders? "Education in science and technology is the cornerstone of the knowledge society," Gago says. "So I suggest that science education should be a competence of the Flemish science and technology minister, and not only of the minister of education."

He sees science and technology education, "as a key to lifelong learning, by which the human values of science and their role in

civilisation can deeply interest society and effectively permeate youth culture. It has to be shaped as an inclusive process of practical socialisation to science and technology, contributing to all other areas, from the arts to sport, with no barriers."

In Flanders, only a minority of students specialise in STEM subjects. How serious a problem is this?

"The progress of modern knowledge-based societies triggers the need for increased science and

young highly educated women are discouraged from considering full-time professionals careers." Gago believes that the lack of STEM students is in large part linked to an unsolved gender gap in society and in the workplace. "This gap, which should be addressed comprehensively – by public policies aimed at better conditions for working mothers – is more pronounced in some STEM professions and less pronounced in others, namely those related to the life sciences." So the obvious question is how do

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The relative scarcity of STEM students and professionals is related to a persistent gender gap

technology education, at all levels," he says. "Therefore, a perceived lack of students aiming to increase their proficiency in science and technology is a healthy sign, provided we are able to respond adequately."

But, he continues, "in Flanders, as well as in other regions, the relative scarcity of STEM students and professionals is related to a persistent gender gap, as a large proportion of girls are induced not to choose those professions and

we close this gap? Gago provides the difficult answer: "By reforming the current socially selective education system, which imposes an unjustifiably early designation of young pupils to the 'higher' or 'lower' careers; by steering student orientation guidelines by actively engaging in greater social and gender inclusion; and by empowering science teachers to do project work with their students and with out-of-school professionals."

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Inclusive education "nearly impossible"

More than half (56%) of teachers in primary and secondary education think inclusive education – in which the majority of children with a disability attend mainstream schools and classes rather than a special education programme – is a positive change. But 82% say it isn't feasible, according to a survey by VRT news programme *Koppen*. The survey showed that teachers take a negative view of the Flemish government's M decree, the measures to include students with special needs in regular education. The majority surveyed said that, to successfully implement the M decree, which comes into force next month, they would need extra assistance in class, special training and collaboration with experts.

Colleges have as many students as universities

The number of higher education registrations in the academic year 2014-2015 has increased by 1.1% on the previous year, according to the government of Flanders' report *Higher Education in Numbers*. The report says there is more interest in professional studies, and the total number of students enrolled in university-colleges matches the number enrolled at universities for the first time. As in the previous academic year, business sciences and administration make up the largest professional study areas at the colleges. But the largest increase took place in healthcare programme, in which there are 4.3% more students enrolled than in the previous years.

Christian union questions class sizes

Jos Van Der Hoeven, secretary-general of the Christian education union, has questioned whether budgets are being used efficiently and pleaded for minimum class sizes. "Small class groups should be merged," he told *De Standaard*. "Funds could be better invested in the current challenges in education, like quality of teaching and diversity." Classes of just three or four pupils are the result of the proliferation of study disciplines in secondary education. Van Der Hoeven says the phenomenon is partly caused by competition between schools and partly by the "freedom of education", which is written into the constitution and ensures parents a choice between state-funded schools from different networks. \ AF

Pre-school Dutch to tackle language problems in Limburg

Limburg province has launched the project *Kind en Taal* (Child and Language) to improve the Dutch-language skills of children from one to six years old. The goal of the programme is to ensure sufficient language skills to help contribute to a smooth start at school.

The project, which is set up in 13 municipalities, is receiving €6 million over the next four years from the SALK recovery programme, set up after the announced closure of the Ford factory

in Genk.

"In some Limburg municipalities, 40% of teenagers leave school without a diploma, and a language deficit is one of the causes," provincial governor Herman Reynders told *Het Belang van Limburg*. Reynders said that child poverty and a language deficit often go hand in hand.

In 2015, about 30 professionals and 100 volunteers will assist young families in the 13 Limburg municipalities where poverty is most

acute. "We don't want to wait until children go to school because then it is often already too late," said Reynders.

