



Anne Provoost, p. 9

PhotoNews



The sorrow of Belgium

Flemish writer Hugo Claus dies aged 78

Derek Blyth

The Flemish writer Hugo Claus, best known for his classic novel *The Sorrow of Belgium*, died on 19 March at the age of 78. Claus was a hugely

talented and energetic literary presence in Flanders during the second half of the 20th century, producing a prodigious volume of work. In a career that spanned more than half a century, his output ranged from novels to

plays, and from poetry to screen-writing. He earned numerous honours and awards, both in Belgium and abroad, but the Nobel Prize for Literature always remained just out of his grasp.

Claus produced more than 200

literary works during his career, but is best known for the epic *Het Verdriet van België*, or *The Sorrow of Belgium*, a scathing portrait of hypocrisy, Catholic corruption and social repression in small-town Flanders. Based partly on his

experience of growing up during World War Two, the 1983 novel launched his career as an international literary figure.

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Business

What started as a chance discovery in a Brussels university laboratory has turned into a multi-million biotech business. And it all comes down to camels.

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Arts

An exhibition in the Elsene district of Brussels chronicles the postwar Diaspora that brought Africans to Paris and Brussels. Our critic Steven Tate take a look.

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Active

Small cinemas are an endangered species, but our team tracks down some fine examples surviving in the least likely locations.

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New government takes office

Nine months in the making – but will it survive?

Alan Hope

The long-awaited new government of Yves Leterme took office this week, amid public fears that his administration – which had been nine months in the making – would not see the country through to the summer. According to an opinion poll carried out by iVox for the Flemish daily *Het Nieuwsblad*, only 4.5% of people are fully confident he will achieve his first major aim – state reform – by 15 July. More than four in 10 of those polled would prefer to see Guy Verhofstadt remain as prime minister than have

Leterme take over.

Within hours, Leterme had announced his new government, made up of 15 ministers and seven secretaries of state – the next rank down. The names in the top jobs remain the same – foreign minister Karel De Gucht, finance minister Didier Reynders, interior minister Patrick Dewael and justice minister Jo Vandeurzen. Laurette Onkelinx remains at health and social security where she was moved during the transitional government. In comes Joëlle Milquet, who the Flemish papers call

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Festival of Architectural Films

In this week's issue, Lisa Bradshaw, Monique Philips and Ian Mundell take a look at the small cinemas of Flanders. These old-fashioned venues in downtown locations don't offer sophisticated sound systems or state-of-the-art seating, but they have an intimate charm that the big venues can't hope to match. Most of the little cinemas were killed off in the 1970s by TV or in the 1990s by multiplexes, but a handful are still going strong, thanks to dedicated owners passionate about the craft of filmmaking who dedicate their lives to digging out films that you won't find playing at the local Kinepolis or on VT4.

This week, six of the smallest cinemas in Brussels are holding a Festival of Architectural Film. The six-day event brings together 40 different films, along with talks by architects and directors. The programme includes a series of three TV documentaries on "The Perfect Home" by Alain de Botton (in English), in which he sets off to find houses that make people happy.

The festival also includes a four-hour bicycle tour around the city looking at the movie theatres where people once gathered to watch screen stars

before TV came along to keep them indoors. There is also a tour that allows people to look inside houses designed by architects as their own homes. These are often more personal than the buildings they design for strangers.

The broad purpose of the festival is to awaken people to the rich social fabric that is present in urban settings and the role of architecture in making cities more appealing.

Some of the most interesting architecture seems to be getting built outside the capital these days. The annual Belgian Building Awards, announced earlier this month, gave the prize for the best residential building to a slim house squeezed onto a narrow plot in Antwerp by architects Pieter Peerlings and Sylvia Mertens. The jury declared themselves "impressed by the intelligent courage shown by these two young people, both recent graduates, who succeeded in creating a four-floor glass house on a site that was barely two metres wide." Small is beautiful, in houses as in cinemas.

Derek Blyth

Online
www.dub40.be/festival



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FACE OF FLANDERS



Patricia De Peuter

When Patricia De Peuter from Hoboken recently became the women's 2008 Belgian darts champion, she was totally caught by surprise. But only by the media attention. "I don't understand. I've been Belgian champion so many times before, but this is the first time the media has made such a fuss."

De Peuter started playing darts at 16 with her boyfriend. It went well. In the 24 years since, she has always ended up in the top three in competition. There used to be better players, she notes, like Vicky Pruim, who was number one for years; but they all stopped sooner or later. "So I took over," says De Peuter. To find more challenging opponents (and larger cash prizes), she needs to play further afield in top tournaments like the Darts Open in Germany or the Netherlands. "I'll wait until my youngest son is a bit older. He isn't even one year yet," De Peuter says. "My children always come first."

In fact, between her full-time job at Delhaize and her family, there is little time to train. The dartboards in the living room are mere decoration. "I just throw a few darts the day of a tournament, and that's it. When would I train? I don't have the time! I play darts as a hobby."

If that isn't enough to make a non-winning darts competitor's blood boil, it gets better. "I'm not even that interested in darts," says De Peuter. "It's weird, but I'm not. Most of the time, I don't even know what tournament I'm playing. I come in, play cards with my friends and throw when it's my turn."

There was controversy in darts circles about other comments De Peuter made in the press, too. "I said I wouldn't mind if darts remained what it essentially is to me: a pub sport. I don't mind noise, and I'd rather don casual wear – just, like, in a cosy café. Now we have to wear a black shirt – with a collar, mind you. Fortunately, my sister handed me down these black trousers."

The circumstances in which they play are, on the other hand, quite...rural. "Usually in freezing halls in far-off places like Tuttewutere or Menen," De Peuter says. "At the Belgian championship, I had to wait until everyone else on stage stood still before I could throw. The stage wobbled. But I'm a fast player. I stand straight in front of the blok [board], and the darts are flying. I just throw. People ask me how I can throw like that. I don't know. I just do. And some people don't like that. But I play to win. I don't let the others win."

The mother of four also competes in the six electric darts tournaments in the country. "I've recently won my entry to a tournament in Spain, so I'm going there now this week. Just to throw and come back, so I can go to work the day after. Two years ago I won that tournament." Electronic dart playing, though, differs from traditional darts. The board is seven centimetres further away, and the darts are lighter, so you have to throw them harder. "But I always throw hard," says De Peuter. "My husband, who plays too, couldn't bridge that gap. Isn't that something?"

An electronic board registers your points even when the dart drops on the floor afterwards. And there are more game possibilities. You can play the traditional 501 and double-out, but also cricket: 15 through 20 and three bull's-eyes. It involves more strategic thinking. "It's much more fun, really," says De Peuter.

A few months out of every year, De Peuter totally loses her interest and stops playing darts for a few months. But afterwards, her gift is still there, and she throws just as well as before. "I always fear that one day it will be gone and then – oh my god – I will have to practice."

Monique Philips

Online
www.bdbdarts.be

TALKING DUTCH
notes on language

reclameblad

Mountains of paper are the bane of the paperless age. The promise made 20-odd years ago was that we would be entering an era where printed paper would be a thing of the past. Not so. Every week we all find bundles of ads in our letter boxes enticing us to part with our money.

Most of us, of course, are not swayed by such ads and open the packet of *reclamebladen* just to be informed. That's certainly my case. I have in front of me the colourful adverts of one of the several Dutch chains that populate the high streets of Belgium. First I see *damesshirt met lange mouwen*, just a plain vest but she certainly looks warm. Then I see that for €16.99 I can buy *een trolleykoffer met inline skate wielen* – verkrijgbaar in de kleuren navy en rood. Just what I need to skate between planes, but would I go for blue or red?

So far, not very interesting. Then between the vest and the bags I see *een digitaal fotolijstje*. Ah yes, I've heard about those picture frames. *Neem de geheugenkaart uit uw digitale fotocamera, plaats het kaartje in het fotolijstje en zet de lijst aan en geniet van de fantastische weergave van uw favoriete foto's*. Amazing! Just put in your memory card and Bob's your uncle! Then I read: *met afstandsbediening*. Even better! I could have one on my desk and use the remote control to change the photos. And all for €90 minus a penny.

Now that's why I turn the pages of the *reclamebladen*. There's always something to surprise you; as it says at the bottom: *steeds verrassend*.

Well, when I do turn the page, there is nothing much to catch my eye: cosmetics in *XXL verpakkingen aan kleine prijzen*, but cheap jumbo packs of shampoo would last me years. Then I alight on a box of DVDs of episodes of BBC detective series going for a song: *deze box biedt een dwarsdoorsnede van de Britse detectives met afleveringen van vijf topseries*. Just a cross-section, *maar liefst 565 minuten*. A lovely word *dwarsdoorsnede*: see how it's built up of *dwars* (crossways), *door* (through) and *snede* (cut). But almost 10 hours of *Silent Witness* and *Miss Marple*? Perhaps not.

I know what half of you are thinking: a typical man's choice. Yes, but is it really so interesting to write about *een deospray* for armpits, *tandpasta* for shiny teeth or *een pannenkoekenpan* (verkrijgbaar in de variant kikker of beer)? I mean, who wants pancakes shaped like frogs or bears? But I will have just one more glance. And there after all is just what I need: *wegwerpmesjes 15 + 5 gratis voor €6.99*. What a great word for disposable razors: *weg* (away), *werp* (throw) and *mesjes* (knives).

So do I really need *een digitaal fotolijstje*? I suppose not, but it would certainly be a talking point if I had one in the living room. Now, where did I put the advert?

Alistair MacLean

Online
www.vandale.be

FEATURE

Photomax



Hugo Claus and Sylvia Kristel, 1974

The lion of Flanders

Continued from page 1

Hugo Maurice Julien Claus was born in 1929 in the old Sint Janshospitaal in Bruges, the son of a printer with a passion for the theatre. His childhood was shaped by the Nazi occupation of Belgium, and several of his schoolteachers were right-wing nationalists. His father was also involved in right-wing politics, and Claus himself was briefly drawn into the Nazi-inspired Flemish youth movement.

He received a formal Flemish education, with an emphasis on classical and modern languages, but did not go on to university. Instead, he worked as a book illustrator, and began writing poetry in his late teens. His first book of verse was published at the age of 18, a collection called *Short Series* that bristled with anger at the Flemish bourgeoisie and repressed social life.

He went on to produce 1,200 pages of verse and gained widespread international recognition as a poet. In a recent review, the South African writer JM Coetzee said: "From the beginning, his poetry has been marked by an uncommon mix of intelligence and passion, given expression in a medium over which he has such light-fingered control that art becomes invisible."

