A majority of people in Antwerp wants to see the cordon sanitaire removed

The research bureau TNS/Dimaros has carried out a survey, commissioned by Gazet van Antwerpen, among a random sample of 400 residents of Antwerp, into local people’s satisfaction with the Antwerp city council. Opinions were also gauged on attitudes to the Vlaams Blok and the cordon sanitaire around the far right party. After two years of the current city administration, it appears that the average Antwerp citizen is slightly less pleased than before. However, he has changed his attitude to the cordon sanitaire around the Vlaams Blok. A clear majority feels that this is no longer tenable, and that it should be possible to talk to the Blok. Even in left-wing parties such as SP.A and Agalev, there is respectively a 42% and 38% opposition to the cordon, albeit only to give the Blok the chance to prove its incapacity. That is good news for the Blok. Less good news for Filip Dewinter & Co. is that four out of every ten Blok voters do not believe in the Blok’s solutions at all. They appear to be mere votes of protest and disenchanted (FF).

ROGER VAN HOUTTE
GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 28 MARCH

The opinion of the people of Antwerp on the cordon sanitaire is striking. A significant shift has occurred compared with a poll from two years ago. In March 2000, there was almost as large a group in favour as there was against this cordon. Now, 66% are against maintaining the cordon and only 33% are in favour of keeping it in place. However, the fact that two-thirds of Antwerp citizens reject the cordon sanitaire does not mean that faith in the Vlaams Blok is equally great. More people think that things would go less swimmingly with the Vlaams Blok in power. Only 28.5% think that the Blok would be an improvement. Irrespective of what Antwerp’s residents might think of the Vlaams Blok, their satisfaction with the current city council [made up of SP.A, VLD, CD&V, and Agalev] is very mediocre. Fifty-one percent gives the majority a satisfactory mark, with 48% giving it an ‘unsatisfactory’.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
Beyssen sets up right wing pressure group within VLD

The VLD is increasingly having to deal with a right-wing wind of change in its Antwerp party division. In that city, the bench of aldermen contains Greens, Socialists, Christian Democrats, and Liberals, and the Vlaams Blok is the only opposition party of any importance. The Liberal MEP Ward Beyssen is now advocating a coalition without the Greens and with a new mayor, more specifically a Liberal. Since he was placed on the political sidelines within his party, Beyssen has turned into the conveyer of right-wing displeasure within the VLD. Last weekend he organised a meeting at an Antwerp hotel, which was the subject of great interest. In fact, the level of interest in his ‘congress’ prompted him to decide to set up a right-wing pressure group, which he has called the Liberal Appeal. Central to the Liberal Appeal is opposition to the tax burden, to tolerance for criminals who re-offend, to the current ‘fast-track-Belgian’ law, to the de facto legalisation of drugs, and to the ‘lack of blue (police) on the streets’. It is Beyssen’s aim to win back voters from the Vlaams Blok without breaking through the cordon sanitaire. Beyssen has already taken on communication specialist Wim Schamp as his campaign manager. According to the local VLD Chairman Van Campenhout, there is no problem whatsoever with the establishment of the pressure group. The same day VLD Chairman Karel De Gucht held a conference on globalisation with the NCD, breaking through the cordon sanitaire. Beyssen has already taken on communication specialist Wim Schamp as his campaign manager. According to the local VLD Chairman Van Campenhout, there is no problem whatsoever with the establishment of the pressure group.