Families, who participate on a voluntary basis, are selected by organisations like *Kind en Gezin*, the social aid agency OCMW and schools. "SALK can help change Limburg's DNA," said Reynders. "These projects will not immediately result in jobs, but the effects will be visible in the long term." \ Andy Furniere

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Getting to know the neighbours

Flanders and the Netherlands unite through culture in 2015



Daniel Shamaun
More articles by Daniel \ flanderstoday.eu

The Flemish and Dutch governments have joined forces to fund BesteBuren 2015, a programme that supports new cultural projects in Flanders and the Netherlands. Organised by culture houses deBuren in Brussels and DutchCulture in Amsterdam, the programme provides €500,000 in funding. The 48 projects for the first six-month phase have been chosen, and all involve some form of collaboration between Flanders and the Netherlands.

"BesteBuren celebrates 20 years of cultural agreement between the Netherlands and Flanders," says Dorian van der Brempt, director of deBuren, explaining that the goal is to look at the future and ask: "What can be done even better?" There were 147 applications for the first phase, and those that were accepted were chosen on three qualities: sustainability, innovation and a link between Flemish and Dutch people or organisations. The 48 projects chosen cover disciplines such as visual arts, theatre, dance, music, design, heritage, literature, film and circus.

They also vary greatly in size, from a collaboration between Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam and Ghent's Design Museum, to the Babbelut children's festival in Neerpelt, Limburg, which has teamed up with a partner in Amsterdam.

"We hope this year's buzz will infect the art world with new connections, and that these new connections will create more collaboration in the future," van der Brempt says. The deadline for the second (and final) call for projects in the



© Marianne Hommersom/deBuren

Flanders has a "strong cultural relationship" with the Netherlands, says Dorian van der Brempt

second six-month phase, which begins next summer, is 1 February. BesteBuren (Best Neighbours) marks the 20th anniversary of the Cultural Treaty Flanders-Netherlands, which was signed in Antwerp on 17 January, 1995. Under the treaty, the two regions agreed to work together closely in the areas of culture, education, science and welfare.

"Since 1995, Flanders has grown, and in the minds of the Flemish people, something has also changed regarding the relationship with the Netherlands," van der Brempt says. He lived in Amsterdam in 1969 and says that "in those days, at least culturally, we thought the Netherlands was a more developed place than we were".

But this gap has closed, and, over the past 20 years, Flanders has become one of the most important places in the world for innovation in theatre. "The Dutch got that message," says van der Brempt. "Now there is no longer

a border between the Netherlands and Flanders in terms of theatre." This is happening in literature, too, as in 2016 Flanders and the Netherlands will go to the Frankfurt Book Fair together, as a guest of honour. As van der Brempt puts it, "it's not a country going to that fair, it's a language".

He argues that the nation state is a concept of the 19th and 20th centuries. "Now we have other concepts of state, nation and community," he says. "The art community doesn't live within borders."

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui is a prime example of culture crossing borders. The Antwerp choreographer now often works in London and has been received warmly by dance critics there. "In art, more and more, the quality of the artist is the first criteria when booking someone, not their nationality," says van der Brempt.

The cultural exchange between Flanders and the Netherlands, and the unity created by a common

language and high artistic quality, is at the heart of the BesteBuren programme. But speaking the same language is not always enough. The close vote in September's referendum for Scotland to leave the UK was evidence of that. But van der Brempt argues that language can also be a boon for co-operation and creativity. This is the side that BesteBuren embraces. Politically though, van der Brempt suggests it is time to "ask our politicians to think a little bit more about what's binding us instead of focusing too much on what's separating us".

In terms of theatre, there is no longer a border between the Netherlands and Flanders

BesteBuren 2015 will launch on 8 February in Rotterdam and runs until February, 2016, when the final event is due to take place at deSingel arts centre in Antwerp. "Our cultural relationship is an open and strong one," says van der Brempt. "I think that the Netherlands and Flanders are much more beautiful and have much more potential when they work together."



Larmuseau and much more.
The third location is the gorgeously renovated waterside Marriott

13-14 December

Across Ghent city centre

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Festival of Equality

Second edition of this multi-faceted weekend festival with performances, debates, readings, music, film screenings, book market, freecycling and dance parties. 10-12 December, Vooruit, Sint Pietersnieuwstraat 23, Ghent; most events free \ www.festivalgelijkheid.be

Wintertime in Leuven

Leuven's annual winter festival, with Christmas market and old-fashioned carnival rides. This weekend only: experience the Grand Begijnhof by candlelight on 13 December. 11-31 December; free \ www.wintertijdinleuven.be