After publishing his first novel at the age of 19, Claus rapidly became a literary sensation, espe-

cially after he published two novels in the 1960s that touched on the theme of repressed homosexuality. After breaking one taboo, he went on to tackle incest in his 1970 play *Friday*.

His literary idols included Antonin Artaud and the French surrealists, and he soon became attached to the Cobra art movement (named after the cities Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam), which focused on spontaneity and child-like inspiration.

Claus spent extended periods in France and Italy in the 1950s, and in 1959 he was invited on a tour of the United States by the Ford Foundation. He travelled throughout America in the company of a group of rising European writers, including Günter Grass and Italo Calvino. But America didn't appeal to the young Flemish writer. "A verse from Luke won't help you here," he wrote when confronted with the intimidating scale of Chicago.

Talented in a range of artistic areas and hugely energetic, Claus continued to write poetry and fiction and to paint, while at the same time developing his skills as a playwright, screen writer, theatre director and filmmaker.

As a playwright, he first won recognition with the 1962 play *Sugar*, an angry portrait of social conditions in a French sugar factory. Claus himself had worked in one such factory just after the war but, like fellow Belgian rebel

Jacques Brel, he railed against the monotony of production-line work. "As a boy working in a sugar factory, I found it so senseless that I left and decided never to work for anyone again," he said.

Claus also directed several movies, one of which landed him in court. His experimental film *Mascheroen*, shot in 1968, was deemed indecent by a Bruges court, and he was sentenced to four months in prison. Angry protests followed the verdict, and the sentence was eventually suspended.

Claus cemented his reputation in 1983 with the publication of *Het Verdriet van België* (*The Sorrow of Belgium*), a massive *bildungsroman* that describes a Flemish adolescence in the 1930s and 1940s through the eyes of the main character Louis Seynaeve. Clearly autobiographical, the novel charts a young Flemish man growing up in a repressive Catholic school run by nuns. Like the young Claus, the hero briefly flirts with the Nazi youth movement and experiences the agonies of sexual awakening.

The novel gained international recognition for fearlessly addressing the issue of wartime collaboration at a time when most people wanted to bury unpleasant truths. It was later translated into most of the world's main languages and shortlisted for the Nobel Prize for Literature.

One year later, Claus was back on a film set making an adaptation of

Hendrik Conscience's classic 19th-century novel *The Lion of Flanders*. But he was unhappy with the project. "It's a bad novel," he said in an interview at the time. "He was a marvelously bad writer."

Despite being feted as one of the greatest writers in the Dutch language, Claus remained ambivalent about his Flemish and Belgian identity. He was not entirely at ease in this country, yet he saw advantages to being Belgian. "I insist on being Belgian," he says. "I want to be a member of the pariah nationality, the laughing stock of the French and an object of ridicule for the Dutch. It's the ideal situation for a writer."

As a result of this uneasy relationship, Claus often lived abroad. He spent lengthy periods in Rome, the south of France, the Greek islands and Paris, but kept coming back to the familiar cobbled streets of Antwerp and Ghent, whether to see his plays performed or join literary friends in one of the dark cafes he liked to frequent.

He could be a difficult person and often raged against his translators for misunderstanding his work. He quarrelled endlessly over the English version of *The Sorrow of Belgium* and even crossed the Atlantic to talk to his American publishers. "They just laughed," he said, "kept 25 of my 2,000 changes and said that English wasn't my language, and people didn't speak like that."

Claus was also a prolific translator, and produced Dutch versions

of more than 30 plays and novels by English, Greek, Latin, French and Spanish writers. Among the English writers he translated were Samuel Beckett, Noel Coward, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare.

He married several times. His most famous wife was the actress Sylvia Kristel, who starred in the 1970s soft porn movie series *Emmanuelle*.

The writer suffered from Alzheimer's disease in his final years and finally chose to die by euthanasia at Middelheim Hospital in Antwerp. "He himself picked the moment of his death and asked for euthanasia, not wanting to extend his suffering," said his last wife, Veerle De Wit, in a statement.

Claus chose to die on the very day when the longest political crisis in Belgium's history was finally resolved. One of his great admirers was Guy Verhofstadt, who had just handed over power to Yves Leterme when the news of his death was reported. "In each and every text and poem, he was an emotional beacon in our dark world," Verhofstadt said. "I can live with the fact that he decided [to end his life]. Because he left us as a great glowing star, right on time. Just before he collapsed into a black hole."

Online

www.clauscentrum.be

Undated early portrait



All you need to know about banking services on arriving in Belgium

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Hugo Claus remembered

“We’re simply crushed”

Misunderstood

“Hugo was an enormously rich and multifaceted talent. He came from a generation where writers could still grow into gods. Nowadays things are different. He achieved a lot of recognition in his lifetime, but he still felt he was misunderstood. He had to put up with often very bitter reviews, and that was hard for him. I can’t for the moment see who from our generation might be his successor.

Kristien Hemmerechts
Writer

Sidelined

“In recent years Hugo Claus grew into a monument, but during his career he was often sidelined. His last collection of poems was given a tepid reception, after which he vowed not to write any more poetry. But any writer who has produced such a body of work as Hugo Claus has to put up with criticism.”

Herman Brusselmans
Writer

Multifaceted

“Hugo Claus’ unique writing style and the variety of his work were like a breeze blowing through Dutch-language literature. His many attributes made him one of the most multifaceted and prolific artists in Flemish literature and Flemish history. The seven state prizes he won, and the nominations for the Nobel Prize for Literature, are a well-deserved reward for his great virtuosity in the fields of art and film as well as in literature.”

Kris Peeters
Flemish first minister

A Renaissance man

“He was the only one in Flanders who excelled as much in prose as in poetry and theatre. He also made many translations, directed films and painted. We are simply devastated. We admired him enormously. He was a gentleman, an Italian condottiere, a Renaissance man, a *Homo universalis*. We’re simply crushed.”

Jef Geeraerts
Writer

Greedy, courageous and hospitable

“He is the greatest of the Flemish literary figures from the 20th century. Not of Dutch literature, because it makes no sense to talk of that. Claus didn’t have much of Dutch Calvinistic writing in him. You see in his work the French

and American influences. He was greedy, courageous and hospitable, just as we imagine Belgians to be. I have lost a friend, and the literary world has lost a giant. It feels to me as if I have known him all my life. We went well together, and that’s a rarity, because there are also many writers I can’t stand. Of course we knew this would happen, but when it happens it’s a lot harder than you expect.”

Harry Mulisch
Dutch writer

A driven spirit

“He enjoyed his life in the last days as much as he was able. He was a man with a gigantic talent and the sort of driven spirit few can equal.”

Professor George Wildemeersch
Director of the Hugo Claus study centre in Antwerp

Exhausted

“I spoke to Hugo only yesterday, and he was satisfied with his life. But I also know that he was exhausted. And we have to accept that.”

Sylvia Kristel
Actress and ex-wife

Friendly

“It’s a blatant injustice that he never won [the Nobel Prize]. His death comes far too soon after that of Jan Wolkers, and far too early. He was still only 78, this friendly man. He should have stayed with us longer and should have won a few more major prizes.”

Joost Zwagerman
Writer

Sometimes brutal, sometimes loving

“The aesthetic of his words, their meaning, the sometimes brutal, sometimes loving mirror held up to each of us and this country, those will be his unfading legacy. Even were it only in the hope, as he put it himself, that in 100 years a young girl reading one of his poems would feel a wetness in her pants. It is with sorrow but also with gratitude that we take our leave of a master, who left behind a lasting memory in everyone who met him.”

Yves Desmet
editor of *De Morgen*

The greatest Dutch writer

“The greatest writer of the Dutch language has died. I am glad that I had the chance to tell the man

personally that *The Sorrow of Belgium* was the most beautiful book I ever read. He signed it for me, and I cherish that copy as a treasure.”

A reader
commenting on *Elsevier.nl*

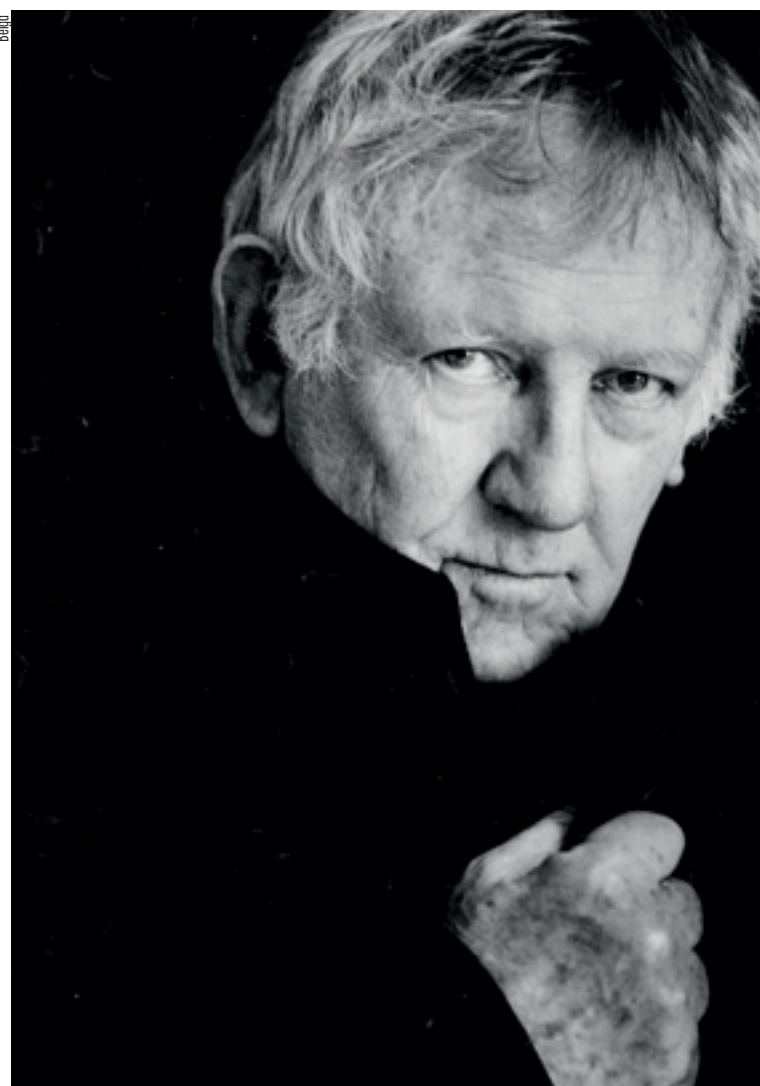
Profound and banal

“His immense body of work is a cosmos in itself, a solar system with great planets and small asteroids. In it, there are numerous relationships, like the many forces acting on the debris that orbits

Against separatism

“At the time when, after nine months of crisis, Belgium is giving birth to a government, Claus had hopes for this reconciliatory development; despite writing in Flemish, he hated Flemish separatism, and with 400 other writers had opposed the division of Belgium. His whole existence consisted of such calls to arms and battles.”

