Walking on eggshells
As the fipronil egg crisis continues, the food safety agency reveals that it began investigations in June, while codes of eggs considered unsafe are published.

Green Oases
A Genk landscaping firm provides a stepping stone to regular work and plants glorious gardens where you least expect to find them.

Running for His Life
One of Flanders’ leading cancer researchers is running the marathon of a lifetime – 2,400 kilometres to Santiago de Compostela – in honour of his son.

Fortress City
Excavations shed light on Antwerp’s forgotten past

As part of the pre-metro construction works, a team of archaeologists has uncovered the remains of the gates and bridges that once formed the first line of defence around Antwerp.

On a recent sunny Sunday, I took a walk on the city walls of Antwerp. Hundreds of other residents joined me, from pensioners to little kids. Antwerp was built as a fortified city, but very little remains of its impressive protective walls. The city is currently in the process of constructing a new pre-metro line, part of which will pass near the ancient walls, which were unearthed by the local archaeology department earlier this summer.

The open day was organised to bring to life a part of local history, before the walls are covered up again. When completed, the pre-metro line will run along what Antwerpenaars call the Leien – the main boulevards that cut across the city. The Leien follow the path of the former city walls, erected by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1542. The fortifications were designed by master architects from Italy and represented the state-of-the-art craftsmanship of the time, explains city archaeologist Karen Minsaer, who served as one of our guides.

The wall featured triangular ravelins, or small fortifications, with platforms for rotatable cannons. In front of it was a moat, with several bridges letting people in and out of the city gates.

In the 19th century, people didn’t want to have to cross bridges to get in and out of Antwerp.

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In a fit of 19th-century urban renovations, the walls were demolished and used to fill up the moat. Earlier this summer, near present-day Paardenmarkt and Tunnelplaats, archaeologists uncovered some of the remaining structures, including the pillar from one of the bridges that led to what was known as the Rode Poort, or Red Gate.

The bridge was 90 metres long and formed part of a basin...
Brussels is ‘selling off driving licences,’ says Weys

Brussels is now cutting that crucial period for those with enough money to zero days,” said Weys. The new system will operate according to a sliding scale of practical experience, depending on the number of lessons followed. The 30-hour option involves no wait and will cost about €1,500. Twenty hours of lessons must be followed by three months of practice, while 14 hours of lessons sees the practical period extended to six months. Finally, it is possible to take a test with no lessons, but in that case nine months of driving practice is required. Fewer hours of lessons also costs less.

“Just as we are doing everything in Flanders to raise the bar with better driver education, Brussels is giving out the opposite signal and is basically selling off driving licences,” Brussels secretary of state for road safety, Bianca Debaets, defended the region’s policy. “Instead of focusing on how many kilometres you’ve driven, pay more attention to the type of kilometres,” she said. “You can drive for thousands of kilometres on the motorway or on the back roads of Beerse, but that doesn’t equip drivers for the pressure of urban traffic. And we do expect future motorists to be able to manage everywhere, including the more difficult situations.”

The reality, she continued, “is that anyone who can drive in Brussels after 30 supervised hours can drive anywhere”.

The Flemish Community Commission (VGC) in Brussels is creating extra child-care facilities, with two new crèches—one in Elsene and one in Sint-Joost—as well as the extension of an existing facility in Schaerbeek. The total investment package comes to €3 million, according to Bianca Debaets, the capital’s secretary of state for family matters. The day-care centre in Elsene will be in Kerckstraat, where €2.4 million will be spent on a new facility to be ready in three years. In Sint-Joost, a house will be converted by the end of this year. The extension to the Elmer-Noord crèche near North Station in Schaerbeek will take over an adjoining building and be available by mid-2019. The number of places made available by the latest investment is not yet certain, Debaets said. “That will only be clear once the new buildings are finished and kind & gezin have licensed the new crèches,” she said.

Bomb disposal squad sees record number of call-outs as visibility grows

Belgium’s army bomb disposal squad Dovo responded to 320 incidents in 2016 and the first half of 2017, according to the federal defence ministry. On average, Dovo were called out four times a week, compared to an average of two calls a week during 2014-15.

“At this rate, the figure of 400 interventions will have been exceeded by the end of the year,” said MP Velı Yüksel, who requested the figures from defence minister Steven Vandeput. “The pressure on Dovo staff has grown visibly since the attacks of 23 March 2016.” Yüksel also raised the issue of the cost of call-outs, particularly to deal with suspect packages that turn out to be harmless. In each case, the police make an evaluation of the situation before alerting Dovo – members of the public cannot call Dovo directly.

As far as the squad is concerned, Vandeput said, each case is treated as being genuine until proven otherwise. The costs, he said, are carried by the defence ministry.

Flemish conservancy organisation Natuurpunt has defended the steps it recently took in gassing 700 geese in Limburg in order to keep the population under control. The birds are not wild geese, but geese that were imported at some point and have flourished in the province’s protected wetlands.

The geese are reproducing at such a rapid rate, said Natuurpunt spokesperson Hendrik Mooremans said. “As good managers we have to take the responsibility for keeping the population under control.”

Hunting associations, however, are angry at the decision. Hubertus Vereniging Vlaanderen (HVV), a hunting association in Limburg, complained that some 4,500 kilograms of “sustainable, ecological meat” have been wasted.

“We killed the birds in the manner we think does the least harm,” Mooremans said. The geese were netted on Schelens Lake and Paalse Plas and driven into containers, where they were gassed in a process taking 17 seconds. “We’re not doing it because we enjoy it, but because we and the authorities think it is necessary.”

The hunters would have preferred to have been allowed to hunt the over-population. “At least we hunters give the animals a chance,” argued HVV chair Jochen Hermans. “We don’t shoot if they’re on the water. It concerns us that they have been destroyed in this rough manner.”

The hunters are also concerned at the loss of so much meat, as the geese are now contaminated by the poison gas and are no longer fit for human consumption. “We would like to be involved in the future if hundreds of geese have to be eliminated,” Hermans said.

Brussels is preparing to spend €3 million on new child-care facilities. The Flemish Peace Institute, which has kept a close eye on the developments, found that not all the figures released so far appear correct.

“The reality, she continued, “is that anyone who can drive in Brussels after 30 supervised hours can drive anywhere”.

© Courtesy scharebeek

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48% 2

€3,000

2

€855 million

10.2%

of managers in Belgium would be prepared to sacrifice some salary for a job they liked better, according to a survey carried out by recruiting specialist Robert Half.

% 2

€3,000

of bus and tram stops operated by Flemish public transport authority De Lijn are accessible to the disabled, and 4.6% to the blind or visually impaired, the company said.
Flemish home affairs minister Jan Jambon has issued an order governing the use of drones in public spaces. Drones will now require a licence issued in advance by the federal department of the interior, which will take into account evaluations carried out by municipal services.

Four months after the introduction of a new traffic plan in Ghent, Google Maps has not caught up with developments, it is reported, following a number of incidents involving foreigner drivers in the city centre. The city has delivered details of the new system to providers of GPS services.

Flemish media group Medialius, publisher of De Standaard and Flanders Today, has obtained a majority holding of Telegraaf Media Groep (TMG), owners of various enterprises including the Netherlands’ biggest daily, De Telegraaf. Dutch media entrepreneur John De Mol and his company Talpa decided to drop a takeover attempt but continue to hold 29% of TMG.

Holidaymakers intending to return to Brussels Airport from Lanzarote and Fuerteventura in the Canary Islands last week finally took off after a 42-hour delay. TUI airlines blamed the delays on a lack of spare parts to carry out repairs to the aircraft on the runway. Passengers are being offered €400 in compensation.

Telecom giant Proximus has announced a roll-out of its latest mobile data system, which it calls 4.5G, in Antwerp and Ghent. It offers faster internet speeds than 4G, but the new rating will not be available for the time being in Brussels because of limits on GSM antennas due to suspected health risks.