Fiery Winter Night

An evening walk lit by lanterns, candles and firelight in a beautiful outdoor setting. Live entertainment and food and drink. 12 December, 19.00-23.00, Provinciaal Groendomein Vrijbroek, Ridder Dessainlaan 25, Mechelen; free \ www.gezelligbuiten.be

Midwinter Festival

Annual neighbourhood Christmas market with an emphasis on handmade and artisanal goods. Free access to the Folklore Museum and newly renovated Lace Centre, with lace-making demonstrations and craft workshops. 14 December, 11.00-18.00, Balstraat, Bruges; free \ https://bezoekers.brugge.be/midwinterfeest2014

Walk: Touring Club de Belgique

A guided walk through Woluwe park with an old Brussels guidebook from the Touring Club de Belgique as companion. Registration required via the website. 12 December, 13.00-17.00, meet at tram stop Wiener, Watermaal-Bosvoorde (Brussels); free \ www.wabo.be

Bip's Christmas Village

A holiday market organised by Brussels Info Place at the top of the Kunstberg, with food and craft stalls, a brass band and ice sculptures. 18-21 December, 10.00-22.00, Koningsplein \ http://biponline.be

BITE Cook with Carluccio

Ghent's Old Fish Market, Great Butchers' Hall and Marriott Hotel form the backdrop for a unique culinary event in the heart of the city. Lekker Genieten gathers the finest products from Belgium and guest country Italy for a public tasting event.

Location number one is the Old Fish Market on Sint-Veerleplein. The newly renovated historic building is the scene of numerous cooking sessions by top chefs, including Felix Alen of caterer Hof te Rhode in Diest and Lieven Lootens of the celebrated 't Aards Paradijs in Nevele. Bier sommelier Nicolas Soenen of Duvel Moortgat will be there as well, pairing his brews with the wares of cheese-monger Michel Van Tricht. With the best local products at

every turn, visitors are invited to stroll around at leisure to taste, discover and learn. Café Chantant provides a dreamy atmosphere with performances by singer Freddy Bierset, paying homage to the French classics, and *Genteenaar* and rocker Kurt Burghausen of Biezebaaze promises to keep it relaxed and fun. Meanwhile, each visitor will be treated to a free beer or glass of bubbly.

The second location is Het Grote Vleeshuis (the Great Butchers' Hall) on nearby Groentenmarkt, another of Ghent's architectural gems. It makes for a cosy market with a medieval feel, featuring the best products to come out of East Flanders, including grain jenever, local dried ham, mustard from Tierenteyn, snowballs from

Hotel next door on Korenlei, which will host the Italian leg of the event. The face of the event is the famous London-based Italian chef Antonio Carluccio (pictured), the author of books promoting authentic Italian cuisine. Carluccio will give several workshops during the weekend.

Every afternoon, Ghent restaurant Coeur d'Artichaut will serve an all-inclusive Italian buffet created by Carluccio. The buffet is €95 per person, the Carluccio workshops are €25, and entry to the market is a mere €5. All tickets can be purchased in advance online. Every visitor gets three tokens for a free drink or snack at any of the locations. \ Robyn Boyle

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

More than 10,000 at Luc De Vos funeral

More than 10,000 people from across Belgium crowded into Ghent's Sint-Pietersplein last Saturday for the funeral of Gorki lead singer Luc De Vos, who died suddenly on 29 November of multiple organ failure. About 1,000 people found a place inside the church, while the rest listened outside as the service was transmitted through loudspeakers. Vos, 52, founded his band 25 years ago and was an icon of Dutch-language rock music. Gorki songs were played on the square until 13.00, at which time most Flemish radio stations played their hit song "Mia" simultaneously.

Rubens in Private tickets on sale now

Next spring, the Rubens House in Antwerp will host the show *Rubens in Private: The Master Portrays His Family*. Some of the painter's most intimate and celebrated portraits were of members of his family, most notably of his two wives – Helena and Isabella – and his children. These portraits, along with portraits of his sisters and brothers-in-law – and his well-known self-portraits – were largely painted at his home in Antwerp but are now part of collections across the world. Paintings and drawings are traveling from, among other museums, the Uffizi in Florence, London's British Museum and the Hermitage in St Petersburg. As Rubens House expects a great deal of interest in the exhibition, it has put tickets on sale already.

