



TRAINS AND LANES

Not only will more S-trains be heading into and out of Brussels, the city is putting cycle paths all along the inner ring road



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I THINK I CAN...

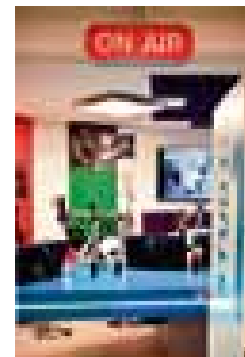
A new series of talks in Ghent aims to light a fire under young people to get them off the beaten path when it comes to their careers

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A FAMILIAR VOICE

Radio Internazionale in Genk offered Italian mine workers and their families a lifeline to the home country – and now it's inviting other voices in

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A natural sanctuary

Care farms offer a taste of freedom and a break from institutions



Andy Furniere

More articles by Andy \ flanderstoday.org

A recent funding overhaul is expected to make it easier for farms across Flanders to involve people with disabilities in their daily activities, fitting into a growing trend that recognises the importance of a natural environment to well-being

A recent overhaul of disability subsidy regulations will make it easier for farms in Flanders to open their doors to people with physical and mental disabilities. The move is being hailed as a milestone by both care providers and government officials, who say that *groene zorg*, or green care, can play a hugely beneficial role in the wellbeing of people with disabilities.

By offering them the opportunity to interact with nature and animals, they say, such initiatives provide a critical break from care institutions and a boost to their self-confidence.

"The people who come here are often tired of therapy, of being seen as a person with problems that need to be treated," says Sylvia Goossens, who runs a care farm in East Flanders. "Here they can do something pleasant and useful in a relaxing environment, with a lot of freedom to do what they feel like."

Experts have long touted the benefits of interacting with nature on our mental and physical health. In recent time, it's also become increasingly clear that working and relaxing in a green environment has substantial therapeutic effects for persons with a disability.

A milestone in the development of green care in Flanders was the launch of the non-profit Steunpunt Groene Zorg, a collaborative effort by the Boerenbond farmers' union, Leuven-based co-operative Cera and the Ons umbrella network of women's associations. This support centre, founded in 2004, helps care institutions find an appropriate farm for the disabled.

Groene Zorg, based in Leuven, helps green care providers organise and improve their services and activities and also offers info sessions and trainings, screens green care providers and helps them get started.

“

Because they're not institutions, relationships with the guests are much more spontaneous, more equal

"You can compare the whole process with the placing of a child in a foster family; both parties need to be prepared and protected," explains Willem Rombaut, a Groene Zorg adviser. Green care providers, however, are under no obligation to seek support or advice from the centre.

While Groene Zorg started out with a network of 50 green care providers 13 years ago, there are now some 900 in Flanders, which together welcome 2,250 guests per year. Most of these affiliated providers are professional farmers who take one or two people under their wings.

The government used to offer such care farmers a subsidy of €40



© Katrĳn Van Giel/ID Image

More trains for Brussels

NMBS plans more lines and routes for S-trains, and an increase in frequency



Alan Hope
More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.org

National rail authority NMBS plans to increase the frequency of its S-trains, which run into and around the capital, the company has announced. Nationwide, new lines and frequency of current lines will increase by 5%. The 12 S-trains were introduced in 2015. At present, some lines are restricted at certain times of the day. Weekday changes expected to come into force by the end of this year include the Aalst-Brussels-Vilvoorde S4 train running from Merode station in Brussels to Vilvoorde all day, and the S5 train Enghien-Halle-Schuman-Mechelen always running as far as Enghien. Similarly, the S6 Aalst-Brussels-Geraardsbergen train will go on to Aalst at all times.



© Fabian318/Wikimedia

Weekends will also see increases in frequency and service to the S5 and S2 (Braine-le-Comte-Leuven) routes. For students travelling to and from schools at weekends, two new trains will run direct to Etterbeek and to Louvain-la-Neuve. At the same time, NMBS presented its multi-year investment plan, worth more than €3 billion. The main spending goes to rolling stock and improvements to passenger comfort and safety. Stations also receive a substantial part of the package, with renovation works planned on platforms in Brussels North and to the ticket hall at Schaarbeek station, as well as increased parking facilities for bikes across the network.

New regulation will make distinguishing ambulances easier

Soon Belgium will have two clear categories of ambulance: yellow ambulances for emergency and urgent patient transport, and white ambulances for non-urgent patient transport. The second category will not use flashing lights and sirens. The new federal measure follows some confusion among medical assistance workers during the March 2016 terrorist attacks. While some ambulances contain specific emergency equipment and are manned by highly trained staff, others are only used for non-urgent transport. The difference between the two is difficult to distinguish. "There is no time for confusion after an

accident or disaster," said federal health minister Maggie De Block, introducing the new regulation. The Belgian Professional Association of Ambulance Services supports the plans, including the decision that ambulances transporting patients will no longer use flashing light or siren. "Flashing lights have been at times misused in order to get a patient to an appointment on time or to avoid a traffic jam," said Jan Bollen, director of the association. Bollen said, however, that a solution is required for companies that use the same ambulance for both urgent and non-urgent transport. \ Andy Furniere

Cycle paths and wider footpaths for Brussels inner ring road

Brussels' inner ring road, which surrounds the city centre, is to be equipped with cycle paths separate from traffic and wider footpaths along its entire length, the region's mobility minister Pascal Smet has announced. Work has already begun on the first section, the Poincarélaan in Anderlecht, which runs between Dauwstraat to near South Station. According to Smet, who has reached agreements with the municipalities concerned, it will be possible to circumnavigate the entire city centre by bicycle, without having to enter into traffic, in three years' time. "Not only will it become safer and more agreeable to cycle, the look and feel of the ring road will also change," said Smet. "Alongside

the canal, a new park is under construction, while on the section between Madou and Troon, food trucks will guarantee a whole new atmosphere." Over the majority of the ring, cycle paths will be separate from the rest of vehicle traffic, though where that is impossible, "cycle streets" will be created, where bikes have priority. Those sections include Madou to Kunst-Wet, Troon to Naamsepoort and Hallepoort to South Station. The whole project consists of 12km of cycle paths and a budget of €25 million, spread over three years. This year sees not only works on Poincarélaan but also the sections Ijzer-Rogier and Kruidtuin-Madou. \ AH

Gilbert's solo surge wins a dramatic Tour of Flanders

Belgian cyclist Philippe Gilbert lifted his bike over his head as he crossed the line in triumph after winning an incident-packed Ronde van Vlaanderen (Tour of Flanders) for the first time last Sunday. Gilbert surged ahead with 55km of the 261km race to go and held on to win, as world champion Peter Sagan and Olympic champion Greg Van Avermaet crashed 17km from the end. Gilbert's audacious breakaway paid dividends, and added to the 2012 world champion's impressive resume, which includes stage wins at all three Grand Tours, victories in two other "Monument" races – Liege-Bastogne-Liege and the Giro di Lombardia – and the 2016 Belgian National Road Race Championship. It was the 34-year-old's seventh Tour of Flanders, where he came in third in both 2009 and 2010.




© David Stockman/BELGA

Philippe Gilbert crests the Paterberg climb without another rider in sight during this year's Tour of Flanders

Flemish cyclist Van Avermaet, the in-form rider this spring, picked himself up to take second place, but the crash with Slovakia's


Sagan and Flanders' Oliver Naesen robbed the race of a grandstand finish. The return of the iconic Muur van Geraards-

bergen, after five years of exclusion, proved pivotal: what would become the winning group went clear after the famously grueling climb with over 90km remaining. Gilbert was part of the group of 14 riders who broke from the peloton, as another teammate, three-time Tour winner Tom Boonen, accelerated up the Muur. Both Van Avermaet and Sagan were caught out and left in the peloton, which quickly lost a minute. They had started to close in when, with 55km to go and on the second ascent of the 2.2km-long Oude-Kwaremont climb, Gilbert turned on the after-burners and broke clear. Gilbert's final time was 6:23:45. Van Avermaet made it in 29 seconds later, with Dutch cyclist Niki Terpstra on his heels to take third. \ Leo Cendrowicz




02 310 4634

telephone number used by fraudsters, according to Test-Aankoop, posing as tax officials. The organisation suggests that anyone who gets a call from this number should block it




€30

premium offered by the municipality of Schaarbeek in Brussels for the sterilisation of a cat, up to a maximum of three, in an effort to reduce the numbers of feral cats in the area




1,116

users of Brussels public transport authority MIVB caught travelling without a valid ticket in one day, during a massive check carried out on the metro, tram and bus network last week



445

double-decker train carriages to be purchased by rail authority NMBS, thanks to a loan of €600 million from the European Investment Bank. The loan represents 46% of the long-term investment



100,000

residents in Leuven, meaning the city finally qualifies for extra subsidies from the government of Flanders – €6.7 million to be exact

WEEK IN BRIEF

The **squatters who took over** a newly bought house in Ghent's Holstraat while the owners were abroad have left following a court order to vacate the premises. Police in attendance said they left voluntarily, with an agreement to return later to clean the house. A lawyer for the owners said his clients were "relieved and satisfied".

Brussels Airlines has **taken over part of Thomas Cook Airlines Belgium**, the charter air service of the travel agency. The deal covers two airplanes and 160 pilots and crew, with the loss of 40 ground-crew jobs. Another three planes are retained by the Thomas Cook group. The merged airline will cover destinations in North America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia.

Artist Delphine Boël will appeal a decision by a Brussels court that rejected her claim seeking recognition that **former king Albert II is her biological father**. Boël, 48, has long argued that her mother had a relationship with the monarch between 1966 and 1984 and sought a court order for a DNA sample. A sample from her legal father, Jacques Boël, has proven that he is not her biological father. But the court ruled that since he was her legal father, it was impossible for anyone else to be named her father. Biological evidence, the court ruled, was not in itself enough to demonstrate paternity.

An initiative to allow householders to **sort plastic rubbish** not allowed in the blue PMD bag, at present on trial in some Flemish municipalities, will be extended to the whole of Flanders, environment minister Joke Schauvliege has announced. Last year the trial saw nearly 15,000 tonnes of mixed plastic being collected in a pink bag, substantially reducing the amount of rubbish sent to landfills.

This year's **visit.brussels awards** have gone to Bozar and Couleur Café, among others, the result of a public vote from a list of 63 projects. Couleur Café was voted best international event, while Bozar won for its Electronic Arts Festival. Awards also went to the Brussels Food Truck Festival, the 100 Masters exhibition across the capital's museums, the JAM Hotel and the Make.Brussels competition. \ tinyurl.com/visitbrusselsawards

There were **1,214 breaches of regulations in tanning salons** across Belgium in 2016, compared to only 357 the year before, according to figures from the economy ministry. The figures are a result of an increased number of inspections ordered by labour minister Kris Peeters after the 2015 figures emerged. Breaches includes not providing the required information on the increased risk of skin cancer and allowing customers to remain under the lights too long.

Belgium is in **fifth place for the provision of emergency health care** in a survey of 144 countries carried out by the British website Clinic Compare. Top of the list came Monaco, based on the number of doctors per head of the population and a life expectancy of 90 years. The last on the list was Cameroon. Belgium listed highly for skills of medical staff, equipment available to medical teams and convenience of location. The rest of the top five was made up of Austria, the Netherlands and France. \ tinyurl.com/cliniccompare

Belgium's **road toll for lorries has raised €648 million** since it was introduced a year ago, according to Viapass, the company operating the collection system. The largest part of the total – €408 million – came from Flanders. The initial estimate of €500 million for the region was off because of the growth of greener lorries,

Viapass said. More environmentally friendly vehicles pay less.