BELGIUM

Belgians are living longer, according to new figures released by the federal government’s statistics department. In 2016, the average age of death was 81.4 years, continuing the trend of adding about two months every year over the last 20 years. The average lifespan in 2016 was 83.8 years for women and 79 years for men.

Organisers of the Tomorrowland dance festival had to pick up 25 tonnes of used camping material left existing at the DreamVille camping area after the festival ended on 30 July. Bins at the festival collected 480 tonnes of rubbish and 15 tonnes of sorted plastic waste.

Belgium’s apple industry will only produce one-third of the normal harvest this year, as a result of the late spring frost, the Flemish department for agriculture and fisheries told an international congress in Spain. Pear crops, meanwhile, are expected to be down by 7%.

Former Red Devil Anthony Vanden Borre has announced his retirement from football at the age of 29, citing mental and physical exhaustion. Vanden Borre had already called off his contract with Anderlecht this year after 13 seasons but had signed to play with TA Mazembe in the DRC in the spring. His contract was monthly and he has declined to continue.

BELGIUM

The Unlike chain of bike shops in the Antwerp area, which sells and repairs bicycles, has announced that it will not service bikes bought in supermarket chains, including Decathlon. Owner Marc Groven said that priority would be given to customers who bought bikes in one of his shops, but legal experts said a ban on certain sales points was not defensible.

FLANDERS TODAY

Herman Dircks

If there’s one man in Flanders you wouldn’t want to trade places with right now, it’s Herman Dircks. The head of the Federal Agency for Food Security (FAVV) is under the microscope this week, after he admitted that the FAVV had known about worrying levels of the insecticide fipronil in eggs from Belgium’s poultry farms since June.

The agency immediately initiated an investigation and chose not to inform the public, wanting to avoid panic. The federal government – and many European governments with it – are now critical of Dircks’ approach.

Unknown to the general public up to now, the 58-year-old agricultural engineer was appointed to head the FAVV in 2014. Dircks is one of the founding fathers of the agency, which was created a year after the dioxin crisis of 1999.

When the then opposition leader Guy Verhofstadt (Open VLD) leaked an internal memo stating that the toxic substance dioxin had entered enormous quantities of animal feed, seven million chickens and 60,000 pigs were destroyed, eggs taken off the shelves and 2,000 farms closed – some for months.

Critics are now arguing that, despite the establishment of the FAVV, Belgium doesn’t seem to have learned any lessons from the dioxin crisis. As a young engineer from Ghent, Dircks worked within the ministry of small business and agriculture, where between 1996 and 2000 he acted as an advisor and modernised the ICT department. In the world of agribusiness, he is known as the protege of the very outspoken Piet Vanthemsche, chair of farmers’ union Boerenbond for seven years.

Vanthemsche and Dircks are even business partners, as in 2000 they founded a consultancy firm focused on the agri-food sector. When Vanthemsche became the first director of the FAVV, he appointed Dircks as a deputy director.

Six years later, Dircks became director-general of inspections policy, before becoming CEO in 2014. Dircks’ background in agriculture is considered impressive, but his lack of experience in public health has become a concern in recent weeks.

FACE OF FLANDERS

OFFSIDE

Egg yolk blonde

Now we’re certain, here at Offside, that any lover of tel...
Fipronil found in eggs in June

Agriculture minister says requests to Dutch government went unanswered

Federal agriculture minister Denis Ducarme appeared before the parliamentary committee for agriculture last week and blamed the current egg crisis on the Dutch government. He claimed it had waited for a month to respond to requests from Belgium for specific information. A number of supermarket chains have withdrawn Belgian eggs from sale in the light of evidence that they contain traces of fipronil, albeit at levels under the limits set by the European Union.

The insecticide has been traced back to a Dutch pest control firm, Chickfriend, which used a legal product mixed with fipronil in multiple locations across Europe, contaminating eggs. Chickfriend is being investigated, as is its pesticide supplier, the Antwerp company Poultry Vision. It is not yet clear where the fipronil, which is banned from use in poultry farms – was mixed with the other insecticide.

Belgium’s Federal Food Safety Agency (FAVV) was aware of the contamination as early as June, Ducarme told the committee. Eggs from one distributor in particular, in Sint-Niklaas, were destroyed at the time. FAVV is now being criticised by Belgian and European authorities for its lack of communication when it discovered fipronil more than two months ago. According to Ducarme, the government requested information from the Netherlands at that time but received no answer for a month.

He also said that the Netherlands was aware of fipronil contamination as far back as November. “We were never informed,” he told the commission. “Had we known, we could have reacted faster.”

Meanwhile, the federal food safety agency has released the codes of eggs that are considered safe to eat. Although the levels of fipronil remain under European safety limits, the agency is advising customers to either discard the eggs or bring them back to the place of purchase.

The codes are: 2BE3014, 2BE3015, 2BE3016, 2BE3114. However, the Network points out that future egg certificates will have a whole new federal government coalition, bringing this provision into danger.

Government takes over €50m of debt from merging municipalities

The Flemish government has taken over nearly €50 million in debt from towns that have decided to merge in 2019, minister for administrative affairs Liesbeth Homans has said. Municipalities in Flanders have until the end of the year to submit a desire to merge by January 2019. The government has agreed to take over municipal debts of €500 per resident, up to a maximum of €20 million for each merger. There are currently eight municipalities concerned: Meerwen, Gruttrode and Odpellaberk and Overpelt and Neerpel in Limburg; Kruishoutem and Zingem and Aalter and Knokkelee in East Flanders; Deinze and Nevele in East Flanders and Puurs and Sint-Amands in Antwerp province have also expressed an interest in merging.

Of the municipalities that have already decided to merge, Overpelt (pictures) and Neerpelt account for nearly €16 million, for almost 32 million residents.

Benefits in new federal budget too low, says anti-poverty network

The Network Tegen Armoede (Anti-Poverty Network), an umbrella organisation of groups and associations in Flanders and Brussels working to fight poverty, has criticised one of the provisions in the federal government’s recent budget agreement.

The provision regards welfare benefits as well as benefits paid to retirees who are receiving less than the poverty level. The government’s agreement has benefits increasing to match the poverty line as calculated for 2016 + €1,50 for a single person. Next year will see benefits increased by a total of €100 million.

This affects those receiving welfare benefits as well as the income guarantee for senior citizens known as IGO, which supplements any pensions that fall below the poverty line. The measure of what constitutes poverty level in the European Union – 60% of median income – applies to ever-increasing salaries, the Network pointed out. It also said that by 2020, Belgium will have a whole new federal government coalition, bringing this provision into danger.

“If it appears that further efforts are needed, then we will certainly look into that,” said a spokesperson for Zuhal Demir, secretary of state for poverty issues. “We are always making evaluations and adapting policy.”

The Network is concerned that those evaluations might include taking other benefits – such as social housing or energy subsidies – into account when it calculates benefits received. “That could mean that the government could drag some people over the poverty line,” a Network spokesperson said. “And that means that some people could receive too little or no money at all.”

Fiscal injection to fight poverty approved

The federal government has approved a €100 million injection to fight poverty, the Ministry of Social Affairs announced.

The money will go to the regions of Brussels and Wallonia and the communities of Waasland, Horebeke and Lo-Renove.

The injection is part of the federal government’s efforts to combat poverty, which are expected to increase by a total of €100 million. The government has already approved a €120 million increase in poverty relief and a €150 million increase in social welfare benefits.

The funds will be used to increase the income guarantee for senior citizens and to provide additional support to those in need. The government has also announced plans to introduce a new poverty benefit for those on low incomes who are not eligible for the existing income guarantee.

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that kept the Scheldt river from mixing with the fresh water that filled the rest of the moat. The fresh water was used mainly by a group of breweries that were located just inside the city walls.

"In 1865, before the walls were demolished, city authorities took photographs of the gates and some of the bastions," says Minsaert. "People were ready for a new, more open city. They didn't want to have to cross bridges to get in and out of Antwerp. Also, they had other fortifications, which were put up by General Brialmont in 1859. The ring road follows that outline."

