Antwerp is set to host one of the largest comedy events ever held in Flanders when the first-ever Live Comedy Festival starts this week. Kicking off on Friday, the festival features 13 comedians from Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK and the US.

Many performers at the Live Comedy Festival in Antwerp will be familiar to local audiences from television shows such as the British stand-up comedy programme Live at the Apollo. Others, the American comedians in particular, are likely to be less familiar to the crowds at Antwerp’s festival venues.

Still, organiser Tom Bertels is confident that every performance will tickle the funny bone. “We’ve only invited quality, professional comedians who offer a great show,” he says. Hans Teeuwen from the Netherlands opens the proceedings with his band The Painkillers in a unique mix of comedy and jazz. The following night top American comedian Reginald D Hunter takes to the stage with his controversially titled show A Nigga Runs Through It.

Over the next six weeks, they will be joined by leading comedians from the UK, including Jimmy Carr, Jack Dee, Stephen Merchant and Daniel Sloss, and American comics including Jim Breuer, Whitney Cummings and Eddie Griffin. Flanders will be well represented with performances from local comedians Jeroen Leenders, William Boeva and Begijn Le Bleu. Dutchman Jan Jaap van der Wal rounds out the line-up.

The process of selecting the acts has involved many trips to the UK and beyond. Bertels used these trips to fine-tune the line-up and select the supporting acts that will accompany some of the shows. “Our headliners will perform alone, but we’ve identified some great new talent to support the newer acts,” he says. English-language comedy lovers are spoiled for choice, with nine of the 13 shows to be performed in English. That also includes the performance by Ghent comedian Leenders.
Brussels to co-host Euro 2020

New national stadium at Heizel must be ready for football’s European Championship

Brussels has been selected to host four matches of the 2020 European Championship, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) has announced. The city will host three group matches and one last-16 match. As capital of Europe, the city will continue to lobby to be allowed to stage the opening match, said Alan Courtois, the city alderman who led the bid. Earlier this month, UEFA gave Brussels’ candidature a positive report. Brussels has the experience of staging major sporting events, UEFA said, as well as the necessary infrastructure and hotel accommodation. However, Brussels does not have a stadium that measures up to UEFA standards. The new national football stadium is planned to be constructed on what is currently Parking C on the Heizel site, where ground has yet to be broken. UEFA is expecting the stadium to be completed in time for the championship. To mark the 60th anniversary of the tournament, Euro 2020 is being staged around the continent, rather than in one country – or in two, as happened in 2000 in Belgium, and the Netherlands. The other host cities will be Munich, Baku, Saint Petersburg, Rome, Copenhagen, Bucharest, Amsterdam, Dublin, Bilbao, Budapest and Glasgow, with the semi-finals and final taking place in London. "It was unthinkable for the capital of Belgium and of Europe not to be one of the 13 match cities," said Rudi Vervoort, minister-president of the Brussels-Capital Region. In a statement, Brussels city council added: "Brussels has finally won back her place on the international football stage."

Obstacles like delivery trucks cost De Lijn millions every year

Obstacles in busy traffic areas, such as badly parked cars, lorries loading and unloading and ill-timed traffic lights are costing Flemish public transport authority De Lijn millions of euros every year in lost time, according to a study carried out for the authority. Part of the study involved filming a whole day’s traffic on the number 24 tram in Antwerp, between Siburg and Schoonmelk, using a camera fixed to the front of the tram. Researchers found that the trip from terminus to terminus, which should take 51 minutes, was often delayed by as much as 15 minutes. When taking into account the number of trips on all lines at peak traffic times, the total day’s delay reaches 15 hours. If the obstacles were removed, the same service could be offered using four fewer trams, saving about €1 million a year for every line in operation. Shot on 4 September, the footage shows how small delays can easily accumulate. The tram is delayed by 30 seconds at stops where passengers cross in front of the vehicle. At one point the tram loses 2.5 minutes waiting for a delivery truck to finish unloading. Insufficiently timed traffic lights cost the tram more than one minute, as does left-turning traffic. On stretches of the route where the tram has its own carriageway apart from other traffic, on the other hand, it manages to speed along unhindered.

Police strike over pensions

Unions representing police officers were due to take part in a national strike on Tuesday, 23 September, as Flan- ders Today went to press. The announcement came after a major demonstration in Brussels last week in which 14,000 marchers took part (pictured). The unions are demanding confirmation from the federal government coalition that pension arrangements agreed in 2000-2001 will be maintained. ‘Those negotiations, which merged the gendarmerie, judicial police and local police into one federal force, were carried out by eight political parties including those now negotiating to form the next federal government. However, a recent ruling by the Constitutional Court on early retirement provisions for police officers threatens to strike down those agreements. ‘The rules were confirmed in 2008 and 2009, but people seem now to be suffering from amnesia,’ said ACV representative Jan Adam, speaking to the throng in the Jubelpark. ‘We feel betrayed.’ The government negotiators were given until Tuesday to offer a ‘strong signal’ of support for the unions’ case. ‘Agreements have to be respected,’ said NSPV leader Gert Coocks. ‘We will hold a day of action on 23 September, and other actions will follow.’

Jihadists arrested at airport may have been planning attack

A man and a woman arrested last month at Brussels Airport suspected of being jihad fighters returning from Syria may have been planning a terrorist attack on the Berlaymont, home of the Euro- pean Commission and one of the most symbolic buildings in Brussels, according to the Dutch broadcaster NOS. The past, both of Turkish origin, live in the Hague but rented an apartment in Brussels where, according to Het Laatste Nieuws, explosives were found as well as firearms and bullet-proof vests. The prosecutor’s office has declined to confirm or deny the story, and the Commission said it had no knowledge of any specific threat. The two are being held on suspicion of being members of a terrorist organisation. The prosecutor did confirm that several arrests had been made in recent weeks involving Belgians returning from fighting in Syria. The alert has been higher since May, when four people were killed in a shooting at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. A French national who had fought in Syria is awaiting trial on suspi- cion of carrying out the attack.

In related news, the Flemish parliament has voted to continue offering public transport passes to its members and honorary members, rejecting a proposal to abandon the system. Earlier this year, minister of state Freddy Willockx returned his free member’s train pass in protest at plans by De Lijn to stop free transport for over-65s. He then suggested to both the Flem- ish and federal parliaments that free transport for members be abandoned. Last week the steering committee of the Flemish Parliament rejected the proposal, explaining that it would require an amendment to the Constitu- tion.

Belgium’s place in the world rank- ing of reputation, compiled by the Reputation Institute and based on a survey of 26,000 people in 55 countries. Sixteen criteria include natural beauty, economic policy and hospitality.

Increase over the last 10 years in the cost of raising a child, according to family organisation Gezins- bond. In 2004, a child cost on average €378 a month, rising to €461 in 2014.
WEEK IN BRIEF

People living in Flanders are four times more likely to use a bike as a means of transport than residents of Brussels, according to a survey of 1,000 people in both cities.

Taxi drivers from Canada, India, the US and Europe, including Belgium, are protesting against the Uber taxi service on 8 October. Taxi unions met in Brussels last week, faced with the growth of Uber—now operating in 205 cities in 45 countries—in conflict with taxi service regulations. The Brussels-Capital Region originally banned the service, which has nevertheless continued to operate, and last week offered free taxi rides as a promotional stunt. Previous taxi protests in Brussels have led to serious traffic disruption.

The bodies of an elderly couple were found in a house on fire after a power cut last week. The man is thought to have been swimming in the vicinity of a breakwater when he got into difficulties. The man tried to rescue her, but both were carried off by the strong current.

Conflict arose between police and a crowd of about 200 young people on Ghent's Woodrow Wilsonplein after a police patrol detained two teenagers accused of an attack on inspectors of the public transport authority De Lijn. During the stand-off, two officers used pepper spray when they found themselves surrounded. The crowd later dispersed.