Five people were held by police last week following **clashes at the Turkish embassy** in Brussels between supporters and opponents of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The embassy was the site of voting in a referendum in Turkey that would give the president wider powers. About 175 people took part in an anti-Erdoğan protest, police said. Six people were injured in the clash; suspects could face two years in jail, which would double if they are found to have acted from political motives.

Postal service Bpost is considering taking legal action against postal regulator BIPT's decision to **not allow an increase in the price of postage stamps** this year. The increase was planned for products for individuals and small businesses, but BIPT said the profits gained would exceed the "reasonable income" level of 15%, in a market where there is not sufficient competition. Bpost argues that the ruling is not in keeping with Belgian and European regulations.

Last year saw more than **700 concerts taking place in Brussels**, featuring more Belgian artists than in 2015 and 25,000 more tickets sold than the previous year. Planning for this year shows a continuing increase, with 25% more concerts planned. Last year, Ancienne Belgique accounted for 303 concerts, followed by Botanique on 258 and Vorst Nationaal on 72.

Brussels-Capital Region's mobility minister, Pascal Smet, is working on a proposal to create a **priority lane on motorways** heading into capital for vehicles carrying more than two people. The proposal would also introduce a congestion charge for vehicles with fewer than three occupants.

FACE OF FLANDERS



© Tialy Kiriloff/Facebook

Tiany Kiriloff

At one time or another, most of us have resolved to have less to do with social media, the greatest productivity sink of the modern world. But what if you woke up one morning to find social media had apparently decided to have less to do with you? That's what happened last week to Tiany Kiriloff, co-founder of the Flemish marketing bureau Belmodo. Kiriloff's brand is a big hit on Instagram, with almost 200,000 followers. But when she tried log in last week, she was refused access. It appeared she was the victim of a hijacking – her account had been taken over by hackers and was being held for ransom. Kiriloff, 38, was born in the Netherlands to a Chilean mother and a Dutch father with Russian roots. The family lived in Venezuela until she was 13, when they moved to Kalmthout in Antwerp province. Kiriloff studied communications in Antwerp, modelling at the same time, and she landed a job as a host on the JIMtv fashion programme *Alive.Style*. She stayed with the channel, covering lifestyle subjects.

In 2008, she set up Belmodo, a social media marketing platform for fashion designers. The Instagram account of about 5,000 photos is one of the most visited in Flanders. But it's a simple matter for hackers to take over an account and shut the owner out altogether. "This is an attack on my livelihood," she told business daily *De Tijd*. "My clients are supporting me for the time being, but if I can't get my profile back, I'll have to cancel some of my contracts." The incident is an illustration of how important social media has become to some businesses, including those like Belmodo who are entirely reliant on the channels. Kiriloff is what is known as an influencer: She offers fashion labels exposure to almost 200,000 followers, who – importantly – don't feel as if they're being sold anything. Many labels are currently paying people like Kiriloff to reach that kind of audience. "Fashion companies count on the exposure we can offer," said Michael Schockaert, co-owner of the company. "The sooner this can be sorted out, the better."

\ Alan Hope

FLANDERTODAY Flanders State of the Art

Flanders Today, a weekly English-language newspaper, is an initiative of the Flemish Region and is financially supported by the Flemish authorities.

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VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER
Hans De Loore

OFFSIDE Flying high

Sometimes the sky really is the limit, as the residents of Wortegem-Petegem in East Flanders are about to find out. This week they are due to attend an information evening on a plan to stage an air show over the village of Elsegem, part of the municipality. The air show is the idea of Willy Naessens, 78, an industrialist in general contracting and food production, who has a stud farm in the village. Every year he organises the Belgian championships in *mennen*, a form of carriage racing. But the sport is dwindling in popularity, so he has been thinking up new ways of drawing a crowd,



© Frank Kovalchek/Wikimedia

including mechanical bull-riding and concerts by K3. The planes for his air show would take off and land at Wevelgem, 12 minutes away, and perform aerobatics over the farm. The only problem is, residents of about 35 homes would have to leave for

about 90 minutes during the show for safety reasons. Naessens has promised to treat them as his special guests, but some of them are not keen on such a barn-storming event taking place over their rooftops – a sentiment shared by Wortegem-Petegem mayor Luc Vander Meeren. "I'm still somewhat concerned about safety," he told *Het Laatste Nieuws*. "There are no airports here in the area, so fire service zone is not equipped with foam for putting out kerosene fires." And if residents refuse to evacuate? "Well then we have a problem," said Naessens. \ AH

5TH COLUMN

Peace out

The federal and regional levels of government each have their own dynamics, with more drama at the federal level and a more business-like approach in Flanders.

In the federal parliament, north and south, each with its distinct political culture, meet. But this doesn't explain the drama of recent weeks, between the Flemish N-VA and the equally Flemish Christian-democrats CD&V.

The conflicts have intensified as N-VA shifted its attention to identity politics. Key players are Theo Francken, secretary of state for migration; Jan Jambon, federal interior minister, responsible for security in the wake of the Brussels attacks; and the new secretary of state Zuhair Demir, whose Turkish-Kurd background attracts much media attention. CD&V finds it much harder to fulfil its role as the voice of reason, subtly accusing N-VA of stirring up differences between population groups. CD&V president Wouter Beke criticised Francken when he accused Doctors Without Borders of trafficking. A press conference by N-VA president and Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever following an incident in a busy shopping street, became another source of conflict: Justice minister Koen Geens of CD&V stated that the public prosecutor had expressly said not to hold a press conference on the situation.

By contrast, the government of Flanders has been an island of peace, achieving results such as a budget surplus and an agreement on environmental protection. The most notable Flemish minister is Ben Weyts (N-VA). Best known for his mobility portfolio, he's also in charge of animal welfare. Weyts did not hesitate to close the slaughterhouse in Tielit earlier this month, after undercover video revealed serious cases of animal abuse. He also came up with a proposal banning slaughter of animals without stunning them, although this remains contested by religious communities.

His biggest achievement this year, though, is an agreement on Oosterweel, the Antwerp ring road link meant to solve the city's grave mobility problems. Construction has been postponed for decades due to protests by grassroots organisations. An intendant appointed by Weyts managed to come up with a compromise. Weyts started his career as spokesperson for Geert Bourgeois, now Flanders' minister-president. He has spread his wings to become a stronghold in the regional government.

\ Anja Otte

Ritual slaughter to be banned

Slaughter of animals without stunning illegal from 2019 in Flanders



Alan Hope

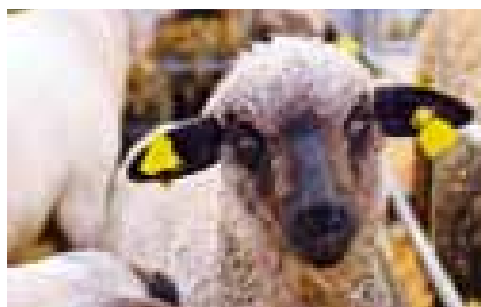
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A proposal by Flemish minister for animal welfare Ben Weyts for a total ban on the slaughter of animals without stunning them has been approved by the government of Flanders. The practice of ritual slaughter, or slaughtering animals without stunning them – required by Muslims and orthodox Jews for religious purposes – will be illegal starting on 1 January 2019.

At present, animals in Flanders are required to be stunned, which means administering an electric shock to render them unconscious, before their throats are cut. For bovine animals, the alternative is known as "post-cut stunning" where the shock comes just after the cut. This method is considered by veterinarians as less desirable but still preferable to no stunning at all.

Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of the Sacrifice, requires Muslim families to slaughter an animal – usually a sheep – while it is still alive, and fears that stunning could kill the animal first have made the procedure unacceptable.

Licensed slaughterhouses are allowed to



perform ritual slaughter, but during Eid, they cannot keep up with demand. Temporary slaughterhouses set up to handle the demand are not allowed to slaughter without stunning. Post-cut stunning has been accepted as a valid alternative for sheep by Muslim organisations in other EU countries. But Weyts' proposal requires pre-cut stunning for all animals outside of cattle.

A political accord was reached based on the work of Piet Vanthemsche, former head of farmers' union Boerenbond. He spent eight months talking to religious communities, animal rights

representatives and slaughterhouses, eventually bringing the majority and opposition parties together.

Stunning, Vanthemsche said on the programme *De afspraak*, does not kill the animal but prevents it from feeling pain. "If the technique is being done successfully [elsewhere], then let's use it. The animal actually dies by being bled, and that is according to the principles of ritual slaughter."

Michel Vandenbosch of animal rights organisation Gaia said he was "moved" by the agreement. "I can hardly believe it."

The Muslim Executive, which represents Muslims in Belgium, distanced itself from the agreement. In a statement, it said that it was "prepared to research all avenues that might lead to an improvement in animal welfare, that might limit the extent of animal suffering".

The European Council for Kosher Slaughter, meanwhile, has come out against the new regulation and will study it before deciding on further steps, according to Michael Freilich, editor of the magazine *Joods Actueel*.

Homans dismisses Flanders' chief diversity officer

Flemish minister for equal opportunities Liesbeth Homans has fired the administration's chief diversity officer, Alona Lyubayeva, and will fill the post as quickly as possible, she said. There will be an interim replacement in the meantime.

Lyubayeva took to the press last week to complain about the reasons for her pending dismissal,

which she says was political and based on her criticism of government policy. The government said that she had received a negative evaluation largely based on reports of her management style.

She appeared on the VRT programme *De afspraak*, where she stressed that someone in her position must be autonomous,

arguing that she had barely seen Homans in the course of the last year and, therefore, could not be evaluated by her. "I grew up in a totalitarian regime," she said, "and I know what it's like to be treated unjustly." Lyubayeva was born in 1972 in Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union.

She later admitted that the last

remark had been overly harsh. "I meant to say I had the feeling of being hemmed in as to what I think and what I'm allowed to say." Lyubayeva was appointed in 2014 by then-minister for administrative affairs Geert Bourgeois, now minister-president. Homans has declined to discuss in detail the grounds of the dismissal. \ AH

Lloyd's of London to open post-Brexit office in Brussels

Prime minister Charles Michel said the decision by insurer Lloyd's of London to open an office in Brussels was "outstanding news". The world's oldest and largest insurance market is the first multinational company to announce a move to the mainland following the triggering last week of Article 50 by British prime minister Theresa May.

"This shows the attraction of Belgium as a land to invest in after Brexit," Michel said. CEO Inga Beale said the office would be operational from 1 January 2019 – just weeks before the deadline for the UK's negotiations on the end of membership of the European Union.

While the terms of that departure have still to be discussed, Lloyd's – fittingly for a historic risk-taker, intends to get the jump on the market. "It is important that we are able to provide the market and customers with an effective solution that means business can carry on without interruption when the UK leaves the EU," Beale said.

Michel, meanwhile, promised that Belgium would adopt a constructive attitude to Brexit negotiations. "We are convinced that any agreement must benefit both the United Kingdom and the European Union," he said. "Transition measures must allow for a smooth transition, provided they are clearly defined and a fitting legal framework is in place. It is crucial that the rights of EU citizens living in the UK are safeguarded, under the principle of reciprocity."