City planners in the 19th century, she continues, weren't as concerned about preservation as they are today. "There were the two main gates – Kipdorppoort and Keizerpoort – which some people wanted to keep. Even when the walls were all taken down, these two gates were still standing. There was also international interest in keeping a small, but important, part of the fortifications."

Unfortunately, she adds, that didn't happen. "City planners decided to demolish the gates. That was the mentality of the time; people weren't interested in heritage. The fortifications were soon forgotten."

The excavations were first planned several years ago but couldn't take place because the archaeologists weren't sure about the site's exact size. "Five years ago, we did some prospective work in preparation for the development of Operaplein," she says, "but the boulevard that's located where the Red Gate used to be is very wide, and we could only explore near the trees and the parking spaces in the middle of the avenue."

With the pre-metro construction, the team got a second chance. "We wanted to know how much of the walls were torn down as the 19th century, so for us the Red Gate was a nice surprise. We found out that the city authorities only demolished it to one metre below the ground."

At the open day, the public was only allowed to see the remains of the bridge that once led to the Red Gate, but it was enough to imagine what the monumental structure must have looked like in its prime. Of the nine sets of pillars that held it up in the air, only one remains. "The other eight are gone."

The site is now closed off again, allowing the pre-metro construction to resume. The Red Gate remains, Minsaert says, were covered up, with the hope that "the future generations of Antwerp will get to find them again."

Despite the excavations, the pre-metro construction has not fallen behind schedule. In Flanders, any public works project is usually adjusted to factor in the time allowed for excavations and research. "We are able to carry out as much archaeological work as possible in the time allowed," Van de Velde explains.

During the construction, the Kipdorp bastion will be exposed between the bridge and Korte Winkelstraat. Some parts of it will be integrated into the tunnels under the Leien, while others will become part of a bridge complex. "At Kipdorp, we'll carry out a very large excavation," says Minsaert. "It's the highest point of the boulevards, and based on our research from five years ago, we know that the walls were broken down at ground level."

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The excavations will take place in September and October. "In November, traffic tunnels will be constructed through the bridge and parts of the bastion. Some of the city walls will be removed."

As part of the pre-metro construction, Operaplein – the square in front of the Opera building on the corner of De Keyserlei and Frankrijklei – will be thoroughly renovated. The new parking area and tunnels will include a 60-metre-long fragment of the city wall that ran from the Kipdorp Bridge to Teniersplaats. "A large part of our work will be integrated into the new Operaplein, with access for the public," Minsaert says. "This will be a truly unique site."
Local health groups want ban on new tobacco ‘heatsticks’
Call for federal government to ban local sales of latest e-cigarette

Flemish health organisations have issued a warning about the dangers associated with smoking a new kind of electronic cigarette, in which tobacco is heated rather than burned.

Tobacco giant Philip Morris has launched the iQOS, referred to as a “heatstick”, in a number of European countries, claiming that fewer harmful substances are released when the tobacco is only heated.

The Flemish Institute for Health Promotion and Sickness Prevention (Vigez) and other organisations, including cancer fund Kom op tegen kanker, have written an open letter to public health minister Maggie De Block, De Standaard reports.

“...the introduction of these heatsticks is a commercial strategy by the tobacco producer to make more profit, improve its image and circumvent tobacco legislation,” they said.

According to the organisations, nicotine is quickly released when using the product, which makes it very addictive, just like cigarettes. An iQOS cigarette dose is used up after five minutes, creating the urge to smoke another.

The organisations are more in favour of standard e-cigarettes as an alternatives to cigarettes. The IQOS contains tobacco, while smokers of e-cigarettes inhale vapours from a liquid that contains nicotine and other substances.

The quantity of nicotine can be adjusted with an e-cigarette, which is not the case for the IQOS. They have called on De Block to ban the IQOS until independent studies show that it is safe for users and bystanders. The IQOS is not yet available in shops in Belgium but can be bought online.

Companies are ‘doing more’ to keep employees satisfied

Management in businesses across Belgium are more aware that they need to keep their employees motivated and satisfied with their jobs, according to human resources company Acerta, which recently surveyed 470 CEOs across the country.

The biggest concern, according to the poll, is psychological problems such as burnout. Compared to a similar survey carried out two years ago, bosses are 50% more likely to be taking measures to improve staff morale. Measures include advertising vacancies internally, providing career support and activities to support overall mental and physical health.

“There is clearly a shortage on the labour market, ” said Acerta director Peter Tyuyens. “Businesses realise how important it has become to understand their staff and keep them happy. The survey shows that bosses are more aware of their employees’ situation.”

At the same time, he said, with one in three surveyed would like to see more feedback from their staff with regard to career decisions and other matters such as continuing education.

Perfect date planner is winner of Apps From Antwerp

The city of Antwerp has announced the third winners of the second edition of its app development competition Apps From Antwerp, the result of more than 6,000 votes from the public. Seventeen developers responded to the call for entries issued in March, with the proposals open to a popular vote in June.

The winner is an app called Sers (pronounced like “Cesar”) with more than 25% of the votes. Sers allows couples to find the most suitable dating activity according to their respective interests and a database of available options in the port area.

The app also allows a selected activity to be reserved and paid for if necessary, and makes it possible for organisers to list their activities.

The third prize winner receives €10,000 in development funding. All three winners now have until 31 October to make their idea a reality with the help of the city, while those contestants who came in fourth to eighth place also receiving help and support from a number of companies specialised in marketing, logistics or law.
E
oexoskeletons – machines that can be worn to enhance one’s physical capabilities – could one day mitigate the detrimental physical effects of demanding jobs on workers, while reducing the economic losses for business. But they aren’t exactly new to Flanders. At a cycling race last month in Antwerp province, among the young women who typically congratulate the winners on the podium with a kiss and a bouquet of flowers was the first-timer Jolien Van Loy, who is paralysed from waist down. The 28-year-old took the stage wearing a robotic machine that helps her walk. The exoskeleton was provided by the To Walk Again foundation, founded by the Flemish truthate Marc Herremans, who’s also paralysed. The foundation has three exoskeletons at its disposal, which it uses in therapy and for special occasions. While exoskeletons can help people suffering from paralysis and muscle weakness, among other conditions, there is an obstacle in the way of their widespread use. At €160,000, they’re too expensive for most people who need to buy them, including Van Loy. She has access to one from To Walk Again – for one hour a week. According to professor Bram Vanderborght of the Netherlands and Multibody Mechanics research group (BruBotics) at the Free University of Brus- sel (VUB), the cost of exoskeletons makes it much more likely that they will first find wide- spread use in industrial applications. With 20 Flemish companies and the University of Leuven (KU Leuven), Bruotics has submitted two project proposals that look into the use and economic potential of exoskele-
tons on the work floor. If approved for funding by the regional and national research institutes, the group will be led by VUB professor Dirk Lefeber, an expert in robot assis-
tants and rehabilitation robotics. “The industry is calling for help,” Vander-
borght explains. “We’re talking about a wide range of companies – from the postal sector, car manufacturing to construction firms to supermarkets and hospi-
tals. Some send us pictures of large and heavy objects in their warehouses, with the simple question: Can you design something that could help us move this around?” Both projects are meant to answer the questions posed by the industry. “In the first proposal, we are setting out to design an exoskeleton for use on the work floor,” Vanderborght says. “It’s a difficult process that can easily take four years of work before we have the first prototype. The second project, he continues, answers to the more pressing need. “We will purchase several existing models and test them to see if they live up to their abilities as advertised.” The projects aim to move things forward for exoskeletons, on both economic and practical levels. According to a study by human resources consultancy Secures, lower back pain – caused mostly by lifting objects – is second only to the common cold as a cause of sick leave. The same study shows that an absent employee can cost the employer more than €1,000 a day or €270,000 a year. In that context, says Vanderborght, “purchasing a machine that costs, say, €23,000 that can prevent absence due to muscle or back pain makes perfect sense.” Before that can happen, however, research-
ers have to first develop a prototype that can be marketed on a wider scale and at an affordable price. “No scientific team in the world has managed to create a spin-off where exoskeletons roll off the assem-
ibly line, causing prices to drop to what you’d pay for a car,” Vanderborght says. “That’s what we intend to do.” The Belgian branch of non-profit Handicap International has rewarded the inventors of four devices that improve the lives of people with a disability. The Design with a Heart contest is in its 14th edition this year. The four winners were chosen in the catego-
ries ‘daily life’, ‘work’, ‘leisure’ and ‘school’. All laureates receive a voucher of €250 for home improvement chain Brico and other gifts from the competition’s partners. They also get visibil-
ity for their inventions can be contacted by others interested in using the device. The school category had the youngest winner: 13-year-old Olivier Catsolfs of Duffel developed an app that records conversations and trans-
lates them via speech recognition technology to written text on a screen. This way, his deaf uncle

Q&A

Researcher Natasha De Winter of survey company Aron was part of an archeological team in Tongeren that discovered fragments of a skull belonging to a dromedary camel from Roman times.