\ WWW.RUBENSHUIS.BE

Flemish film wins Grand Prix at Tallinn

Lucifer, the new film by Flemish director Gust Van den Berghe, has won the top prize at the Black Nights Film Festival in Tallinn, Estonia, one of the largest and most respected film festivals in Europe. The director, who wins €10,000 as part of the prize, was in attendance to accept the award. The film is based on the play by 17th-century Dutch scribe Joost van den Vondel and finds the title character landing in Mexico during his fall from heaven to hell. His interaction with a family of three naturally doesn't end well. *Lucifer* is Van den Berghe's third film, following on from *Blue Bird* (2011) and his debut, *Little Baby Jesus of Flandr* (2010), which made a splash at Cannes and had critics calling him the new Bergman. *Lucifer* opens locally in February.

Documenting the everyday

Meunier both painted and sculpted the labourers who built Belgium



Ian Mundell

More articles by Ian \ flanderstoday.eu

\ WWW.FINE-ARTS-MUSEUM.BE



Constantin Meunier is closely identified with Wallonia, thanks to his paintings of its mines and steelworks and the powerful statues he made of the men and women working in them. But a major retrospective at the Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels reveals equally close links with Flanders, both in his formative years and when he was developing the work that made him famous.

Meunier was born in Brussels in 1831 and began studying sculpture at the age of 14 at the city's Academy of Fine Arts. He was modestly successful as a sculptor, but an encounter with Gustave Courbet's realist painting "The Stone Breakers" in 1851 convinced him that this was the only way to handle the social themes that he held dear. He decided to begin again as a painter, giving up sculpture in 1854. His work from this period ranges from rousing history paintings, such as scenes from the 1798 Peasants' War in East Flanders, to a more contemporary allegory on the death of Lincoln from 1865. Meunier also produced countless religious paintings, with the emphasis on duty and suffering, along with a steady stream of society portraits and amusing scenes from bourgeois life. After marrying in 1862, he had a growing family to support.

Flanders is present in some of the religious paintings, such as a Leuven *begijn* or the Easter pilgrimage in Diegem. But the strongest influence is the Trappist abbey at Westmalle in Antwerp province, where Meunier stayed for several periods between 1857 and 1875. He sketched and painted scenes of life in the abbey, from services and ceremonies to the fieldwork undertaken by the monks.

His interest in depicting agricultural work – reapers, sowers and gleaners – began in this period, and was soon to be complemented by other forms of labour. In 1878, he made his first journey into the Black Country of Wallonia to see



Constantin Meunier took arts patrons to unfamiliar spaces in paintings like "The Foundry of Seraing", perfected sinewy muscles in his sculptures of labourers and had his own take on religious subjects such as in "St Stephen" (detail, top)

conditions in mining and steel communities. And in the 1880s, he visited the port of Antwerp and the fisherman's wharf in Ostend. The story goes that it was the sight of men unloading sacks on Antwerp's docks that inspired Meunier to think again of sculpture. Working in three dimensions was the only way he could capture the poise and physical strength that he had seen. In 1885 he tentatively exhibited wax models of dockers and steel workers. The response was good, and in 1886 he exhibited a first monumental sculpture of an industrial blacksmith.

His hesitancy was connected to the need to support his family. This problem was solved in 1887 when he was appointed to a teaching post at the art academy in Leuven. Along with financial security came the use of a studio, an auditorium previously used to teach anatomy students.

Meunier stayed in Leuven until 1894, producing both paintings and sculpture, going ever deeper into industrial subjects. However, he also captured scenes from the city, such as the immense floods of 1891. After a couple of rooms exploring Meunier's development, the retrospective adopts a thematic approach, combining work from before and after his return to sculpture. In this way it explores in some detail his approach to farm workers, fishermen and dockers, and

then steel and mine workers. Throughout you can see the formula that made Meunier's sculptures so effective: a combination of the *contrapposto*, the stance used in Ancient Greek and Roman art to bring dynamism to a figure, with the trappings of contemporary industry. This turns sack carriers and smiths into heroes and the young women who pushed coal wagons into beguiling nymphs.

You can also see attitudes from his religious work reappear, most notably in the variations on "Firedamp", in which a mourning woman stands over the body of a dead miner, who strongly resembles Christ taken down from the cross. As familiar as this work may be, it never loses its fascination.

Meunier's painting is more variable, yet there are works of real power, such as "St Stephen" (1867), in which the murdered saint appears to have fallen from the sky into a flat Flemish field, and "The Foundry of Seraing" from around 1880. There are also some surprises, such as pastels of mining scenes from around 1896 that have a distinctly symbolist atmosphere rather than Meunier's trademark realism.