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD
25 MARCH

The balancing act for the liberal people’s party in the making is becoming precarious. What Beyssen said in Antwerp is not so surprising: the party is ogling the left too much and the participation in the Antwerp coalition is going totally awry. But the fact that he mobilised more people for this than his party chairman did for a workshop with candidates for enlargement, such as Johan Van Hecke, spoke volumes. Furthermore, he announced that he was starting up a ‘sensible right-wing’ movement within the party. That proves that the opposition to the centrist party line is no longer afraid of making itself known. VLD Chairman Karel Van Gucht need not worry unduly about Ward Beyssen’s figure or political talent, but rather about the growing doubt amongst the party’s own members as to the risks that their leaders are taking in their efforts to secure lasting political power. When he came to office, federal Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt said that he wanted to suppress the extreme right wing. But that is by no means the VLD’s main objective. It’s all about those couple of percentage points, those twenty thousand or so votes that ought to make it the biggest party once and for all. Nailing down the Christian Democrats to second place would clear the way for a permanent claim to office. For the time being, that is a lot more important than checking the extreme right wing. But that is by no means the VLD’s main objective. It’s all about those couple of percentage points, those twenty thousand or so votes that ought to make it the biggest party once and for all. Nailing down the Christian Democrats to second place would clear the way for a permanent claim to office. For the time being, that is a lot more important than checking the extreme right wing.

Spirit posts the biggest rise

The quarterly opinion poll carried out by the French-language newspaper La Libre Belgique has become a reference for Belgian politicians, and is therefore eagerly awaited. The poll is used to ascertain not only how well the party itself has scored, but also what the situation is as regards personal popularity. The latest poll into voting behaviour was carried out between 27 February and 8 March among 2,000 Belgians. On the Flemish side, four parties have registered a fall and three a rise. The VLD, CD&V, Sp.a and N-VA fall back, whilst the Vlaams Blok, the Greens and the Vlaams Partij make gains in comparison with their figures of last December. Although, with 23%, the VLD remains the largest party in Flanders, it has lost ground. In fact over the last six months, this loss has amounted to 1.7%. However, the VLD can take solace in the fact that its direct challenger, the Christian-Democratic CD&V, is proving unable to take advantage; the largest opposition party has also lost ground, by 0.4%. The course of treatment on the opposition bench is evidently not doing the CD&V much good, as it still stands at 1% below the already dreadful result it posted in the last parliamentary elections of June 1999. The Sp.a also loses ground, falling back from 16.6 to 16.2%, although this is still 1.2% better than the showing in the last elections. For the time being the Socialists are not managing to overtake the Vlaams Blok again, which is again doing well and has risen slightly to 17%. The Greens notch up a small gain of 0.2%, but most attention has naturally gone to the successors to the Volksunie: the N-VA and Spirit. The gap between the two parties is narrowing. The N-VA loses 0.5% and drops to 4.7%. Spirit registers a 1.4% increase, and climbs to 3.7%. Finally, confidence in the Federal Government is at its lowest level since it came to office (40%). On the other hand, confidence in the Government of Flanders, under the leadership of Patrick Dewael (VLD), has risen by 1 % to 38% (table p.3).
Federal agreement on three crucial issues

**FF EDITOR**

Federal Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt was once again a contented man on Monday 25 March. Before heading off on a week’s trip to China, he was able to present three agreements on three extremely difficult issues. This was two more than expected, since few commentators believed that anything more than an agreement on budgetary control would be forthcoming. As has so often been the case in this Liberal/Socialist/Green government, each of the coalition parties was able to notch up something for itself. Verhofstadt mollified his Liberal grassroots with the reform of the corporation tax, which benefits SMEs in particular, Green Minister Magda Aelvoet pleased her Green grassroots with the introduction of environmental taxes and eco coupons, and Minister for the Budget and Deputy Prime Minister Johan Vande Lanotte (Sp.a) was able to close with a slight budget surplus.

Environmental taxation for drinks packaging

**JOSSE ABRACHAMS**

De Morgen • 26 March

Anyone buying a drink in a disposable (e.g., plastic) bottle, can or carton will soon pay 11.6 eurocents per litre for doing so. This levy will be used to finance the lower VAT and excise duties on reusable types of drinks packaging. The aim is to promote the use of reusable packaging, which, after all, will become cheaper than disposable bottles and cartons. The introduction of this environmental taxation is the most important trophy that the Greens have managed to land from the negotiations (FF).