Corriere della Sera
editorial



the sun. Alongside huge differences, we find deep similarities. The burlesque and the classical exist alongside one another, the profound and the banal, the virtuoso and the corny.”

Michael Zeeman
editorialist in *De Volkskrant*

Always beautiful girlfriends

“Hugo was my greatest hero, as a writer and as a man. I met him in 1950. I had the feeling: this is happening, round about me. He had a certain modernity, something American. He had something cinematic about him. Always beautiful girlfriends, now in Rome, now in Paris.”

Remco Campert
Author

The absolute top

“[This is] a great loss for the whole community, the whole cultural sector. Hugo Claus was the absolute top. For me he is the best poet of all time. I knew him enough to be able to say that he wanted to take his leave in pride and dignity. We will miss him.”

Bert Anciaux
Flemish culture minister

For 12 readers and a snoring critic

“He wrote his works, as he once said in a poem, ‘For 12 readers and a snoring critic’. According to critic Paul Claes, Claus got it right. Claes came to exactly the same conclusion. Ninety percent of the reviews of Claus’ work were, he

said, ‘openly dismissive, and even insulting in tone’. Claus himself noted, ‘Over the years, they’ve thrown tons of shit at me.’ That presents a puzzle: how could Flanders react so negatively to work which otherwise was rewarded with just about every imaginable official and unofficial prize?”

Marc Reynebeau
writing in *De Standaard*

A blessed writer

“In his novels, in his plays, in his poems – whether it was *The Sorrow of Belgium* or the *East Bank Poems* – he holds a mirror of life up to us. A hard, often merciless image, which helps us to understand who we really are and what our destiny is. I know of no one who wasn’t affected by the power of his words. I know nobody who met him who didn’t retain an indelible memory. Hugo Claus was a blessed writer who defied heaven, until age had irreversibly transformed him into a block of marble against which people gratefully leaned and rested. That’s something I was able to do for more than 10 years.”

Guy Verhofstadt
Former prime minister

Versatile

“Claus’ charm as a person is extremely visible in his style. Looking for the proper adjective the first one I think of is ‘versatile’. He gave the Dutch language a flow that kept taking you aback as a reader. Don’t believe people who claim that everybody in Belgium bought his novel *The Sorrow of Belgium* but never read it. The book charms you, it floods you. Finishing it takes no effort whatsoever.”

Anne Provoost
writer

Dying with dignity

“For the last couple of years, Hugo Claus wore the end on his features. Public appearances were first a bother, then downright painful. Some days he still wandered through the city, but on others, unwillingly, he hung around with his head in a mist. There were no new books from him in the last years. In interviews he spoke of dying with dignity. But he never said: ‘My work is finished, it’s all over’. But everyone knew: it’s almost over. And now it’s over for good.”

Jeroen Overstijns
De Standaard

New government gets off to shaky start



The new government led by Yves Leterme will focus on job creation and cutting taxes

Continued from page 1

“Madame Non” because of her hard line in negotiations, to labour and equal rights. Pieter De

Crem stays on at defence.

New faces include Bernard Clerfayt, the burgomaster of Schaarbeek; Maria Arena, previously the Walloon minister for

education; Charles Michel, son of EU commissioner Louis, and like his father in charge of development cooperation; and accomplished self-publicist Vincent

Van Quickenborne, now in the government for “enterprise and simplification” – a job involving cutting bureaucracy and red tape (which he previously did with no cabinet rank).

The oddest aspect of the new government is that there is no budget minister for the first time in decades. That job will be handled by Melchior Wathelet, another son of a veteran politician father, who holds the rank of secretary of state, answering to Leterme himself.

The make-up of the government includes all of the main parties except Flemish socialists and right-wing nationalist N-VA. There are more French-speaking members (including secretaries of state) than Flemish, which aroused the wrath of Vlaams Belang and N-VA leader Bart De Wever. And Leterme’s own party colleagues staged an immediate protest against the fact that there are only six women in the 22-strong team.

Leterme’s first public duty, after he and his team had taken their oaths before the King, was to read his government’s agreed

programme to Parliament. It concentrated on job creation, improving competitiveness, reversing a decline in purchasing power and cutting taxes. Onlookers were reported to be less than impressed by both the presentation and the content.

Leterme also bid farewell with thanks to his predecessor, Guy Verhofstadt, who now moves on to a holiday, a tour of Europe and eventually pastures new. Later the two met at the Prime Minister’s official office, where Verhofstadt was presented with an antique map of Europe drawn by Mercator himself, dating from 1613. One of Leterme’s first acts was to remove a painting from his office’s conference room, which was hung there by Verhofstadt. It depicts a gathering of ministers from the administration of Charles Rogier in 1831, and was painted by Charles Picqué, an ancestor of the current minister-president of Brussels. But more than the content, the title is likely to have provoked Leterme’s displeasure: the painting is titled *Voorlopig bewind* – Temporary Government.

UCB profits fall following drug recall

Brussels-based pharmaceutical concern UCB has revised its 2008 forecasts downward following a decision to recall batches of an anti-Parkinson’s drug in the United States and Europe. The Neupro drug comes in the form of a skin patch, and the company said there were doubts as to whether the active ingredient was being delivered correctly. The recall leaves the US market, worth some €10 million to the company in 2007, with no reserves of the drug. The company’s shares fell on the Brussels stock exchange by 10% over the day, the largest drop in 18 years. The Neupro recall comes on the heels of an order from the US Food and Drug Administration to strengthen warnings on UCB’s Tussionex cough syrup for children following reports of side effects and even deaths.

Neupro came into UCB hands on the acquisition two years ago of Schwarz Pharma, since when the share price has fallen by 28% in all. In November last year the European Medicines Agency refused a permit for a drug developed by UCB for Crohn’s Disease, an immune system disorder. In 2009 and 2010, patents on UCB epilepsy drug Keppra expire in the US and Europe, leaving the drug open to copying by generics producers.

Online
www.ucb.be

Antwerp University gets new rector

Antwerp University’s new rector is Alain Verschoren, following a third-round vote-off with his sole remaining opponent Dirk Van Dyck. Professor Verschoren is a mathematician with a special interest in computers and artificial intelligence. The new rector arrives in his post facing a budget deficit for this year of €4.5 million. The university’s board has agreed a five-year plan to balance the budget by 2013. Antwerp has experience in such matters: when three city colleges were merged in 2003 to create one university, Antwerp made savings by fusing two departments covering the same subject – applied economics.

Hate speech spreading

Hate speech is spreading faster and wider than ever before, thanks to the internet, according to the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Anti-Racism. The Centre issued a new report on the phenomenon last week to coincide with the International Day Against Racism. Last year the Centre’s Cyberhate tip-line for reporting cases of racist or other hate messages received 330 complaints, up from 140 in its first year. “We are worried,” said centre director Jozef De Witte. “You used to find these hate messages on the websites of neo-Nazis and other extremist groups. Now they are infecting the whole net.”

Online
www.cyberhate.be

City fund gets cash injection



Bright lights big city: Antwerp woos young couples

The Flemish government has approved an increase of more than €4 million for its City Fund, bringing the total to €119.92 million. Antwerp and Ghent take the lion’s share of the total – some €76.38 million in all. The remainder is divided between Aalst, Bruges, Genk, Hasselt, Kortijk, Leuven, Mechelen, Ostend, Roeselaere, Sint Niklaas and Turnhout. The fund aims to give cities an “extra push to make living conditions better,” a statement from urban policy minister Marino Keulen said. For example, a new campaign is about to start, financed by City Fund money, to attract young double-income couples back to the cities.

Online
www.thuisindestad.be

Make mine a bolleke

A landmark Antwerp brewery celebrates 175 years in the business



Dyck Year.

"To mark our 175th anniversary, we are launching a new beer, the Gusto 1833," says Van der Steen. "It's designed to bring beer back into restaurants, with a completely new Champagne-type bottle and look. People in restaurants traditionally order wine; by offering Gusto 1833 in a special bottle, we are determined to bring beer back to restaurant tables. The new beer will be put on the market in August this year, but the taste has already been determined as a mix of bitter and sparkling acidity, with a solid head on top."

With an annual production of 76,000 hectolitres, De Koninck is exported to the UK, Canada and the Netherlands, which accounts for about one-third of production. "De Koninck is brewed without the addition of preservatives and maintains its high quality during the first six months – with bottled and barrelled beer tasting the same. The new Gusto 1833 on the contrary, with fermentation in the bottle, will keep its quality for a much longer time."

De Koninck, headed by the Van den Bogaert family, currently employs 120 people – 70 of them working in the brewery in Antwerp

and 50 in the company's distribution centre De Valk.

Despite the De Koninck brand's reputation among beer drinkers, the company is facing stiff competition in a tough market, and the 175th anniversary is seen as crucial in rebranding the beer and safeguarding one of Antwerp's best-known brand names. "The younger generation has grown up with all kinds of soft drinks – they don't appreciate the taste of bitter and have deleted that element from their taste buds," says Van der Steen. "I admit that the bolleke has a somewhat antiquated feel. And in times of falling beer consumption – as is now the case throughout Flanders – we must innovate to survive. With the creation of a new glass, the "Handje" [which refers to the Antwerp hand on the boundary post near the brewery], we want to freshen up our image."

De Koninck is taking part in the first national Open Brewery Day on 20 April.

Online
www.dekoninck.be

beers qualify as top-fermented, using high temperatures in the process (25° to 27°). After the conversion of the sugars, the yeast rises to the surface of the beer. In the case of low-fermentation beers, such as pils-types, the yeast falls to the bottom of the tank. The top-fermentation beers offer greater character and aroma, experts argue.

Today, the De Koninck brewery offers four types of traditional beers: blonde (6%), Winterkoninck (6.5%), amber (5%) and tripel (8%). It also does some special brews inspired by the Antwerp connection – like the Antoon beer, brewed to mark the Antoon Van

purified, making it safe to drink. This explains the explosive growth of breweries and beers in the 19th century."