'Bad for UK, bad for EU'

Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois told the programme *Terzake* the triggering of

Article 50 on 29 March was "a historic but sad day" that was "bad for the UK and bad for the European Union. We are losing an incredibly important member state."

He went on to talk about the effect Brexit could have on Flanders, emphasising that negotiations must seek to control damage to Europe's economies. "The UK is our fourth-largest trading partner. In 2015, we exported more than €720 billion in goods. One in four jobs in Flanders is dependent on trade with the UK."

The "worst-case scenario", he continued, "is that we don't negotiate a good trade accord and that we fall back to the tariffs imposed by the World Trade Organisation." Some of the industries that are particularly vulnerable when it comes to UK trade are textiles, car manufacturing, agriculture and the food industry. The port of Zeebrugge, he emphasised, depends on the UK for 45% of its activities.

London mayor in Brussels

London mayor Sadiq Khan, meanwhile, visited Brussels last week for talks with EU and Belgian officials. He met with, among others, Flemish MEP Guy Verhofstadt and Brussels-City mayor Yvan Mayeur.

Khan and Mayeur discussed London's recent terrorist attack on Westminster Bridge and nearby parliament, as well as the terrorist attacks in Brussels of March 2016. The London attacks happened on the same day as the one-year anniversary of the bombing of Brussels Airport and Maalbeek metro station.

Khan was involved in a series of meetings with Belgian counterparts and EU officials. He and



Lloyd's of London building at One Lime Street

Verhofstadt – a well-known champion of the EU – discussed the UK leaving the EU, which Khan opposes. Verhofstadt will represent the European parliament in Brexit negotiations.

Mayeur emphasised differences over Brexit must not be allowed to interfere with relationships among Europe's capitals. "Brexit will not come between local co-operation of European cities," he tweeted.

In related news, more than 100 British nationals living in Brussels have begun or completed the procedure to gain Belgian nationality, while many others have applied to their local council for information on how to do so.

Elsene, with 1,535 British residents – the most of all 19 municipalities – has received more than 300 inquiries, with 41 people now naturalised and 26 others on the way. Brussels-City received 46 inquiries, half of which are now complete. In Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe, 37 applications were received. \ AH

A natural sanctuary

Farmers take mentally disabled under their wings in the Groene Zorg programme

LEEFBOERDERIJDEKANTELING.BE
GROENEZORG.BE

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per day, regardless of the number of individuals they hosted. According to Tine van der Vloet, a member of the Flemish parliament for N-VA and an expert on the topic, this evolution in the disability sector is part of a broader trend in society.

"More and more, we're realising that a green environment is beneficial – on school playgrounds, for example, and in rest homes, working environments and prisons," she says. "And creating a more natural environment doesn't require big investments, but mostly a change in mentality."

Two recent legislative developments are expected to significantly diversify the green care landscape in Flanders. A major funding overhaul adopted under Flemish welfare minister Jo Vandeuren will gradually shift the management of government subsidies from care organisations to people with a disability and their caregivers, in the form of a personal care budget.

At the same time, the government also introduced a law that makes it possible for people with disabilities to spend those personal care budgets on green care. Care farms will moreover not be required to obtain a permit from a care organisation, so that guests will be able to pay them directly. So while the government used to pay care farms €40 a day, now the guests will pay themselves, according to agreements with the farms.

"This will encourage other organisations that aren't professional farms – such as children's farms and animal shelters – to start up green care initiatives," explains van der Vloet. "The changes will also enable such initiatives to take care of larger groups," she says, noting that care providers will receive compensation for each person they assist rather than a flat fee.

To safeguard the quality of green care, the government has established a number of requirements covering safety, insurance, hygiene, transparency and cost, which farms must meet to obtain official recognition. To get this government stamp of approval, green care providers must register at the Flemish Agency for People with a Disability, while the government's Zorginspectie (Care Inspection) agency will monitor the quality of the care offered.

Rombaut of Groene Zorg still sees limitations to the system. "The changes will be limited because underage people and psychiatric patients, for instance, are not entitled to a personal budget yet," he says. Only adults with a physical and mental disability currently fall under the new rules.

But since the reforms, a handful of new projects have already cropped up. These include the "living farm" De Kanteling in Herzele, located on the eastern border of the Flemish Ardennes and run by Goossens, a former special-needs teacher.

Seven young people with a disability work on the farm, which used to house Goossens' construction company. One of De Kanteling's staff previously assisted adolescents with special needs.

At De Kanteling, the youngsters take care of the farm's horses, donkeys, chickens and rabbits. The farm also boasts an orchard, a vegetable garden and a workshop where guests can take part in activities such as working with wood.

They might also be asked to help prepare meals in the kitchen of the farmhouse, where



© Photos courtesy Groene Zorg

Guests at care farms help out with the chores and sometimes take part in activities like cooking, woodworking or sport. New regulations means more kinds of organisations, like children's farms and animal shelters, are hosting guests



Goossens and her family live. The farm's large grass field often serves as a football pitch as well.

"An advantage of care farms is that the providers are not care professionals, like in institutions," Rombaut explains, "so the relationship with the guests are much more spontaneous, more equal."

Rombaut's view was echoed by the guests at De Kanteling while they ate their sandwiches together on a recent afternoon. David* explained how much he enjoyed the comradeship at the living farm, while another guest, Wim, described the wooden enclosure he built for the farm's rabbits. Meanwhile, Ben noted that he enjoyed spending time with the farm's animals when he felt like being on his own.

Goossens' ambition is to have the same group of people come on the same days, so that they can become friends over time. "If all their time is spent being supervised in a limited space, people with behavioural or emotional problems can explode," she says. "The space and freedom here relaxes them, and the work gives them a sense of fulfilment."

Goossens hopes to double their number of daily guests to 14 by 2019 so that they can

earn enough to become a fully self-sufficient care farm. The plan is to gradually make the necessary infrastructure adjustments for people with physical disabilities, such as those in a wheelchair.

Increasing the number of guests also increases the diversity level – someone with Down syndrome, for instance, requires a completely different approach than someone with autism. This is where staff experience with special needs, such as is available at De Kanteling, comes in handy.

De Kanteling also sometimes lends neighbours a hand with small chores such as raking leaves, which further builds the social skills and self-confidence of their guests and fosters a positive communal atmosphere. "Instead of feeling different and dependent, they understand that they are able to help others, which increases their self-worth," says Goossens.

Groene Zorg, meanwhile, will have an important supporting role as the new regulations come into force. They will develop a manual for green care providers, help them work with larger groups and help them correctly price their services.

Although the care farms will now be able to

set their own prices, Rombaut also emphasises that many of them offer their services for free and will continue to do so.

"We are also considering the development of a quality label with website that would describe the initiatives in Flanders with this label," says Rombaut. "This will give the most successful initiatives the chance to improve their visibility," says Rombaut.

Rombaut notes that care institutions could stand to adopt a more positive attitude during the current transition phase. "A close collaboration with care institutions would be beneficial for green care providers, as they could then rely on their extensive expertise in case of any problems," he says, noting that many have adopted a defensive attitude for fear of losing their funding.

Groene Zorg also receives project subsidies from the Flemish and provincial governments. "We hope to be awarded structural funding in the future," he says, "so that we are sure that we can continue providing our support during the next government administration as well."

**Names of guests at De Kanteling were changed due to privacy concerns*

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Aircraft \ Asco

The Zaventem-based designer and manufacturer of mechanical parts and components for aircraft has won an eight-year contract to supply equipment for the future Boeing B-777X. The company's plants in Canada and the US will contribute leading edges for the wings and parts of the fuselage.

Supermarkets \ Albert Heijn

The Dutch chain plans to open a supermarket in Wemmel, which will be its closest to Brussels. AH is, however, considering transforming all its stores into Delhaize outlets by 2019, following last year's merger between Delhaize and its parent company, Ahold.

Construction \ Besix

The Brussels-based group has won the contract to build the substructure and foundations of what will be the world's tallest building – the one-kilometre high Tower, expected to open in Dubai in 2020. The company, which is also pitching for the rest of the contract, has many other projects in the country, including residential real estate developments and water treatment facilities.

Plastics \ Resilux

The €390 million takeover of the Wetteren-based producer of PET bottles by the US Bain Capital fund has been aborted in the face of opposition by German competition authorities.

Retail \ Zeb

The fashion chain, owned by the Halle-based Colruyt group, has taken over the Point Carré chain, adding 28 outlets to Zeb's current 62 across the country.

Hygiene \ Ontex

The Aalst-based disposable diaper and incontinence products group has raised €220 million to finance its recent acquisition of Brazil's Hypermecas hygiene products group.

Steel \ Arcelor Mittal

The Ghent production unit, an affiliate of the London-based group, is investing €133 million and hiring an additional 100 workers to streamline production and increase capacity. The company already employs over 5,500 people in its operations in Ghent and Liège.

€20 million for energy saving

Government's holding company to invest in ESCo consultants for business



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.org

PMV, the government of Flanders' holding company, has announced an investment of €20 million over the next five years in energy service companies, known as ESCos. These kind of companies help other businesses to achieve energy efficiency and cut spending. Businesses in Flanders, according to a statement from energy minister Bart Tommelein and economy minister Philippe Muyters, are still investing too little in energy-saving measures, despite the savings opportunities available.

They attributed this to "a lack of expertise and a shortage of time and resources for invest-



Businesses from retail to warehousing can save substantially with the right lighting

ments outside the core business". An Escos has the expertise and can take on the job of evaluating the opportunities.

"Escos can take care of energy-saving interventions," said the ministers, "such as the replacement of lighting, better adjustments to heating or the installation of solar panels."

The participation of the PMV is expected to trigger additional investment from banks and private concerns of up to €150 million. "Escos companies will be strengthened, businesses will feel the difference in their bank accounts, and the climate will benefit. A win-win situation all down the line," Tommelein said.

Platform helps retailers and designers create better shopping experience

Hasselt University's architecture and arts faculty has launched a new knowledge centre focused on retail design. The Retail Design Lab offers students, retailers and designers the scientific tools they need to improve the shopping experience.

Many factors, including the use of certain materials and lighting, have an impact on customer mood and behaviour. The centre will assemble expertise and data from around the world that can be useful to develop a more experience-oriented shop.

Retail Design Lab also offers education programmes for professionals. A DIY Fashion Store Audit maps the shopping experience through a questionnaire. Retailers can also find concrete cases and "tips and tricks" on retail design.

Designers and retailers can ask experts for advice or assistance during the design process on a range of issues, including design, marketing, communication, psychology and trend-watching.

"Designing for the retail sector requires a multidisciplinary approach," said academic director Katelijn Quartier. "Experts have to keep in mind consumers' perceptions, behaviour and emotions." \ Andy Furniere

Court slashes damages award for asbestos victims' family

The court of appeal in Brussels has confirmed a judgement against roof products manufacturer Eternit for failing to take safety measures to protect its employees and local residents from asbestos. However, a €250,000 award of damages handed down in first instance was reduced to €25,000. Eternit, based in Kapelle-op-den-Bos, Flemish Brabant, long manufactured fibre cement using asbestos. A case was filed against the company by the Jonckheere family, who lost their father, a long-time Eternit employee who also lived in Kapelle-op-den-Bos, to mesothelioma in 2000. The lung cancer is characteristic of exposure to asbestos.