The measure is being introduced as a result of pressure from the Green parties in the government, which want to see a reduction in the amount of waste entering the environment. The measure could also provide the impetus for the launch onto the Belgian market of reusable PET and polycarbonate bottles. This is the norm in the Netherlands, according to Bart Martens of the Association for a Better Environment (Bond Beter Leefmilieu - BBL), where these plastic bottles are handed in again after use. That would go some way towards countering the criticism that glass bottles are heavy and can be problematic, particularly for elderly people. However, the Greens’ original ideas were adjusted. For example, bottles and other types of packaging that offer adequate recycling possibilities escape the levies. For Fost Plus, the measure is not such good news. Fost is an initiative of the producers themselves, and was set up for the purpose of recycling the various types of drinks packaging. The company is obliged to recycle at least 15% of each type of packaging. An exception to the environmental taxation is being made for milk. Every system that were to advise against disposable packaging for milk would make the product more expensive on average, and that is something that the government wanted to avoid.
Lower corporation tax chiefly benefits SMEs

The government has decided to cut the rates of corporation tax from 40.17% to 33.99% for large companies. For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), a rate of 24, 25, 31, or 34.5% will be charged, depending on the taxable profit. This move brings the rates close to the European average, so that a more attractive environment for foreign investments is undoubtedly created. This operation is costing the government EUR 1,195 billion, but is offset by a package of additional measures (notably, deductible expenses are being pruned), which, however, do not apply to SMEs with a taxable profit of less than EUR 322,500. The tax deductibility of company cars is not being touched. Finally, a ‘ruling’ system is being introduced, under which companies can make individual arrangements with the tax office. This is intended to promote transparency and attract international companies (FF).

Luc Coppens
De Standaard • 26 March

The idea of reducing the amount of tax that can be deducted on company cars—a proposal that was supported by the Green ministers right up to the last minute—has been completely brushed aside. Even petrol costs remain deductible in full. The Prime Minister feels that the business of getting people to use their cars less is ‘not a job for the corporation tax’. The only measure that appears to dovetail with the Greens’ demands is the deductibility of the costs of transport to and from the workplace for staff participating in a carpooling scheme (or travelling by train or bicycle). From now on these costs are deductible for a distance of up to 50 kilometres per journey, double what it was before.

The government wants to tax the capital gain realised when an enterprise is discontinued (10% tax). Furthermore, the 25% rebate on the tax on profits of foreign origin is being abolished, and the concept of ‘definitively taxed income’ is as good as being scrapped. From now on, companies will have to prove that they have already paid tax on dividends collected abroad (often through shareholdings). Otherwise, regional taxes (e.g., environmental levy, ed.) will no longer be deducted from the federal corporation tax. From now on, it will only be possible to book depreciation on a pro rata basis. Under the present rules, if a company makes an investment in December, it can write down the investment that same year as if it had made the investment on 1 January.

The prospect is also being held out for measures to tackle spurious non-profit-making organisations and misuse of legal personality. None of these measures apply to SMEs posting a taxable profit of less than EUR 322,500. In addition, the profits of SMEs that are ploughed back into the company are exempt of tax to the tune of 50% (subject to a ceiling of EUR 37,500). During the first three years after its start-up, the company is taxed on a lump-sum basis (on the basis of an estimated profit). No further taxes may be imposed on SMEs if the estimate proves to be too low—something which regularly led to unpleasant surprises in the past. During his press conference the Prime Minister did hardly avoid to thank the Association of Independent Employers (Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers - Unizo) for the way in which it had helped the government with ideas and tips on how to keep the 180,000 SMEs in this country out of harm’s way.

Wim Van de Velden • De Financieel-economische Tijd • 26 March

The Minister of the Government of Flanders for the Budget and Finance, Dirk van Mechelen [VLD], is thinking of turning the environmental levies into environmental contributions. In that way he wants to keep them tax deductible. This is a suggestion that the Flemish Employers’ Association (Vlaams Economisch Verbond - VEV) had already made to him. After all, the Flemish business community risks being hit hardest. According to estimates made by the federal government, the scrapping of tax deductibility on some regional taxes—chiefly the environmental levies—means that companies will have to pay EUR 97 million more. And the vast majority of that is payable by Flemish companies: 90% of the environmental levies are paid in Flanders.