The hand (symbol of Antwerp) became the trademark of De Koninck brewery, appearing on everything from bottles to beer mats. But an even more potent symbol is the *bolleke* glass, in which most Antwerp cafés serve the amber-coloured De Koninck beer.

The word *bolleke* is a typical example of Antwerp understatement. "We talk about a *bolleke* [a little bowl] a *cinemake* [a little cinema] or a *steakske* [a little steak]," explains Van der Steen. The *bolleke* is similar to the glasses used for serving Trappist or abbey beers, but there is an important difference. "The *bolleke* has a conical shape, which allows you to enjoy beer the easy way."

Belgium is the world's only country producing beers in low, high and spontaneous fermentation versions. The De Koninck

Marc Maes

"We want to get back to the young segment of the market," explains Wim Van der Steen, public relations officer with De Koninck brewery in Antwerp, which this year celebrates its 175th anniversary.

The De Koninck brewery was founded in 1833 near the Antwerp city gates and still occupies the original site. It was here that founding father Charles De Koninck brewed his first beers in the kitchen of his coach house inn De Plaisante Hof. "Antwerp was a walled city, and merchants had to declare their goods at the city gate before entering," Van der Steen explains. "A boundary post with a hand indicated the city limits. It's still there near the crossroads of the Mechelsesteenweg and the Boomgaardstraat."

Every town had a drinking water problem in those days, "and beer provided a safe alternative", he continues. "During the brewing process, the beer is boiled and

Stricken car carrier sails again



The car carrier Reppublica Di Genova, now renamed Daewoo Frontier, sailed out of the port of Antwerp on 14 March. The 20-year-old Grimaldi-owned vessel capsized almost a year ago in the Verrebroek Dock on Antwerp's left bank.

After extensive repairs at the Antwerp Ship Repair dockyards, it was towed out to sea by the ocean-going tug Salvigilant. Both ships head off on a three-month journey to the Chinese port of Dalian for further repair work.

The accidental scientist

What started as a chance discovery in a Brussels science laboratory, has turned into a multi-million euro business. And it all comes down to camels

Emma Davis

A camel cannot pass through the eye of a needle. Everyone knows that. But it took a team from Brussels to discover that the antibodies a camel produces when infected with a disease are small enough to pass into diseased human tissue.

Harnessing this discovery, the Ghent-based biotech company Ablynx is developing healthcare applications which replicate these smaller antibodies – known as nanobodies – to treat a range of serious diseases, including rheumatoid arthritis and Alzheimer's.

It all started with a "serendipitous observation", explains Edwin Moses, chief executive of Ablynx, which has exclusive worldwide rights to use nanobodies to make healthcare treatments.

Students at the Free University of Brussels were carrying out laboratory tests on blood samples to examine antibody structures. Antibodies are produced when our bodies are invaded by disease and are crucial to drug development because they target only the invading cells rather than any healthy tissue, resulting in fewer side effects. They hit the target and nothing else, in other words.

However, while pharmaceutical companies have imitated these antibodies to develop treatment for diseases such as breast cancer, they are difficult and expensive to make. In addition, since they are quite large, the antibodies are hard to administer and usually have to be injected into a patient.

By pure chance, the students were working close to the zoology department and decided to take a sample of camel serum for their experiment. They saw that the antibodies were much smaller, only a few nanometres in length.

Their teacher, Professor Raymond Ramers, was intrigued by this discovery and took his own samples of camel serum

to check the results. He found exactly the same: the antibodies it produced were about one-tenth of the size of the antibodies produced by humans.

These nanobodies – which are also found in llamas, a close relation of the camel, and in two species of shark – were easier to manufacture due to their simpler structure. They were also more stable when faced with a change in temperature or acid (which is present in the stomach and can react with certain drugs). "These are the next generation of antibodies," said Moses.

Ablynx has taken this discovery and turned it into a multi-million euro business with plans for the first drugs to hit the market in 2012-2013. The company started its clinical trials last year. After completing initial tests on healthy humans, it will soon start testing a drug to prevent thrombosis (blood clotting) on heart disease patients.

It has already partnered with several leading pharmaceutical groups, including Switzerland's Novartis and US pharmaceutical giant Wyeth. After a successful listing on the stock exchange, raising more than €85 million, Moses is optimistic about the future.

"Now we are hiring more people. We plan to have 200 by the end of this year. The vast majority are scientists and they will be looking at developing drugs in a range of areas," says Moses. "What we are building here is a centre of excellence. Our dream is to take this chance discovery and turn it into things that can help improve people's health."

HIGHER EDUCATION

Flemish Universities look abroad for students and staff

Leuven University is to open a representative office in Beijing to promote the university in China. Ghent University is said to be moving forward in the same direction, with concrete plans to do the same in the near future. Leuven, which will share an office with Louvain-la-Neuve University, already has close ties with Chinese institutions and awards degrees in cooperation with Tsinghua University. "But still we felt the need to be physically present in China," said Bart Hendricks of the Leuven international office. The office's main aims would be to recruit students and researchers. Opening is planned for April, and former Leuven and UCL students will, if possible, be employed as assistants.

The Ghent office, meanwhile, is due to open in June, with the aim of improving the quality of Masters and doctoral students brought to Ghent, rather than the quantity. "At the moment we're just about at maximum capacity," said Valère Meus of the university.

Meanwhile, Flemish universities are attracting increasing numbers of foreign academic staff and researchers, according to a recent survey carried out by *De Morgen* newspaper. In Antwerp, one in four professors is of foreign origin. In Leuven, the number of independent academic personnel and researchers has risen from 12.8% in 2005 to 14.6% this year. One-third of all responses to job vacancies for lecturers at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) come from abroad, with the figure rising to 40% for research posts. Ghent University, meanwhile, makes a point of trying to attract foreign staff by carefully selecting where vacancies will be advertised. No academic job in Ghent and no lecturing job in Leuven can now be filled without the post having been advertised abroad.

Alan Hope



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One for the books

Famous authors, a rare art collection and novels made of chocolate together under one roof

Peter Bleuzé



Anne Provoost is the curator of the second annual Zogezegd

Lisa Bradshaw

Anne Provoost is very honest about the origins of Zogezegd (So Called): "The Boekenbeurs in Antwerp has been the book event for decades," the award-winning Flemish author says, "and it started to feel like that was the only moment of attention for books in the year." Not only does Zogezegd bring literature to the fore in another season – spring, a time of rebirth – but it also eases Ghent's jealousy just a little bit. "Ghent also wants to be known as a book city," says Provoost.

Even though this is only the second Zogezegd, last year's event was such a success that it's got culture hounds buzzing with anticipation and serves as the kick-off of Literaire Lente (Literary Spring), Flanders' long-running, month-long celebration of Dutch literature. Literaire Lente highlights 24 new Dutch-language books and international works that have just been translated into Dutch. Always taking place in April, it hosts readings, walks, workshops and performances around Flanders.

Returning to Ghent's Vooruit arts centre, Zogezegd will pack an ocean of events into one evening on 4 April. As curator, Provoost spearheads the activities and brings in most of Literaire Lente's 24 featured authors, plus a few extra. She's built the programme around the theme "From imagination to power?" in order to ques-

ions literature's current ability to be visionary and to transform society. "I was born in 1964, and I always had the feeling that I had major landmarks that were a moment in time," she explains. "Writers had beacons that they were writing towards. Like 1984 was such an important moment, everything was measured as before or after that date. And 2001 was similar because of 2001: A Space Odyssey. After that, we had no beacon left."

Provoost, who is about to publish a non-fiction book on the need to redefine atheism, wonders: "Is it naive to think you can still write a utopian novel?" The Zogezegd programme will look at this question through the historical context

of the 1960s. "When you look at the role that books – fiction and non-fiction – played then, which of these are still relevant today?" asks Provoost. "That's a question I plan to throw in there."

"In there" refers to one of Zogezegd's main attractions: The Relay Debate, an ongoing live debate with a number of Flemish and Dutch writers that will last the entire evening. Visitors are invited to walk in and out whenever they choose, and it will also be video streamed into other parts of the massive Vooruit.

In another hall is The Memory, in which authors born before 1940 are interviewed and read from their texts. Then there is The Future, which offers a forum to new writers. In the Tower of Babble, you'll find international fiction writers reading and answering questions, including French author Philippe Claudel and German author Ingo Schulze. They will be interviewed in their own languages, but Croatian author Igor Stiks will speak English, as will British authors Blake Morrison and William Sutcliffe.

When you're ready for a bit of a rest, there's no harm in heading to the Chocolate Book room, where you can devour very special sweet editions of all the evening's featured books. After that, make your way up to an attic room for Unplugged, where 24 beds await. "You get a glass of jenever and a blanket," explains Provoost. "And chances are if you sit on a bed, the author of a book will come and read to you."

These are only part of the offerings, and visitors have to make choices because you cannot see or hear it all. But make sure to spend part of your time in Erotica, which features just that sort of Flemish literature. Top billing goes to the now 78-year-old Jef Geeraerts, author of the 1960s and 70s *Gangreen* series (the first of which detailed his sexual exploits in colonial Congo). Formerly censored Flemish books will be discussed, including work by the just-deceased Hugo Claus, and you

can take a peek at the new book *En rijen is plezant* (*And Lining Up is Pleasant*), a collection of old Flemish folk songs that were sung with a wink and a nod. The fantastically fun girls' choir Scala will be on hand to test out a few of them.

Finally, whatever you do, don't miss the most visual part of the evening: Louis Paul Boon's *Fenomenale Feminatreek*. This massive collection of images of women in all manner of dress and undress was an ongoing project of the Flemish writer before his suicide in 1979. He tore them from magazines and wrote comments on them, and they have been scrutinised, judged and oggled for decades. "He said that he did it as research because he wanted to see how women were pictured over the years that he lived," says Provoost. "We all want to know what is happening in the head of a writer, and we have to take it for what it is. I'm not willing to make it more beautiful than what it was or more dirty than what it was." The province of Antwerp, though, came down on the side of dirty when they cancelled a planned showing of a part of the collection recently at Antwerp's Foto-Museum.

In fact, it is impossible to see *Fenomenale Feminatreek* in its entirety. "No one has ever seen it all," says Provoost. "It would take you seven days of eight hours each." But Zogezegd is presenting the whole thing. "I can't tell you how, but we're showing it as it's never been shown before."

If you can't join the 2,000 who are expected at Zogezegd, you can listen to a live feed on Radio 1, the main sponsor. But if you do come, Provoost is sure that you'll find something that will tickle your brain. "I've programmed for everybody's taste," she says. "For those who think they cannot be surprised anymore to those who still think literature is fun."