How did you find the skull? We initially discovered the remains of two Roman residen-
tial buildings that were separated by a road in what is now Tongeren. In the late Roman period, the locals built a new wall that crossed through the buildings. As a consequence, most of the eastern building ended up outside the wall and was aban-
donned. In the trench that inter-
sected the wall, we came upon a lot of bone fragments. They included a relatively complete skull of a dromedary.

A dromedary? Here? Are you sure? We have determined that these are the remains of a male adult – most likely a dromedary, but it could also be a camel, or a hybrid of the two, as these were commonly used back then. The Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences have studied the bones, and scientists in Vienna are now carrying out a DNA analysis, so we would have a conclusive answer soon.

How common are findings like this? It is only the second time remains of a dromedary from Roman times have been found in Belgium; the first was discovered in Arlon in Wallonia. In all of northwest Europe, there have only been about 20 other cases, and all of them were found along Roman roads.

How did this one get here? For centuries, the Roman Empire used dromedaries as pack animals: the ones from Tongeren and Arlon come from the fourth century AD, or the late Roman period. Normally, the animals would perish by the side of the road and eventually decom-
pose. We will never know how this one ended up in Tongeren. It could be that the skull came from some-
where else, because there is no trace of the rest of the skeleton.


in Brussels

Design with a Heart rewards inventions for disabled people

The Belgian branch of non-profit Handicap International has rewarded the inventors of four devices that improve the lives of people with a disability. The Design with a Heart contest is in its 14th edition this year. The four winners were chosen in the catego-
ries ‘daily life’, ‘work’, ‘leisure’ and ‘school’. All laureates receive a voucher of €250 for home improvement chain Brico and other gifts from the competition’s partners. They also get visibil-
ity for their inventions can be contacted by others interested in using the device. The school category had the youngest winner: 13-year-old Oliver Catsolfs of Duffel developed an app that records conversations and trans-
lates them via speech recognition technology to written text on a screen. This way, his deaf uncle

Q&A

Researcher Natasha De Winter of survey company Aron was part of an archeological team in Tongeren that discovered fragments of a skull belonging to a dromedary camel from Roman times.

How did you find the skull? We initially discovered the remains of two Roman residen-
tial buildings that were separated by a road in what is now Tongeren. In the late Roman period, the locals built a new wall that crossed through the buildings. As a consequence, most of the eastern building ended up outside the wall and was aban-
donned. In the trench that inter-
sected the wall, we came upon a lot of bone fragments. They included a relatively complete skull of a dromedary.

A dromedary? Here? Are you sure? We have determined that these are the remains of a male adult – most likely a dromedary, but it could also be a camel, or a hybrid of the two, as these were commonly used back then. The Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences have studied the bones, and scientists in Vienna are now carrying out a DNA analysis, so we would have a conclusive answer soon.

How common are findings like this? It is only the second time remains of a dromedary from Roman times have been found in Belgium; the first was discovered in Arlon in Wallonia. In all of northwest Europe, there have only been about 20 other cases, and all of them were found along Roman roads.

How did this one get here? For centuries, the Roman Empire used dromedaries as pack animals: the ones from Tongeren and Arlon come from the fourth century AD, or the late Roman period. Normally, the animals would perish by the side of the road and eventually decom-
pose. We will never know how this one ended up in Tongeren. It could be that the skull came from some-
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in Brussels

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Burning ambition

Parents take initiative to set up alternative school in Kortrijk

New school ‘TVier follows the century-old teaching principles of Celestin Freinet to prepare its pupils for a 21st-century future.

Preparing children for a 21st-century world requires a 21st-century education. That’s why a small group of parents in Kortrijk have taken the initiative in setting up a new secondary school based on the philosophy of French educational reformer Celestin Freinet. The school, called TVier, will open in September with 53 pupils.

The name means “the fire” in local West Flanders dialect, and is a reference to the ancient Greek essayist Plutarch, who is credited with the initiative in setting up a new network of 92 Freinet schools, its approach, some things are still rather conventional. TVier follows the Catholic curriculum with its emphasis on Latin and religious studies. Cotyn: “We would have preferred to set up an autonomous school but the costs are too high. When we showed our draft concept paper to various educators in Kortrijk, the Catholic school group Rhizo was very supportive of our ideas and gave us the guarantees to realise our project.”

Lut de Smet had no problems deciding where to send her 12-year-old son, Rens. “I’ve taught in higher education for 10 years and encountered 18-year-olds who would wait for me to tell them what to do next,” she says. “In Freinet schools are taught from the start how to work independently.”

Rens went to a traditional school before changing to a Freinet school at the age of 10. There he started by focusing on the things he could do well. With the confidence gained by doing things well he was then coached into the topics he was struggling with, which had a positive effect.

Many have enrolled because we offer a broad first grade in which pupils can really discover their own talents and interests.

Freinet felt that students learned better by directly experiencing ideas within a context and with a set purpose. In Freinet’s time – in the 1920s – children would regularly leave the classroom to conduct field trips. They would also compose their own works on a printing press and discuss and edit them as a group before presenting them as a team effort. These newspapers were exchanged with those from other schools and gradually the group texts replaced conventional school books.

With its emphasis on inquiry-based learning in smaller groups, the Freinet Modern School Movement is actively practised in many countries across the world. In Flanders, the movement is not exactly new. The first schools of which 14 are in Ghent. Only a handful offer secondary education.

The aim of TVier is to offer a system more in sync with the requirements of the modern world, where creative problem solving skills aren’t generated by simple knowledge retention. Pupils learn in small groups and work on projects. Teachers are known as supervisors, and as well as being experts in their own field, they are also responsible for pupil guidance.

Close attention is paid to pupils’ personal development and the development of social skills. Respect for diversity, the environment and a democratic platform for parents and students to participate in are part of the school’s core identity.

Secondary education in Flanders is divided into four general types. Each type consists of a set of different directions that may vary from school to school. What doesn’t vary, however, is the age at which a child has to decide its future direction: 12 years old. Unlike in regular education, TVier doesn’t require first-year pupils to make that choice right away. The opportunity to delay this important decision drew many parents and children to the new school.

‘About a third of the 53 pupils come from Freinet primary schools in Kortrijk and the surrounding towns,’ says Cotyn, ‘but many others enrolled because we offer a broad first grade in which pupils can really discover their own talents and interests. It’s only in the second half of the second year that they will be expected to make a focused and positive choice about what they do next.’

The school aims to serve a mix of children from different backgrounds, but for now the student body is not a genuine reflection of the diversity in Kortrijk. ‘At the moment, pupils with a multicultural background are the exception,’ says Cotyn. ‘This is unfortunate because we intend to take specific actions next year to reach a wider target group.’

No matter how new or different its approach, some things are still rather conventional. TVier follows the Catholic curriculum with its emphasis on Latin and religious studies.