Their mother later died of the same cause, and the family alleges that their deaths were due to the asbestos, which caused cancer not only in employees but also in people living near the factory. The judge at first instance ruled that Eternit had ignored the dangers of asbestos, which have been widely known since the 1960s, and had even tried to "cover up and obscure" the problem. Eternit continued to use asbestos

in its products until 1997, as the government was preparing a ban on the substance, which came into force in 1998.

The Jonckheere family was initially awarded €250,000 in damages, accusing Eternit of "greed for profit" which allowed them to "push aside scientific knowledge".

N-VA member of the federal parliament Valerie Van Peel pointed out that the Jonckheere family stood virtually alone against Eternit, despite "many victims in this country". She blamed the federal government's Asbestos Fund, which pays compensation to those with mesothelioma or the chronic lung disease asbestosis. "By accepting compensation from the fund for mounting medical costs, asbestos victims have to forgo the right to pursue the asbestos company in court," she said. "Since their time and energy are scarce, almost everyone opts for the fund."

A new regulation is in the works, she said, that would allow patients to receive compensation from the fund as well as take Eternit to court. \ AH

Leave of absence, day care, mortgages: changes on 1 April

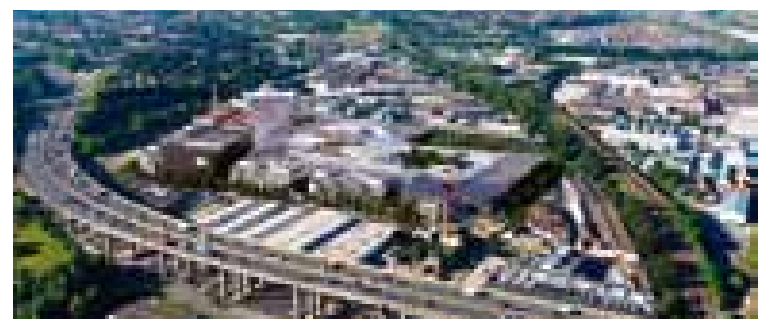
A number of new federal and regional regulations came into force on 1 April.

Employees may no longer apply for a leave of absence – time taken off work outside of official vacation, holidays or sick leave – except to care for sick children or relatives, and leave will be limited to 51 months over one's career. Previously, workers could request a leave of absence for any reason at all, and part of their salary would be paid by the government. The government allowance was halted in 2015.

Property management firms representing tenants or owners of apartments must be registered with the federal economy ministry. Existing firms have one year to register.

All day care facilities in Flanders with more than 18 places must publish a handbook describing the quality of the services they provide. Existing organisations have two years to comply.

Banks must now advertise the total cost of any mortgage offered, including fees other than interest, such as administrative fees and insurances, to help customers compare different offers more easily. \ AH



© Architect's rendering of Uplace

Uplace environmental permit suspended by Council of State

The Council of State, in the latest twists in the story of the Uplace leisure and shopping complex, has suspended an environmental permit, calling the future of the project once more into question. In 2011, Uplace – planned for Machelen, just outside the northern portion of the Brussels ring in Flemish Brabant – applied for an environmental permit, which was refused by the province, but later approved by Flemish minister Joke Schauvliege. The Council of State struck that decision down in 2015. A new application for a 20-year permit was approved in June last year.

However, opposition to the project – from Leuven and Vilvoorde, employers' organisation Unizo and mobility experts – meant the

Council of State was again invoked. The Council is tasked with scrutinising decisions of governments at all levels.

The Council, bypassing the advice of its own auditor, said it was important to take into account changes that may have taken place since the original application was submitted, to avoid a threat to investors. A new application needs to be submitted, according to the court.

"It is impossible to understand how the Council could follow its own auditor's advice in the case of Docks Brussel, but not in the case of Uplace," said Uplace CEO Bart Verhaeghe. The ruling, he said, was "weakly argued" and ignored the positive response of the Flemish environment ministry. \ AH

The time is now

Ghent talk series nudges 20-somethings off the beaten career path



Daan Bauwens

Follow Daan on Twitter \ @DaanBauwens

WWW.MOTIVAY.BE

A low tolerance for risk seems to be somewhat of a *leitmotif* in Flanders when it comes to career choices and moves. Secondary school graduates are, for instance, often counselled by their parents and relatives to set their sights on a stable nine-to-five, and entrepreneurship rates remain low compared to countries like the UK and the US.

Mathijs Vonckx and Patrice Boone, the pair behind the new Ghent-based talk series Motivay, want to encourage people to step off the beaten career track. The Ghent entrepreneurs have both charted extraordinary paths themselves.

In 2012, Boone founded the Eddie Clothing streetwear label while still a student in digital media at Gent University College. He subsequently decided to switch to marketing studies instead and eventually became a successful digital marketer.

Meanwhile, his friend Vonckx took a break from studying political science at Ghent University to found two non-profits, which in turn inspired him to pursue a legal degree.

Motivay, which invites young entrepreneurs with unusual career paths



© Motivay

Laura Verhulst told the Motivay audience what led her to open her own bakery at the age of 23

says Vonckx, now 32. But that wasn't the case for them, he says, "and it isn't the case for most 18-year-olds. Still, most follow through because of expectations. People similarly refrain from starting a business because they think they need a diploma."

Vonckx notes that people quickly abandon thoughts of pursuing careers in acting and singing because they aren't seen as 'real' careers. "By presenting the stories of people who didn't follow the

Motivay held its maiden event at the Backstay Hostel in Ghent last week. Focused on the theme of studying and entrepreneurship, three entrepreneurs with possibly even more unusual stories than Vonckx and Boone took the stage.

Laura Verhulst, a 23-year-old literature student, is the brainchild behind Madam Bakster, a bakery that offers "guilt-free" pastries and sweets that do not contain refined sugar, artificial sweeteners or animal products. Bertony da Silva, meanwhile, told the story of how he converted his hobby of creating T-shirts into the breakout clothing label Arte and opened his first physical shop in Antwerp last year.

Finally, Angelo Medagoda, a former management student shared what led him to found Friends and Fools, a company that offers people unique and luxurious travel experiences such as dining on a raft in the middle of a lake or spending the night in a treehouse.

Medagoda, 24, says he would never tell anyone that launching a business while still in school is an easy thing to do. "It's rather the opposite; I needed to drop out temporarily in the middle of exams," he says. "I was combing the Netherlands for a raft

that fitted my needs, while spending the rest of my days getting the paperwork done for the start-up of the firm."

It was a time of long days and short nights, but he says it was all worth it. "By presenting my story to an audience, I want to spread the message that there's nothing wrong with taking risks at this age. Now is the time: you're too young for anyone to blame you when things don't go as planned."

Medagoda still runs Friends and Fools but is also back in school with one year left until graduation.

Vonckx and Boone aim to organise one Motivay event every two months, with each lecture centred on breaking deeply ingrained taboos about careers and tickets priced at €8. The next talk, which should take place in May, will focus on experiences abroad and their potential to enrich a person's private and professional life.

"A sabbatical in which you travel the world for one year right after secondary school is still highly underrated," says Vonckx, "but it is proven to have a profound impact on one's understanding of self and, hence, the choices you will make. That same night, we will also give the stage over to people with international jobs: a documentary filmmaker, a war photographer and a traveling DJ."

The event after that, in July, will centre on careers that are often considered hobbies, like singing, acting and playing music.

With a dedicated website and the talks, Vonckx and Boone hope to establish a community of people who think alike. "Keeping in mind that today's careers will be about adjusting, learning new things and heading in new directions, we want to form a network of like-minded people," says Vonckx. "We want to offer a warm nest for the hatching of new entrepreneurs."

“We want to show people that many things they think are impossible are maybe not that hard to achieve

to tell their stories on stage, was born when the two started brainstorming about organising an event that could respond to the needs of today's generation. A glance back at their own careers sufficed to settle on their focus – lifting professional taboos.

"At 18, we were supposed to know what our futures would look like,"

beaten path or who succeeded in realising their dreams, we want to prevent such things from happening," he says.

But they aren't out to encourage naïve proposals, he insists, rather to stress feasibility. "At the same time, we want to show people that many things they think are impossible are maybe not that hard to achieve."

Q&A

Sven Van de Perre is a game designer with Monkube, which has developed a smartphone app called Think Twice that wants to show a different side to Brussels

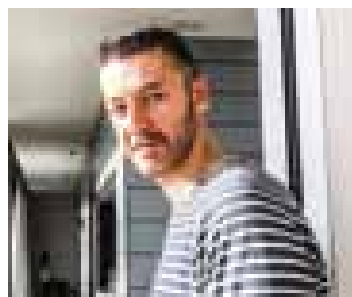
What is Think Twice?

Think Twice is an abstract puzzle game in which all 90 levels were designed by minority communities in Brussels. Each community also added a one-sentence word puzzle – a message they want to share with the world.

Our goal is straightforward: We want to show the world that Brussels is a city full of people who mean well, and full of communities who work together. And not the hellhole that some international politicians would like you to believe.

What inspired you to create it?

From a young age, I've been confronted with the prejudice of people from outside Brussels. It always bothered me, but I never felt I had to take action until after the Paris attacks of 2015. At that point, many of my international friends started asking me weird stuff like: "Are you still able to go outside?" I stated realising that these horrible events led to a whole generation that will shun Brussels if we don't act.



How does it work?

It starts out childishly easy. But without the use of text, and in many cases without the player even noticing, each new level teaches you something. The more you play, the smarter you get. And you'll need those smarts to successfully complete the level in

front of you. It is a very rewarding game to play. As in, it makes you feel smart. Because, hey, you are.

What has been the impact since its launch?

Well, the game is now out on all platforms, and reception has been great. High user ratings all around, which proves that it's not only seen as a good game, but people are also open to the message it holds. And we hope its message will keep on spreading in the months to come.

\ Interview by Leo Cendrowicz

Think Twice is available for iOS, Android, Windows, Mac and PC, in 12 languages

WEEK IN INNOVATION

UGent researchers turn grass into fuel

Ghent University researchers have developed a process that turns grass into biofuel. For his PhD research, Malaysian scientist Way Cern Khor investigated methods of breaking down and converting grass into substances that could fuel cars and airplanes. "Until now, grass has mainly served as feed for animals, but we can get a lot more out of it," said Khor. "Due to its vast abundance, it is an attractive source." There are, however, major challenges ahead, said Khor. The amount of biofuel that can be made from grass in the laboratory is at this point limited to a few drops. "But if we keep working on optimising this process, in co-operation with industrial partners, efficiency will increase," said Khor.

Stricter regulations for alcohol

Federal health minister Maggie De Block is introducing stricter rules concerning alcohol use among minors aged 16 to 18, for whom it is illegal to drink, buy or be sold spirits. New regulations concern TV and radio ads for alcoholic drinks, which must now be approved beforehand by the Jury for Ethical Practices. De Block has also increased the number of inspections of vending machines containing alcoholic drinks to ensure they have a properly working "age lock", which can only be opened by inserting an identity card. Each hospital will include a team of staff members who will be trained to quickly diagnose and treat alcohol abuse.