Online
www.boek.be
www.vooruit.be



Anne Provoost, curator of Zogezegd, is one of very few contemporary Flemish authors who have been translated into English. Translations include her young adult novels *Falling*, about a young man who must face the Nazi past of his grandfather, and *My Aunt is a Pilot Whale*, about a girl dealing with sexual abuse. Provoost's 2001 novel *In the Shadow of the Ark* has sold 100,000 copies in the United States – practically unheard of for a Flemish author. Set at the dawn of civilisation, a young woman, following her love for one of Noah's sons, stows away on a massive wooden ark built to withstand the great flood.

Online
www.anneprovoost.be



International Zogezegd

Zogezegd is a celebration of new Dutch-language books but also books in other languages that have just been translated into Dutch. So, though most of the authors at the event will speak Dutch during presentations and discussions, some international authors will read and be interviewed in English. These include Igor Stiks from Chicago, whose 2006 book *Elijah's Chair* won both Best Fiction Book of the Year and Best Novel of the year in his homeland of Croatia.



Two British authors are also visiting Ghent for the literary evening. William Sutcliffe's (photo, above bottom) new novel *Whatever Makes You Happy* is actually coming out in Dutch before it's released in English in May. It's a story of three mothers who hatch plans to straighten out the lives of their shiftless sons. Sutcliffe's satiric books often focus on young Brits struggling with commitments.

Well known author, poet and contributor to numerous publications, including *The Guardian* and *The New Yorker*, Blake Morrison's 2007 novel *South of the River* makes its Dutch debut. Probably best known for his painfully truthful memoir *And When Did You Last See Your Father?*, Morrison (photo, top) is also an award-winning poet. *South of the River*, about a group of loosely connected, rather unhappy adults, begins: "For the rest of his life, Nat would remember exactly what he was doing last night – at any rate, when his current amnesia wore off he would remember some of it."

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EXHIBITION

Black is beautiful

Exhibition brings together African work from two colonialist capitals

Steven Tate

Paris is a major player in the world of African art, which is understandable since more than one-fifth of the French capital's population of 12 million is of African descent – testament to the continued connection to the continent following the sun setting on the French empire. Belgium's similar colonial past is also evident in Brussels, as is clear in the exhibition *Black Paris, Black Brussels*, running at the Museum van Elsene. The focus is on the art and history of the African Diaspora in the two capitals, from 1906 to the present.

Some might look at the horrors that colonisation caused and the ongoing instability of the continent as damning evidence of Europe's involvement. And, regarding art, Europe has not always had the best reputation for displaying Africans, who were at one point considered objects in themselves: Venus Hottentot, the South African slave born in 1789, travelled throughout Europe as a sideshow attraction, paraded in front of crowds fascinated by her prodigious bottom. She died tragically before her 27th birthday, with her genitals and brain preserved so that they

could be displayed at Paris' Musée de l'Homme. (They were finally removed in 1974).

In 1878, the World Expo in Paris actually featured Africans in a human zoo – an attraction that was popular until the early 1930s. The 1920s brought the Jazz Age, with Africans and African-Americans upgraded from primitives to exotics: Josephine Baker and her banana skirt is still an icon from that era, with "black" evolving from being seen as primitive to being objectified. "As much as I personify the savage onstage, I try to be as civilized as possible in life," said the entertainer.

Despite such inauspicious beginnings, the artistic relationship between Africa and Europe has flourished to produce works both rich and complex. This exhibition features just the tip of the iceberg. Cameroon-born, Nigeria-bred photographer Samuel Fosso is Africa's answer to Cindy Sherman, adopting different guises (a pirate, golf player, body guard, socialite) for self-portraits that are both kitsch and disquieting; Congolese Bers Mbalaka works his "school of the make-do" with salvaged materials to create something inspiring; and Brussels-based award-winning artist Ola-

dele Kuku uses his Yoruba roots in architecturally inspired pieces that have drawn raves worldwide.

Meanwhile, Mortsels native Luc Tuymans originally created the series *Mwana Kitiko*, or *Beautiful White Man*, referencing Belgium's colonial past in the Congo for the Venice Biennale in 2000; and photographer Marie-France Plissart and anthropologist Filip de Boeck collaborate on an installation employing large screens, photos and audio to conjure up the sensory overload of being in Kinshasa: children accused of bringing misfortune tossed onto the street by their parents, huge masses, religious fanatics and evangelist preachers all contributing to an almost apocalyptic cacophony. Riveting and rewarding.

With news coming out of Africa of rampant political unrest, war, disease and famine, some see the continent as mired in hopelessness. *Black Paris, Black Brussels* is a reminder that to dismiss such an important area that has contributed so much to Western culture would be a tragedy.

Until 27 April, Museum van Elsene, 71 Jean Van Volsemstraat, Brussels



Sudanese artist Hassan Musa's "Bananes Bagdad" at *Black Paris, Black Brussels*

Online

www.museum.elsene.be

FILM FREAK

Brussels International Festival of Fantastic Film

The Brussels International Festival of Fantastic Film could easily substitute the word "people" for "film" in its title. There is a film festival – celebrating horror, sci-fi and fantasy – but many of the festival's biggest fans see this as more of a backdrop to their fabulously freaky parties, rather than as the main event. If you're intrigued by such notions as

a Vampires' Ball, a Zombie Parade or the International Body Painting Contest, don't be afraid to go along to Tour & Taxis between 27 March and 8 April. These people love fresh blood.

And if you get nervous, you can always slip into a cinema. Of the nearly 100 films, perhaps you fancy opening night: it's the Belgian premiere of *The Eye*, in

which Jessica Alba sees dead people – and worse – after an eye transplant. It's preceded by a (live) performance by Teater Exces. But if you've had enough of American remakes of Asian horror, you might consider Belgian Film Day on 4 April. Brussels filmmakers Giles Daoust (*The Room*) and Emmanuel Jaspers premiere their new English-language film *Arte-*

facts, in which a young woman notices that all her friends are getting murdered by strangers who look just like them.

Belgian Film Day also includes the premiere of first-time Flemish director Jo Smets. *I Against Ghost*, also filmed in English, is about a ghost with an existential crisis. Experimental in nature, it stars the director in a trippy performance that floats between the supernatural and the merely surreal. Belgian Film Day takes place on a weekday, but its four features also show at other times during the festival.

Every year, the festival brings a horror director to town to work with students at Brussels two Flemish film schools. This year, Bernard Rose, director of *Snuff-Movie* and *Candyman*, worked with three students to make their first shorts. We get an "emotional vampire" who sucks the feelings from his victims, a world where people make love with their feet and a priest chased by monstrous rabbits. All three films are "full of sexual anxiety," says Chris Orgelt, from the festival's programming department. "This fear of intimacy, maybe it's the generation. One of our guests commented that he hoped they could afford therapy later in life."

There is also a German focus this year at the festival, and the

evening of 3 April finds many directors presenting their own films, including Andreas Klei-ert (*Paths in the Night*) with his new film *Head Under Water*, and Toke Constantin Hebbeln, whose first film *Nevermore* is a perfectly-realised fable of love, loss and devotion, which is one of the festival's handful of offerings appropriate for children.

Finally, if you're a fan of the outrageous art-house horror of Italian cult director Dario Argento, don't miss *The Mother of Tears*, the third in his "mother trilogy", which he began in the 1970s with *Suspria*. Many claim that Argento's movies are unintentionally hilarious, but I think he delights in his own creatively sensationalist gore. He's outdone himself here, when a mysterious urn winds up in the hands of two archaeologists, and Rome falls victim to a murderous madness.

The films in the Brussels festival that are not in English are often subtitled in English. Full schedules are available in venues around town, and the website includes an excellent English section. Fantastic, indeed.

Lisa Bradshaw

Online

www.biff.org



Ghost with an identity crisis: Flemish director Jo Smets premieres *I Against Ghost* at the Festival of Fantastic Film

Screen play

Flanders is bursting with independent cinema, where the place can be more fun than the flick

The Flemish art scene is full of, to put it bluntly, headstrong individualists. When it comes to cinemas, this extends to those who want to promote art, as well as to those who make it. The number of independent cinemas in Flanders opening their doors to movie audiences is extraordinary – and a testament to the region's ability to counter homogeneity.

Antwerp's most famous alternative cinema, **Cartoon's** in Kaasstraat, has been going strong for 25 years. You're allowed to take snacks and drinks from their cosy café into one of the three theatres, where you find the latest in international art-house movies. Those same movies are later on sale under the Homescreen DVD label in the café: documentaries, experimental, classics and the biggest selection of gay and lesbian movies in the Benelux.

Equally appreciated are the **MuHKA media** films shown at the FotoMuseum. Their programme leans toward the quirky: a Todd Browning series is coming up. In Borgerhout, meanwhile, the popular old dame Cinema Roma, a concert and event hall, hosts second-run films in the curtained-off balcony of a large theatre hall. An upcoming Elizabeth Taylor series fits quite nicely in the lush interior of this 1920s listed monument.

One up-and-coming cinema is **Filmhuis De Klappei** in the Klappeistraat. Volunteers rebuilt this former police station (the Gents toilet used to be a cell) into a hip one-theatre. The plush red chairs were recycled from the recently refurbished Antwerp Opera House. Their slogan is

"from the neighbourhood, for the neighbourhood", and it reflects the local population very well. Wednesday afternoons are mainly reserved for the older generation and children, with classic 1950s comedies or kids' films on offer. On Wednesday nights, film buffs feast their eyes on modern or older classics. Saturday is theme-night: once a month you'll find Kinky, hosted by Murielle Schelle, the Ghent lingerie designer. Another Saturday every month is reserved for a movie chosen by a musician, who then performs in the intimate venue afterwards.

In Zwijndrecht, a village on the opposite bank, you'll find a truly inspiring man in the box office of **Service Cinema Flora**. Tommy Pasteels has almost single-handedly revived the once-flourishing neighbourhood theatre into his personal cinema vision. After years of convincing the major film distributors to book with him, he continues to strive for top quality – combined with luxury. The loveseats offer two whole meters of leg space each, and you can order drinks and snacks (including champagne) via remote control while enjoying the latest blockbusters.

Further afield, in both Antwerp and Limburg provinces, are other

worthwhile cinemas and screenings. In Boechout, near Lier, you can visit the old Kalifornia soup factory twice a month for a quality second-run film selected by **Cinema Victoria**, a project by a local arts non-profit organisation. As a pre-show, you watch the good people of Boechout in old home movies.