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-Marie-Eve Bossu is a teacher at a ‘traditional’ school in the Kortrijk area. She agrees that independent learning is not a priority in regular education and adds that serious improvements overall are required to meet current as well as future needs. On average, classes in Flanders have 24 pupils. “Small numbers and individual attention with specific areas of interest are essential to quality education,” she says, “but because of limited funds and lack of resources it’s impossible to tailor learning to individual children. In traditional schools the quality of education is only as good as its teachers.”

\ ADDENDUM \ # Andy Furniss

\ WEEK IN EDUCATION \ Antwerp maps safe routes to school

Following a pilot project in central Antwerp, the city’s eight outer districts have decided to also participate in Route2School, which maps the safety of routes taken to school by pupils. The project was developed by Hasselt University’s Institute for Mobility (Imob) and its spin-off Abeona Consult. Route2School helps schools and municipalities analyse the traffic safety of approaching routes and collect information on how pupils are getting to school. Students, teachers and parents can report any problems they encounter on their way to and from school. They can also upload a photo and suggest a solution.

\ ROUTE2SCHOOL \ KU Leuven graduate at Nobel ceremony

Flemish scientist Tom Dendouw will travel to Sweden in December to present his Master’s research on hospital bacteria at the Stockholm International Youth Science Seminar (SIYSS). Dendouw, who is currently working on his PhD at the University of Cambridge, carried out his Master’s thesis at the University of Leuven’s bio-engineering department, where he researched how to stop the growth of hospital bacteria. The SIYSS seminar is part of the Nobel Prize festivities and Dendouw will also attend the Nobel ceremony and banquet. Every year, some 25 of the world’s most promising young scientists between the ages of 18 and 25 are invited to take part in SIYSS.

School principals leaving post sooner

Head teachers in Flanders are quitting their job much earlier than in past decades, according to figures gathered by Het Neenowblog. About 40% of schools in Flanders will start the new year next month with a new principal. That’s about the same number of new head teachers that primary and secondary schools combined saw in the 2016-17 school year, while in 2012-13, the figure was 15% and the year before 33%. According to the Association of Co-ordinators in Flemish Education (VLVO), the main reason for the increase in resignations is excessive responsibility and working hours. According to VLVO, principals work about 60 hours a week and spend an average of 50% of their time on educational and administrative support. The situation is most acute in primary schools.

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**WEEK IN ACTIVITIES**

**Games weekend**
De Kempen Speelt is a two-day event for lovers of board games. Play your favourite games with other players, try out new, demo and prototype games, bring in your old starter games for the second-hand game sale, or sign up a six-person team for the Escape Truck. 19 August 12.00-24.00 & 20 August 10.00-18.00, Fator, Wezenstraat 6, Turnhout; free  
\[dekempenspeelt.be\]

**Bollekesfeest**
Much more than a cultural festival, this street party takes over Antwerp's historic centre with street artists, food stands, a children's village and play fountain, guided city walks, free dance workshops, boat trips and more. Something for everyone, for three fun days. 18-20 August, Steenplein, Free
\[tinyurl.com/bollekesfeest\]

**Golden Tree Pageant**
This pageant-filled procession in Bruges only happens every five years and commemorates the wedding of Duke Charles the Bold to Margaret of York in 1468, when the city witnessed 10 days of feasting, jousting and festivities to celebrate the occasion. See all of Bruges' history depicted by colourful floats and community groups. 17-20 August, Warandeplein; free  
\[tinyurl.com/golden-tree-pageant\]

**Theater Nomads Festival**
The park across from the Royal Palace in Brussels will be the setting for street artists and performers of all kinds. See circus acts, live music, puppet shows and more, plus an international sale of handicrafts and food. 17-20 August, Bruges city centre; free  
\[fluenttheatre@nomadsevents.be\]

**Bilzen Urban Cross**
A new kind of bike sport using the urban landscape as your track: a race through cobbled alleys and city parks, up and down stairs and over grass, sand and concrete. Besides categories for men and women in different age groups, there's also a youth division and a race for kids aged two to seven. Register online. 20 August, Bilzen; €35  
\[cfectournec.eu\]

**Branching out**

**Gardening co-op brightens up business parks and employees’ futures**

**Talea**, a young landscape gardening company based in Genk, has an unusual business plan. Its aim is to create biodiversity in places where you would expect it the least, namely Flanders’ business parks. At the same time, Talea offers job opportunities to those who are facing difficulties on the labour market.

"The goal was to offer a position to workers who are ready for the regular labour market," says manager An Berden. "But face difficulties in coping with too much pressure, or simply don't get a chance because of their background." Talea has a social outlook but is not a social enterprise. It operates just like any other company, Berden explains.

"We are convinced that it's possible to create biodiversity in places where you would expect it the least," says Berden, whose background is in landscape architecture. "At the planning stage, we research the plants and animals in the surroundings and adapt our design to create stepping stones that allow movement between green spots."

Ecological gardens have advantages for companies as well. "We don't use pesticides, we choose only native plants and we map out garden designs that are easy to maintain," she says. "A normal lawn has to be trimmed every two weeks, while an ecological flower grassland only needs it twice a year. That cuts the cost significantly." Even before Talea was founded, parent organisation De Winning was already active in the field. A small survey showed that the concept of ecological gardens at business parks had potential. "There is definitely a growing interest, especially among bigger companies," says Berden. "They are willing to work on sustainability, particularly if you can offer them a comprehensive solution at the same cost as normal garden maintenance."

"Talea's co-operative structure means that partners can buy a share in the company and have a say in the organisation's future. "We firmly believe that much more can be achieved by co-operating," Berden adds. "Both our workers and our clients can be part of our structure. Co-operative enterprises are gaining traction, but the idea needs introduction. We are a young company, so we still have to prove ourselves. What we are trying to do is ambitious, bringing together job creation with a social objective and the creation of greener spaces with more biodiversity. Our story is sound, so I think it will convince people."

**BITE**

**Brewing hot and cold at Ghent’s coolest new coffee spot**

Despite what you might have heard, Ghent is much more than a bland imitation of New York’s hipster hotspots. Step into Take Five, a new coffee house on the classy Volderstraat strip, to understand the difference.

First, the name – a reference to Dave Brubeck’s 1959 jazz standard – would be deemed much too trite for a bonnet-adorned Williamsburg entrepreneur. But here it works just fine. The two smartly dressed pensioners in the corner enjoying a cocktail at 11.00, smiling at everyone as they enter – now that’s a sight you wouldn’t find in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

Then there’s the interior – one elevated wooden table in the middle, white-tiled walls and a ceiling painted in Oxford Blue. There are interiors that scream for attention, and there are those that provide a perfect setting for deep conversation. This is the latter.

Owner and founder Alexis Ywaska says there’s nothing noteworthy about his personal story. Like lots of other West Flemings, he hung around in Ghent after graduating from higher education. However, there aren’t many other West Flemings of Russian-Swedish descent, let alone those who have made it their mission to teach Ghent a lesson about coffee.

"Take Five serves top-quality specialty brands like Masha from Burundi and Daterra from Brazil, brewed using the Chemex, Aeropress or V60 techniques. At the bar we are seduced by cakes including vanilla berry, vegan carrot and rhubarb crumble."

With my partner orders an espresso and one of the bar’s five homemade lemonades with elderflower, lime and mint. I choose the salad with figs, pear, goat’s cheese, honey and pecans and the bar’s own bottled cold brew coffee.

Cold brew is still a novelty here, though it’s been sold for decades in Scandinavia and the US. Flanders is just discovering it.
Running for hope
Leuven cancer expert runs 2,400km to Santiago de Compostela in tribute to son

Johan Swinnen of KU Leuven is undertaking a feat of endurance to raise money for cancer research, and is spreading a message of hope for all cancer patients as he goes.