Offside

Conflict over a new law of the jungle

Last week saw the arrival of a new resident of Antwerp Zoo, and never has there been such hope that the welcome would be a warm one. Kiki (pictured) is a seven-year-old lowland gorilla from the Heidelberg Zoo in Germany. Kiki went through a difficult birth, which left her subject to epileptic seizures. The gorilla group in Heidelberg was unstable, which made things difficult for her with fragile health. "At feeding time, she was always last in line," explained Ilse Segers, spokesperson for Antwerp Zoo. "Sometimes she got nothing to eat, and now she's underweight."

Kiki's experience is an unfortunate effect of natural selection, where stronger members of the group charge of the rescue operation, for which she received an honorary knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II. He was ennobled by King Albert II in 2002.

Antwerp chief of police Serge Muysers has appealed to government negotiators to allow the deployment of the Belgian army for the protection of Jewish institutions in the city. He stressed that the army would only be brought in during extended periods of increased risk of terrorist attacks.

Olivier Vanneste, governor of West Flanders from 1979 to 1997, has died at the age of 81. Vanneste once participated in the rainforest expedition in 1987 when the ferry Herald of Free Enterprise foundered off the port of Zeebrugge. He was in the last in line, "explained Ilse Segers, chief of police for Antwerp. "So she has not been able to obtain money during the brownouts, which will also affect electronic payment terminals in shops.

A fire that broke out in a flat above a synagogue on Klinkstraat in the Brussels district of Anderlecht last week was arson but has been referred to the Dutch proverb "Het oog van de meester maakt het pan voor de oude," which means the work advances better when the boss is watching. "The eye of Frank van de Eeden raises the level of a film," he said.

Van den Eeden was born in the Netherlands and came to Brussels to study at St-Lukas art school, where he soon began to focus on what was happening behind the camera. The director of photography (DoP) is responsible for the lighting and camerawork of a film, leading to the overall look and feel. DoPs have been known to be able to make or break a movie. Van den Eeden's debut feature, following a string of shorts, was one of the popular Blinker family films. He then spent five years working on more shorts and TV before his first collaboration with Fien Troch, Een ander zijn geluk ("Someone Else's Happiness").

Friends of Flanders

This year's Flemish Community Prize for Film has been awarded to Frank van den Eeden, the highly regarded cinematographer. The prize was handed over at the weekend by culture minister Sven Gatz.

The National Bank of Belgium has cautioned against using electronic payment networks in the event of a loss of power this winter. The government has a brownout plan in place for times when demand threatens to exceed supply. According to NBB, people will be unable to obtain money during the brownouts, which will also affect electronic payment terminals in shops.

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Flanders’ waterways “cleanest in 15 years” says agency
Progress made to improve nitrate levels in region’s rivers and streams

T he rivers, canals and streams in Flanders are much cleaner than they were 15 years ago, according to the latest annual report of the Flemish environment agency VMM. The agency, which has been measuring nitrate levels in Flemish groundwater since 1999, said in its report that the nitrate concentration had dropped dramatically in many places. In 1999, the nitrate level was above the legal limit in 60% of locations where it was measured; the figure now is 21%.

Flanders gives €250,000 in aid to tackle Ebola epidemic

Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois, who is also responsible for foreign policy, has approved a €250,000 emergency aid package to assist in the fight against the Ebola epidemic that is raging across large parts of West Africa. The payment will go to Flanders-based companies, medical aid organisations and local councils to protect citizens and medical staff from the disease.

5TH COLUMN
Power slipping away
How does a party cope with the loss of power? The question is particularly poignant right now for CD&V. Until the Verhofstadt years (1999-2007), Christian-democrats being in charge went without saying. CD&V (then CVP) was the obvious leader, given its electoral strength, and the party could pick out coalition partners at will. The archetypal Christian-democrat was Jean-Luc Dehaene: a statesman above all concerned more about governing in the best possible way than about ideology.

CD&V's current party president, Wouter Beke, is an ideology specialist, who has published essays on the Christian-democrat doctrine. In recent years, though, Beke has become quite a pragmatist, too. And as a pragmatist, he has to deal with the loss of power. Since the May elections, he has taken some surprising decisions.

One of them was CD&V linking its fate to N-VA, the party that won the elections convincingly. This made a continuation of the sitting tripartite coalition of socialists, Christian-democrats and liberals impossible, even though that had gained some seats in parliament. Parting prime minister Elio Di Rupo (PS) finds this incomprehensible. But, it is reasoned, a party with over 30% of the Flemish vote is too large to ignore. Leaving the nationalist N-VA out, once again, would only increase its popularity among voters. Also, CD&V made an informal agreement with N-VA to deal with the position of Flemish minister-president and federal prime minister between them. This solution suited them both: N-VA does not want to provide a prime minister for a country it does not believe in, while CD&V’s Kris Peeters was happy enough to take the job.

Socialist Johan Vande Lanotte and liberal Karel de Gucht have criticised this. They feel CD&V is letting N-VA off the hook by not forcing it to take up its responsibilities.

Things only got more complicated when CD&V gave up the prime minister position so that Minister-President Elio Di Rupo could become European commissioner. The move “liberated” the party when it came to solving social and economic policy, but how credible are “leftist” demands from a centrist party?

One of them was CD&V linking N-VA as its partner in the future government: steering the government does not have a French-speaking majority. On the Flemish side, the most promising candidate is outgoing migration secretary Maggie De Block, who is popular among French-speaking Belgians.

Peeters calls on liberals to propose a candidate prime minister

Kris Peeters has called on the Flemish and French-speaking liberal parties to put forward a possible candidate to serve as prime minister as soon as possible. Peeters (CD&V) is one of two senior politicians steering the delicate negotiations to form a federal coalition government. Who will serve as prime minister is an important part of the discussion.

The liberals have been invited to propose a candidate in order to balance the government, since CD&V has already been granted the post of European Commissioner, while the Flemish nationalist N-VA is not. The most plausible candidate, not is interested in leading a country that it would prefer to see abolished.

Peeters has urged the liberals to come up with a name quickly so that the coalition can begin the tough job of lobbying €17.3 billion off the budget. “It’s been difficult, and it is going to get even more difficult,” he said.

Belgium expected to join global action to defeat IS

Belgium seems very likely to join more than 30 other countries that have pledged to work together in order to defeat the threat from Islamic State (IS) terrorism.

Outgoing foreign minister Didier Reynders joined representatives from around the world in Paris last week to discuss a strategy against IS militants. “The threat is global, and the response must be global,” said French president Francois Hollande, who hosted the meeting. "There is no time to lose."

Most Belgian political parties support the idea of participating in an international mission. Outgoing prime minister Elio Di Rupo stated that “Belgium should join an international coalition.”

His position already has the support of the Flemish nationalists N-VA, the Flemish Christian-democrats CD&V, the Flemish socialists SP.A and the environmental party Groen.

More cuts needed as funding gap grows

A body composed of senior economists known as the Monitoring Committee has warned federal government negotiators that the agreement will need to save a further €600 million on top of the €17 billion already forecast if it is to balance its budget.

The Monitoring Committee said that the new government would need to find an extra €24 million this year and €570 million in 2015. The additional income is needed because of slower economic growth than expected.

The experts said that the economy would grow by 1.1% this year rather than the expected 1.4%, and by 1.5% in 2015 rather than the forecasted 1.8%. The announcement could make it more difficult to form a coalition based on the three Flemish parties N-VA, CD&V and Open VLD and the French-speaking liberals MR. The parties are currently struggling to find a way to balance the budget without increasing taxes.

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Flanders waterways “cleanest in 15 years” says agency

Progress made to improve nitrate levels in region’s rivers and streams

The rivers, canals and streams in Flanders are much cleaner than they were 15 years ago, according to the latest annual report of the Flemish environment agency VMM. The agency, which has been measuring nitrate levels in Flemish groundwater since 1999, said in its report that the nitrate concentration had dropped dramatically in many places. In 1999, the nitrate level was above the legal limit in 60% of locations where it was measured; the figure now is 21%.

The level has dropped over the past 15 years due to information campaigns and official inspections that have persuaded farmers to cut down the amount of nitrates they use in fertilisers, the report said.