Sluggish public services are the reason for most complaints

FF Editor

The government often underestimates the annoyance it causes in people by the sluggish service it provides. So says Bernard Hubeau, the ombudsman of the Flemish Community, in his annual report. Part of what the Government of Flanders calls the mood of bitterness and disenchantment among citizens is indisputably a result of this sluggishness in the way the public services operate. This embittered citizen also expresses this annoyance politically.

His report also reveals that the Authorities of Flanders appear to take the recommendations of their ombudsman a little more seriously than does the Federal Government. But nonetheless, all is far from perfect. At the ombudsman’s suggestion, a complaints decree was therefore drawn up, which obliges every Flemish department and every Flemish public institution to work out a genuine complaints management system. In 2001, the Flemish ombudsman’s office dealt with 4,832 complaints. The bulk of these concerned Flemish taxes, town and country planning, and the environmental and transport policies.

www.flanders.be
The Mechelen biotechnology company Tibotec-Virco was acquired by the American pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson (J&J) on 21 March. Tibotec-Virco shareholders could not decline the offer of EUR 360 million. The company had almost exhausted its liquid assets. What is more, the firm had very close ties with J&J. After all, Tibotec-Virco was founded by Rudy Pauwels and Paul Stoffels, the latter a former employee of Janssen Pharmaceutica, which had already previously been acquired by the American giant. At Tibotec-Virco, the two founders owned 25% of the shares each. A further 25% of the shares was in the hands of a group of investors formed by Fortis, Ibel, KBC, and BBL, Trustcapital and De Vaderlandsche, and the remaining 25% was held by Luc Verelst’s Pharma Capital Holding Company. Tibotec-Virco tests blood from AIDS patients from all over the world for resistance to AIDS drugs. It also develops drugs that can reduce the amount of the AIDS virus in the blood. Two hundred people are employed at Tibotec-Virco. The parallel with Janssen Pharmaceutica, which was sold to J&J in 1961, is striking, reports De Financieel-Economische Tijd (FF).

The parallel between the history of Janssen Pharmaceutica then, and Tibotec-Virco is striking in many respects. Tibotec-Virco, too, has in the last five years gradually come to be acknowledged worldwide as one of the few top players in the specific field of research into resistance to AIDS. So it is that the small company from Mechelen, which was only established in 1994 by Rudy Pauwels, managed to act as a partner to large American companies such as LabCorporation, LabCorp., the largest American laboratory, sent the blood samples of AIDS patients to Mechelen, where tests were carried out into the virus’s possible resistance to the existing drugs. In this way Tibotec-Virco built up a database on all the possible mutations of the AIDS virus and the ways in which drugs reacted to it. It was not long before the company took the step of moving from this diagnosis activity to the testing of new AIDS drugs. Tibotec was given access to a number of molecules from Janssen Pharmaceutica, with a potential effect against the AIDS virus. Tibotec-Virco has worked up one of these molecules, which goes by the code name TMC 125, into the clinical phase II. It is extremely effective in reducing the amount of the AIDS virus in the blood, where other existing drugs had failed.

Tibotec-Virco now has two drugs in a clinical phase II (testing on humans), each of which has the effect of checking the AIDS virus in a different way. For large pharmaceutical companies such as Johnson & Johnson, this is an ideal phase at which to obtain molecules or take over the company. Indeed, in a subsequent phase these companies become very expensive, or they can easily make deals in order to finance the subsequent development costs. The second parallel with Paul Janssen’s deal at the time is the lack of capital in a small region such as Flanders. It was already known that Tibotec-Virco from Mechelen had gradually exhausted its liquid assets. Like all biotech companies in their start-up phase, Tibotec-Virco had a high burn-out. The income was far from sufficient to cover the high research costs. The income from diagnoses or the blood testing of AIDS patients from all over the world was nowhere near enough to pay for the testing of new AIDS drugs and to cover the costs relating to the international presence that is required in order to stay abreast of things in the scientific field. Given the many ties between Tibotec-Virco and Janssen Pharmaceutica, J&J was seen as virtually the only possible choice, according to Pauwels.