As a cancer researcher, professor Johan Swinnen is all too aware of the challenges that lay ahead when his son Pieter was diagnosed with a brain tumour six years ago. Pieter has since recovered, and to honour his son and all cancer patients, Swinnen is undertaking an extreme running pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

Swinnen is a busy man. His day job is as head of the oncology department of the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) – which consists of about 300 researchers – and he is vice-president of the Leuven Cancer Institute (LKI). When we meet, he has just returned from Boston in the US, where he promoted a project on prostate cancer funded by the Movember Foundation.

"At the LKI, we bring the different worlds of basic and clinical scientists involved in cancer research together at events and to work on projects," says Swinnen. "Uniting their expertise is essential in improving cancer diagnostics and treatments," Swinnen himself focuses on the role of lipids – which are essential for the communication between cells and their energy provision – in cancer.

As well as his busy professional schedule, 51-year-old Swinnen also runs 30 kilometres a day during the week and 70km a day at weekends. He's training to keep a promise he made in 2011, when his 13-year-old son was diagnosed with a brain tumour. The tumour was already at an advanced stage, giving Pieter only a small chance of survival.

"That was a slap in the face, but as a family we focused on the chances of survival, no matter how small they were," says Swinnen. "We went through the whole process step by step, celebrating every small success, like a positive brain scan."

Swinnen also vowed to himself that he would carry out an extreme feat if Pieter was still alive after five years, the point at which the risk of recurrence is considered to be significantly reduced.

Pieter had to give up his dreams of going to university to complete his secondary school diploma. "He had to give up his dreams of becoming a civil engineer or technical draughtsman," says Swinnen. "But he's now working on his creative drawing skills, by designing cartoons and comics, so he can still use his drawing talents!"

To pay tribute to his son's courage, and that of other cancer patients, Swinnen is preparing the feat he vowed to do five years ago. And it will be extreme.

On 21 August, he will set off from the University Hospital of Leuven (UZ Leuven) for a trip during which he will run the equivalent of almost two marathons each day, on average. In total, he will have to run about 2,400km, crossing the Pyrenees. After about a month, he should arrive in the pilgrimage town of Santiago de Compostela, where his son and wife will be waiting.

"It was Pieter's idea to raise funds for cancer research," says Swinnen. "My journey will symbolise the search for hope against cancer; a hope that is justified because I know that we are making big progress in cancer research."

On his trip, Swinnen will carry a backpack full of messages about people's experiences with cancer – mostly from patients, former patients and people who have experienced the consequences of the disease. The messages can be sent online or by post.

Swinnen received messages full of anxiety and frustration but also full of hope and gratitude. "For example, I got a message from the family of a cancer patient whose dream it was to go to Compostela but who passed away before he could do it," he says. "They feel his wish is now partly coming true through my trip."

After he arrives in Compostela, a Flemish literary performer will set to work with all the messages, using them to create one text that will constitute a message of hope.

Swinnen is not taking the challenge lightly. He is an experienced long-distance runner, and has taken part in several marathons over the past 10 years. He has also completed ultra-running events, longer than the traditional marathon length of 42km. His most extreme achievement so far is running non-stop for 300km, from London to the source of the Thames.

He will be helped along the way by renowned colleagues like Peter Hespel, a professor in exercise physiology and sports nutrition, and thanks to sponsors he will have excellent equipment at his disposal. During the trip he will be followed by a small team in a motorhome, in which he will sleep each night.

Even so, the road ahead will be strewn with obstacles. "I'm worried about injuries – the smallest ache can have big consequences, as I will have very little time to recover," Swinnen says. "The unpredictable weather can also have a big impact and the accumulation of tiredness will be difficult to deal with."

He will run much of the route on his own but will be joined at various points by supporters, who will run or cycle along with him. At the start of his journey, his son and a group of supporters will accompany him for a while from Leuven's town hall, where mayor Louis Teobback and KU Leuven rector Luc Sels will wish him good luck.

An important goal of the initiative is to raise funds for cancer research. Several organisations, companies and individuals have already set up fund-raising activities and made donations. Pieter has drawn a cartoon figure of his father – running with a backpack – which has been printed on bags and school notebooks sold by the UZ Leuven to raise money.

Swinnen's journey will be followed by camera crews on his road to Compostela, for the TV programme Zeparts on VTM and a documentary made by a film student. He is also writing a book on the history of cancer, his son's story and his pilgrimage. The book, published by Bergerhoff & Lamberigts, will be called De lange tocht (The Long Journey) and should be available shortly after he reaches his destination.
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Family affair

Experimental play on life’s regrets debuts at Het Theater Festival

When Boris Van Severen and Jonas Vermeulen won the young talent prize at the annual Het Theater Festival in 2014, they promised to return with a follow-up. Three years on, they’ve finally delivered.

In 2014, Boris Van Severen and Jonas Vermeulen’s debut show, The Great Downhill Journey of Little Tommy, won the Boel Verniers Prize for young talent at Het Theater Festival, the annual showcase of Dutch-language stage productions from the previous season. The rock opera garnered praise in Belgium and abroad, reaching audiences at Edinburgh Festival Fringe and the Auckland Arts Festival in New Zealand.

Het Theater Festival’s cash prize allowed the Flemish duo, who met while studying at Antwerp’s Royal Conservatory, to produce a new show for the next edition. They got to work almost immediately, but it took them three years to come up with The Only Way is UP.

“We made a conscious decision to take more time,” Van Severen (pictured above) explains. “We brainstormed the idea of portraying life stages from different perspectives at 2014’s Theater aan Zee, but it took us a while to put the pieces together.”

Witnessing the new show, it’s easy to see why. It’s not typical theatre, but rather an ambitious coupling of music and drama, technically and musically even more sophisticated than the pair’s debut. The writer-directors also play the show’s four characters, from behind a DJ deck and in front of a neon wall; their lines are accompanied by beats and electric guitar.

“The music and dialogue illustrate the difficult passages in people’s lives, from initial hopes and dreams, through pain, redemption and regret,” Van Severen and Vermeulen drew inspiration from members of their own family who no longer bear any resemblance to the people they were in their youth. In a way, growing older makes us lose not only our innocence, the two explain, but a lot of our potential as well.

“At my age, I could still become a plumber, if I wanted to,” says Van Severen, who’s 28. “But at 40, I think it would be too late for that.” Our options become more limited, they suggest. “We only graduated four years ago,” Vermeulen says. “In fact, Little Tommy was their final project before graduation. “We wanted to create something daring in the safety of our school before moving on to full-on careers.”

But the show’s success gave them the confidence to continue on their path. “The success has taken us where we are now, but it also means our lives have taken a different direction from what we initially planned.”

By combining the different elements in their work, the duo get to invent a language of their own, putting stories in metre and rhyme. For Vermeulen, who’s also the guitarist and synth player for the electronic punk rock outfit Psycho 44, the entire process is like a mix-and-match.

“This also means they’re likely to break out of the confines of traditional theatre. “It would be awesome to play in concert halls one day, bringing together rock and theatre audiences,” Van Severen adds. “That really would be a dream come true.”

The show’s official tour starts in December, but first it will honour its debt to Het Theater Festival, where it makes up part of the event’s side programme. Vermeulen, however, also stars in one of the festival’s official 12 selections: Bijgaren Drei (Richard III) is a Shakespearean production by Olympique Dramatique and Toneelhuis. He shares the stage with two of Flanders’ biggest actors of both stage and screen: Peter Van Den Begin and Jan Declerq. Vermeulen met the two co-stars while working on the TV series Den Elfde van den Elfde. He says he felt honoured when they asked him to join them back on stage, especially as he also got to write two of the play’s songs.

“I have always been a huge fan of Declerq and Van Den Begin,” he says. “Sharing the stage with experienced actors is always very interesting, especially if it’s in a play that aims to make Shakespeare more accessible to a wider audience.”

Compared to the compact concert vibe of The Only Way is UP, he adds, “the 2.5 hours of traditional theatre is a totally different experience. But it’s nice to do both”.