But the authors added that the level of nitrates in Flemish waterways was still frequently well above the European norm of 16%. The report also showed that some rivers are more polluted than others. The rivers Nete and Demer were very clean, whereas the Lys and the Leie in West Flanders were polluted due to intensive pig farming in the region.
Stand-up finds its footing

Comedy festival brings host of leading comedians to Flanders

"I like to make it hard for myself," explains Leenders, who has lately been trying out his English material on audiences across Belgium and the Netherlands. "Every language has nuances and grammatical tricks. These are new for me in English, but a nice experiment."

One of the youngest comedians to perform is Daniel Sloss from Scotland. Now 24, Sloss began trying out his material on family and friends at the age of 15, performing his first gig at 17. "I'm slightly more opinionated and annoying now," he says.

Sloss decided not to tailor his material for a non-English-speaking audience. "There's always the fear that people won't understand everything I say," he says. "But from my experience, they always do. I do speak a lot slower and pronounce things better, because I'm aware that my accent is quite stupid."

The Live Comedy Festival is part of Comedy Fest Europe, a collaboration of a handful of European stand-up comedy promoters. Many of the comedians appearing in Antwerp will also perform at events in Norway, Sweden and Iceland. However, Antwerp will host the largest number of performances.

"By combining the Antwerp Festival with events in northern Europe, we are able to offer the comedians a longer tour," says Bertels. "This makes it much more appealing to them." The plan is to make Antwerp's Live Comedy Festival an annual event although the 2015 edition may take place later in the year.

Bertels believes Antwerp is the natural home for the Flemish leg of the festival because of the high percentage of people who speak English. "To understand the international acts, the audience will need English, and in Antwerp, most people under 40 comprehend it well," he says. "More and more Flemish people are also using English in their daily work lives."

The Live Comedy Festival will be staged in five theatres in Antwerp ranging from the 2,000-seat Stadsschouwburg to the 400-seat Zuidereiland. Bertels hopes that the latter will become a long-term venue for comedy shows in Antwerp. "It's a very adaptable space with bare brick walls - very atmospheric," he says.

Stand-up comedy is, in fact, a relatively recent phenomenon in Flanders. "Twenty-five years ago Flanders had never heard of the concept," says Bertels. Then, in the late 1990s, two comedy venues opened almost simultaneously - Le Bal Infernal in Ghent and De Buster in Antwerp. Both clubs are now closed, but they provided important outlets for local talent, including stand-up virgins such as Nigel Williams.

Born in Bristol, Williams moved to Flanders when he was 20. By the time he took to the stage at De Buster, he was working as a union organiser at Antwerp's Opel factory. "I performed in Dutch every week for six weeks before I got my first proper laugh," remembers Williams. "That was like an injection of heroin, and I've been a comedy junkie ever since."

In addition to performing across Europe, Williams also runs Stand-Up Antwerp, a monthly English-language comedy club in the cellar of De Groene Waterman bookshop. Held on a Wednesday night, the 100-seat venue is always sold out. "We're aiming for quality on a small scale," explains Williams. "I want to build a comedy audience who come without knowing who is on the bill."

Along with bringing one or two acts from the UK or elsewhere in Europe, Williams invites up-and-coming talent to perform each month. "To be a true comedian, you have to do time on stage, but there are not enough clubs here for people to get the experience." That's a sentiment with which Leenders agrees. "People in Belgium don't really know stand-up," he says. "Real stand-up demands that you think, I wear a lot, and I make people think." And Leenders has a piece of advice for those who don't like that. "Tell your friends, so they don't come either.

Headliner for the night is Sean Hughes from the UK. Supporting acts were selected based on feedback from the Stand-Up Antwerp audience and will include Christian Schultze-Loh from Germany, Isak Jansson from Sweden, and the UK's Maureen Younger. Like all Stand-Up Antwerp events, every act will be performed in English.

The success of Stand-Up Antwerp has seen similar events take off in Brussels and Hasselt, which held its first event at Café Café earlier this month. "We give it to local people to run but support them by sharing comedians," Williams says. "Each venue is run like a proper comedy club. We want to build an audience of people who know they will have a good night."

True comedy aficionados love such open-mic nights where inexperienced comedians get to try out their acts. They offer a chance for audiences to discover new talent and have been a launching pad for many now-famous faces, including Williams and Leenders. Antwerp's Café The Joker is where Leenders and William Boeva got their first break, and the venue is still going strong.

"Sundays are dedicated to professional comedians who usually perform in Dutch," explains Fokke van der Meulen, organiser of the comedy events at Café The Joker. "Two Wednesdays a month, we do an open-mic night. Anyone can perform for up to eight minutes, in Dutch or English." Flanders may not have a long tradition of stand-up comedy, but it is rapidly becoming more familiar to local audiences. It's to be hoped that the Live Comedy Festival will be the shot of adrenaline needed to encourage Flemish audiences to explore this unique art form more.

More Stand-Up in Flanders

Stand-up comedy might not be the most popular pastime in Flanders, but the number of venues catering to comedy addicts continues to grow.

Café The Joker

Started by Fokke van der Meulen and Yasmine Van Stuendaal in 2006, Café The Joker hosts both professional and amateur comedians. Most performances are in Dutch, but the venue also welcomes English-speaking comedians. Check the website for details of upcoming shows; reservations aren't necessary. Café The Joker, Klein Markts 16, Antwerp

Stand-Up Antwerp/Brussels/Hasselt

Once a month, Stand-Up Antwerp brings top international comedians to Belgium. In Antwerp, they perform in the cellar of De Groene Waterman bookshop where the evening is hosted by Nigel Williams. This month, Stand-Up Brussels events will move to The Black Sheep in Elsene, while Stand-Up Hasselt starts its first season at Café Café. De Groene Waterman, Wildstraat 7, Antwerp

www.facebook.com/StandUpAntwerp

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Agristo wins Export Lion

Agristo, the world’s largest producer of frozen potato products, based in Harelbeke, West Flanders, has been awarded this year’s Louvre van de export, or Export Lion, for companies with more than 50 employees. The prize for smaller companies went to Michelen-based High Tech Metal Seals. The winners were announced last week by Flanders Investment and Trade (Fit). “Both companies are an inspiring example for enterprise in Flanders,” commented Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois, handing out the awards. The Export Lion, administered by Fit, is a prestigious business award, given annually to large and small companies that perform exceptionally well in export markets. Agristo produces more than 200 frozen potato products, mainly as private label goods to be sold by supermarkets and other retailers in 116 countries. The company employs 373 people and last year had a turnover of €242 million, 99% of it coming from foreign sales. High Tech Metal Seals manufactures seals for the aviation and aerospace industries, offshore oil and gas installations, nuclear research and medical applications. The company has 34 employees and last year exported to 26 countries, where sales accounted for 96% of the €6.7 million turnover. The two companies were among six nominees. The others were Brouwerij Huycke, brewers of Delirium Tremens, and special brewer Vermeiren Princeps in the small-to-medium category, and crop protection specialists Biobest and Datwyler Pharma Packaging Belgium in the category for larger businesses.

Antwerp researchers launch burnout platform for employers

Due to recent legislation, employers in Belgium are legally required to reduce the risk of burnout in the workplace, and they can now rely on a new web platform to help them out. Assessment and talent management company ‘Balento co-operated with researchers at Antwerp University (UA) to develop an online tool that provides employers with information and advice on burnout and “burnout”. The tool offers assistance with promoting the development of talent, the prevention of burnout and mobility questions, such as mobile desks, digital availability and working at home. “Employees are more than ever before considering their staff’s career development, commitment and well-being in the workplace,” said Wouter Van Bockhoven of UA. “The retention of valuable employees, mobility, the possibility of working longer, the prevention of burnout...these are all crucial themes for companies and organisations.”