The Belgian GIB holding company is selling its DIY chain Brico to the Dutch retail chain Vendex KBB. The acquisition has a price tag of EUR 505 million. According to the Financieel-Economische Tijd (28 March), this is 13 times the operating result or 71% of the turnover of the Brico group. Both parties are calling the price ‘standard in the market’. With the sale, GIB garners an increase in value of EUR 315 million. Vendex KBB is buying the entire Brico chain, but in fact is only interested in the 97 Belgian stores. The French, Spanish and Portuguese stores are to be sold on to the French DIY group Leroy Merlin. With the acquisition, Vendex KBB becomes the market leader in the do-it-yourself market in the Benelux. What is more, the Dutch group in fact already has a very prominent presence in the street scene of many Flemish shopping precints. The clothing chains M&S Mode, Claudia Sträter, and Hunkermöller and the Hema chain of department stores, for example, belong to the group. After the sale of the GB supermarkets to the French group Carrefour, and now of Brico, the GIB holding company also wants to divest itself as quickly as possible of its loss-making fast food chain Quick. So it is that the once handsomely filled GIB portfolio is slowly running down.
First private competitor of the NMBS

FF EDITORIAL STAFF

In March 2003, in accordance with a European directive dating from 1991, the entire sector for freight transport by rail is to be opened up to competition. Dillen en Le Jeune Cargo is not waiting that long. On 2 April, this first private-sector rival for the Belgian National Railways, NMBS will be operating its first freight train with containers from Aachen in Germany to the port of Antwerp. It is now beginning to dawn on the NMBS that it is heading for a very difficult period. In 2001, the railway company already recorded a 6.2% fall in turnover for freight transport. What is more, in 2002 turnover of its freight transport subsidiary, B-cargo, is now inevitable. The trade unions are warning that there will be social unrest. They have already had to bite the bullet of having been ejected from the NMBS’s new board of directors further to the new Railways Act, and now only sitting on an advisory board, the so-called strategic committee. That has made them doubly alert. And Managing Director Etienne Schouppe and Transport Minister Isabelle Durant will now be crossing swords. According to the new Railways Act, which was recently approved in the Senate, Schouppe must re-apply for his post and undergo an examination, in Durant’s view. Schouppe is having none of this, maintaining that he has a contract that runs until 2004. According to this new Railways Act, the NMBS must also operate more efficiently and improve its service. The Act also contains a co-operation agreement between the federal authorities and the regions.

Second rail access to the port of Antwerp

A second rail access for freight transport to the port of Antwerp is perhaps the first large-scale NMBS project able to count on Flemish financial support. The plan in question has come about after years of discussion as to what the best route would be. Since there is not much public land available to the east of Antwerp, where the line is to come, and there are strict environmental requirements and considerable sensitivity about quality of life, about 13 of the 28 planned kilometres are to be laid underground, in tunnels or cuttings (FF).

PASCAL SERTYN • DE STANDAARD 26 MARCH

In the coming months, work will be carried out on an environmental impact study (EIS) and a public inquiry on the Regional Town and Country Planning Implementation Plan that includes the rail route. The NMBS and the Authorities of Flanders will be organising information meetings for the residents of the municipalities affected in the coming months. The Flemish financial contribution will enable the second rail access between the port of Antwerp and the Lier-Aarschot railway line to be laid more quickly. The NMBS’s investment plan holds out the prospect of the line being commissioned in 2012. With Flemish financial aid, the freight railway line could be brought into use by 2009 or 2010. In order to make that possible, the Flemish government would have to earmark a good EUR 25 million to the project in their budget every year. The current route illustrates the extreme sensitivity to environmental concerns and quality of life. The second rail access to the port of Antwerp is very important not just for the port of Antwerp itself, but also for rail traffic through Antwerp. According to Antoine Martens, a member of the NMBS management board, the laying of the second rail access is a sine qua non for encouraging domestic passenger traffic. The second rail access will help take the strain off the existing railway lines that cut through the city of Antwerp.