Monique Philips

Sometimes Brussels is just too much for the curious film fan. Festivals arrive one on top of the other, while associations and foreign embassies present clusters of films that promote their cause or culture. So you need a cinema you can call home without worrying too much about the programme, because pretty much everything is going to be good.

The palace of independent cinema in Brussels is **Cinema Arenberg** in the centre of town. It is part of the architectural fabric of the royal galleries, a situation that both adds to its grandeur and saves its two large screens from being sliced up into smaller, more economic units. This is good for the filmgoer, but bad for the management, and the Arenberg seems to be in a permanent state of crisis.

It's a mystery because, on top of the beautiful setting, the Arenberg has a rich programme. A wide range of new art-house films show sparingly through the week, which means they stay longer and don't disappear after their first weekend. And in the summer Arenberg turns itself completely over to Ecran Total, a festival with retrospectives, recent favourites and sneak previews of films to come.

If the Arenberg is the palace, then the **Styx** is the pits. I mean that in the nicest possible way,



Worth the wait: film fans line up at the Sphinx in Ghent, while Filmhuis goes in Antwerp sink into former opera house seats (centre)

since this tiny two-screen cinema tucked away in the streets behind Elsenesteenweg has a flavour of the Parisian flea-pit about it, minus the insect life.

Styling itself a "memory cinema", the Styx is a great place to catch up with the best art-house films after they've disappeared from the first-run cinemas. It also has a neat trick of sometimes programming past films by a current director, so that if you are carried away by *My Blueberry Nights*, for instance, *2046* is there to feed your enthusiasm.

Away from the centre of town, the best viewing experience is to be had in **Le Cinema Stockel**. This vast single screen has become exceptionally popular in the past two years, attracting spectators where other independents have seen numbers plummet. Its programme mixes mainstream films with the more accessible end-of-the-art-house scene, a combi-

nation calculated to welcome the curious suburban filmgoer rather than the esoteric cinephile. Yet the Stockel has a genuine buzz of enthusiasm, which is a joy to relax into.

If, however, you are an esoteric cinephile then you should head for the **Cinema Nova** in the centre of town. Run by a collective of cinema enthusiasts, the Nova tends to follow its own path rather than relying on what film distributors have to offer. The resulting

Look away now

If your idea of alternative film is inadvertently watching the reels in a different order, you've missed the showing of Paul Haggis' *In the Valley Of Elah* in Hasselt's Kinopolis last month. About 700 visitors didn't notice.



by a workshop where kids can react creatively to what they've just seen.

In a refreshing show of goodwill and mutually-beneficial collaboration, Sphinx works out agreements with Studio Skoop, the other independent cinema, so they don't run the same films. This allows many movies at each venue to show for weeks or months. Studio Skoop is the longest-running indie cinema in town; it opened in 1970 with one theatre, located in a former ballroom. Now it has five and is decked out in a 1920s Art Deco style, thanks to Walter Vander Cruysse, who bought it in the mid 1970s after working there as a student.

Vander Cruysse has built **Studio Skoop** into what a cinema should be: red plush, heavy curtains, dank smell. Theatres are decorated with original 1920s French posters of splashy musicals, and the lobby contains the cinema's two original 1940s Bauer projectors, a German brand made of steel. "They're the Rolls Royce of film projectors," says Vander Cruysse. "They come from a time when those things were indestructible. I don't think my new projectors will last that long." You can mull that statement over, along with the movie you've just seen, in the adjoining café – wide wooden tables, plenty of light and a tempting menu make it a destination in itself.

Lisa Bradshaw

Online

Listings for most cinemas can be found at www.cinebel.be, but a few can't: www.deroma.be, www.klappei.be, www.ufovzw.be (Cinema Victoria) www.film-plateau.ugent.be

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Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein
First run art-house films and retrospectives

Movy-Club

Monnikenstraat 21
Second run art-house and mainstream films

Vendôme

Waversesteenweg 18
First run art-house films

programmes can be obscure or quirky, but are always put together with passion.

Sometimes they follow themes, such as migration or psychiatry, or focus on films old and new from a particular country. The Nova also has a taste for the weirder end of horror and for mixing film and music, producing an atmosphere that often spills over into its ragged but otherwise excellent cellar bar.

Ian Mundell

It's no surprise that the freewheeling, post-hippie, alt-culture that is Ghent supports alternative cinema spaces. There are just three but, considering the city's size and the presence of Kinopolis, that's still plenty to keep film lovers busy. The most off-the-charts programming is to be found at **Film Plateau**. It's part of the University of Ghent and caters to

film students, which explains its analytical, theme-oriented schedule. This week, for instance, is an evening devoted to the lower Congo, with presentations from university staff, a Belgian-made documentary and a debate. There are also year-long themes which are explored monthly: horror as a means to construct alternative worlds is illustrated this spring through such diverse offerings as *Cat People*, *Carrie* and *Evil Dead 3*.

Meanwhile, not far away, **Sphinx** gets the prize as the best located independent cinema: right on the Korenmarkt in the heart of the city, so that when you emerge from a screening in the evening, Ghent lies at your feet. Its five screens offer first- and second-run art-house fare, and it's often the home of premieres or sneak previews in Ghent. Once a month, Sphinx hosts a children's programme with a special film screening followed



Classical & new music

Brussels

Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
MAR 30 11.00 Elfa Rún Kristinsdóttir,
violin; Francesco Corti, harpsichord:
Bach, Hallgrímsson, Casto (Iceland on
the Edge Festival)

Royal Music Conservatory
Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.507.82.00
MAR 27 20.00 Jos van Immerseel,
fortepiano; Midori Seiler, violin:
Beethoven sonatas

Sint Pieterskerk
Kardinaal Mercierplein; 0495.67.74.50
MAR 30 16.00 Félix Snyers, organ:
Bach's Easter music for organ (free
concert)

Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
MAR 26 21.00 Gavriel Livkind, cello:
Bach and post-romantic works for cello

Borgerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90
MAR 30 15.00 Jos van Immerseel,
fortepiano; Midori Seiler, violin:
Beethoven sonatas

Hoeilaart

Maison de la Musique
Edgar Sohiestraat 41; 02.657.96.52
Until MAY 8 Concert series by soloists
from the Queen Elisabeth College of
Music

Opera

Ghent

Vlaamse Opera
Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02,
www.vlaamseopera.be
APR 2-13 15.00 Dialogues des
Carmélites by Poulenc, conducted
by Jean-Claude Casadesus, staged by
Robert Carsen with Olga Pasichnyk,
Hendrickje Van Kerckhove, Christian
Tréguier, Martial Defontaine

Jazz & blues

Brussels

Archiduc
Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52
MAR 30 12.00 Lucien Dubuis Trio

Atelier 210
Sint-Pieterssteenweg 210; 02.732.25.98,
www.atelier210.be
MAR 27 21.00 Reggie Washington Trio

Beursschouwburg
Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50,
www.beursschouwburg.be
MAR 29 20.30 Springboard Sessions:
Work, city blues for the 21st century
APR 2 20.30 Sabin Todorv Trio

Brasserie de L'Union
Sint-Gillisvoorplein 55; 02.538.15.79
MAR 30-APR 27 12.00-15.00 Carson
Barnes & friends

Jazz Station
Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78
MAR 26 20.30 Ben Prischi Trio
MAR 29 18.00 Pierre de Surgères
Quartet

La Brocante Thoumas
Blaesstraat 170; 02.512.13.43
MAR 29-APR 26 12.00-16.00 Carson
Barnes & friends

Sounds Jazz Club
Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,
www.soundsjazzclub.be
Concerts at 22.00:
MAR 26 Chamaquiando, salsa **APR**
1 Jazz Big Band **APR 2** Caribe Con K,
Caribbean music **APR 3** Michael Blass
& Tony Lakatos Quartet

The Music Village
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
MAR 26 Dapoerka
MAR 27-28 Natasha Roth & Ivan
Paduart Quartet
MAR 29 Sandyland

Uccle Cultural Centre
Rodestraat 47; 02.374.64.84
APR 3 20.30 Renaud Patigny and his
Blue Devils, boogie woogie

Bruges

De Werf
Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29
APR 1 20.30 Biondini/Godard/
Reijseger

Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
MAR 30 Velvet Revolver. Gonzales &
Together Ensemble present Soft Power
APR 3 Down

Fuse
Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89
MAR 29 23.00 Pierre's Birthday Party:
James Unk, Jeremy P Caulfield, Sarah
Goldfarb, DJ Pierre. Bruno Proncato,
Daze Maxim, Pipo Vitch, Marcus
Vector

Le Botanique
Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Concerts at 20.00:
MAR 26 The Wombats
MAR 30 The National Bank with
Thomas Dybdahl, Lars & Martin
Hornthveth, Morten Qvelild, Nikolai
Eilertsen, Erlend Ropstad

Phoolan Bar
Luxemburgstraat 43; www.phoolan.be
APR 3-JUNE 12 18.00 Petra Jordan

VK Club
Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07
APR 3 20.30 Geoff Berner + Kaizers
Orchestra

Bruges

Stadsschouwburg
Vlamingstraat 29; 050.44.30.60
MAR 30 20.00 Gabriel Rios

Leuven

Het Depot
Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03
APR 1 20.00 Angie Stone

World, folk

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
MAR 27 20.00 Melingo
MAR 28 Youssou N'Dour
APR 1 Sebastian Sturm + Groundation

Beursschouwburg
Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50,
www.beursschouwburg.be
APR 3 20.30 Kaizers Orchestra
(www.vkconcerts.be)

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44
APR 2 20.00 Gilberto Gil (Brazil)
APR 3 20.00 James Taylor (US)

Stekerlapatte
Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81,
www.stekerlapatte.be
MAR 27 21.30 Rawfishboys
MAR 29 21.30 Le Mythe des Grands
Singes

Théâtre Molière

Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00,
www.muziekpublieque.be
MAR 28 20.00 Anatolian Masters:
Ertan Tekin & Cengiz Özkan

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991
APR 1-2 20.00 Yannick Noah

Antwerp

Zuiderpershuis
Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00,
www.zuiderpershuis.be
APR 3 20.30 Zedashe, polyphony
(Georgia)

Dance

Brussels

Jacques Franck Cultural Centre
Waterloosesteenweg 94; 02.538.90.20
MAR 28-30 Parcours danse n°2:
MAR 28 Exhibition of art by Aurélie
Thiolat and Catherine Lambermont
with a performance by Tracee
Westmoreland
MAR 29 18.00 Danse apéritive
MAR 30 11.00 Danse avec brunch.
14.00 Dance workshop for children and
adults

