Agreement with banks on levy for investment funds

The federal government has finally given definite shape to the levy at source to be charged on investment funds with more than 40% in bonds. The levy at source will only apply to the capital gain from the interest revenue from the bonds of the funds, realised since 1 July 2005. The levy is charged on funds which investors sell from 1 January 2006. If they sell before 1 January 2006, they will not pay any levy at source. But there was one major question that was of concern to the financial sector. How was the government intending to raise the targeted EUR 235 million in tax revenue? After all, investors could easily divert to funds exempt of the advance levy, such as funds with a capital guarantee (the so-called pegged funds) or funds without a European passport. After the council of ministers’ meeting of 27 October, the federal government came up with the solution: the banks will simply advance the intended revenue of EUR 235 million. That way the banks avoid the very popular pegged funds being taxed or the capital being moved abroad again (FF).

Opinion

DIRK MICHIelsen – DE TIJD – 27 OCTOBER

The government only taxes funds with a European passport, not the very popular funds with capital protection. The banks observe that it is very small investors who invest in these funds. It is an argument that must certainly have made an impression in socialist circles in the government.

It also goes without saying that, by means of the joining commission, the banks earn their daily bread on the pegged funds. Moreover, the possibility should not be ruled out of customers being presented with the bill within a few years for their bank’s generous attitude. The banks want to recover the advance from the government over the coming years. This should happen every time investors deposit their capital gain in the fund concerned and pay the levy at source. But what if a lot of investors decide to sell their funds before the government measure comes into force, i.e. before 1 January 2006? The fear is that in that case investors will have to “cooperate” in a different way in order to make up the amount again. The measure brings to mind the idea that was followed in the case of the ‘application of tax liabilities’. The government immediately receives money from the banks and the latter can collect a handsome revenue by efficiently collecting tax liabilities that are difficult to collect.
Confusion in communication on avian influenza

The fuss that has been kicked up has led to stocks of three of the four flu vaccines being sold out on the Belgian market

Piet Vanthemsche, the head of the Federal Food Agency (FAVV), has been appointed by the Belgian government to coordinate all measures in the event of an outbreak of avian influenza. As yet there is no general penning-up obligation for poultry, as exists in Germany or the Netherlands. However, this obligation does exist in risk areas, such as in the vicinity of nature reserves where migratory birds often alight. From this week there is also a ban on poultry markets and other places where birds are brought together, as in other European countries. Although no focus of avian flu has been detected in our country, sales of chicken are down by as much as 50% and the price has already dropped to below the production price. If this situation continues, Belgian poultry farmers will be facing their third disaster in barely seven years, after the dioxin crisis in 1999 and the fowl pest in 2003. For that matter, poultry farmers in Belgium cannot insulate themselves against avian flu. There is a Sanitary Fund that is fed by the poultry sector itself and has to compensate the affected farmers if poultry has to be slaughtered, but the fund is empty, reports De Standaard (25 October).

The government is aware that good objective communication is very important. The news that the H5N1 virus has already been found in birds in Turkey, Romania and Croatia, has quickly fanned the fears here of a pandemic in people. The fuss that has been kicked up has led to stocks of three of the four flu vaccines being sold out on the Belgian market. The stampede is the result of the call by Public Health Minister Demotte (PS) to have all children, the over-65s and people who come into contact with poultry vaccinated. But this vaccination is not in any way intended for a mutated virus passed on from person to person – for there is no such thing (at the moment) (FF).

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN – DE STANDAARD 24 OCTOBER

There is already a much-increased demand for virus inhibitors in chemists. That points to confusion in public opinion. For at the moment there is no talk of a mutation of the deadly H5N1 virus found in poultry into a virus that can be passed on from one human being to another. As long as that has not happened – and nobody can predict whether, where or when that will occur – we are simply dealing with an animal disease, albeit a virulent one. In Asia there have been a few dozen deaths, but these chiefly have to do with a lack of elementary hygiene and precautionary measures. Nonetheless, we are once again facing the risk of a large-scale economic disaster, with the systematic slaughter of countless birds in order to hem in any foci of contamination. Once again questions will be raised about the mass breeding methods commonplace in the food-processing industry.

For the time being there is no immediate danger for public health, but people nonetheless expect the authorities to be prepared for that eventuality. The pressure to do “something” is increasing, but for the moment there is little that can be done. Vaccines can only be developed if and when the fatal human virus has manifested itself, not before. It is difficult to fight against an impalpable threat, one that calls up irrational fears. If it wants to avoid uncontrolable panic setting in, the government should now provide communication on the scenarios that it is taking into account.