Delhaize launches line of products containing insects

Delhaize has become the first supermarket chain in Flanders to launch a range of products based on insect protein. The chain will offer two sorts of savoury spread, branded Green Bugs, both containing mealworms. The spreads, clearly stating their origin on the label, contain no identifiable insect parts. They come in two Flavours – tomato, carrot and – and look more like jars of baby food than anything creepy-crawly. The spreads cost €1.42 for 125 grams. The tomato spread contains about 6% of ground mealworm, while the carrot version contains only 4%. “Products made from insects are trending at the moment, and Delhaize wants to reaffirm its role as a pioneer in the field of food retailing,” said spokesperson Roel Dekever.

AB InBev prepares biggest takeover bid ever

Leuven-based AB InBev, the world’s largest brewing group, is reporting by the Wall Street Journal to be in talks with its banks with a view to preparing a takeover bid for SABMiller, its biggest competitor, now based in London. The bid is said to be worth €42.2 billion, the largest the beer industry has seen since the takeover of Anheuser-Busch by InBev in 2008. SAB – which stands for South African Breweries was – established to meet the beer needs of South African miners at the end of the 19th century and moved its base to London in 1999, three years before taking over Miller Brewing of Milwaukee, SABMiller has operations worldwide and owns several brands, including Pilsner Urquell, Fosters, Grolsch, Peroni and Carling Black Label. The company is also a major bottler of Coca-Cola. Rumours of a bid by AB InBev have been circulating for some time, with a recent failed bid by SABMiller to take over Dutch brewer Heineken, owner of Alken-Maes, a sign of a pre-emptive attempt by SABMiller to defend itself. A takeover of Heineken would have made SABMiller too large to be in danger of being taken over itself. News of the failed bid was only recently released, when Heineken responded to rumours. A takeover by AB InBev would make its brewer less dependent on its own Belgian brewery unsalable and give the Leuven brewing giant new market possibilities in Africa, China and Australia. AB InBev brands include Jupiler, Stella Artois and Hoegaarden in Belgium, and Budweiser and Corona in the US.

VRT series to stream on newly launched Netflix

Six VRT programmes will be available via the Netflix streaming service, which launched in Belgium last week. Monthly subscriptions start at €7.99 and allows customers to stream films and TV series to watch on computers, games consoles, TV or tablets. The service is expected to be popular mainly in Flanders, where viewers are accustomed to watching British and American productions in their original version with subtitles. For those Flemish viewers, Netflix will be including six series from the VRT, with more to come later if the experiment is a success, VRT general manager Jean-Philippe De Tender said. Details of exactly which series are involved have not yet been released. “This is in the first place a service for media consumers, who want to watch live in real time but also be able to watch when it suits them,” De Tender said. “On top of that, we’re selling the six series, which bring money to the VRT that we can invest in new series. Part of that income also goes directly to the co-producers.” Flemish media giant Telenet, meanwhile, has announced that it will make its own drama series, together with Zaventem-based production house deMensen. Chaussée d’Amour (Leve Boulevard) will be available to paid subscribers, with all 10 episodes released at the same time. The series, about a woman who goes to live in a brothel along a suburban road in Flanders after her divorce, will be directed by Nathalie Bastrems, who also made the family drama Clan for VTM. Production begins in 2015 for broadcast in 2016.
Flemish company unlocks new market with mid-sized windmills

Catching the wind

because the available space for wind turbines is limited in the geographically small region of Flanders, manufacturers tend to maximise the power of the turbines for which they receive a permit. This explains why most wind turbines in Flanders, often placed along highways, loom large like giants and deliver several megawatts of power to the electrical grid.

But this preference for large wind turbines has had consequences at the national and international level, since it has made the segment of mid-sized wind turbines on the energy market a real terra incognita. Yet smaller turbines are the most suitable to deliver decentralised, green and cheap electricity to small- and medium-sized companies across a variety of sectors – from industry and retail to farming and horticulture.

XANT, a young Brussels-based company, decided headfirst into this overlooked market segment with the development of a wind turbine that can be easily and quickly assembled and that can even be shipped to distant locations. The container was designed according to the ‘JEP’ method, or Just Enough Essential Parts. In this case, ‘just enough’ means nine parts that together fit into a standard 12-metre container. You could compare your turbine with a do-it-yourself kit that’s easy to transport around the world,” says Alexander Van Heuverswyn, the XANT sales manager. “The easy shipping is important, as our ambition is to sell our turbines to foreign customers who want to use it as a hybrid solution, meaning in combination with a diesel generator or photovoltaic system.” Because remote locations can sometimes be hard to reach, XANT developed a version of its turbine that doesn’t require a crane to be erected. “The turbine can be easily rigged up using just a gin pole,” Van Heuverswyn says, referring to a specialised pulley system. “And the container can be used as a maintenance of control room afterwards.”

But that’s for next year. First, XANT wants to perfect its expertise by delivering mid-sized wind turbines – mid-sized being powered with a stand-alone pole – to customers in Flanders and Europe. “Because there are only nine components, there isn’t a lot of maintenance needed,” explains Van Heuverswyn. “The turbine is easy to assemble and transport; it doesn’t require a crane to be lifted. In most cases, we will be used for direct electricity consumption, not for production and supply to electrical networks.”

So how much does a XANT wind turbine cost? “The current price fluctuates around €300,000, depending on the choice of a standing pole or pole and a metal type of rope, and also on the characterstics of the direct environment and the subsoil. It takes about 10 days to install. Of course, we provide assistance with the installation.”

For Van Heuverswyn, it’s obvious why small businesses and organisations would be interested in such mid-sized wind turbines. “For free electricity. After eight to 10 years, the wind turbine has paid for itself. From then on, it delivers free electricity to the company. The life expectancy is 20 years or longer, as replacement parts, like generators, are available.”

In addition, Van Heuverswyn says, wind turbines also give companies a better and greener image. “It’s even possible to paint the blades the colours of the company’s logo, so it just might replace their traditional flag.”

XANT is a joint venture between 3E, a pioneer in renewable energy; Vyncke Energietechniek, a provider of biomass combustion technology; and Jo Versavel, a venture capitalist from West Flanders. A few weeks ago, XANT signed a strategic deal with ParticipatieMaatschappij Vaan- deren, the Flemish government’s investment company. The deal means a capital injection of €1 million and a loan of another €1 million. “The collaboration with Vyncke creates possibilities because our wind turbine could be used to power small and localised biomass plants,” says Van Heuverswyn.

InnOVATIOn

PHILIP VAN DAMME IS A NEUROLOGIST AT THE LEUVEN UNIVERSITY HOSPI-タル (UZ Leuven), where he oversees research on the neuro muscular disease ALS

The Ice Bucket Challenge must have come just at the right moment for your research on the exact nature of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS?

It’s like a gift from heaven. In the last few months, we’ve begun roll- ing out the MinE project, an international research project that will analyse the DNA of at least 15,000 ALS patients, with a special group of 7,500 healthy people. Research into the genetic basis of ALS has never been done on this scale before. Hospitals and universi- ties in Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK, Ireland and Portugal are already involved. The ALS Liga Belgium has decided to allocate the money raised by the challenge to the MinE project. We’ll need it, because the sequencing of entire human genomes is a very costly proce- dure. With our team in Leuven, we want to analyse the DNA of at least 500 patients.

If you’re looking into the genes of patients, you must be assum- ing that ALS has a genetic cause. Indeed, all types of ALS are due to a com- bination of aging, environmental and genetic factors is thought to cause ALS, the genetic cause may be the easiest to identify, but at the moment, we literally have no clue what this genetic cause might look like. It could be a collection of separate SNPs [single-letter mutations in the DNA code] or an interplay between different faulty genes.

Some patients die just months after an ALS diagnosis; some live with the disease for years. Why is that?

The mechanism that controls the huge diversity of ALS is still a mystery. We know that it is caused by irregular proteins in the nerve cells of the motor system. You could call ALS a neurogenerative disorder like Alzheimer’s, with the difference that it only affects the motor nerves. But what determines the differences in the progression of this process is still unclear.

Can ALS, like Alzheimer’s, affect entire families?

Yes, but this type of ALS is rather rare; it makes up only 10% of cases. The other 90% suffer from so-called sporadic ALS, in which no hereditary link can be found. Hopefully, the results of the MinE project will provide us with a genetic cause and offer the start- ing point for research into an effective treatment, because no treatment exists at this time.