Other shows selected by the jury include the monologue A-Quarter to Time (A Quarter to Time) by Anne Teresa De Keersmaker, which has been released. Yasmine apparently wrote and recorded the song as a demo a year before she died, and her family has now given permission for it to be produced and released. Proceeds from the sale of the single, which is called “Kwart voor tijd” (A Quarter to Time) will be donated to the Make-A-Wish foundation.

Bonobo born at Planckendael

A bonobo was born at Planckendael last week. Both the mother and the baby (pictured), which has been named Djanoa, are in good health. It’s the second bonobo born this year at the Mechelen animal park, which is internationally renowned for its breeding programme of the species of great ape. Djanoa is the 16th bonobo to have been born at Planckendael.

Rooted is most popular show at Caermersklooster

A “new” single by the Flemish singer Yasmine, who committed suicide eight years ago, has been released. Yasmine apparently wrote and recorded the song as a demo a year before she died, and her family has now given permission for it to be produced and released. Proceeds from the sale of the single, which is called “Kwart voor tijd” (A Quarter to Time) will be donated to the Make-A-Wish foundation.

Newly released single by the late Yasmine

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EXIT

Flancommunity

© Jonas Verhulst/Planckendael

Bonobo born at Planckendael last week. Both the mother and the baby, which has been named Djanoa, are in good health.
Talk it over
Limburg’s annual literary festival tackles the meaning of family

You can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family, the old saying goes. But what makes up a family, anyway?

That’s the theme behind this year’s Zin in Zomer, a series of literary conversations in unusual places that takes place over the last two weeks of August in Hasselt, Genk and Sint-Truiden.

The various events are built around a conversation between a well-known Flemish author and one or more interviewers or collaborators. The talk is usually accompanied by a musical performance or some other cultural component.

The festival’s name is a double entendre. A zin in Dutch is a sentence, so on the one hand, it refers to the literary character of the events. But to have zin in something also means to feel like doing something, to have a taste or preference for it. So, zin in zomer also means ‘a taste for summer’.

The series opens with a performance by poet Bart Moeyaert and multi-instrumentalist Tijs Delbeke. The two were paired up for a Radio 1 programme and wrote a love song together, which they’ll perform live.

Moeyaert wrote the lyrics and Delbeke the music. Moeyaert has said that his dearest wish is for couples to play the song as the opening dance at their wedding. The pair will talk about their collaboration in the atrium of Genk’s public library, a soaring, glass-clad space that’s a favourite meeting place for the city’s residents.

The ultra-modern library was the last design project of French architect Claude Visconi, who died in 2009, and forms the focal point of the city’s central square.

A few days later, in Hasselt, Dutch writer Adriaan van Dis will discuss his novel Ik kom terug (I’ll Be Back) with journalist Anna Luyten, a regular interviewer for the festival.

The award-winning book is based on van Dis’ difficult – and sometimes comic – relationship with his mother. During their conversation, Carll Cren, one of the most esteemed children’s book illustrators in Flanders, will draw live on stage, and his drawings will be projected on to a screen for all to see. This event will take place in the auditorium of the city hospital.

For each presentation, we try to find an interesting location, says Marijke Rekkers of Villa Verbeelding, the former cloister in Hasselt, because her family was religious, and she always had to deal with the nuns. “The presentation with author Lieve Joris will take place in the chapel of the former Clarissen cloister in Hasselt, because her family was religious, and she always had to deal with the nuns, as we call them – the nuns.”

In addition, there is a related activity before each event for a limited number of participants. For the festival opener, which centres on a love song, it’s a workshop centred on herbs and love in a pop-up garden.

For the interview with van Dis about his mother, there’s a guided tour of the exhibition Mother and Child in the former school for midwives. “We combine things so that people have a whole, complete evening,” explains Rekkers, adding that sometimes food and drink are also available.

There are seven events in all, organised by Villa Verbeelding (Imagination Villa), the former Literary Museum in Hasselt. The other partners are the cultural centres and the three city’s libraries.

Now in its eighth year, Zin in Zomer has proven quite popular. “The audience here is anyone who likes to read or to discover new places, who wants to have a cultural experience or to hear an interesting interview,” Rekkers says. “Actually, it’s meant for a very wide audience.”

And while most of the events are for adults, there is one event for all ages, with Flemish author Jef Aerts, whose award-winning books for children often revolve around family and friendship.

The festival closes with travel writer Lieve Joris, whose books have been translated into several languages, including English. The interview will be accompanied by music from gypsy jazz band Les rideaux de ma grand-mère.

Across Hasselt, Genk and Sint-Truiden

Controversial war photo re-examined in Antwerp exhibition

Calling a single photograph an exhibition might seem to be stretching a point, but Controversy – the latest pop-up show at Antwerp’s contemporary art museum M HKA – still provides plenty of food for thought.

It’s the work of rising Flemish photographer Max Pinckers, whose theatrically constructed images question accepted methods of documentary photography, and like-minded Dutch photographer and artist Sam Weerdmeester.

Their starting point is one of the most famous – or notorious – images in the history of photography. In 1937, images in the history of photography were taken of a soldier standing over the body of a fallen comrade. It soon proved to be a false portrayal, but the image remained iconic. The controversy around the famous ‘Body and Bicycle’ series produced in a way that gives the maximum depth of field. The trees are sharp, however far back in the landscape you look, as is the grass and the horizon.

Reality is heightened, but falsified. And rather than capturing a moment in time, this picture is made up of many moments. Yet the effect is not to reignite the controversy, but to bring closure. From the image of an apparently dead death we move to an apparently innocent landscape. I saw apparently innocent, because this scene will be familiar to anyone who has followed the campaign in Spain to find the bodies of people who disappeared during the civil war. Places such as this sometimes hold darker secrets than Capa’s flirtation with photographic propaganda.

Ian Mundell

M HKA
Leuvenstraat 32, Antwerp

Until 28 August

The "Controversy" photograph revisits the site where Robert Capa took his iconic image

© Max Pinckers & Sam Weerdmeester / M HKA

"The 'Controversy' photograph revisits the site where Robert Capa took his iconic image on a Spanish hillsides, under a pale blue sky. This is where the research says Capa took the photograph, as it appears today. But again, this is not all that it seems. The 'photography' is a composite of 46 images of the trees on a Spanish hillsides, under a pale blue sky. This is where the research says Capa took the photograph, as it appears today. But again, this is not all that it seems. The 'photography' is a composite of 46 images of the trees on a Spanish hillsides, under a pale blue sky."
Riveting voices and mesmerising rhythms

Feeërieën

21-25 August

Warandepark, Brussels

ABCONCERTS.BE

AUGUST 16, 2017

At the end of every summer, Brussels music hall Ancienne Belgique hosts Feeërieën, a series of free concerts in the gazebo of Warandepark. The programme is thematic, with each day devoted to a specific scene or style. That’s not to say the artists aren’t crossing borders and genres, with many taking full advantage of the small scale, fairy-lights atmosphere. The Brussels string ensemble Echo Collective, known for their collaboration with A Winged Victory for the Sullen, open the series with an intriguing post-classical version of Radiohead's 2001 album Amnesiac. They have invited along producer Otto Lindholm, whose gloomy minimal electro fits the theme perfectly. A day later, British jazz drummer Moses Boyd presents two of his latest projects: the funky quartet Moses Boyd Exodus and a duo with saxophonist Binker Golding. Later in the week is a triple bill featuring Dj Marfox, DJ Njiga Fox and Nidha Minaj. Their label, Lisbon Principe, fuses contemporary techno and house with African genres like Angolan kuduro and fumana. In recent years, AB has ventured into lesser known genres of music. This year features a joint concert by the Niger desert blues band Mdou Moctar and Derya Yildirim & Grup Şimşek, who turn Turkish folk songs into hypnotic psych-pop grooves. The rising star of the concert series, however, is Aldous Harding, a New Zealander with a riveting voice and a handful of mesmerising compositions. The singer-songwriter (pictured) has just released her second album, Party, with producer John Parish. In the studio, Parish worked hard to restrain Harding’s very expressive singing style, which varies from song to song. In Brussels, however, Harding will be on her own, so expect a one-of-a-kind, unforgettably beautiful performance. \ Tom Peeters

VISUAL ARTS

Vive Labeur: China in Poperinge

Until 17 September

Gasthuiskapel, Poperinge

POPERINGE14-18.BE

The First World War centennial rolls on with this photo exhibition recognising the contributions and struggles of the Chinese labourers brought to Poperinge by the British Army to support the war effort. They lived in segregated camps and observed their own traditions. Vive Labeur explores both the historical archive and the enduring cultural resonance of this cross-cultural encounter. Two contemporary Flemish photographers, Stephan Vanfleteren and Sanne Dewilde, retrace the labourers’ steps back to China and return with a striking visual account of the journey, while reporter Lieselotte Schoonens’ array of site-specific performances, all unfolding under the ancient beltway.