WWW.FAVV-AFSCA.FGOV.BE

Antwerp polder escapes environmental disaster

On 25 October the polder to the north of Antwerp escaped an environmental disaster by a very close call. A Total storage tank with 35 million litres of petroleum sprang a leak in the Waasland dock in Kallo – perhaps due to a landslide – and emptied its contents. Fortunately it was possible to contain the leaking oil in a concrete buffer pit which is built around the storage tanks, although it emerged later that this also had a small leak. Therefore an emergency barrage was hastily built around the buffer pit. Only 2,000 litres of petroleum reportedly leaked into the polder basin. The petroleum that seeped out did give rise to strong odour pollution in the north of the province of Antwerp and the smell even reached as far as the Netherlands (FF).

PATRICK LEFELON • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS 26 OCTOBER

The leak was detected at around 6.00 p.m. The Disaster and Emergency Services, the fire brigade and the technical services of the municipality of Beveren were immediately called in. The governor of East Flanders Denys coordinated the relief action. He established a no-go area for traffic around the company. “Our first priority was to put down a foam carpet,” says General Manager Jean-Marc Sohier. “That prevents any extra odour nuisance and cuts the chance of explosions to zero.” To prevent the worst happening in such catastrophes TotalFina’s six tanks are embedded in a large concrete pit. In principle this should be able to check the mass of oil. But when the oil reached the concrete edge, the concrete buffer proved also to be leaking. To avoid matters becoming any worse, the whole concrete pit was walled in with all speed. A genuine environmental disaster would have occurred had more oil flowed out. At around 9.30 p.m. the situation was under control. In the meantime the Disaster and Emergency Services had had flame-proof pumps brought in to pump away the black mass.

WWW.TOTAL.BE

focus on FLANDERS • 22 October - 28 October 2005 • Number 40
Mounting tension between employers and trade unions

The employers’ organisations Voka and Unizo are preparing themselves for the strikes. On no account do they want to see industrial estates closed, as occurred on 7 October. The 17,000 Voka members received instructions by e-mail on how they should legally act against strike action. Lawyers’ firms were brought in, who have contact with process servers and chairmen of courts. The idea is to demand fines via unilateral petitions submitted to courts of first instance if companies risk becoming inaccessible on account of blockades by strike pickets. On 7 October an industrial estate in Hasselt was rendered accessible in this way. On Monday 24 October a similar legal action was used in Zedelgem to give employees willing to work access to their company. Voka and Unizo see this as a precedent for the organisation of similar actions on Friday. There is the right to strike, but also the right to work and do business, according to the employers. The Voka also had a radio commercial broadcast against Friday’s strike, but this was removed by the VRT’s advertising directorship on account of its political message.

Unizo and Voka also reacted with satisfaction at the statement made by Interior Minister Patrick Dewael (VLD) that the mayors and police services would have to assume their responsibility on Friday in guaranteeing the right to unobstructed passage on the public highway. Blockades of roads and junctions will therefore not be allowed. For the trade unions the legal steps taken by the employers only add fuel to the fire. They refer to the “gentlemen’s agreement” between employers and trade unions on strikes (FF).

LIEZBETH VAN IMPE • DE MORGEN
25 OCTOBER

In the run-up to Friday’s national demonstration the atmosphere between trade unions and employers is getting substantially bitter. The trade unions reacted in a joint declaration against the debate on the right to strike being brought sub judice. “We won’t forget this,” warned ABVV leader Xavier Verboven. The trade unions refer to the gentlemen’s agreement between the social partners on strikes. In this the trade unions undertake not to use physical violence, not to destroy equipment, to give advance notice of strikes in good time and to mobilise as far as possible employees who are directly involved. In exchange, the employers promised not to organise any legal proceedings concerning strikes, but to solve the situation as far as possible by dialogue. According to the employers it is the trade unions that have violated that agreement, among other things by closing off industrial estates and preventing strikebreakers access to their company.

According to Verboven the strikers’ position involves convincing strikebreakers to join the strikers. “Usually that works, since it involves people working in the same company. However, nonetheless going to work could turn against them.” The ABVV also regards the closing-off of industrial estates as a legitimate form of action.

“In this way workers in SMEs can also take part. As long as the employers refuse staff participation (trade union delegates, works council, ed.), we will use this form of action.” The ACV also feels that the legal steps taken by the employers cannot be allowed.

“A picket is not an excuse to do absolutely anything and a careful approach needs to be taken to the blockading of industrial estates, but we will try to solve problems as peacefully as possible. Going to the court is diametrically opposed to that”, says spokeswoman Greet Vandendriessche. According to Verboven the employers are creating a dangerous precedent.