The Brussels retrospective is



complemented by a small exhibition at M Museum in Leuven, which shows a modest cross-section of Meunier's work and draws out some of its religious inspirations. The most persuasive juxtaposes "Firedamp" with a carved figure of Christ in the grave from around 1500.

There are also unrealised plans that would have turned the nearby Monseigneur Ladeuzeplein into an open-air Meunier museum, with a promenade to Sint-Donatuspark where his massive "Monument to Work" was to be installed. In the event, the posthumously realised monument remained in Brussels, where it can still be seen at the point where Koninginnelaan crosses the canal and runs into Laeken.

The Meunier Museum also ended up in Brussels, in the house and studio where the artist was living and working when he died in 1905. While somewhat depleted by the demands of the retrospective, it is still worth a visit for the atmosphere and to see monumental versions of his most famous sculptures. Entry is free and, for the duration of the retrospective, the museum has expanded its restricted opening hours so that it is possible to visit at weekends.

Museum of Fine Arts Belgium

Museumstraat 9, Brussels

M Museum

Leopold Vanderkelenstraat 28, Leuven

Until 11 January

Women are just like that

Così fan tutte

14-31 December

Opera Antwerp

All three Mozart operas with libretti by Lorenzo Da Ponte appear in Opera Vlaanderen's current season. *Così fan tutte* and *Le nozze di Figaro* revive popular productions devised by Flemish director Guy Joosten in the mid-1990s, which have toured widely ever since. The third is a new take on *Don Giovanni*, seen as a weak link in his original vision of the operas.

The cycle begins this month with *Così fan tutte*, in which two young officers, Guglielmo and Ferrando, accept a wager that tests the fidelity of their fiancées, the sisters Fiordiligi and Dorabella. The men pretend to depart for war, then sneak back in disguise and attempt to seduce the women they left behind.

From this initially comic situation emerges a more serious dissection of the psychology of love, exposing the way that sentimental expec-



tations can end in disappointment.

Joosten sets the tale in Naples, in a large hotel overlooking the restless volcano Vesuvius, sometime in the mid-20th century. Reviewing a recent production in Lisbon, one critic suggested a cross between *Death in Venice* and *Fawlty Towers*, which need not be a bad thing. In the Opera Vlaanderen production, the sisters

Opera Ghent

WWW.OPERABALLET.BE

are played by Cristina Pasaroiu and Maria Kataeva, the officers by Riccardo Novaro and Sébastien Droy. Umberto Benedetti Michelangeli, a specialist in Viennese music, will conduct.

Così fan tutte is followed by the new *Don Giovanni*, which previewed in Ghent earlier this year. This time, Joosten has set the action behind the scenes at a theatre, a twilight world that can accommodate the eponymous seducer's activities. The production runs in Antwerp through March 2015, with Alexander Joel conducting. The cycle is completed in June with *Le nozze di Figaro*, conducted by Paul McCreesh in Ghent.

\ Ian Mundell

Così fan tutte is in the original Italian with Dutch surtitles

CLASSICAL

O Magnum Mysterium

12 December, 20.00

Sint-Hermes Church, Ronse

WWW.RONSE.BE

Brussels vocal ensemble Via Vocis, jazz saxophonist Tim Acke and Syrian singer Nour Lahdo join forces to interpret the Latin chant *O Magnum Mysterium*. This isn't your Father's hymnal, though. Their genre-busting production blends Renaissance music, contemporary composition, saxophone virtuosity and age-old ecclesiastic



VISUAL ARTS

Lascaux

Until 15 March

Jubelpark Museum, Brussels

WWW.KMKG-MRAH.BE

In 1940, a mischievous bunch of schoolboys made the archaeological discovery of the 20th century. The cave complex at Lascaux, in the south of France, contains nearly 1,000 well-preserved wall paintings and etchings created a full 20,000 years ago. These depictions of local fauna give both the scientist and the

layperson a tantalising glimpse into prehistory. Tourists, including an awe-struck Pablo Picasso, flocked in droves until the site was sealed in the interest of preservation in the 1960s. Now all of Europe can enjoy the travelling exhibition *Lascaux*, which features a high-tech recreation of the original caves. \ GV