All quiet as regards the ‘active welfare state’

There has been a conspicuous silence lately on the issue of the ‘active welfare state’, formerly one of the great advertising boards of the Liberal/Socialist/Green coalition’s platform. De Standaard (22 March) calculated how active our welfare state is. The conclusion is disappointing. The bulk of the 985,377 people receiving benefit (61.5%) from the Government Employment Office (Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening - RVA), are no longer even looking for a job. One in three Belgian employees drew from the RVA’s cash till last year, according to a calculation made by Knack. This cost the government some EUR 6 billion.

GUIDO DE SPIEGHELARE • KNACK 27 MARCH

The welfare state is less active than some ministers would like. The RVA no longer chiefly pays out to job-seeking unemployed persons. The enormous unemployment budget is ‘financing’ a number of socially imbedded customs, such as the early withdrawal from the labour market, for example. Early retirement is almost the general rule: there are 111,000 people on early retirement. And the number of unemployed persons on early retirement - the over-50s who for the time being still do not have to be available for the job market - runs to almost 190,000. Moreover, career breaks are proving to be hugely successful. No fewer than 112,000 employees and civil servants receive a career break benefit payment, 90% of whom being women. This number will rise still further now that the system has been changed with the introduction of the more attractive ‘time credit’. An equally deep-rooted custom is for school leavers to come knocking at the RVA’s door for a benefit whilst waiting for work. There were 108,000 of these last year.
Subsidized neighbourhood parties on 11th of July

The eleventh of July 2002 is not just another Flemish national holiday like many before it. It is also the seven hundredth anniversary of the Battle of the Spurs (1302), which is symbolic of Flemish emancipation. On that occasion the Flemish cities defeated an army of French Knights near Kortrijk. To observe the anniversary of the battle, the Government of the Flanders wants to treat Flemings to new kind of celebration. The government wants to open up the party to include all Flemings, and not have it just reserved for Flemish Nationalists and other supporters of the Flemish movement, whose presence at the corny 11th of July celebrations is usually characterised by processions, speeches, and banners. Subsidised neighbourhood parties, free public transport on 11 July and a ‘Museum Night’ on 10 July are the celebration’s main ingredients. Deputy Minister-President Steve Stevaert (Sp.a) had already successfully put into practice ideas such as district parties aimed at checking the sour attitudes of people and free public transport, in his home town of Hasselt, reports De Morgen (FF).

GEERT VANDEPITTE • TIJD CULTUUR 20 MAART

Pieter Brueghel the Elder enjoyed huge success even whilst he was still alive. After his death, his works became even more sought after, and fetched high prices on the art market. The demand was satisfied by the production of copies. The copies exhibited in Brussels come for the most part from the studio of the eldest son, Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564-1637). In the 17th century much less importance was attached to the uniqueness of works of art than is the case nowadays. In those days, recognisability of a work was more important than originality, so that making copies of successful works was not unusual. The sons Brueghel, in particular the eldest, Pieter, were champions in this field. When father Brueghel died, the eldest son, Pieter, was barely five years old, and would only begin to paint copies decades later. By that time the original paintings were already long gone, which raises the question as to how he was able to make the copies. One possible answer is that he worked on the basis of paperboards and sketches that had been kept.

In the exhibition, each of the four exhibited works is studied on the basis of some ten copies, which had been kept. The copies exhibited in Brussels come for the most part from the studio of the eldest son, Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564-1637). In the 17th century much less importance was attached to the uniqueness of works of art than is the case nowadays. In those days, recognisability of a work was more