“This works like a red cloth waved at a bull and jeopardises the serenity of the demonstration. The actions could take on a very enraged tone. Sooner or later we will pay this back in cash.” The government partners are following the mounting tension very carefully. The SPA’s action at the factory gates to go and explain the Generation Pact was postponed to 15 November and, to avoid provocation, will occur in consultation with the trade union. PS deputy prime minister Laurette Onkelinx did criticise the trade unions’ “lack of correct information”.

WWW.VOKA.BE
WWW.ABVV.BE

Strikes in Wallonia and in Zedelgem in West Flanders

FF EDITOR

In Wallonia the trade unions did not wait until Friday, 28 October to come out in strike in protest at the rise in age of early retirement. On Monday, 24 October all major economic sectors were paralysed in the provinces of Hainault and Namur. The large metal companies and the regional public transport network set the tone. In Charleroi there was a demonstration of some 6,000 trade union members. In the West Flanders metal company Case New Holland in Zedelgem, strike action was also called against the rise in age of early retirement.

Those employees wanting to work were prevented by the strike picket from accessing the industrial estate. However, the employer promptly went to the court with a petition to free access to his company for strikebreakers. The court for the settlement of industrial disputes in Bruges acceded to the petition and imposed a fine of EUR 1,000 per non-striker per hour. Shortly after midday the employees were able to go into the company after all, under police protection and to the tune of loud jeers from the striking workers.

Focus on Flanders • 22 October - 28 October 2005 • Number 40
SP.A MP Bonte enraged at Dewael’s strike guidelines

HANS BONTE THINKS THAT DEWAEL IS DIRECTLY ATTACKING THE RIGHT TO STRIKE AND ADDING FUEL TO THE FIRE INSTEAD OF CALLING FOR CALM

On 25 October Interior Minister Dewael (VLD) called the trade unions together to discuss safety during the day of strike action planned for 28 October. Dewael wants to avoid strikers putting up road blockades again and is threatening to send in the police if this does happen. Xavier Verboven of the socialist union ABVV replied that he could not guarantee that blockades would not be erected in spontaneous actions. However, in a circular Dewael urges the provincial governors and mayors also to see to it that free passage is guaranteed for those wishing to work and that all road barriers erected on the public highway are removed. If dialogue achieves nothing, they should then simply send in the local police. A judicial decision is not needed for that, he added.

SPA MP Hans Bonte thinks that in so doing Dewael is directly attacking the right to strike and adding fuel to the fire instead of calling for calm (FF).

WIM WINCKELMANS • HET NIEUWSBLAD
26 OCTOBER

‘Dewael says that he respects the right to strike, but SPA MP Hans Bonte does not see it that way. “You would expect an interior minister to try to provide for calm. But instead he is stoking up the atmosphere of polarisation still further. I have the definite impression that he wants to create a profile for himself (and his party) and gain political capital from the whole situation.” Bonte is thereby breaking the silence that the SPA had imposed on itself as regards the strike. He acknowledges that “Dewael’s words were not met with applause by us. That you can well imagine. But so far we have not wanted to react. It is up to the mayors to regulate safety during a demonstration and strike. It is in everyone’s interest that each one is allowed to play his role.”’

“Now Dewael comes along with big new declarations, in which he unthinkingly echoes the employers, and then I do feel called upon to dig my heels in. Dewael and the Flemish Liberals with him are making improper use of the situation. The trade unions are on the defensive after the career-end debate, and the minister is now using that to curb something fundamental, the right to strike. That is not justified. ’

Bonte is in favour of the social partners solving their problems themselves. “An arrangement has also been reached in the Gentlemen’s Agreement between trade unions and employers. Unfortunately there is still the eternal problem of SMEs, in which there is no union representation. So trade unions use road blockades so that the strike is felt there too. If that has to be solved, it is the responsibility of the unions and employers to do so.”

WWW.SP.BE
WWW.VLD.BE

PROPERTY

Property market overheated or not?

Over the last 20 years the Belgian housing market has experienced unparalleled growth. In the space of 10 years the number of homeowners in Belgium has risen from 65 to 75%. But according to three property experts in De Tijd (22 October), the good times are over. They reckon that today selling a house is a much more attractive proposition than buying one. According to ING economist Ivan Van de Cloot, after 20 years of growth in the housing market, we are going back to a downward trend with rising interest rates and falling house prices. The interest rate is a full percentage point too high and if property prices do not come down there is the risk of a bubble, says Van de Cloot. The mega projects of project developers in Antwerp and Brussels also threaten to distort the market, says Gilbert Aelbrecht of the estate agents’ network Trevi. On account of the crisis on the office market, these developers have thrown themselves en masse into the apartment market. Philippe Janssens of the real estate firm Stadim feels that the government should take measures to combat the ingenious financing techniques used by banks, such as mortgage loans with an annually adjustable rate of interest or with a very long term, because they are causing the property market to overheat. Peter Vanden Houtte, chief economist at ING, holds a different view. He does not think that prices of houses will fall; at best those of apartments (FF).