PERFORMANCE

Stand-Up Antwerp: Out of the Cellar

13 December, 20.15

Arenberg Schouwburg, Antwerp

WWW.ARENBERGSCHOUWBURG.BE

Stand-Up Antwerp hosts its monthly English-language comedy shows in a humble basement, but for this third anniversary, plus Christmas extravaganza, organisers have decided to climb out of the cellar and into the theatre. The night is headlined by Anglo-Irish comic Sean Hughes (pictured), perhaps most famous for his role in the long-lived BBC quiz show *Never Mind the Buzzcocks*. What most youngsters don't know is that before *Buzzcocks* Hughes was a fixture of the 1980s alternative British comedy scene. Stand-Up Antwerp's other international guest comics are Christian Schulte-Loh, Isak Jansson and Maureen Younger. \ GV



FAMILY

China Light Zoo

Until 18 January

Antwerp Zoo

WWW.ZOOANTWERPEN.BE

Antwerp Zoo celebrates the New Year in Chinese style. Dozens of Chinese artists have helped bring the traditional light festival to the port city. Lanterns and smaller sculptures were shipped via container from China; the larger installations were built on-site by local and Chinese artisans. Among these lanterns and luminous



CONCERT

Brussels

Irish Club Christmas concert: The Irish in Europe Association International presents its second annual Christmas concert, featuring Belgian, Irish, English, Hungarian, German and American carols, with Dénes Dosztán on piano. *13 December 12.30-14.30, Sint-Gorikshallen*

WWW.MEETUP.COM/IRISH-IN-EUROPE

PERFORMANCE

Turnhout

Admission: One Shilling: Award-winning British actress Patricia Routledge (otherwise known as Hyacinth Bucket) pays homage to the great British pianist Myra Hess and tells of her concerts in London's National Gallery during the Second World War. Australian pianist Piers Lane provides musical accompaniment by Schubert, Brahms and Bach. *20 December 20.15-21.15, De Warande, Warandestraat 42*

WWW.WARANDE.BE

VISUAL ARTS

Antwerp

Renaissance Drawings: More than 40 unique drawings from private Antwerp collections featuring examples of refined penwork in both compositional drawings and landscapes dating from the 16th century, when drawing first started to gain recognition in Europe as an art form in its own right. *Until 25 January, Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Lange Gasthuisstraat 19*

WWW.MUSEUMMAYER-VAN DEN BERGH.BE

FAMILY

Antwerp

Ice Sculpture Festival: Artists create a fairytale world in snow and ice, inspired by famous attractions from Disneyland Paris, with the most beloved and imaginative Disney characters in the main roles. *Until 4 January 10.00-19.00, Vlaamskaai*

WWW.IJS.BE

FILM

Brussels

Classics by UFK: The Belgian Film Critics Association (UFK) celebrates its 60th anniversary with screenings of all of the films that have won its grand prize for Best Film of the Year over the past 60 years, some of them with an introduction by a UFK member. *Until 28 February, Cinematek, Baron Hortastraat 9*

WWW.CINEMATEK.BE

Talking Dutch

You don't say



Derek Blyth

More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

Do you feel frosty when you see the word "chill"? Does the word *participatiemaatschappij* make you want to lie down in a dark room? Well, the good news is that you're not alone.

'Weg met dat Woord' gaat op zoek naar de meest gruwelijke woorden uit de Nederlandse taal - Get Rid of that Word is looking for the most horrible words in the Dutch language, *De Morgen* reported.

Every year, the Institute for Dutch Lexicology launches a poll to decide which Dutch word is the most hated. *End 2013 stelden Nederlanders en Vlamingen massaal het woord 'kids' weg* - At the end of 2013, the Dutch and Flemish voted in huge numbers to ban the word "kids".

Het woord zou verveelend en nutteloos hip zijn - The word was seen as annoying and pointlessly hip.

This year's candidates include several more English words that have crept into everyday Dutch conversation, like "nudging", "chill" and "swag".

A number of eminent Dutch and Flemish writers were asked by *De Morgen* to name the word they would most like to see removed



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from the dictionary. For Flemish author Ann De Craemer, it was *oorhangers* - ear-hangers, used to mean earrings. *Het is werkelijk een gruwelijk synoniem voor het veel mooiere oorbel* - It's actually a horrible synonym for the much nicer word *oorbel*, she said. *Wanneer ik het woord 'oorhangers' hoor, denk ik onmiddellijk aan een benepen, opgetut dame die dat met een veel te zuinig mondje stijfjes* - When I hear the word "oorhangers", I immediately think of a sour-faced grumpy old lady dolled up in all her finery, said De Craemer, *aan haar al even afgeborstelde echtgenoot vraagt waar haar 'oorhangers' ook alweer gebleven zijn* - who asks her equally well-scrubbed husband where she has left her earrings.