Robot-human interaction breakthrough

Workers at Audi Brussels are communicating with a collaborative robot, or "cobot", through the use of hand gestures. The robot, named Walt, is equipped with heat sensors and depth and colour cameras in order to detect workers in the near vicinity. He can also recognise workers' faces and uses his own "face" to communicate. Flemish company Robovision developed the software that supports worker safety and at the same time increases cobot precision by 60%. Walt is the first cobot at Audi with these new capacities. "It's the first fully operational cobot that is working together with human colleagues successfully," said the factory's director Patrick Danau. \ Andy Furniere

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You are what you eat

Pupils get to grips with fresh fruits and veggies in GoodCook project



John Bean

More articles by John \ flanderstoday.org

\ GOODPLANET.BE

Good eating habits start young, and a project launched by GoodPlanet Belgium and supermarket chain Delhaize aims to teach children between eight and 12 how to eat more healthily.

"Pre-teens and teenagers in Belgium eat far too little fruit and vegetables, about 200 grams a day on average," says Denis Knoop, CEO of Delhaize. "But recommendations call for twice this amount."

There is overwhelming evidence, he continues, "that demonstrates the positive benefits of a diet rich in these foodstuffs. Fruits and vegetables are an important source of water, carbohydrates, fibre, minerals and vitamins."

GoodPlanet's priority in the coming years is to improve the public's understanding of our connection with nature, and with our food in particular. Through constructive action and sharing their in-house expertise, they hope to inspire young and old alike to work towards a sustainable society.

Its GoodCook project exemplifies this philosophy. GoodCook will introduce pupils to fresh seasonal products through a series of hands-on cooking workshops in schools across Belgium.

The classes encourage each child to get out from behind their desk and smell, feel, taste and even cook their own food, allowing them to discover for themselves the possibilities of including locally grown produce into their diet.

"Today, children don't have as close a connection with nature as they did in the past, and they no longer make a link between themselves and the source of their food," says Jo Van Cauwenberge, director of the Brussels-based GoodPlanet.

With GoodCook, he continues, "we hope to re-establish and strengthen this link. We want them to know where cauliflower, carrots and strawberries grow. We want them to experience first hand the rich variety of tastes that are made possible using fresh produce."



© Courtesy GoodPlanet

A typical lesson follows the lines of a meal plan, where pupils are first given an appetiser of activities to stimulate their senses. This is followed by a main course where they learn to prepare and cook simple yet creative and tasty food.

be added to the dinner table. At this time of the year students learn about preparing meals with foods such as spinach, chervil, rhubarb, celery and lettuce.

In summer, flowers have turned to moist fruit, while autumn brings

One group, for example, will visually inspect the products while another explores the products by touch. The idea is to use your senses to learn more about what you eat.

Each workshop ends with the pupils cooking a variety of dishes and then enjoying a good meal together. In doing this, GoodCook hopes to engage students in the kitchen and in preparing the food they eat.

They hope that by exposing young people to a variety of healthy foods, they will be able to develop healthy eating habits in youngsters from an early age. The take-home message is to put a rainbow of food on your plate, and each season offers its own characteristic fruits and vegetables that nourish the body.

GoodPlanet develops and supervises projects, training and educational tools on a variety of sustainability issues. With GoodCook, it hopes to develop a programme that will reach upwards of 10,000 students this year and continue to grow, improving the eating habits of children around the country.

“Children don't have as close a connection with nature as they once did, and they no longer make a link between themselves and sources of food

They top it all off with dessert: a handy recipe book full of tips that they can bring home and share with their parents.

The lesson also follows the calendar, as each season brings its own colours, scents and flavours. In spring, when nature wakes from winter sleep, an abundance of buds, shoots and flowers appear that can

earthy colours, and turnips, pumpkins, carrots and beets join the table. Even winter has its own unique flavours as endives, celeriac, onions and cabbage appear on the menu.

GoodCook workshops are pupil-centred. In small groups, the children explore various fruits and vegetables up close using a single sense.

Diane von Furstenberg among UAntwerp honorary doctorates

Antwerp University has awarded an honorary doctorate to the Belgian-American fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg, best-known for the iconic wrap dress she created in the mid-1970s.

"She is receiving the doctorate for her exceptional merit in fashion and entrepreneurship but also for her intense commitment concerning women's rights and human rights in general," UAntwerp rector Herman Van Goethem said in a statement. The Brussels-born von Furstenberg, 69, also worked as goodwill



UAntwerp rector Herman Van Goethem and Diane von Furstenberg

ambassador for Antwerp's Red Star Museum, which is dedicated

to migration.

Four top scientists also received an honorary doctorate during the ceremony last week. Flemish scientist Jan Rabaey, a professor at the University of California in Berkeley, received a doctorate for his pioneering ICT work. In the 1990s, he laid the basis for what would later become tablet computers with his "infopad". He is now developing applications that communicate with the human body through sensors and other forms of technology, such as prostheses controlled by the human brain.

French scientist Almuth Grésillon, meanwhile, was recognised for her research efforts in modern manuscripts and genetic criticism, while Christophe Lasseur, also French, received accolades for his work on waste processing during space journeys.

Austrian scientist Ernst Fehr received an honorary doctorate for his research into the impact of factors like justice and social rules on modern economic life.

All five laureates taught a master-class that was open to students, alumni and industry professionals. \ Andy Furniere

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Happy teachers make happy pupils

A new study conducted by the province of Antwerp shows that children's feelings of well-being are influenced by how happy their teachers are. "Teachers are real role models for children in primary school," researcher Guido Van Hal of Antwerp University told *De Standaard*. The findings are the result of a poll conducted among almost 14,000 students in primary school. On average, the polled children gave themselves a happiness score of eight out of 10, with happiness levels heavily determined by such factors as friends, the absence of bullying, feeling motivated and healthy relationships with multiple people, though especially with parents.

Schools embrace digital performance reports

The large majority of secondary schools in Flanders sends school reports to students and their parents digitally, a massive increase from just three years ago. According to Jan Schuer, founder of Smartschool, 90% of schools in Flanders are using the communication platform to send digital reports. "After each test or task, the teacher inputs the marks on Smartschool, and the student and parents get a notification on their smartphone or computer and can check the results immediately," explained Rita Utens, director of KTA in Sint-Truiden, which has switched entirely to digital. "Parents can regularly follow up how their child is doing, both in terms of results and behaviour," she added.

VUB collaborates with Bolivian university

The Free University of Brussels (VUB) has started a project with the Universidad Católica Boliviana (UCB) in La Paz, Bolivia. Researchers will carry out population research to improve the quality of life in the South American country's fragile rural and urban regions. Bolivia has seen rapid economic growth over the last 30 years that have come with major legal, social and ecological changes and had an immense impact on the availability of natural resources, agricultural production and social development, VUB said. It wants to help strengthen UCB's research project and training capacity. The institutions will develop Transdisciplinary Learning Communities, which will provide local communities with practical applications to counter the negative effects of social developments. \ AF

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

BlaBla Language Exchange

Improve your language skills, meet new people and help build the international community in Brussels. At the entrance, you'll be guided to the language group of your choice, whether it's your native tongue or a language you're learning, and provided with a list of suggested conversation topics. 5 April 19.00-23.00, BrewDog, Putterij 20, Brussels; free

\ tinyurl.com/putterij

Blossom nocturnes

April is the best time to visit Haspengouw, the fruit-growing region of Flanders, when the trees are in bloom. On Friday and Saturday evenings this month, take a guided walk through orchards lit by fire pits and enjoy storytelling, drinks and snacks along the way. Reservation via 011 70 18 18 or info.toerisme@sint-truiden.be. 7-8 April 19.40, 20.00 & 20.20, Fruitbedrijf Jacobs, Heide 114, Kortenberg; €12

\ toerisme-sint-truiden.be

Slow Art Day at the MAS

Did you know that the average museum-goer spends just 17 seconds looking at a work of art? MAS museum invites visitors to take their time during separate guided tours for adults and children. Reservations required. 8 April 14.00 & 15.30, Hanzestedenplaats 1, Antwerp; free with museum admission

\ mas.be

Photo Walk Brugge

Every year, Andy McSweeney of Photo Tour Brugge offers a free guided photo walk in the heart of Bruges. It's a great chance to get help with your photography skills, meet other shutterbugs and shoot some photos in one of Flanders' most beautiful cities. Register via the website. 9 April 9.00-12.30, meet at Burg 14, Bruges; free

\ phototourbrugge.com

Guided abbey tour

The historic abbey of Tongerlo dates to the 12th century and is still home to a group of Norbertine monks, as well as a faithful copy of Leonardo DaVinci's "Last Supper". On Sunday afternoons through September, a guided tour reveals its fascinating history. No reservation necessary. 9 April 14.30, Abdijstraat 40, Westerlo (Antwerp province); €2

\ tinyurl.com/tongerlo

Cartoon madness

Comics Station has 60 attractions and Europe's longest indoor slide



Clodagh Kinsella

More articles by Clodagh \ flanderstoday.org

\ COMICSSTATION.BE

With its impressively eclectic architecture, Antwerp Central is an attraction in its own right, but now the famously elegant train station boasts a new asset: a theme park devoted solely to Belgian comic strips.

Spread across four floors at the station's southern entrance on Kievitplein, the €13 million Comics Station Antwerp took a year to build and expects 250,000 visitors per year when it opens on 9 April.

"A year ago there was nothing here, and now there stands – in one of the most beautiful stations in the world – the first amusement park devoted to Belgian cartoon characters," says Wim Hubrechtsen, CEO of the new venture.

While there are still some finishing touches to make, the press and VIPs got a sneak preview together with Prince Laurent and his brood as the guests of honour. "I've been a comics fan all my life," said the prince. "I enjoyed reading *Urbanus*, and *Suske en Wiske* as a child. It's magical to watch them come to life in this new park."

Urbanus, Flemish comic and cartoonist Urbain Servranckx's strip mining his own adolescence, and veteran adventure comic *Suske en Wiske* feature alongside *The Smurfs*, *Lucky Luke*, *The Kiekeboes* and *Jommeke* in six themed zones spread across 6,200 square metres.

The park offers over 60 activities, spanning old-school attractions like a funhouse, bumper cars and a whack-a-mole game, plus a 4D cinema, a saloon shooting game and a free-fall ride that takes place in a pitch-black room. Visitors can help professor Barabas find *Suske*



© Courtesy Comics Station

Former Studio 100 execs are behind Comics Station Antwerp, spread over four floors of Antwerp Central

and *Wiske* via a time machine, or gather berries for the *Smurfs* on an interactive woodland ride.

There are also three slides varying from a gentle number to the show-stopping Mega Twister – a 22.5-metre-high corkscrew slide that runs through the centre of Comics Station and is the longest of its kind in Europe.

Comics Station is the brainchild of Hubrechtsen, Jeroen Jespers and Mark Kiekens – all former employees of Flemish media company Studio 100, which also runs several other amusement parks. Firm comic fans, they called on Antwerp publisher WPG, holder of many comics copyrights, to help bring the project to life.

While Julien Bertévas, who's

behind Parc Astérix and Walibi, took care of the scenography, Wijnegem architects Wollaert+Partners were charged with transforming the largely underground space into a bright and appealing theme park.

Their solution was to centre the design on an ellipse-shaped void that brings daylight 18 metres below ground. "This was an incredible opportunity to fully engage our creativity," said Nils Wollaert. "A bright, airy, open space at the heart of the project makes for a pleasant experience and forms a link between the different levels and the station."

At street level there's a restaurant with a terrace, and a glass-walled gift shop that runs down

the southern end of the station, terminating on Kievitplein, where guests descend into the park via escalators.

The restaurant will serve traditional Belgian dishes, catering to passengers and locals as well as park visitors. With an indoor playground, accessible after the park closes, "parents can enjoy the restaurant and [children] can play to their hearts' content," added Hubrechtsen.