STEVEN SOMERS • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS
24 OCTOBER

“We are seeing trends towards a turnaround, but there is no immediate cause for concern,” says Vanden Houtte. “It is true that the current interest rates are unnaturally low. We are expecting the European Central Bank to introduce an increase in the short-term interest rate in 2006. But that process will only occur gradually: from 2 to 2.25% and possibly another quarter a year later. Those who have incurred debts with a variable rate of interest are the most vulnerable in such interest-rate rises. But there is also a ceiling or maximum interest rate built in. And at the moment the long-term interest rate stands at around 3.3%. In the coming years we will see that rise to 4%.”

Will the current excess supply in housing projects cause prices on the property market to fall? “That is particularly applicable to apartments, but not ordinary houses,” says Vanden Houtte. “Project developers have invested a lot of money in apartment blocks in recent years. There is a risk of oversupply in that subsector, which could lead to the prices of apartments falling. For ordinary houses I see the current rise in prices remaining stable, because there is no oversupply and because the overall price level in our country is still not as high as in our neighbouring countries, the Netherlands and France. So, let’s not panic. The trends will shift gradually. There won’t be a brutal crash.”
Ageing of the population hits Flanders harder than Wallonia and Brussels

FF EDITOR

The first Flemish Report on the Ageing of the Population, which was presented to the Flemish Parliament last week, is alarming for Flanders, writes *De Standaard* (21 October).

Up until now figures on the ageing of the population were generally collected at federal level. But the data from the Flemish Administration for Planning and Statistics (APS) show that the total Flemish population is continuing to grow slowly, but that the active population (those aged 20 to 65) at working age takes a dive between 2010 and 2030. In 2030 it amounts to just 93% of the active population in 2000. In 2005 it falls further to 89%. If it is assumed that Flemings stop working when they reach 58, we will already have 50,000 fewer people working in Flanders in 2010, 170,000 fewer in 2020 and 300,000 fewer in 2030, according to calculations by the APS. By 2030 the total population will also comprise 200,000 more Flemings. That means that in the case of unchanged policy, 300,000 fewer people will be creating wealth and paying taxes and social security contributions, and 200,000 more people will have to live off those payments.

If Flemings stopped working at a slightly later age and the level of activity increased again, the number of working people could be kept at the 2000 level until 2020. In Wallonia and Brussels the drop in the working population from 2010 is much less drastic than is the case in Flanders.

www.aps.vlaanderen.be

Struikfoods: the tip of the iceberg

FF EDITOR

The employment of cheap Polish labour at the company Struikfoods remained in the news over the weekend, albeit only because all specialists agreed that Struikfoods was but the tip of an iceberg.

A great many sectors, such as the construction sector and horticulture, are asking for the deployment of Eastern Europeans, since their vacancies are no longer being filled on the domestic market. For the time being the recruitment of Poles and others has to occur under the strict Belgian employment conditions and an employment permit has to be issued.

Up until May next year Belgium can in this way continue to protect its labour market, as can other EU countries. But at Struikfoods the Poles were earning some EUR 10 per hour less than their Belgian colleagues and the wage conditions contravened Belgian labour law. The company’s management immediately terminated the contract with the Dutch temporary employment agency and also demanded compensation.

Struikfoods is demanding that the agency pay the lost turnover of the strike days. On 21 October the social inspectorate visited the Turnhout company Freshcom, where Poles were also employed via the same temping agency.

Labour law expert Kurt Devos pointed out in *De Morgen* that, apart from the white-collar-worker sector, Poles are employed in practically all sectors in Belgium, and many are underpaid. He regards the relocation of companies to Poland as a much greater threat. For example a great many Belgian haulage companies have already relocated to Poland. Their lorries have Polish number plates, and the drivers have been hired under Polish (or Czech) employment conditions. They are not only cheaper, but also a lot more flexible than their Belgian counterparts.