Back surgeries increase by 40% In the decade to 2012, the number of back surgeries in Belgium increased by 40%. For many patients however, interven- tion doesn’t help and can even lead to complications, accord- ing to the Belgian Health Care Knowledge Centre (KCE). For many patients, surgery is not the appropriate solution for their back pain. In most cases of unnecessary surgeries, patients complain about non- specific lower back pain for which there is no clear cause such as inflammation or a fall. According to recent findings, a minimum 100% increase in the use of physical therapy is the best option in most cases. KCE argues in favour of more infor- mation for physicians, who should reserve back surgeries for carefully selected patients.

UHasselt MS research gets funding boost Hasselt University is taking part in a huge international research effort for the development of drugs and rehabilitation strategies for multiple sclerosis (MS), an incurable chronic disease that affects the central nervous system. Patients with relapsing remitting MS experience sudden periods of physical decline, with periods of recovery. Patients with progressive MS suffer from symptoms that only get worse, without any chance of improvement. Over the next five years, the Inter- national Progressive MS Alli- ance will launch a new European project into research on progressive MS. Among the 22 projects selected for the first round of funding, an Antwerp Antwerp University, which receive a total of €755,000.
The Bulletin and ING Belgium invite you to a seminar on
PROPERTY IN BELGIUM

• Joris Vrielynck, COO, Optima Global Estate.
  “Latest trends in the residential market.”

• Alexis Lemmerling, Notary, Berquin.
  “Update on recent legal changes.”

• Dave Deruytter, Head of Expats and Non Residents, ING.
  “Finance and insure Private Real Estate in Belgium? How about taxation?”

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(nearest subway station: Trône)
- Registration at 17:30
- Presentations at 18:00 sharp

FREE ENTRY • Register before October 6 at www.thebulletin.be/realestate
KU Leuven embraces entrepreneurship with new facilities

As the new academic year begins, students at the University of Leuven have the choice of a new package of courses aimed at starting a business, as well as a new enterprise platform to guide and assist them in the idea-to-market process. The new lessons offered by the university’s economics and business faculty includes a one-year module on the most crucial step taken by any start-up – drawing up a business plan. During October, meanwhile, the university will launch its enterprise platform LCE, which stands for Leuven Community for Innovation Driven Entrepreneurship. The platform brings together a group of potential partners with would-be student entrepreneurs. LCE project leader Wim Fyen says that in the past entrepreneurship at Leuven was either too academic – the teaching of case studies by economics professors, for example – or too confusing. "The network of enterprise players in Leuven had become too complex," he explains. "Students needed to have one central place to turn to. LCE will serve as a hub that brings everything together." A student with an idea for a business can address LCE and get advice and support from old hands in the field, such as Flanders’ Enterprise Agency for business creativity; the digital research centre and ideas incubator iMinds and the Leuven Innovation Networking Circle of high-tech innovators, companies and researchers. LCE will offer four contact points for students, including the economics faculty, where they will be able to make use of meeting rooms and office space. The university has made financing of €138,000 available, on top of which the province of Flemish Brabant is giving €100,000. Although it may be early days to think of such a thing, the university has already decided it will not make a share in any income generated by student enterprise projects. All rights arising out of successful projects go to the students, a spokesperson said. Meanwhile, the platform will allow the university to keep track of promising new businesses. In related news, the Erasmus University College in Brussels is also starting a Bachelor’s degree in Ideas and Innovation this year, with lessons offered by business professionals in creativity, enterprise, people skills and innovation. So far 62 students have signed up.

University hospitals ask for €60 million
Belgium’s seven university hospitals have asked the incoming federal government for an increase of €60 million in funding for their teaching role. According to the council of university hospitals (RUZB), Belgium pays much less for its teaching hospitals than neighbouring countries, and the shortage could have a negative impact on patients. Last year the hospitals received €139 million for their teaching activities, including teaching medical and nursing students and carrying out research. RUZB has asked the government to increase the share it pays of the salary of specialized nurses, including teaching medical and nursing students and carrying out research. Last year the hospitals received €139 million for their teaching activities, including teaching medical and nursing students and carrying out research. RUZB has asked the government to increase the share it pays of the salary of specialized nurses, including teaching medical and nursing students and carrying out research. Last year the hospitals received €139 million for their teaching activities, including teaching medical and nursing students and carrying out research.
**WEEK IN ACTIVITIES**

**Fort Weekend Lizele** ‘14

Fort Lizele is the best preserved remnant of Antwerp’s First World War defences. This weekend, living history re-enactors will present a war encampment, and visitors can explore the fort and its surroundings. 27-28 September, 10.00-18.00, Fortlaan 2, Paars; £5 | WWW.FORTEN1914.BE/FORTWEEKEND

**CanArt Festival**

Tenth and last edition of this three-day festival of music, dance, performance and visual arts. This truly is an event with something for everyone: wine tasting, tattoo art, skate park, children’s shows and more. 26-28 September, Domein Horve; Vandervalle, Boom-guardiastraat 188, Kruize (West Flanders); free | WWW.CANARTFESTORG

**Day of the Wijers**

A wijer is a manmade pond used for fish farming hundreds of years ago. There are more than 1,175 of them in one area of Limburg, creating a unique natural environment. Activities at more than a dozen locations including guided walks, fly-fishing imitations, bike tours, bird watching and more. 28 September; free | WWW.DWDLI.DE

**Mussel Festival**

The festivities begin with two historic fleets of sailboats entering the Willemdok and Bonapartedok, kicking off a weekend of nautical lore, maritime heritage, entertainment and demonstrations. Guided tours of mussel fishing boats, and of course plenty of mussel, 26-28 September, Elandstraat, Antwerp; free | WWW.SHIPTOSHORE.BE/WATER-RANT

**West Flanders Walks**

Discover the historic city of Tielt during this family event with routes ranging from 2km Kids Walk and 6km Photo Scavenger Hunt to 18km and 23km routes for more experienced walkers. 8.00-16.00, Europahal, General Maczekplein 7, Tielt; £4 | WWW.WEST-VLAANDERENWILDELT.DE

**Naturaria Fair**

International expo for terrariums, aquariums, insects, reptiles and orchids. Animals, plants, equipment and supplies for sale, plus enthuisiast groups, demos, information and expertise. 28 September-10.00-18.00, Antwerp Expo, Jan Van Ruyvenlaan 181, £9 | WWW.NATURARIA-FAIR.BE

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**Robuust goes for zero**

A new supermarket in Antwerp aims to eliminate disposable packaging

_Catherine Koster_

More articles by Catherine | FlandernToday.eu

**F**or years, stores have been trying to create an eco-friendly image for themselves by getting rid of plastic bags for single use and introducing reusable ones. The sceptical shopper may point out that this measure only gets rid of a tiny percentage of waste, since all supermarket products still come meticulously packed in heaps of eco-unfriendly plastic. Entrepreneur Savina Istas came to the same conclusion. Ietas, 25, decided Antwerp needed an environmental retail incentive and, after a summer of postpone-ment due to financial issues and the unavailability of builders, she finally showed her baby Robuust to the public on 31 August. The supermarket without pack-aging is the first of its kind in the country and only the fifth of its kind worldwide, modelled on shops like in.gredients in the US and Original Unpackert in Berlin.