A visit to the park is expected to last a few hours, and can be tailored to suit requirements. "Visitors give their age and their preferred language when ordering the ticket," Hubrechtsen explained. "The visit is completely personalised."

BITE

Mexican eatery answers Ghent foodies' prayers, at last

\ INDEWULF.BE

Flemish star chef Kobe Desmarauts is at it again. After gaining the culinary world's highest distinction – a Michelin star – at the age of 25, he infused a refreshing level of creativity into every passion project he subsequently took on. Known for insisting on locally sourced ingredients and traditional methods to inspire his menus, Desmarauts is a force to be reckoned with on the local food scene and beyond. But last year, he decided to close his West Flemish restaurant In de Wulf, and further disappointed diners by shutting his incredibly popular Vitrine in Ghent.

But there's a new venture in Ghent, which again has people talking, but now for entirely different reasons. It's no secret that quality Mexican fare is a rare find in Flanders, even in one of its most food-forward cities, so buzz quickly mounted when pop-up La Chaparrita opened its doors earlier this year.

Housed in the Vitrine's former space in the city centre, this fun eatery is light on pretence and



© Piet De Kersgieter

heavy on charm. Colourful *papel picado* banners hang from the ceiling, Gypsy Kings music sets the mood, and a sombrero-clad boar frames the doorway to the dining room.

The only reservations accepted are for a table of eight upstairs in the eatery's private room, which is as inviting as the downstairs area. The menu is simple, offering tasty Mexican staples like *ceviche*, *tacos de la calle* and classic rice and beans.

Desmarauts' La Chaparrita strikes the delicate balance of maintaining Mexican food's casual appeal without skimping on great presentation and taste. Everything is well done, but the *tacos*, *ceviche tostada* and *mezcal margaritas* are spot-on.

The muse behind this stroll into Mexican territory is Klaus Georis, a Californian with Belgian and Mexican roots. He caught Desmarauts' attention when he made delicious Mexican specialties for the staff at In de Wulf after hours. Georis, now La Chaparrita's chef, is happily surprised at the success of the pop-up and says its fate might not be sealed on 1 May when it's scheduled to close. "There's always a chance that this place could re-emerge somehow, but we'll just have to see," he says.

As for Desmarauts, he's still got De Superette over in Ghent's Zuid district and also plans to open a new restaurant in the city in the coming months. Until then, get to La Chaparrita while you still can. \ Monica Cisneros

Window to the world

Radio Internazionale has been a pillar of Genk's Italian population since the 1980s



Toon Lambrechts

More articles by Toon \ flanderstoday.org

RADIOINTERNAZIONALE.BE

Giuseppe Allegro reaches into his pocket and pulls out an old photograph. It shows a group of men, dressed in '80s garb and smiling proudly beside their radio equipment.

"This is me," he says, pointing to a more youthful version of himself. "These were the very early days of Radio Internazionale."

Like many before him, the dire economic situation of southern Italy brought Allegro to Belgium in 1974. The coal mines of Limburg – and later the car manufacturing industry – demanded more labour than the region could provide, and extra hands were recruited from other parts of Europe.

By the 1970s, Genk was home to a well-established Italian community, as well as settled migrants from other Mediterranean countries. "Doing radio shows was definitely a trend in those days," Allegro recalls, and by 1982 Radio Internazionale had followed the crowd and taken to the airways.

"Belgium had a lot of local radio stations. A few others were already airing in Genk, and we wanted to go for it as well. I started with a sports programme, which was always one of my interests."

Today, the studio of Radio Internazionale – located in the mezzanine of the Missione Catolica Italiana church in the Waterschei neighbourhood – looks brand new. It was recently renovated and the red, green and white colours of the Italian flag dominate its interior, along with pictures of some of Italy's most famous faces.

What had started as a small project quickly became a pillar of Genk's Italian community. "Don't forget, in that period there was no internet, and even phones were not that



© Toon Lambrechts

Giuseppe Allegro was one of the founders of Radio Internazionale, which lives up to its name by bringing multiple ethnic communities together

common," explains Allegro. "A letter to your family back in Italy would take about a month to arrive. Can you imagine how important it was for people here to hear radio in their

the airwaves – marriages, funerals and local activities all found a place. For many women who didn't work outside the home and often lacked local language skills, the radio

Sometimes people sent us material by post. Making radio was definitely more technically challenging back then," he recalls with laughter. "Now we can just buy Italian radio programmes."

Things have changed over the decades, both for Genk and for the station, but Radio Internazionale remains important for the Italian diaspora. "Everything is funded by the community. The church, our community centre and the radio are still at the centre of it. People pass by to announce news or just say hello. It's a bit like the Little Italy of Limburg."

But Radio Internazionale was never an exclusive project. "From the beginning, the other migrant communities had their place at our station. There were programmes in

Greek, Spanish and Turkish."

The calendar shows that the diversity of its output continues to grow. An Armenian show airs at noon on Saturday, while on Friday, Ukraine takes its turn. "We have programmes in about 11 languages at the moment. It reflects the multi-cultural reality of Genk."

The programming of Radio Internazionale shows a social commitment, too, explains Rosaria Ciarlo, who volunteers there. "We did a project in collaboration with Tevona, an organisation that provides care for people with a mental disabilities. Together we put together a monthly programme called *The World Belongs to Everyone*."

Another popular show was *Long Live the Grandparents*, which brought the elderly and their grandchildren to the studio together, and the success of these projects inspired Ciarlo to continue on this path.

"We are working to set up a collaboration with the Toermalien home for the elderly," she says. "The first generations who came to Belgium are ageing, and it is time to do something for them. The idea is to give them access to the radio for a monthly programme. We want to get their voices outside of the walls of the nursing home."

As we leave the studio, Allegro passes through the church that houses the station, where a more silent atmosphere reigns. On the wall, scenes from the mines bear witness to a harsh industrial past.

"This whole place – the church, the studio, the community centre – all of it was built by the miners. They collected the funding and built it themselves after working in the mine."

"Without them, there would have been nothing."

“To fill in our music collection, we asked people to bring records back from their holidays in Italy

language, with their music and with news from Italy?”

But Radio Internazionale was more than a cultural lifeline to the homeland; it fulfilled a local role as well. News from Limburg's Italian community was spread through

proved to be a window to the world. It seems hard to imagine now, but it was tricky to lay their hands on Italian music back then, says Allegro. "To fill in our music collection, we asked people to bring records back from their holidays in Italy.

Flemish Refugee Action awards outstanding initiatives

GASTVRIJEGEMEENTE.BE

Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, or Flemish Refugee Action, has announced the winners of their fourth annual Gastvrije Gemeente (Hospitable Community) contest. The umbrella organisation for refugee support in Flanders launched the competition to give visibility to the region's countless solidarity initiatives.

"In contrast to what one might think, given the seemingly harsh climate when it comes to refugees, Flanders shows an incredible solidarity towards newcomers," says Eef Heylighen of Flemish Refugee Action. "We co-operate with a large network of grassroots organisations and individual volunteers, and we wanted to somehow make this solidarity more visible, to tell a counter-story."

Gastvrije Gemeente covers seven categories, ranging from initiatives in the arts and education to businesses and municipalities. There is also a public choice award.

Winners include Refu Interim, a project spearheaded by Ghent social-cultural organisation cirQ, which gets refugees involved in volunteering and taking part in cultural activities – from running the bar to acting on stage. The youth work award, meanwhile, went to Tumult in Mechelen, which brought Flemish and refugee youth together in summer camps.

This year, Violet, a youth orchestra from Flemish Brabant went home with the public trophy, based on the results of nearly 26,500 votes.



© Kortrijk OCMW

Violet set up a series of concerts with refugee musicians in collaboration with the Syrian violist and composer Shalan Alhamwy, who fled his country for Belgium in 2015. He composed a new piece

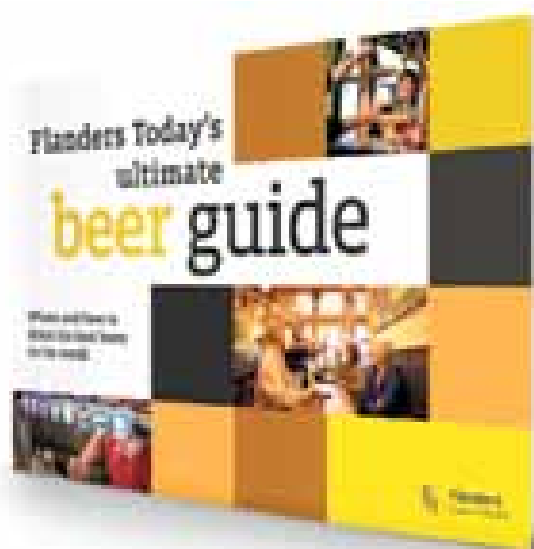
of music for the series, combining Flemish and Syrian influences. Proceeds from the concerts and an accompanying CD went to Life Skills, a project started by Alhamwy's sisters to provide psychologi-

cal support to refugee children in Belgium.

This year's Gastvrije Gemeente broke records in more ways than one. Aside from more votes for the public prize than ever before, it also received more nominations for the other prizes – nearly 460.

This comes to no surprise to Heylighen. "We witnessed a significant increase in solidarity projects since 2015, when the refugee influx was at its peak. Normally, most of the initiatives are initiated by schools, local municipalities or existing organisations. But more and more, individuals are setting up something to help refugees, to assist them in rebuilding their lives here. This growing solidarity is the face of Flanders that we want to be seen." \ TL

Welcome to the land of beer



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Taking art to court

Mechelen' Contour biennale pushes and prods the legal process



Ian Mundell

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CONTOUR8.BE

OPRECHTMECHELEN.BE

The Contour biennale of the moving image honours Mechelen's former role as the seat of the highest court in the Low Countries, with installations that tirelessly question how law is applied in both past and present

Mechelen is in the middle of a two-year celebration of all things legal, recalling its role as home to the Great Council of the Habsburg Netherlands during its Op.Recht. Mechelen city festival. From the 15th century to the 17th century, the Council was the highest court in the Low Countries, and influential in shaping Europe's tradition of constitutional law.

This reflection on the law also permeates the eighth edition of the Contour Biennale of the moving image, now on show in spaces across the city. Among the locations are two of the Great Council's former homes – Schepenhuis, which housed the Council's predecessors from 1473 and then the Council itself, and the Court of Savoy, which took the Council in when it returned to Mechelen in 1616 after a period of exile.

"In the movement from the Schepenhuis to the Court of Savoy, you are moving in the direction that the court itself moved," observes Natasha Ginwala, the curator of this edition of Contour. In preparing the programme, the Berlin-based curator and researcher immersed herself in the history of Mechelen at the time of the Great Council, but also determined to keep a critical, contemporary perspective. "This is not about valorising and simplifying the history of the Low Countries and building a romantic vision," she says. "Rather, it's to question, through artistic approaches, how the law is applied and the methods of presenting testimony and evidence that act upon the course of global justice."

Several of the pieces inquire into legal processes or the architecture of courts, both in the past and present. One of the most striking is by Rotterdam-based artist Rana Hamadeh, whose work sets the scene for an opera about a 1783 case in which the captain of a slave ship was sued by the expedition's investors for disposing of the cargo short of the destination. The point of law was loss of goods rather than mass murder.