BART EECKHOUT DE MORGEN • 27 MARCH

“We want to emphasise the solidarity of all residents of Flanders. We want to strengthen social contact and thwart the creation of sour and bitter attitudes’, said Minister-President Dewael. Flemish Culture Minister Bert Anciaux [Spirit] made an explicit call for all immigrants also to be involved in the 11th of July celebration. In Anciaux’s view, 11 July is the perfect moment ‘to blow the dust off the traditional 11th of July celebrations’. The most eye-catching new aspect is the ‘neighbourhood parties’ initiative. District committees or associations who want to organise a party in their area during the last week of June or between 4 and 11 July, will be eligible for a government subsidy for that purpose. To this end the Authorities of Flanders will be

making available 1,800 party cheques to the value of EUR 200 each. The spirit will also be overindulged. Flemish Minister for Culture Bert Anciaux announced yesterday that on the eve of the Flemish Community’s Holiday, a string of Flemish museums would be opening their doors in the evening for a free ‘Museum Night’. The Dewael Government drew inspiration for its initiative from the ‘Grande Pique-rique’ which was organised last year in France on 14 July. In four border municipalities, a cross-border party table will quite literally be set up, so that in Essen, Hoegaarden, Menen, and Voeren, the district’s Dutch, French, or Walloon neighbours will also be invited. In the cities of the centre, performances will be organised near the major bus stations. The traditional large-scale 11th of July observance in Brussels will also get a new outfit this year. And there will be a special festive song. However, Anciaux lamented the fact that 11 July was still not an official paid public holiday for all Flemings, and called on the Federal Government, which has competence in this regard, to work on this by next year.

The Brueghel Firm

The Royal Museums for Fine Arts in Brussels are staging a unique temporary exhibition entitled ‘The Brueghel Firm’. The ‘firm’ in the title is a reference to the passion that the offspring of Pieter Brueghel the Elder had for copying. Working in their studios with a whole host of assistants, Pieter Brueghel’s two sons, Pieter Brueghel the Younger and Jan Brueghel, made copies of the works of their very successful father, for there was a huge demand for paintings by Pieter Brueghel the Elder (1527-1569). The exhibition was conceived by the Bonnefanten Museum in Maastricht and displays copies of four famous paintings by the old master: ‘The census in Bethlehem’, ‘The Adoration of the Magi in the snow’, ‘Winter landscape with bird snare’, and ‘The country lawyer’. The original works belong to the Royal Museums’ own collection, and are also exhibited (FF).

GEERT VANDEPITTE • TIJD CULTUUR 20 MAART

The Dewael Government drew inspiration for its initiative from the ‘Grande Pique-rique’ which was organised last year in France on 14 July.
Around this 'lab for painting analysis'. You discover analysis techniques such as infrared reflectometry, which is used to make the signature of a panel visible. An excellent video is also permanently shown, which very effectively evokes the working atmosphere of the Brueghel Firm. Seldom is scientific research illustrated so clearly to the public.

**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE**

- **Until 17 November**: Brugges 2002, Cultural Capital of Europe; info: 070/22.33.02 www.brugges2002.be
- **4 and 5 April**: Arco Renz, Think me Thickness, dance, Kaaitheater, Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be
- **8 April**: One Only One # 19, Ictus, the grand jeu by Bruno Montavani, Kaaitheaterstudio's, Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be
- **6 April**: Le cercle spirituel conducted by Hevie Niquet with Te Deum and Messes pour Mr. Mauroy by MA Charpentier, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/238.59.60 www.desingel.be
- **8 April**: Jean-Louis Murat, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.ab-concerts.be
- **5 April**: Tielt, exhibition, Arentshuis, Tielt; info: 05/71.90.90 www.antwerpen.be/cultuur/kmska
- **7 April**: Belle de Sebastion, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.ab-concerts.be
- **8 April**: Mary J. Blige, Vorst National, Brussels; info: 0900/00991
- **Until 4 April**: Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg by Richard Wagner, Flanders Opera, Antwerp; info: 02/225.24.25 www.vlaamseopera.be
- **6 April**: Cesaria Evora, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00 www.springsessions.be
- **11 April**: Paul and Manno De Nooyer; moving installation performance with music by Gary Swords; De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- **12 April**: Chocolate genius, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: 050/33.20.14
- **15 April**: Marc-André Hamelin, piano with compositions by WF Mozart, CV Alkan and F Schubert; De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- **24 April**: Festival Robert Altman, Filmuseum, Amsterdam; info: 03/233.85.71
- **30 April**: Festival South USA, Filmuseum Brussels; info: 02/507.83.83
- **Until 4 June**: Festival Kunstkoters, Youth, Bruges and modern art; info: 02/730.23320