**BITE**

**Gone fishin’**

Last year the Smaakboot travelled all the way inland to Hasselt. This year it’s sticking closer to the coast, but that doesn’t mean the journey will be any less adventurous. The Smaakboot (Flavour Boat) was introduced by the culinary and fishing world. This year’s theme for the Week van de Smaak (Week of Taste), a celebration of all things culinary and fishing world. This year’s theme for the Week van de Smaak is 'The Sustainable Imaginasion, and nowhere is sustainabiliy more urgent or needed. The fishing industry is actually remarkably sustainable, having over the years had to cope with a threat to what is a limited fishing environ-ment. Belgian waters in the North Sea offer little other than the flat fish our fisheries have evolved to concentrate on – plaice and sole. Cod is also caught, but more by accident than by design. Hence the idea of a whole week devoted to Belgian fish, not just plaice and sole but also turbot, dogfish, brill, pollack, haddock and of course the unmissable world-beating grey shrimp. The 40 passengers on each leg of the trip aboard the lovely Gentse Barge will be served by one of 11 up-and-coming chefs, and the food and beer explained by experts including Beer & Women campaigner and beer sommelier Sofie Vantraelf-ghem. The boat stops in Zeebrugge, Bruges, Ostend, Nieuwpoort, Ypres, Diksmuide, Erklo, Denizel, Kortrijk, Sint-Martens-Latem and Ghent. And how do you get to take part? Go to the website and select Vistournee Generale, then follow the instructions in the video. Namely, invent a recipe using Belgian fish, invite some people over to try it, then send in a photo of the event with a short description of your recipe. To make that worthy your while, you win a pair of tickets, which include lunch on board the Smaak-boat, an overnight stay, with breakfast, in the city where the boat stops next and a bus back to where you started from. In another contest, pit your beer wits against the experts by coming up with the perfect match for a set of recipes devised by the chefs who will be serving on the boat. Be warned: it’s a brain-buster.
It's scientifically proven that taste, smell and memory are inextricably connected, tastes and smells revive memories. Ghent chocolatier Nicolas Vanaise works the other way: He designs tastes based on memories. And on books and movies. Take his new Havana praline. "While traveling through Scotland I became fascinated by gentlemen's clubs," says Vanaise, 56. "I started thinking about a way to translate this atmosphere into a taste and came up with a praline that combines whisky from the Scottish island of Jura with Montecristo tobacco from Cuba. Imagine reclining in a Chesterfield chair while having a cigar, just like Hemingway. This chocolate paints the picture."

But he didn't start his shop immediately. "I needed some time to think and figure out what exactly I wanted to do," he says. "I was lucky to end up in the confectionery business. My task there – as an experienced historian and archaeologist – was to research long-forgotten Flemish tastes."

It was an interesting time, but he ultimately decided he wanted to be his own boss and started exploring options to set up his own confectionery company. "The most important question, since Belgium already has the reputation of being a chocolate country, was how to avoid being a dime in the dozen. I started exploring here and abroad, looking for trends that might inspire me.

At the same time, he decided to stop focusing on the past. "It didn't seem like a logical option to start up a brand new company offering old tastes," he says. "I wanted to start something modern. My choice to break with the past blended well with developments in gastronomy. A decade ago, Spanish chef Ferran Adrià was dictating the new laws, encouraging everyone to quit traditions and start discovering new tastes and textures."

That was exactly what Vanaise did. And while on the lookout for new ingredients, he went a lot further than the Middle East. His shop, Yuzu, is named after a Japanese citrus fruit he and his wife discovered on one of their annual trips to Japan. "It ripens in winter and has one of the most interesting perfumes I know," Vanaise says. That perfume can be tasted in the Kookchi praline, named after a Japanese prefecture. "I know merchants who can deliver sancho pepper and real wasabi," he explains, "and at the moment, I'm trying to develop chocolate that contains the taste of sake."

After being named one of the 10 best food shops in Ghent by The Guardian newspaper, Vanaise can count on a lot of international attention. He even delivers his chocolates to the European Commission. But setting up a chain or production for abroad is not an option. "This work is very labour intensive, and the product has a limited shelf life," he says. "Choosing production on a large scale would immediately force me to compromise on quality, I don't want that."

Above all, for Vanaise chocolate is a medium. "Chocolate is for me like bronze or marble is for a sculptor," he says. "Not just because of what the taste conveys, but also because of the shape. Every one of my pralines has the same shape, but the details differ. That's why I try to make them look imperfect. The pralines must look rough, must remind you of the structure of minerals. And not just the outside; the texture must remind people of iron, wood or other rough materials. Somewhere, I'm still an archaeologist."
The Autumn issue of the Bulletin Newcomer is your guide to enjoying life and settling in Belgium. It mixes essential practical information with lifestyle features on finding a job, top cultural events, dating, keeping pets, sampling Belgian wine and spirits and joining a local theatre group.

If you want to make the most of life in Belgium, this is the essential read.

Pick up your copy at newsstands or at www.thebulletin.be now!
With his long, dark hair, glasses and black leather jacket, Herman Brusselmans’ image is as iconic as his fiction. A public figure and prolific writer, Brusselmans was born in 1957 and debuted in 1985 with De man die werk zond (The Man who Found a Job). Together with Tom Lanoye and Kriesten Hemmereghe, he became one of the stars of 1980s Flemish fiction. Revered by some, loathed by others, he is one of Flanders’ enfants terribles. Brusselmans’ novels are, admittedly, an acquired taste. He’s often criticised for being vulgar and sexist and his writing, well, nonsense. Criticised for being serious and delves into his own none-too-rosy past. “Both aspects occur in all my novels, but the semi-autobiographical ones are slightly more serious, while the absurd are usually what people take away from his novels, making him, despite having written 64, an author who isn’t always taken seriously. Humorous novels in Flemish fiction are few and far between, and often not appreciated.

A new direction  

And now for something completely different from Flemish novelist Herman Brusselmans

Books reviews

De tenondergang en de ongelofelijke wederspansting van Eddy Vangels (The Downfall and Incredible Resurrection of Eddy Vangels)  
Marnix Peeters • Prometheus

In his third novel, journalist Marnix Peeters proves he has matured as a writer by ingeniously intertwining 30 characters in 71 chapters, resulting in an expansive climax to this burlesque and bawdy book. Eddy Vangels tries his best to be a good person but is constantly lied to, cheated and abused. There’s a light at the end of the tunnel, but the road is paved with bodily fluids, making it a sticky and wacky trip. Not for the faint of heart. ★★★

Demons of Ghent  
Helen Grant • Corgi Children’s

Part two of former Tervuren resident Helen Grant’s Forbidden Spaces teen trilogy brings back Silent Saturday heroine, Veerle, who has moved to Ghent with her family. There she stumbles across a face from her past: a murderous past she was hoping to leave behind. When the killing starts again, she is forced to the rooftops of this majestic city. Thrilling, dark and immensely atmospheric, Grant’s sequel (which can also be read on its own) takes young adult thriller fiction to new heights. ★★★

Paddenkoppenland (Toad Head Country)  
Luc de Vos • Atlas/Contact

Ronny de Keyzer grows up in a small town near Ghent thinking his fellow inhabitants all look like toads. Desperate to rise above his roots, he waits for a twist of fate. During the first car-free Sunday (based on the oil crisis) in 1973, he realises his musical ambitions will remain dreams unless he takes charge of his life – and one day, mesmerising melodies show up. Luc De Vos illustrates that nothing comes for free, while painting a monochrome portrait of a restless generation. ★★★

Eén mens is genoeg (One is enough)  
Els Beerten • Querido

After the award-winning Allemaal willen we de hemel! (We All Want the Sky), Els Beerten is back with a touching tale about a musical family in Lomborg who are stricken by heroin when the father dies. Juliette and her brother Louis decide to get away from their grieving yet tyrannical mother, but they just don’t work. It’s not as easy as it seems.

“Despite the fact I occasionally mock it, I take literature very seriously. “Literature is mostly weighty stuff,” says Brusselmans (pictured), “and authors are not taken seriously if they write funny fiction, even though it’s an art in itself, making people laugh. The gravity of everyday life has to be alternated with a little absurdity, otherwise life would be too depressing. Despite the continuing criticism, he says: “I want to entertain and amuse people, something that isn’t on a par with ‘art’, where you always have to convey a message or reality.”

Though Brusselmans’ novels seem like simple tabbies from everyday life, much work goes into constructing such a universe. "A lot of people think when they read my novels that they can go write something similar,” he says, “that it’s just a few jokes and some bullshit. My publisher gets a lot of manuscripts from people who want to copy me, but they just don’t work. It’s not as easy as it seems.”