EVENT

Vegan Summer Fest

20 August, 11.00

Artcube, Ghent

VEGANSUMMERFESTBE

The third edition of this celebration of all things vegan isn’t just for the diehards. Plain old vegetarians and curious omnivores are welcome, as well. The free day-long festival is a smorgasbord of ethically produced and ecologically sustainable products from loads of local and regional vendors. There’s food and drink, trendy clothes and cosmetics, activist art and live music—all without any trace of animal parts. Festival organiser BE Vegan have also invited NGOs to participate in an animal rights conference during which grassroots activists can share best practices. Previous editions have attracted more than 3,000 visitors.

CONCERT

Sparks

16 September, 20.00

Ancienne Belgique, Brussels

ABCONCERTS.BE

Two years after a sold-out performance as half of supergroup FFS, veteran Los Angeles art-rock outfit Sparks return to the AB to celebrate the release of their 22nd studio album, Hippopotamus. Viry songwriter-pianist Ron Mael and his bombastic vocalist brother Russell have been crafting smart and surreal but catchy songs since the early 1970s. The current tour will feature material from the new disc as well as hits from yesteryear, like glam stomper “This Town Ain’t Big Enough for Both of Us” and the Giorgio Moroder-produced disco hit “The Number One Song in Heaven.”

FESTIVAL

Lichtfeest Lissewege

Situated between the bustling port of Zeebrugge and the touristic hustle of Bruges, Lissewege is an oasis of calm. The historic hamlet is known for its white chalk houses, artistic community and annual Lichtfeest, which illuminates two summer nights with open-air fire and light installations, video art, live music and street theatre throughout the town centre. This 19th edition boasts jazz in the old train station and a vintage liquid light show that will transport visitors to the psychedelic ‘60s. The festival centrepiece is fire artist Annemarie van der Meer’s street installation, while the main stage will feature material from the new LP by the band from Kortrijk, who will be celebrating the release of their 22nd studio album, Hippopotamus. Viry songwriter-pianist Ron Mael and his bombastic vocalist brother Russell have been crafting smart and surreal but catchy songs since the early 1970s. The current tour will feature material from the new disc as well as hits from yesteryear, like glam stomper “This Town Ain’t Big Enough for Both of Us” and the Giorgio Moroder-produced disco hit “The Number One Song in Heaven.”

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Sint-Gillis-Waas (East Flanders)

The Resonant Rogues: Hailing all the way from Asheville, North Carolina, the Rogues’ influences range from gypsy swing and early New Orleans jazz to Appalachian old-time and Eastern European folk music. 19 August 2018. Rock Classic Bar, Kolenmarkt 55.

FLANDERS TODAY

AGENDA

AUGUST 16, 2017

FESTIVAL

Brugge Plus

Bruges

20 to 22 August

Kapelstraat 76

BRUGGEPLUS.BE

The Resonant Rogues: Hailing all the way from Asheville, North Carolina, the Rogues’ influences range from gypsy swing and early New Orleans jazz to Appalachian old-time and Eastern European folk music. 19 August 2018. Rock Classic Bar, Kolenmarkt 55.

FESTIVAL

Bredene

West Flanders

1 to 2 September

Lichtfeest Lissewege

Lisswege

18-19 August

Across Lissewege

BRUGGEPLUS.BE

The Resonant Rogues: Hailing all the way from Asheville, North Carolina, the Rogues’ influences range from gypsy swing and early New Orleans jazz to Appalachian old-time and Eastern European folk music. 19 August 2018. Rock Classic Bar, Kolenmarkt 55.

FESTIVAL

Veurne

West Flanders

20 to 21 August

Across Flanders

Wachtebeke

18-20 August

CinéBite: Free open-air film screenings on beaches, rooftops and other unique venues across the region. Movies coming up are Woody Allen’s Café Society and Flemish thriller D’Dronden. Until 24 September, across Flanders.

EVENT

Torhout

West Flanders

25 August

Yogaland

Torhout

YOGALAND.BE

Family-friendly yoga festival featuring international instructors and all styles of yoga, in addition to meditation classes, workshops, speakers, musical performance, chefs, a market, Kids Village and Start-to-Yoga Village. 18-20 August.

\ 15
Can you stomach this job?

Dreambaan – Dream job, it said on the bargain-hunter website uitmetkorting.be. Gezocht – We are hiring an achtbaantester – a roller coaster tester.

Wagtails with sturdy legs – Daredevil with a strong stomach and stamina – and nerves of steel are needed. You test (for free) roller coasters in Belgian theme parks. But those aren’t the only qualifications you’ll need. Daarnaast – In addition to the candidate’s adrenaline-junkie status – the candidate has to be an adrenaline-junkie, of height, speed and steep drops – who loves heights, speed and steep drops, but he or she must also naauwkeurig and punctueel zijn – be precise and punctual.

Anything more you need to know? In totaal gaat het om zes pretparken – It involves a total of six theme parks, including Bobbejaanland, Boudewijn Seapark and Plopsaland De Panne.

De tester zal de rollercoaster attracties van de attractieparken moeten beoordelen op verschillende criteria – The tester will have to judge the roller coasters on the basis of various criteria such as thrill and comfort – such as how sick you feel and comfort...

So, what will you do in a typical day? Je staat voor de poorten van Bobbejaanland – You are standing in front of the gates at Bobbejaanland to trappelen van ongeduld – jumping up and down with impatience.

Zodra de deuren open zwiepen – As soon as the gates swing open loop je samen met je partner in crime meteen – loop je samen met je partner in crime – to avoid the queues.

You start with the Bob Express. Then you buckle your seatbelt. After a summer spent spinning round and round, the fizzy drink you had for lunch has gone down.

In response to: Theme of Brussels Airlines’ next decorative plane up to public.

Patrick Jaumonet: Too late, but I would have chosen that little peerig buddy.

In response to: Talking Dutch: Can you stomach this job?

Yannick De Mesmaeker: Hehe, where do we sign up.

Antonis Stylianou: Breakfast could not have been any more hipster than this #breakfast #laundry #wasbar ghent

Jacopo Bernardini @jacoberna20 We’re having a different kind of summer here! leuven #weather #belgiansummer

QueensburyQueens @queeniequeensCC Guess it’s the same as lifting a trophy? Our bikes are our trophies. They’re an extension of us. #Flanders #TiffanyCromwell #Achieve #Pride

Ilse Robinson @IlseRobinson77 Despite the rain still a lovely evening #Antwerp

The lasT Word

An ounce of prevention

“He stole manhole covers and beheaded statues of the Virgin Mary. How mad do you have to be in this country to be committed?”

The father of a man accused of a crime in Diestenbeek thinks the sign should have been spotted sooner.

A good egg

“People here are not even talking about it.”

The egg crisis has had no effect on omlet restaurant 3 Monkeys in Gent, according to spokesperson Lukya Vanaverbeke.

A circle of friends

“A bar owner has to go to a lot of funerals. Even for guys who 15 minutes before were standing at the bar.”

An anonymous bar owner in Flanders, interviewed by Het Nieuwsblad.

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