Many companies inform customers about their *passie* - passion, for their customers or the service

they provide. But it may now have to stop if the language police get their way.

Het woord 'passie' is uitgewoond en versleten, al te vaak gebruikt voor al wat die naam niet verdient - The word "passion" is old-fashioned and worn out and, more often than not, used for something that doesn't deserve the name, said Flemish writer Griet Op de Beeck. People are also less than passionate about the endless management speak that has infiltrated everyday conversation - *woorden als 'targets' en 'prospects' brengen blijkaar collectieve afkeer naar boven* - words like "targets" and "prospects" seem to provoke universal disgust, said *De Morgen*.

Author Saskia De Coster, meanwhile, would like people to stop using the word *potvolkoffie* because it is *ronduit debiel* - frankly stupid. She might be right. It's certainly confusing if you are not familiar with the term, which means, literally, a pot full of coffee but is used as a cutesie alternative to the swear word *potverdorie*.

And if you think the word "cool" is cool, you'll probably want to keep that to yourself.

\ WWW.INL.NL

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

 *In response to: Flanders gets its first beer museum, finally*

Mike Jarrey

The English name Brewster comes from women who were brewers I believe.

 **Méabh @Brusselsness**

We spend more time with our phone than with our family members combined - says #firefox designer @aza at #TEDx-Brussels

 **Alain de Botton @alaindebutton**

Belgium became yet more exciting; down in Antwerp, a new v v beautiful School of Life; <http://www.theschooloflife.com/antwerp>

 **Jono Yates @jonoBLITZ**

Hasselt, that was a right bloody laugh! I'm back in the UK tomorrow. Portsmouth represent.

 *In response to: Talking Dutch, You don't say*

John Greene

Dont purge anything..most dutch even get confused by their own language..dont make it worse.

 **Maria Nakonieczna**

Speak the way you wanna speak, it's, at this point still, a free country. And a language is just a language, it's a living thing. You are in control of it, not the other way around.

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Poll

Should Belgium allow doctors to prescribe medical marijuana freely and allow chemists to sell it?

a. Of course. The medical benefits of marijuana are well-established, and doctors know what they're doing

47%

b. Yes, but only for very specific illnesses that are defined by the government, not just for any old nausea

53%

c. Of course not. Soon there'll be lines outside doctors' offices as dopeheads line up to get their "medical" fix

0%

Well, one thing is clear: Readers of *Flanders Today* are unanimously in favour of Belgian doctors being able to prescribe medical marijuana and pharmacists to dispense it. The only disagreement comes on the matter of whether its use should be limited or less so.

A very slight majority of you prefer more restriction, with the limits set by the government for certain well-defined illnesses. The minority are likely to be able to live with that, seeing as how the tendency in such matters is almost always towards liberalisation.

We don't know how liberal or otherwise federal health minister Maggie De Block is likely to be on the details, but the proposal itself, you think, is a step in the right direction.

THE LAST WORD

Sweet memories

"It would be difficult to introduce anything new to the market that would do better than the classics. New sweets have one disadvantage: There's no nostalgia attached."

Consumers are opting for the old-fashioned style of sweets - cuberdons, spekjes and drop - according to Guy De Vil of Eurosweets

I'm feeling lucky

"Not learning anything by heart any more is impossible. You are always going to need a framework in which to place information. That can only come from learning things."

Pedro De Bruyckere of the Arteveld University College in Ghent, after a Harvard professor last week proposed allowing students to use Google during exams, since learning by rote is no longer required

Spruced up

"This year we received a fine, full specimen. Now we can present a positive face to the world. And for next year, we've been promised another big tree."

Paul Carbon of the festivities committee of Krombeke reports that the West Flemish village, a laughing stock last year because of its pathetic Christmas tree, now has something of which to be proud

Silent night

"The chip is smaller, finer and stimulates both sides of the tongue, so it works better. The surgical procedure is also simpler: We can fit the apparatus with just one cut to the chin."

Paul Van de Heyning of Antwerp University Hospital will begin tests of a revolutionary new anti-snoring device in the new year

\ Next week's question:

Brussels' city council has approved a plan to build more underground car parks in the centre as part of its larger programme to pedestrianise many areas. What do you think?

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