But Brusselmans has often proved himself a prolific author who can tackle a wide array of subjects and formats, ranging from fiction to poetry about music, motorcyles, sex and, frequently, his own life. “I’m very passionate about my trade,” he says, “and although I’ve had some low points, I still love what I do. Despite the fact I occasionally mock it, I take literature very seriously.” It’s often said that parody is the greatest compliment to an original, and Brusselmans – an avid fan of thrillers who has admitted to wanting to parody every serious genre at least once – has just written his first literary thriller. Zeik (Piss).”

“The term ‘literary thriller’ on the cover was actually a joke,” he explains. “‘Literary thriller’ is a subgenre in literature that supposedly that the quality is slightly better than the average thriller, but it still isn’t real literature.”

That’s something the critics often and unfairly say about his novels, of course. The title character, Zeik, is an inspector working for the homicide department in Ghent in 1961. He’s trying to catch a serial killer who tattoos symbolic numbers on the backs of her female victims. Zeik is aided by a colourful cast of colleagues with similarly wacky names. Despite being a whodunit in the style of George Simenon and Agatha Christie, Zeik is a typical Brusselmans novel full of his trade mark humour, crudity and absurdity. And he isn’t done with the character or the genre just yet. Next year, Zeik will be back in De moord op de poetervrouw van Hugo Claus (The Murder of Hugo Claus’ Cleaning Lady).

Though Brusselmans has an eclectic oeuvre and is one of Flanders’ best-known authors, his distinctive yet diverse style has never won him an award or even the appreciation of the masses. He admits that he predominantly writes for “someone between 30 and 40 who thinks like me, is willing not to take literature too seriously and who lives on the same planet as me: likes the same books, the same music, is left wing, has the same views on relationships, a rock’n’roll lifestyle and is young at heart.” He’s often also been called sexist, but he has many female readers, he says: “Mostly women with a sense of humour who don’t take my writing or themselves too seriously.” It is difficult to label Brusselmans. Yes, he is crude and absurd, but there is also a lingering sensitivity just beneath the surface of his semi-autobiographical novels. Whether he’s writing the literary equivalent of a blockbuster or a heartrending chapter about the downfall of his own relationship, Zeik is never denying that whatever he does, he is a skilled and passionate artist, and one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary Flemish literature.
Italian art brings saints to life

Bozar’s Sienese paintings show an evolution in delicate religious art

Bjorn Gabriels
More articles by Bjorn \ www.flandertoday.eu

Should this promising Indian summer not be in it for the long haul, Brussels is offering a multifaceted Italian autumn, the highlight of which is an exhibition featuring the finest art from Italy’s city states in the middle ages. Until November, film archive Cine- matek is the place to indulge yourself in the masterpieces of Luchino Visconti, whose retrospective includes a restored version of the 1962 classic Il gattopardo (The Leopard), presented by icon of Italian cinema Claudia Cardinale (on 6 October). If you prefer your saints somewhat less flamboyant, the exhibition Paintings from Siena: Ars Narrandi in Europe’s Gothic Age at Bozar might suit you better. The exhibition shows some 60 highly fragile works of the Siamese School from the 13th to the 15th century, a time when the Tuscan city was a hub for pilgrims and traders travelling between northwestern Europe and eastern centres of culture and commerce, like Rome, Constantinople and the Holy City, Jerusalem.

It would take until well into the 19th century for Italy to become one nation. For centuries, there was fierce competition marked by shifting alliances between rival city republics, such as Siena and Florence. The rich and powerful, whether secular or religious, often chose arts and crafts to help them articulate their influence and spread their beliefs. The artists they engaged were versatile craftsmen, who worked in the slipstream of the ruling classes, their patrons. Only later, during the Renaissance and especially the Romantic era, did the rather modern myth of the artist as a highly individual creator expressing his innermost thoughts and feelings gain prominence.

The late middle age artists shown at Bozar were called upon to design, embellish and construct various items that could be used in their patrons’ daily lives, or could serve for special occasions. The better part of the artworks in Paintings from Siena – mainly on loan from the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena – are (parts of) foldable diptychs or triptychs meant to be carried along during pilgrimages or to practise devotion at home. The wooden panels are painted with the tempera technique, which predates oil painting and consists of powdered pigments dissolved in water with egg yolk or other glutinous materials. In the same corridors and spacious rooms that welcomed a record number of visitors during the summer expo dedicated to Flemish painter Michael Borre- mans, there now reigns a solemn silence. Dim lighting and large black or white walls create a sober atmosphere.

Every section of the thematically organised exhibition opens with an introductory text that sketches the historical context. The Sienese artworks recount an evolution from depictions that remain faithful to the iconography of religious figures, gradually leading to the introduction of narrative elements and references to contemporary life.

Fittingly, Paintings from Siena starts off with glorifications of the Virgin Mary. Siena’s patron saint. In “Madonna and Child with two Angels” (1262) by Dittisalvi di Speme (pictured), Christ sits on Mary’s arm but mother and son barely seem to touch each other. Mary gazes distantly to us viewers against a golden background, typi- cal for gothic art. Half a century later, Simone Martini paints “Mother with Child” (1300–1310) in which the right hands of Mary and her son are tenderly entangled, even if both stare in opposite directions. In Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s “Mary with Child” (1340), the infant Jesus has his arm around his mother’s neck in a gentle embrace. In less than a century, the blank holy figures seem to have become an actual mother and son.

Another temperament on wood panel. Giovanni di Paolino’s “Madonna of Humility” (1450), also shows Mary holding her son close, against a strikingly different background in comparison with the earlier works. The Virgin Mary is surrounded by a flower garden, and behind her we see houses, fields and mountains.

The halos around their heads still radiate with gold, but the gilded backdrop – often with gold leaf – has been replaced by a landscape. This evolution towards a more mundane yet still highly sacro- sanct art is reflected not just in the depiction of various scenes from the lives of Mary and Jesus. There’s also a shift towards portraits of saints, including contemporaries such as Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) and Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380).

Paintings from Siena shows how artists vary on visual and narrative themes. You can see how pieces of cloth or blood-soaked patches are introduced and subsequently transformed. Over time, Sienese art becomes more dramatic – recounting the crucifixion and resurrection or other biblical passages – and incorporates more details.

One remarkable example in that respect is Giovanni di Paolino’s “Last Judgment, Heaven and Hell” (1460–1465), a work that is clearly influenced by Dante’s epic poem Divine Comedy, which he illumina- ted. Near the end of the exhibition, the Italian Renaissance is in full swing. Sitting alongside The Yellow Side of Sociality, an exhibition of present- day Italian art, in which the gothic gold finds echoes in fluorescent yellow. Paintings from Siena looks ahead with great self-confidence. Florentine middle age portraits Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio would prove to be the fathers of Italian language. Nowadays, the historic city of Siena is recogn- ised by Unesco as world herit- age, just like its (former) rival Florence.

St Francis and St Catherine are partners as patrons of Italy, and the latter was named one of the six patron saints of Europe in 1999, the year the monetary union was established. Paintings from Siena is a remark- able congregation of extremely delicate art – its voyage to the capital of Europe is not an obvi- ous one. Organised for the Ital- ian presidency of the European Union, artists from the Siene- se School are once more employed to distil the core values of their benefactors. Paintings from Siena celebrates a founding base of (European) humanism and salutes the city, the country, and the EU that it enabled.
The art schwindler

Jean Schwind Retrospective

Until 11 January
SMAK
Citadel Park, Ghent

A funeral wreath to Belgian art (‘A notre cher art belge!’), with a ribbon in the Adelheidisc tricolour over a ring of black plastic flowers and foliage, welcomes you to the small exhibition in SMAK that showcases Jean Schwind’s artistic blitzkrieg. Schwind was a pseudonym used by academic-turned-artist Jean Warie (1935-1985) between 1969 and 1976, the year of Schwind’s self-proclaimed death. ‘Schwind was an heir to the destructive side of Dada,’ says curator Jan Ceuleers. ‘Unlike kindred spirit Marcel Broodthaers, who was diplomatic enough to know and respect boundar- ies, Schwind didn’t know where to stop.’ His one-man guerrilla warfare was aimed at everything the art world held – and still holds – very dear. Warie created a mysterious personage that would go against the very notion of an artist as an individual genius who creates (and sells) unique pieces of art. As the first and only Belgian appropriation artist, Schwind made pastiches of works by Christo, Lucio Fontana, Broodthaers and others. Not with the intention of forging his way into the art market, but to expose art as a swindle. Schwind often destroyed his pastiches or – in the line of conceptual art – didn’t materialise his plans at all. SMAK shows a series of photos of art works about to go up in flames, thus ‘sanc- tifying’ the replicated remnants of a distorting parody. With a scathing sense of humour, Schwind offered critique on the art world and the commodification of art objects. He created his own “anti-collection” with decolored art works and parodies of celebrated art, until the art project that was his life had to come to an end.