Kaaithheater

Saintelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59
APR 3-5 20.30 Damaged Goods and
par b.Leux in Forgeries, Love and Other
Matters, choreographed and performed
by Meg Stuart and Benoît Lachambre,
music by Hahn Rowe

Les Brigittines

Korte Brigittinenstraat; 02.506.43.00
Until MAR 29 Troubleyn in L'Ange de
la mort, dance, installation, video and
performance by Jan Fabre (in English
with French surtitles)

Antwerp

Stadsschouwburg
Theaterplein 1; 077.37.38.39
MAR 27-30 Béjart Ballet Lausanne in
Le Tour du monde en 80 minutes
APR 2-6 Béjart Ballet Lausanne in
Zarathoustra

Vlaamse Opera

Frankrijklei 3; 070.22.02.02
APR 1-6 Stravinsky Evening: Royal
Ballet of Flanders with the Vlaams
Radio Orchestra and Choir conducted
by Benjamin Pope, in three ballets
with music by Stravinsky: Apollo
and Orpheus, choreographed by
Balanchine, and Symphony of Psalms,
choreographed by Kylián

Theatre

Brussels

Beursschouwburg
Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50,
www.beursschouwburg.be
Until MAR 28 20.30 Mightysociety5,
multimedia project by Eric De Vroedt
(in Dutch)

Kaaithheaterstudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81;
02.201.59.59
APR 3-5 20.30 Tristero in Iemand van
ons (in Dutch)

Visual arts

Brussels

AmArt Louise Gallery
Dejonckerstraat 34; 0476.53.22.94
Until MAR 30 United Colors of
Belgium, group show by 11 Belgian
photographers

Arts en Marge

Hoogstraat 312; 02.511.04.11
Until MAY 17 Allemaal Beestjes,
outsider art group show on the theme
of real and imaginary animals

Atomium

Atomium Square; 02.475.47.72,
www.atomium.be
Until MAR 30 Willy Van Der Meeren,
furniture from the 1950s by the Belgian
architect

Bibliotheca Wittockiana

Bemelstraat 23; 02.770.53.33
Until APR 19 Imprint: Russian artist-
publishers

Box Gallery

Maliestraat 88; 02.537.95.55
Until APR 5 Bois dormants,
photographs by Hugues de
Würstemberger

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44
Until MAR 30 The Unreal Image:
Emblems, Symbols and Metaphors,
photographs by Charles Nègre, Achille
Quinet, Julia Margaret Cameron, Henry
Peach Robinson and many others
Until MAR 31 Image/Construction,
photographs of architecture by Filip
Dujardin
Until APR 25 Dreams of the Sublime
and Nowhere: multimedia installations
and photographs inspired by Iceland's
natural environment
Until APR 27 Magicians of Nature,
paintings by three Icelandic artists
Until APR 27 Water Vocal –
Endangered II, video and sound
installation by Rúrí
Until MAY 11 Paul Klee: Theater here,
there and everywhere,
monographic exhibition on the Berne-
based artist (1879-1940)
Until MAY 18 Treasures Old and New
from Wallonia: a Curious Land, 12th
to 16th-century paintings, sculpture,
tapestries and religious objects by
Joachim Patinir, Henri Met de Blès,
Robert Campin, Jacques Du Broeucq,
Hugo d'Oignies and contemporary
works by Orla Barry, Michel François,
Jean-Pol Godart, Juan Paparella, Beat
Streuli and Angel Vergara, curated by
Laurent Busine
Until MAY 18 Jan Fabre: Borrowed
time, photographs of work by the
infamous Flemish artist

Centre de la Culture Judéo-Marocaine
Vander Elstplein 19; 02.343.86.30
Until MAY 15 Freud au Maroc. Regards
sur l'identité, the Dahan-Hirsch
collection of art, books and objects
illustrating Jewish culture in Morocco

Children's Museum

Burgemeesterstraat 15; 02.640.01.07
Long term show: Rouge, interactive
exhibition on the theme of red

Costume and Lace Museum

Violettestraat 12; 02.213.44.50
Until MAY 27 Weefsels van het
absolute, textiles by outsider artists
Heide De Bruyne, Fabienne Closson,
Hilde D'Hondt, Aranka Liban, Kenneth
Rasmussen and others
Until DEC 30 Van new look tot Expo
58, fashion from the time of Belgium's
1958 World's Fair, with evening gowns,
wedding and cocktail dresses, ladies'
suits, coats and accessories

Crown Gallery

Hopstraat 7; 02.514.01.23
Until APR 12 A Shimmer of Possibility,
photographs by Paul Graham

De Elektriciteitscentrale European

Centre for Contemporary Art
Sint Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.44
Until APR 27 No Borders [Just
N.E.W.S.], works by 29 young European
artists

De Loge Architectuurmuseum

Kluisstraat 86; 02.649.86.65
Until SEP 28 Belgie/Belgique 58,
architectural and decorative forms at
the time of Belgium's 1958 World Fair,
with drawings, photographs, models,
posters and furniture

De Markten

Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25
Until APR 20 Lumen, works by Yves
Beaumont, Iris Bouwmeester, Esther
Brugginck, Jeanine Cohen, Koen
De Vriendt and Pablo Garcia-Rubio,
among others

Get your tickets now for...



Stravinsky Evening

1-5 April, Vlaamse Opera Antwerp, 1 Frankrijklei; 25-27 April,
Vlaamse Opera Ghent, 3 Schouwburgstraat. Tickets from 070.22.02.02,
www.vlaamseopera.be or www.balletvlaanderen.be

The Royal Ballet of Flanders joins the Flemish Radio Orchestra and Chorus in an arresting triple-bill of ballets by Stravinsky. *Apollo*, which premièred in Paris in 1928 under the title *Apollon Musagète*, was one of George Balanchine's most successful choreographies – an achingly beautiful evocation of the young god of music being taught by three muses. Orpheus was another Stravinsky/Balanchine collaboration, but will be shown here in a more recent version by British choreographer Michael Corder. As for the *Symphony of Psalms*, it will be exquisitely revisited by Czech choreographer Jiri Kylián in a setting reminiscent of an old church that will make the whole experience strangely solemn and ritualistic. With British conductor Benjamin Pope in the pit.

Design Flanders

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60
Until APR 13 Flower Power, vases by 26 Flemish designers

Espace Photographique Contretype

Verbindingslaan 1; 02.538.42.20
Until APR 27 Rhizome oriental-voyage en ex-URSS, photographs by Philippe Herbet

Fondation pour l'Architecture

Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.80, www.fondationpourelarchitecture.be
Until APR 20 Architectuur-landschappen, 150 years of Belgian architects' drawings

Goethe Institute

Belliardstraat 58; 02.230.39.70
Until APR 17 Fotoporträts, 50 photographs by winners of the Chamisso Prize

Iceland on the Edge: Festival of Icelandic arts and culture at Bozar, featuring four visual arts shows
Until JUNE 15 at Bozar, Koningstraat 10
02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be

ISELP

Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until APR 5 Ceramics by Laurence Deweer and textiles by Delphine Grand'Ry
Until APR 5 Serrer les dents, works by François Jacob

Jewish Museum of Belgium

Minimenstraat 21; 02.512.19.63
Until JUNE 22 Dicht op de huid, paintings by Brussels-based artist Maurice Frydman

Koekelberg Basiliek

Basiliekvoorplein 1; 02.420.55.05
Until APR 6 Leonardo Da Vinci: The European Genius, paintings, mechanical models, original drawings and manuscripts

La Cambre Architecture

Flageyplein 19; 02.640.96.96
Until MAY 17 Corps de Ville, photography and architecture biennial with works by 20 Belgian and French photographers

La Fonderie – Brussels Museum of Work and Industry

Ransfortstraat 27; 02.410.99.50
Until MAY 4 Tout feu, tout flamme! La révolution du chauffage, history and evolution of home heating

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Until MAY 4 L'Histoire au present (History in the Present), over 300 photographs reporting on the world's conflicts and human suffering by Belgian photojournalist Bruno Stevens

Museum van Elsene

Jean Van Volsemstraat 71; 02.515.64.22
Until APR 27 Black-Paris, Black-Brussels, 100 years of African, West Indian and Afro-American culture in Paris, plus contemporary works by Brussels-based artists

Pascal Polar Gallery

Charleroisesteeweg 108; 02.537.81.36
Until MAY 5 Des corps de style, photographs by Julien Spiewag

René Magritte Museum

Essegheemstraat 135; 02.428.26.26
Until JUNE 30 Dreaming of a Future World, paintings and drawings by the Belgian artist Edmond van Dooren

Rodolphe Janssen Gallery

Livornostraat 35; 02.538.08.18
Until MAR 29 Scenarios, photographs by Sam Samore

Royal Army Museum

Jubelpark 3; 02.737.78.33
Until JUNE 29 (H)erkenning! 175 jaar Leopoldsorde en Nationale Orden, exhibition on the oldest Belgian military order

Until NOV 30 Le Pinceau au fusil (A Paintbrush in the Barrel), World War One paintings, drawings and etchings by soldiers

Royal Library

Kunstberg; 02.519.58.73
Until AUG 24 In de ban van boeken, Belgian book collectors from 1750 to 1850

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11
Until MAR 30 Alechinsky from A to Y, retrospective of work by the Belgian artist
Until MAR 30 Quadrum: International Magazine of Modern Art, tribute to Ernst Goldschmidt, curator and publisher

Royal Museums of Art and History

Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11, www.kmkg-mrah.be
Until APR 20 Onder dak in China, 2000 years of funerary architecture and furniture from China's Henan museum
Until APR 27 From Gilgamesh to Zenobia, highlights from the museum's collection of Middle Eastern art

Silken Berlaymont Hotel

Karel de Grotelaan 11-19; 02.231.09.09
Until APR 25 Dreams in Dreamland, photographs by Michael Chia, winner of the Silken Photoplate Award 2008

Sint-Gorikshallen

Sint-Goriksplein 1; 02.502.44.24
Until MAR 30 Photography & the Changing Cityscape: Brussels 1850-1880, urban development and the evolution of early photography in 19th-century Brussels

Stadhuis

Grote Markt; 02.279.43.50
Until MAY 18 Slovenian Painting after 1945

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49
Until JUNE 1 Star Wars, interactive exhibition with artwork, costumes and objects from the cult science fiction films

Verhaeren Gallery

Gratèsstraat 7; 02.662.16.99
Until MAR 30 Corpus et Terra, photos by Daniel Bastin and Jean-Paul Antoine

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)

Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60
Until MAY 4 Santhal Family: Positions around an Indian Sculpture, group show of contemporary art relating to a 1938 sculpture by Ramkinkar Baij

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
Until MAY 25 Inside Outside, landscape architecture by Petra Blaisse

Extra City

Tulpstraat 79; 0484.42.10.70
Until MAR 30 Mimétisme, group show of contemporary art

Fifty-One Fine Art Photography

Zirkstraat 20; 03.289.84.58
Until MAY 3 USA³, photographs by Peter Granser and Kate Schermerhorn

Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00, www.fotomuseum.be
Until JUNE 8 Patrick De Spiegelaere, retrospective of the late Flemish photographer (1961-2007)
Until JUNE 8 Provisoria, mixed-media collages by Flemish artist Ria Verhaeghe
Until JUNE 8 Face On, interactive portrait installation

MoMu

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470 .27.70
Until AUG 17 Moi, Véronique Branquinho Toute Nue, retrospective of the Belgian designer marking the 10th anniversary of her fashion label

Don't miss this week

**The Brussels Tango Festival**

3-7 April, across Brussels, www.brusselstangofestival.be

The world's most passionate dance must be seen – or done, if you dare – to be understood. The annual Brussels Tango Festival offers ample opportunities for both. Masters of the dance come over from Argentina to join local couples in performances and lessons for beginners to advanced. On 5 April, the festival takes over Louizalaan and turns the pavements beneath the giant Cityscape sculpture on Guldenvlieslaan into a blur of colourful, sexy movement – backed by a live concert.