"Sketch No.1: On Proxy-bodies", in the cellar of Schepenhuis, combines documents, a libretto and a maquette to stage the opera. But the atmosphere is set by a ticking metronome, amplified and looped to create an eerily tense soundscape that also takes



© Courtesy the artists

Filipa César & Louis Henderson's *Sunstone* (2017) looks at navigation systems in flux – from lighthouses to satellites

in footsteps and anything said in the room.

Other artists are involved in more contemporary issues of social justice and state-sanctioned violence. Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam focus on Tibet's struggle against Chinese oppression, using images of police violence and Buddhist monks and nuns who set themselves on fire as a radical form of protest.

Alongside these disturbing yet compelling images is a gentler work, a filmed portrait of a Tibetan woman who was once a celebrated political prisoner, but now works as a housekeeper in a rest home in Brussels.

Then there is the Karrabing Film Collective, a group of indigenous Australian filmmakers whose work expresses their daily experience of racial violence and dispossession.

Many of the 25 artists and collectives selected visited Mechelen to devise or develop their work, producing some fascinating connections between art and location. "The Book of Glass" by Canadian artist Judy Radul, for example, uses video cameras to build up a multi-layered critique of surveillance culture.

They scan around a ground floor room in the Schepenhuis, capturing visitors but also zooming out through the leaded windows to take in the Grote Markt and people passing by. Meanwhile, another camera, built into a book-reading machine, browses texts on subjects such as the legal status of video evidence.

"She exposes the physical perfor-

mance of the camera and the geometric lines of the lens, while responding to the historical architecture of the Schepenhuis as the inaugural seat of the Great Council, and its gridded windows that open a view into the historical city centre," Ginwala says. "However, there is also a reflection upon the media technology used by state forces, such as the police and in courtrooms, that complicate the use of video as evidence."

The Baroque garden in the Court of Savoy made Beirut-based artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan recall orchards in the Lebanese mountains, where old cassette tape is wound around the fruit trees to scare away birds. Not only is nature wrapped in shiny tape, but also the implied songs and sermons on the tape.

So he has draped the Court's garden with tape in a similar way, while playing what he claims to be a voice recovered from one of these tapes over speakers. I say "he claims" because the discourse concerns an obscure concept in Islamic law that sanctions lying. But my favourite work is that of Pedro Gómez-Egaña, a Colombian artist and composer. Ginwala nudged him in the direction of polyphonic music manuscripts held by the Alamire Foundation in Leuven and the Royal Library in Brussels.

Here he became fascinated by enigmatic phrases inserted by scribes as instructions to be decoded by

the musicians. He also became interested in the early printing industry and visited the Museum Plantin-Moretus in Antwerp.

The result is an installation that turns the attic of the House of the Great Salmon on Zoutwerf into a kind of printing press for coded messages. Weights on ropes swing back and forth, gradually releasing a set of beams doubling those that hold up the roof.

As they tilt over, other ropes pull a shutter closed over the window illuminating the room. When it is finally pitch black, you see phrases from the manuscripts written in light on the far wall.

"The roof itself becomes a creaking instrument as the building is destabilised," Ginwala explains, "while the artists' soundtrack reveals polyphonic echoes and the secret instructions inscribed in the illuminated medieval manuscripts that prescribe silence are projected."

Contour's final location lies outside the city centre, in a former garage now converted to a co-working space and a youth centre. Four films are projected here that explore themes of politics and governance, labour and colonialism.

"In this way, we move beyond the historical court venues," says Ginwala, "to spaces of collective labour, theatre and creating new ideas with young people from Mechelen's diverse neighbourhoods."

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Decision on ABC Cinema by end of month

Brussels' Cineact stated its case to the court of appeals last week with regard to the historic ABC Cinema. Cineact, a foundation launched by the people behind Cinema Nova and La Retine de Plateau, had agreed to rent the cinema on Adolphe Maxlaan and all related equipment from its owner in 2013. The venue had been screening soft-core porn films since the 1970s. Cineact began carrying out renovations, but the owner died suddenly before a contract was signed, and the building went to the his heirs, who quickly sold it to a real estate firm. Cineact went to court to get its right to rent the space recognised, but lost and have now presented their case to a court of appeal. A decision is expected by 24 April.

MiniCiné viewing booths open in Leuven library

This week sees the opening of MiniCiné, viewing booths made available to card holders of Leuven's city library. Visitors can choose from 100 of the best Flemish shorts ever made to watch in the booths. The public is invited to a free grand opening on 5 April. There is an afternoon programme of shorts for the whole family, and an evening programme featuring films selected by Oscar-nominated director Sahim Omar Kalifa. MiniCiné has been launched by a co-operation between European film festivals and libraries called Audio Visual Access. The films in Leuven were selected by the city's International Short Film Festival.

\ bib.leuven.be/minicine

Hof Van Cleve 15th best in Europe

Hof Van Cleve, the three-Michelin-star restaurant in East Flanders owned by chef Peter Goossens, made 15th place on the list of the 200 best classic restaurants in Europe on the influential website Opinionated About Dining (OAD). Also in the top 100 are Sea Grill and Comme Chez Soi in Brussels and lunch and dessert lounge Het Gebaar in Antwerp. Heading the list is Hôtel de Ville in Lausanne in Switzerland. OAD allows anyone to submit their opinions on restaurants, but its surveys are based only on votes by its most experienced reviewers.

\ tinyurl.com/OADeurope

Until 21 May

Across Mechelen

Stronger together

Antwerp artists get into the gallery game with two new artist-run spaces



Clodagh Kinsella
More articles by Clodagh \ flanderstoday.org

\ PINKIEBOWTIE.COM

Antwerp art fans have had a packed diary of late. With the recent launch of C A S S T L and Pinkie Bowtie the following day, the city's gallery scene has a new momentum that has been the talk of town.

C A S S T L is an acronym for the space's three founders: Luc Tuymans, his wife and fellow artist Carla Arocha and her collaborator Stéphane Schraenen. C A S S T L's super sleek white premises, located just north of the city's Mas museum, have housed Arocha-Schraenen's studio for the past year, and the street-front room naturally suggested itself to exhibitions.

On the recent opening night, guests played with Antwerp artist Filip Collin's new *Puzzlebox*. A former printmaker, Collin had sought to bridge 2D and 3D worlds by rendering drawings of Antwerp's Botanical Garden as bright puzzle pieces to be reassembled in multiple ways.

Come and Play With Filip, currently on view at C A S S T L, is his first solo exhibition. C A S S T L has six shows planned this year, with the upcoming *No Pressure* set to showcase art from the founders' own collections, including work by the late, great Robert Mapplethorpe. "The title of the second show

could be the *leitmotif* of the whole endeavour," explains Schraenen. "It's not a gallery. We're not representing any artists, we're not selling. It's mostly for the joy of showing things."

And there's no fixed programme; events can happen on a weekend or weekday, and last an hour or a day. "It could be an evening where someone comes and reads from their new book, or where designers come and show their fabrics," says Schraenen.

Antwerp is home to numerous progressive art spaces, from well-established non-profits like LLS 387, to new enterprises like Pinkie Bowtie and NICC. Founded in Antwerp but presently based in Brussels, NICC advocates for artist rights and recently renewed its Antwerp efforts.

"It really shows that there's a vacuum," says Schraenen. "Institutions and other commercial places have another agenda. Artists doing these things are freer and can work without all that pressure. I'm not against museums and commercial galleries, but there's also another way."

Pinkie Bowtie's opening manifesto made much the same point, referring to the temporary closures of all three of the city's key art institutions – contemporary art museum



© Charlie De Keersmaecker

From left: Vaast Colson, Dennis Tyfus and Peter Fengler founded Pinkie Bowtie to communicate their artistic practice to international audiences

M HKA, fine arts museum KMSKA and Extra City – as a ripe time for forward-thinking artist-led enter-

prises.

Set on Wolstraat in the city centre, opposite artists' watering hole

Café De Kat, the gallery represents the work of three figures synonymous with Antwerp's underground: Vaast Colson, Dennis Tyfus and Peter Fengler.

"We wanted to communicate our artistic practice to an international audience," explains Fengler. "The three of us have worked together a lot, running other platforms; our spirit and approach are very compatible. Joining together will multiply our potential."

The venture, which houses an exhibition space, archive and a shop, was conceived as an experiment in new models of artist representation. Opening show *The First Annual Report*, which included just a handful of works by the trio, was all about planting their flag.

"The main focus is our own practise but the fact that we often co-operate and initiate all kinds of activities means that it won't be about navel-gazing," says Fengler. "Showing what surrounds us is a logical part of it, too."

Given the synchronicity of the C A S S T L and Pinkie openings, journalists were quick to talk of rivalry; but Schraenen just wasn't biting. "It's a misconception that comes from imagining that we run a [commercial] gallery. Besides, the more galleries there are in a town, the better it is for those galleries."

Drone dance: Modern retelling of a legend features unique duets

\ FABULEUS.BE

The story of how Ugo Dehaes came to include drones in his new dance production starts a couple of years ago, when the Brussels-based choreographer joined De Jonge Academie.

The association brings together young local scientists and artists and, true to its mission, it connected Dehaes to researchers affiliated with the University of Leuven and the nanotech research centre imec – both of which were conducting experiments with drones and GPS signals.

"They were looking for a project to implement their knowhow indoors, and my choreography *RATS* turned out to be the ideal vehicle," says Dehaes, 40, a former student of Brussels dance school P.A.R.T.S.

The six Parrot drones used on stage are sturdy, not too expensive and outfitted with a custom software platform. Still, Dehaes says it was a major challenge to connect the story he wanted to tell with the drone technology and the computer programme developed by the Leuven researchers. During rehearsals and perfor-



© Clara Hermans/Fabuleus

The show is based on the story of the Pied Piper, with the drones as the rats

mances, barcode-like markers that line the floor of the stage keep the drones under control by way of an internal camera and GPS system. "The drones receive commands regarding where to fly from the central computer 24 times a second," Dehaes explains. "The one drone I operate myself dances a more intimate duet with a contemporary dancer."

In the new production, which tours across Flanders until the end

of April, with a second leg in the autumn, the threatening drones serve as a metaphor. Loosely based on the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, the drones double as the simultaneously fascinating and irritating rats, seven youth dancers as the kids, and Brussels-based dancer Jenna Jalonen as the rat-catcher – who tries to get the other performers interested in contemporary dance.

To find his dancers, Dehaes turned

to FABULEUS, the Leuven-based theatre and dance company. It organised workshops in local dance classes and sport halls, followed by a boot camp and auditions.

"I didn't know all that much about urban dance, but I liked the explosiveness of urban battles," explains Dehaes. "These short choreographies lack structure and tend to have a strong narrative; it's all about imitating and showing off."

The seven dancers chosen vary in age from 11 to 16 and hail from different parts of the country. On stage, they dance not to the chart-topping R&B tunes of Drake, Rihanna and the like, but also contemporary instrumental music composed by Adrian Newgent.

Eventually the dancers started to get into Newgent's composition, Dehaes says, just as they did the contemporary dance routines, which gradually blended in with their urban moves.

Naturally, rehearsals were beset with unexpected, drone-related obstacles: interfering wi-fi signals,

worn-out markers and the heavy wind produced by the drones. "Only a few days before opening night did it all work out," says Dehaes. "Only rarely will a drone still fly against a wall or into another drone, but the system makes sure a drone cannot fly into the audience."