Because sooner or later, the appropriation artist would become appropriated himself.

Bjørn Gabriels

VISUAL ARTS

Lee Friedlander: Self and Family

Until 14 December
Fondation A Stichting, Brussels

This exhibition focuses on two signature themes in Lee Friedlander’s work. The self-portraits of the cele- brated American photographer are legend. He has been exploring the genre from all angles, especially the most oblique, for over 50 years (long before the current rage for narcis- sistic ’selfies’, with which, it must be noted, Friedlander’s practice has nothing to do). His latest book, Family in the Picture, 1958-2013, reveals another side of Friedlander - the family man. His approach here is every bit as ironic and penetrat- ing as his self-portraits. Fondation A Stichting and San Francisco’s Fraenkel Gallery present a selec- tion of works spanning a lifetime. © Georgio Valentino

MARKET

Fruitmarkt

28 September, 13:00
Grote Markt, Sint-Truiden

It’s not for nothing that Sint-Truiden boasts the second larg- est market in Flanders. Situated in the middle of the fertile, fruit- producing Haspengouw region, this Limburg town is the place to be when apples and pears start coming off the branches. Local producers bring them in by the bushel. Visitors can buy the fresh or sample a range of artista- nal products, including cider and jam. This is one of the main events on Sint-Truieden’s annual calendar, so the whole town mobilises. Local cultural institutions use the buzz to announce the coming season’s programme, and children present arts and crafts made with—what else?—Haspengouw fruits. © GV

EVENT

Brussels Art Square

26-27 September
Zavel, Brussels

Everyone knows that Brussels’ Zavel district is brimming with antique dealers and art galleries. This is thanks in part to Brussels Art Square, an association of local busi- nesses that has been boosting the neighbourhood for almost a decade. Now the Square introduces a new concept. Belgian dealers host visit- ing counterparts from a different European country every year. The inaugural edition spotlights our near neighbours in the UK. Fifteen inter- nationally renowned British deal- ers will be on hand at the Brussels Art Square open house weekend to trade their wares: contemporary and ethnic art as well as antiques of all varieties. The National Trust is guest of honour. © GV

DISCUSSION

Belgium: Occupation and Resistance

30 September, 19.30
British School of Brussels, Tervuren

British nurse Edith Cavell was executed in Brussels in 1915 for assisting Allied soldiers to escape occupied Belgium. The resistance heroine is the subject of this First World War commemoration, as historians Manijke Van Campen- hout and Emmanuel Debruyne join Cavell biographer Diana Souchami to discuss her role in both local nurs- ing and the war. Souchami’s account of the life of Cavell (pictured) is a detailed portrait of a selfless woman who played a pioneering role in founding the nursing profession in Belgium. Cavell came to Brussels to supervise a new school for nursing. When war broke out, her deep sense of responsibility ultimately led to her death. © Sarah Crew

LITERATURE

Brussels

Muntpunt Book Sale: The Brussels library and infor- mation centre is expanding its collection of English- and German-language books. That’s not the only good news: They are about to sell 9,000 used books from all genres. 3-5 October, Muntpunt, Muntpunt Building © www.muntpunt.be

VISUAL ARTS

Antwerp

naArchitecten: Like the buildings of this Brussels- based architecture bureau are complex spatial experiences, this exhibition invites you to walk, see, feel, think and expe- rience their spaces for your- self. 25-27 September, naArchitecten, Hoogstraat 23 © www.desingel.be

EVENT

Across Flanders

Cassette Store Day: The first edition of this festive day reviving all things K7 was conceived last year by a few UK indie record labels. Now Flanders joins in the fun. In Ghent, for example, you can enjoy a cassette market, live shows and tape deck DJing. 27 September, multiple venues © www.cassettestoreday.com

Ghent

Richard Dawkins: The Ghent-based free thinkers from Denkgelag invite the renowned British evolution- ary biologist and philosopher for an evening of discussion and debate. 26 January 2015, Denkgelag © www.denkgelag.be
Talking Dutch

Our daily bread machine

I have never used one, but some people must do because they’re all over Flanders. They are called broodautomaten – bread vending machines. You put in a few coins and out comes a freshly baked (I suppose) loaf of bread. They must be quite useful when you return from a long holiday, or when you’ve been working late, so I was surprised to read a headline in De Morgen that stated Merchtem verklaart de oorlog aan broodautomaten – Merchtem declares war on bread vending machines. Someone clearly didn’t like those machines. The schengencollege van Merchtem wil het aantal broodautomaten in de gemeente drastisch verminderen – The local council wants to drastically reduce the number of bread vending machines in the municipality. In my municipality, I would love it if the council drastically reduced the number of rubbish bags dumped in the street, or drastically reduced the number of people shouting at 3am. But I think I could live with an illuminated aluminium box filled with sliced white bread. Not so the people of Merchtem. Het aantal dergelijke toestellen neemt immers steeds meer toe en dit tot eger- nis van onwonderen – The number of such machines just keeps on growing and residents are getting annoyed.

The proposed solution is a culi – Merchtem wil er in de toekomst nog slechts één per deelgemeente overhouden – In future, Merchtem wants no more than one per district, said Merchtem’s mayor, Eddie De Block. NSZ, a union for the self-employed, described the proposed regulation as een verkeerd signaal en een burgermeester-omwerving – the wrong signal to be sending out and unworthy of a burgomaster.

The proposed ban sparked off a lively debate in the press. Merchtem bindt strijd aan tegen broodautomaten – Merchtem takes up arms against the bread vending machine, read one headline on the VRT news website. It struck me that this was a rather futile battle to be fighting, when there were so many more urgent problems in the world. But then I have no experience of living next to a bread vending machine. Maybe it makes the contrite burgomaster explain that the aim of the regulation was to control the spread of unauthorised vending machines. He added that he was a man who always listened to residents – tot in de eeuwen der eeuwen, amen – forever and ever, amen.

Then he turned his attention to more important issues, like the barbeque for 130 new residents and the fattest Fish in Merchtem competition.

Poll

Should secondary school tech classes be segregated by gender, as industry rep Agoria suggests, since girls do better in the absence of boys?

a. Sure. Schools must create the best conditions possible for girls to learn technology, and if that means girls-only classes, so be it 38%
b. Maybe, but only for part of the term. Girls do better in single-sex classes, but boys do worse, so why punish them? 25%
c. No. The world does not come segregated, so the earlier girls get used to working with boys, the better 38%

What’s the best way for girls to get ahead in technical education? According to the head of the tech industry federation Agoria, it might be to split up classes by gender. It’s been shown time and again that girls do better in classes without boys. Boys, however, do worse.

As you can see, there’s not a lot of consensus among readers of Flan- ders Today. While more than one-third of you thought classes should be split anyway to allow girls to develop their talents to the fullest, an equal number found the idea ridiculous and not in keeping with global realities. A minority of you took the middle road, considering the idea of splitting up the genders for part of the term. And maybe that’s the best of both worlds. Allow girls to be on their own long enough to give them the confidence they need to then be mingled with the boys.

Next week’s question:
At long last, Netflix has arrived in Belgium (see p6). Will you be signing up?
Log on to the Flanders’ Today website at www.flanderstoday.eu and click on VOTE