**EXPO**

- **Until 2 June 2002**: Brains in action, exhibition, Museum of Natural Sciences, Brussels; info: 02/627.42.52 www.natuurwetenschappen.be
- **Until 2 June**: About the Dead, exhibition, Museum Dr. Ghijselinck, Ghent; info: 09/216.35.95 www.fracarita.be
- **Until 14 April**: Jan Van Inschroot, Steven Aalders and Yehia Jusifadin, SMAK, Ghent; info: 09/231.17.03 www.smak.be
- **Until 21 April**: Paris 1900, exhibition, Museum ELSene, info: 02/515.64.21
- **Until 12 April**: The non-conformist city by Luc Deley, exhibition on urban design, Mercator Gallery, Antwerp; info: 02/247.24.19
- **Until November**: Living Tomorrow, where visions meet, the house of the future, Vilvoorde; info: 02/751.90.41
- **Until 21 April**: Bert De Beul & Honoré d’O, exhibition, MUHKA, Antwerp; info: 03/238.59.60
- **Until 14 April**: Berlina De Braycerek, Ilse Jolliet and time/work, exhibition, Caermersklooster, Ghent [Patersho], info: 09/269.29.10
- **Until 30 June**: Jan Van Eyck, The Flemish Primitives and the South, Groeningemuseum, Bruges
- **Until 15 March**: exhibition: Attachment +, contemporary art, Normal School
- **Until 26 May**: Rik Wouters, exhibition, KMSK, Antwerp; info: 03/238.78.09 www.antwerpen.be/cultuur/kmska

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**Facts**

- Until 26 May: Rik Wouters, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.84.66 www.pskpba.be
- Until 12 May: Mahka exhibitions: Guy Mees, Dimitri Vangundraerbeek and Paul de Ruiter, Halle-Neupre; info: 02/328.59.60 www.artexsis.com
- Until 30 March: Elke Boon, Spots and Foam, photo and video exhibition, De Witte Zaal, Gent; info: 09/225.42.90
- Until 25 June: Photo Festival Knokke-Heist with Erwin Olaf, Paradise 2001, Photo Exhibition, CC Scharpoord, Knokke-Heist
- Until 1 April: Eurantica Brussel 02, Antiques Fair, Brussels Expo, Heizel; info: 0800/30.007 www.artexsis.com
- Until 21 April: See from outside: Flandres Opera in Ghent, exhibition; info: 09/225.24.25 www.vlaamseopera.be
- Until 18 July: Rubens and the Flemish Baroque painters, exhibition, City Hall, Brussels; info: 02/279.64.34
- Until 26 May: James Welling: Abstract, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.84.66 www.pskpba.be
- Until 19 April: From Dider to Goya, exhibition with graphic work by Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Goya, Ribera, Piranesi and others, Instituto Cervantes, Brussels; info: 02/737.71.90
- www.bruselas.cervantes.es
- Until 21 April: William Christenberry, Disappearing Places, PSK, Antichambres, Brussels; info: 02/507.84.66 www.pskpba.be
- Until 14 April: Aphrodite and Hermes, exhibition by sculptor Johan Talon, CC Elzenveld, Antwerp
- Until 14 July: Silver work by the De Vecchi Family, Provincial Museum Sterkshof-Zilvercentrum, Antwerp; info: 03/360.52.50
- Until 23 June, The Brueghel Firm, exhibition, Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels; info: 02/508.32.11
- Until 14 April: A journey to Japan, contemporary Japanese architecture, De Garage, Mechelen; info: 015/29.40.00
- Until 16 June: Surrealism with Emilie Saltik (Bel), Desmond Morris (GB), Ergin Ihan (Turkey) and Clovis Trouille (Fr), exhibition, PMMK, Ostend; info: 050/50.81.18 www.pmmk.be
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