At first, the choreographies of the drones and the dancers were rehearsed separately. When they finally met on stage, the curiosity of the teenagers had reached a fever pitch.

Still, real interaction is limited since Dehaes wrote distinctive choreographies for the drones and the dancers. Only the adult in the group, Jalonen, gets up close to the drones.

"There's a huge mutual trust," says the choreographer about his bond with the Finnish contemporary dancer, with whom he also collaborated in his 2013 production *Grafted*. "When I command a drone to fly by closely, I know she will move out of the way when necessary." \ Tom Peeters

Until 29 April

Across Flanders

Heaven vs earth

The Sky is the Limit

Until 2 July
Rockoxhuis, Antwerp
| ROCKOXHUIS.BE

Religious art often featured landscapes, but it wasn't until the 16th century that nature moved to the fore, becoming a genre in its own right. Engaging new show *The Sky is the Limit: The Landscape of the Low Countries* charts the craze for landscapes via 40 Flemish paintings and drawings from the Rockoxhuis Museum's own collection, the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp and Dresden's Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister. It is the last special exhibition in the four-year series The Golden Cabinet, showcasing Western European gems from the Fine Arts Museum, which is closed for renovation. Come July, Rockoxhuis will

merge with the adjoining Frans Snijders House, reopening as a new entity in 2018. The Sky is the Limit begins with pioneering Dinant-born painter Joachim Patinir, whose "Landscape with the Flight into Egypt" (c1516) was the first Low Countries work to subordinate its Biblical theme to the sweeping landscape. "We call him the inventor of the world landscape," explains Rockoxhuis conservator Hildegard Van de Velde. "He brought together different elements in fantastical landscapes that didn't really exist." It was a sleight of hand perfected by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, whose



© Abel Grimmer, "Antwerp in 1600"; KMSKA, Foto Lukasart, Hugo Maertens

dramatic pen drawings of the Alps and Netherlandish countryside – rarely displayed – were snapped up in print form by restless city-dwellers. His son Jan Brueghel later revitalised the genre with his mastery

of depth, dense forest scenes – also practised by Paul Bril and David Vinckboons – and animal-crammed "paradise landscapes". Neatly, the show ends where the Golden Cabinet season itself began: Frans Francken the Younger's beguiling Art Gallery (c1618), depicting a collector's gallery lined with landscapes by Brueghel, Bril and Joos de Momper. The gallery proper holds more fine landscapes and Flemish contemporary artist David Claerbout's mesmerising video "Travel". A slow pan through a divine forest, it's the ultimate fantasy landscape – being made entirely from computer images. | Clodagh Kinsella

EVENT

Floralia

7 April to 7 May
Groot Bijgaarden Castle
| FLORALIA-BRUSSELS.BE

For an explosion of spring colours head out to Groot-Bijgaarden, where the 14th edition of Floralia takes over the castle's park and greenhouses this weekend. More than a million bulbs have been hand-planted across the 14-hectare park. It's a Dutch initiative, so tulips take pride of place, with almost 400

varieties on show. But hyacinths and daffodils will also be well-represented, along with wild flowers outside and hothouse flowers inside. The chapel will be decorated with orchids, and each Friday flower artist Hans Danko will produce arrangements with no less than 10,000 blooms. | Ian Mundell



FILM

Cloudboy

From 5 April
Across Flanders
| CLOUDBOY.BE

Twelve-year-old Niilas has grown up with his father in urban Flanders, but barely knows his Swedish mother, who has made a new life with the Sami people of Lapland. So when he goes to spend the summer with her, there is both a new family and a new way of life to get used to. Initially resistant,

Niilas gradually connects with the far north and finds roots he never knew he had. Antwerp's own Daan Roofthoof plays the young lead in this lively family adventure film, shot in Flanders and Norway, which will make any spirited youngster want to go looking for lost reindeer this summer. | IM



VISUAL ARTS

The Crystal Ship

8-9 April
Across Ostend
| THECRYSTALSHIP.ORG

The second edition of The Crystal Ship street art festival finds some 20 installations, sculptures and murals being unveiled across Ostend. You can discover the works for yourself or take one of three guided tours. International artists invited this year include Axel Void (US), Francisco Bosoletti (Argentina) and Henrik Uldalen (Norway). Meanwhile home-grown duo Schellekens & Peleman have created a huge inflatable refugee, which will move around during the festival. The opening evening also includes free music, with funk from Big Whoop and progressive jazz from Mann-gold. Should you miss the festival, you can still see the works: They're here to stay. | IM



MUSIC FESTIVAL

More Music!

12-15 April
Concertgebouw, Bruges
| MOREMUSICFESTIVAL.BE

This is a festival where genres mix, so you have singer-songwriters and spoken-word performers crossing paths with electronica and multimedia projects. It opens with Lumiere III, a new laser work by German computer music wizard Robert Henke, and closes with the veteran of "continuous piano music", Lubomyr Melnyk. In-between come a wide

range of performers, including SX (pictured), Tamino and Pieter Van Dessel's melancholy Marble Sounds, appearing with chamber orchestra Casco Phil. Tickets also give access to free performances on the Discovery Circuit, which include Miaux (aka Antwerp minimalist Mia Prce) and Broeder Dieleman, billed as true rural folk from Zeelandic Flanders. | IM



CONCERT

Brussels

Brdcst series: AB's spring music series focuses on socially relevant themes like interculturality and afrofuturism, while featuring a range of artists who feel strongly about musical innovation. 5-9 April, Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110

| brdcst.be

Ghent

Frog & Henry: Danceable ragtime and blues from New Orleans inspired by jazz and dance recordings from the 1920s and '30s. 6 April 21.00-00.00, Missy Sippy, Klein Turkije 16

| missy-sippy.be

Full Moon Healing: New Age and ambient festival, featuring Midori Takada and Suzanne Ciani, two of the greatest names from the genre. 9 April 20.00-23.30, Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23

| vooruit.be

PERFORMANCE

Across Flanders

We Shall Overcome: The amiable Flemish actor and singer Wim Opbrouck says goodbye to his stint as artistic director of NT Gent with musical theatre featuring the man himself plus guests Roeland Vandemoortele, Axl Peleman and Ron Reuman, featuring the music of home grown and international artists who stand for concepts such as peace, respect, diplomacy and pacifism. Until 10 June, across Flanders

| ntgent.be

VISUAL ARTS

Ghent

Anna Oppermann: Never-ending Paradox: Collection of visually overwhelming works by the pioneering German artist, including kaleidoscopic ensembles of objects, photos, paintings and text. Until 4 June, SMAK, Jan Hoetplein 1

| smak.be

FILM

Brussels

Toots Thielemans and Film: Film cycle featuring the music of the late Brussels jazz legend and harmonica player, including some with whole soundtracks composed by Thielemans. Films include *Midnight Cowboy*, *Thundering Fatty* and *The Sugarland Express*. Until 14 May, Cinematek, Baron Hortastraat 9

| cinematek.be

Talking Dutch

Don't worry, be Belgian



Derek Blyth
More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

Once again, the World Happiness Report has told us that Scandinavia is a paradise of goodwill. *Noorwegen heeft de gelukkigste inwoners ter wereld* – Norway has the happiest people in the world, according to the latest report.

De Noren nemen de koppositie over van de Denen – The Norwegians took over the lead position from the Danes, *die naar de tweede plaats zakken* – who dropped down to second place.

As usual, Belgians were about average in Europe. *Ons land stijgt opnieuw één plaatsje en staat op nummer 17* – Our country advanced one place and now stands at number 17.

Not bad. But why can Belgium never advance to the top of the ranking, you might wonder? Is it just the chill wind and the traffic?

No, it's not that simple, according to Flemish happiness expert Leo Bormans, who has written books on the subject. *De twee factoren die absoluut bepalend zijn voor hun hoge score* – The two factors that are absolutely essential for the high score, he explained, *en waar Noorwegen zich in onderscheidt* – and where Norway excels, *zijn vertrouwen en gelijkheid* – are trust and equality.

So that's what you need to make you happy. *Wie dacht dat een stel wuivende palmbomen* – Anyone who thought that a few swaying palm trees, *een hageelwit strand* – a dazzling white beach *en een heerlijk zonnetje* – and endless sunshine *je geluksfactor instant de lucht in deden schieten* – would instantly lift your happiness score into the stratosphere, *heeft het bij het verkeerde eind* – has got the wrong end of the stick, *De Morgen* noted.



© Ingimage

Fjorden, dennenbomen en meren daarentegen – Fjords, pine trees and lakes, on the other hand...

But it's not all bad news for Belgium. *We doen het steeds beter* – We are continually improving. And that's because people are getting together more.

Samen dingen doen – Doing things together, *is waar we echt gelukkig van worden* – is what makes us really happy. *Veel meer dan van het materiële* – Much more than material things. *Niet van een nieuw paar schoenen in de kast* – Not from a new pair of shoes in the wardrobe, *wel een boswandeling te maken met de kinderen* – but going for a walk in the woods with our kids.

And so Belgium is gradually creeping up the happiness list. *Drie jaar terug stonden we nog 21ste* – Three years ago we were in 21st place, *het jaar daarop 19de* – a year later 19th, *en vorig jaar 18de* – and last year 18th.

It looks like Belgium is managing to advance one place each year, so if we keep on track we could be the world's happiest country by 2033. And that would be something to smile about.

PHOTO OF THE WEEK



© Kurt Desplenter/BELGA

DEARLY BELOVED The director of Belgium's animal rights organisation Gaia leads a silent protest march to the Debra-Group slaughterhouse in Tielt, West Flanders, closed since 23 March following the release of undercover video showing horrific abuse of pigs

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



In response to: New regulation will make distinguishing ambulances easier

Peter Adye: In a real disaster all ambulances would be needed, regardless of colour.



In response to: Cycle paths and wider footpaths for Brussels inner ring

George Papageorgiou: With an average of almost 18 days of rainfall per month, it seems a good idea



Corine Van Lingen Rowan: Com'on people ... a bit of optimism won't hurt! It's better than it is at the moment.... baby steps



In response to: Docks Bruxsel shopping centre 'built illegally', claims N-VA

Suhaib Ismaeil: But it is so beautiful



In response to: Japanese Garden marks 25 years of taking root in Hasselt

Shirley Pullan: I've been there, it's great. The koi come nearly out of the water



In response to: Quirky Koksijde museum reveals hidden side of animal kingdom

Geert van Calster @GAVClaw: Fangcurlers?



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THE LAST WORD

Home again, home again

"As soon as I'm allowed I'll go right back to the farm. I want to see how things are with my pigs." Farmer Carine Decloedt was one of more than 900 people evacuated from their homes in Gistel and Middelkerke in West Flanders when a tanker containing nitric acid leaked

Driving force

"Ghent is turning into Bruges, and the residents are being made a laughing stock." Novelist Herman Brusselmans is one of the 46% of *Gentenaars* who oppose the new circulation plan, which came into force this week

Horse and carriage

"There's absolutely nothing heroic about it. It's all about talking. Being occupied with each other. And setting aside your own ambitions sometimes to be able to go further together." Flemish actor Hubert Damen and his wife have been married for 52 years

Act of God

"It makes the story of the Passion more contemporary. And it's also a question of necessity: Our former Jesus is pregnant." After three years in which a woman played Jesus in the Passion parade in Ypres on Good Friday, the role will be filled this year by deacon Ettien Léon N'Guessan of Ivory Coast, said organiser Hans Debel



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