Bruges**De Bond**

Buiten Smedenest 1; 050.44.30.48
Until MAY 5 Indonésie, works by Emilio López-Menchero.

Ghent**Design Museum**

Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99
Until APR 27 Challenging the Chatelaine, contemporary objects by 78 international designers
Until APR 27 Verleidelijke eenvoud (Seductive Simplicity), silver and ceramic works by Nedda El-Asmar, Belgian Designer of the Year 2007
Until APR 27 Times through Teaware, 100 years of Taiwanese tea culture
Until APR 27 20 years Theo-design, colourful and eccentric eyeglass frames

Maaltebruggekasteel

Kortrijksesteenweg 1023; 09.242.88.22
Until APR 27 Si le monde..., graphic works by Robert Grosloot

Museum Dr Guislain

Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95, www.museumdrguislain.be
Until APR 27 Sick: Between Body and Mind, multimedia exhibition showcasing the links between mental and physical pain, with work by Félicien Rops, Patrik Vermeulen, Dana Wyse, Léon Spilliaert and many others

Provinciaal Cultuurcentrum**Caermersklooster**

Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10
Until MAR 30 Quebec in vorm, works by designers from the collection of Quebec's National Fine Arts Museum

Hasselt**Modemuseum**

Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21
Until OCT 31 Looks: Mode 1750-1958, Two hundred years of fashion history

Z33

Zuivelmarkt (Begijnhof) 33; 011.29.59.60
Until MAY 25 Place@Space (re)shaping everyday life, installations by Paul Casaer, Ryoji Ikeda, Limite Azero, Alice Miceli and others

Knokke**Absolute Art Gallery**

Kustlaan 285; 050.62.22.40

Until APR 30 De magie van de regen, photographs by Dalia Nosratabadi

Leuven**Tweebronnen**

Rijschoolstraat 49; 0497.64.94.52
Until APR 13 De Stiel, retrospective of drawings by Belgian artist Ever Meulen

Machelen-Zulte**Het Roger Raveelmuseum**

Gildestraat 2-8; 09.381.60.00
Until JUNE 15 Witte schaduw, drawings by Roger Raveel

Waregem**BE-PART**

Westerlaan 17; 056.62.94.10
Until APR 20 Paintings, video and photographs by Helmut Stallaerts

Ypres**In Flanders Fields Museum**

Grote Markt 34; 057.23.92.75
Until MAR 30 Oorlogsgetuige: 1914-1918 (War Witness: 1914-1918), drawings by Henry De Groux

Municipal Museum

Ieperleestraat 31; 057.21.83.00
Until JUNE 1 Twilight of the Gods over Ypres, Ypres pictured by photographers Léontine, Maurice and Robert Antony (1893-1930)

Festivals & special events

Béjart Festival 2008: Dance festival honouring the late choreographer Maurice Béjart featuring early and recent works
Until APR 13 in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent
www.musichall.be

VW Spring Sessions 2008: Annual festival of jazz, rock, world music and DJs
Until June 5 across Belgium
www.springsessions.be

Brussels

Art Fever: Hip-hop activities including workshops in graffiti, breakdance, MC's, DJ's, urban fresco and outdoor cinema, plus an international urban dance competition
MAR 30 14.00-21.00 at Kaaitheater, Sainctelettesquare 20
02.201.59.59; www.artfever.be

Balkan Trafik Festival: Weekend of musical activities by artists from the Balkan countries plus a circus, screenings and wine tasting
MAR 27-29 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 02.507.82.00; www.bozar.be

The Brussels Tango Festival:

Argentinian tango across the city. Balls, shows, concerts and workshops
APR 3-7 at venues and public spaces across the city, including Louizalaan and Art Deco swimming pool Bains
www.brusselstangofestival.be.

Gad Elmaleh: standup comedy
MAR 27-29 20.30 at Vorst-Nationaal, Victor Rousseaulaan 208
0900.00.991

Iceland on the Edge: Icelandic cultural festival with exhibitions, concerts, theatre, dance and film
Until JUNE 15 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23
www.bozar.be

Les Hommes viennent de Mars et les femmes de Venus by John Gray, adapted and performed by Paul Dewandre
APR 3 20.30 at Uccle Cultural Centre, Rodestraat 47
02.374.64.84

Live from Broadway: musical hits conducted by David Miller, with Paul Gérimon, bass; Muriel Bruno-Godron, soprano
Until MAR 29 at Woluwe-Saint-Pierre Cultural Centre, Charles Thielemanslaan 93
02.773.05.80, www.livefrombroadway.be

Plaats voor de lente: Spring festival of street and circus arts
Until APR 5 in the Marollen, Hooikai and Warendepark
02.279.64.14, www.brupass.be

Roma Integration in Europe: Launch of exhibition Chachipe and conference on Roma migration
APR 3 at Espace Senghor, Waversesteenweg 366
02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be

MY FLANDERS

Franck Mercken

Franck Mercken owns several upscale men's shops in Antwerp and Hasselt. He talks about the futility of following labels and the real meaning of luxury

How long have you been in the fashion business?

When I was growing up, my parents had a shop called Merco in Bilzen, about 15 kilometres from Hasselt. They sold men's and women's clothing. So I decided to come to the big city of Hasselt in 1968 and open my own shop.

Impressive: so your Hasselt shop has been open for 40 years.

No, I mean I opened in 1986! (laughs) English numbers confuse me sometimes. I'm old, but not that old.

What was your idea behind opening a shop?

To sell fashionable clothes, of course. Back then, I was selling Emporio Armani and Byblos. Now I've expanded. Along with the store in Hasselt, I have two more in Antwerp, which sell Brioni and our own house label, as well as Tom Ford, who used to design for Gucci. I also had a shop in Brussels, selling Zegna suits, but I sold that to the Zegna company.

People generally don't think of Hasselt when they think of fashion...

Only non-Belgians would say that. Hasselt has always been a very important city in Flanders. First there's Antwerp, then Ghent, then Hasselt. People like to dress up here – and they like to look good. If you want good shopping, few places can beat Hasselt.

How would you describe Flemish style?

Not as traditional as the English,

but not as reserved as the French. I spend six weeks of every year travelling to buy stock for my shops, and the designers say that the French always go for the black jacket/white shirt combination. We Flemish are a bit more adventurous – even if we aren't like the Dutch. The Dutch also like quality clothing, but they sometimes go for brighter colours.

And how has your clientele changed over the last 22 years?

Well, they're more aware of fashion and luxury. That's our niche in our Antwerp store: luxury. There are TV shows and magazines now about luxury, and it's more within people's reach. The consumer knows more and more what he wants – and is able to get it.

You started out working in one shop, selling all the clothes yourself. Now you oversee three shops and travel a lot on business. How do you maintain the vision of what your customer wants?

By working with my staff. When I go to buy a collection, I never travel alone: I always have someone who works in the shop I'm buying for with me when I place orders. They see the customers more than I can because they are in one specific shop day in and day out. They know that so-and-so is looking for a certain blazer in size 48, or another one who needs shoes in whatever material. They have relationships with the customers that I'm too busy to have.



Do you ever buy things that you don't like just because you think they will sell?

Not things I don't like – but things I could not wear, of course. There are certain cuts of blazer or a trouser that look good on some men – but on me, well, I'm not exactly the right fit. And some of the tapered shirts...well, I could have worn them a few years ago. I always have to keep my customer in mind, so it's not just about me.

Who is your customer?

Age 30 to 70 and in business: me, to a certain extent. Someone who

likes clothes, but is not a slave to fashion. I like fashion in the Italian ideal – the Zegna and Brioni ideal more than the Dolce & Gabbana ideal.

So you're not about labels.

No, no. I'm about quality. It's something that the trained eye can see or that appeals to someone who truly appreciates the cut and feel of a garment.

Are there some things that just don't work in Belgium but sell elsewhere?

We just became the exclusive seller of Tom Ford clothes in Belgium:

when he was at Gucci, his clothes were more about sex – but now he's gone dandy. It's much more upscale. Our customers like it, but there are some things they are not into – like a Chinese-embroidered silk smoking jacket for €10,000. Then again, we have sold two crocodile overnight bags at €22,000 each – so it's not just a matter of price.

What is your idea of luxury?

It's a combination of quality materials, superb craftsmanship and excellent fit. It does not have to be expensive, and it doesn't always mean a fancy label. Sometimes, the label is just a way to get you to pay more money. It's difficult to judge: you can have an extremely luxurious wool sweater and a passable cashmere sweater. You know luxury when you feel it. Then there's the luxury experience: you could buy a pullover online, but there's something about the shopping experience that, at its best, is luxury.

Interview by Steven Tate



THE LAST WORD

"I am a person who is unhappy with things as they stand. We cannot accept the world as it is. Each day we should wake up foaming at the mouth because of the injustice of things."

"An intelligent libido doesn't exist."

"Tetitatutis."
("It's time to call it a day")

West Flemish dialect word.
According to witnesses, this was Hugo Claus's final word before he died.

Hugo Claus, 1929-2008

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