Haulage companies see this as their solution in coping with the cut-throat competition

Fear of inexpensive Poles is unfounded

On 27 October an EU summit was held at Hampton Court, in the UK, on the future of the European social model. The liberalisation of the European labour market came up for discussion again. For the free movement of goods and capital there are hardly any problems left in 2005. But since the enlargement of the European Union from 15 to 25 Member States in 2004, the liberalisation of the services market has been pushed onto the back burner, whilst the free movement of workers largely remains an area of national competence. Great Britain, Ireland and Sweden have already opened up their labour markets to workers from the new EU Member States. But it does not look as though the other countries are about to follow suit immediately. However, the fear of ‘cheap Polish workers’, as in the case of Struikfoods, is unjustified, reports *Trends (FF)*

ALAIN MOUTON – TRENDS – 27 OCTOBER

Abuse, such as in the case of the food company Struik Foods, cause people to frown, but the worry about “cheap” Polish workers is unjustified. After all, they have to be employed here under the Belgian labour market conditions. Experts in temporary employment and labour law agree: if people want to work within the legal circuit, there are no cheap Polish workers in Belgium.

The fear of a tidal wave of Eastern European labour is therefore unjustified. Until 1 May 2006, workers from the new EU Member States can certainly not simply come to Belgium to work just like that. That also applies to the other Member States, except in Great Britain, Sweden and Ireland. In May 2006 Belgium (just like the other EU Member States) must decide whether to further open up the labour market, but the chances of that happening are small. After all, the European legislation allows transitional measures until 2011. The services market is a thorny issue, too. Since the opposition to the Bolkestein directive, it appears to be dead and buried. Experts point out that services account for 70% of the European economy, and that a liberalisation of this market is an urgent matter. Proportionally speaking the share of the new Member States in the services sector is small, so the fear of social dumping from these countries is unfounded.
Option is Flemish Company of the Year

Mobile data transmission cards got the pendulum swinging in the right direction again

The award for ‘Flemish Company of the Year’ this year has gone to Option, the Leuven specialist in wireless technology. After a number of difficult years, Option has managed to grow into a leading company in the field of data cards for laptops, and its customers include international operators such as Vodafone, Orange and T-Mobile. Success came when the company changed strategy and started working as a ‘silent manufacturer’ for operators instead of selling cards under its own brand name. Option currently has a stock exchange value of EUR 525 million. 18.2% of the shares are held by founder and managing director Jan Callewaert, whilst the rest are on the stock exchange. The Company of the Year award is an initiative of Ernst & Young in cooperation with De Tijd, Fortis Bank and the business channel Kanaal Z. Minister-President Yves Leterme presented “The Flemish Government Award for Promising Enterprise”, for the first time, to the West Flanders company Televic that produces high-tech communication systems for niche markets such as conference systems and communication systems in hospitals and on public transport (FF).

When it was founded, Option began with one product: a video card. But a PC project for Ford Genk soon had the company moving into modems for computers and laptops, a segment that it was in fact not to leave. An important step forward was the introduction in 1993 of the plug-in card, also known as the PCMCIA card. By plugging this card, the same size as a bank card but thicker, into a slot in a laptop, the appliance can easily be connected to a network. Option was a pioneer in PCMCIA technology. Callewaert proved that in 1995 by bringing onto the market the first plug-in card that could run on both the fixed and mobile telephone networks. It was not the first world first for which he was responsible, and not the last either. The product, baptised GSM-Ready, was Option’s first big sales success.

Another first came in 1998: the FirstFone. This was the first plug-in card into which a mobile phone was incorporated, so that it was no longer necessary to connect the laptop to a mobile telephone. But the FirstFone was unable to take over the role of sales engine from the GSM-Ready, sales of which were beginning to fall. Option was to regret the over-dependence on one product, which for years had been a weak point. At the end of 1998 the company, by then listed on Easdaq Europe, was to disappoint its investors for the first time. This marked the beginning of a number of dark years, during which Callewaert was seen as a voice in the wilderness and Option was nicknamed Floption. But Callewaert’s resolve, together with some injections of cash, got Option through the difficulties. With the 2001 launch of the GlobeTrotter, a card for data transmission over a GPRS-mobile phone network, the Leuven company appeared to have obtained a new engine with which to get things moving again. Mobile data transmission began to receive more and more interest and a contract with mobile phone giant Vodafone finally got the pendulum swinging in the right direction again. In the first quarter of 2003 Option was able to post a profit for the first time in almost five years. Since then the company has been flourishing and now has a whole range of cards. This year Option will end up with a net profit of around EUR 27 million on a turnover of some EUR 180 million. Option now supplies dozens of mobile operators and could grow into the world market leader it its segment.

www.option.be
www.televic.be

THE FOUR EUROPEAN ECONOMIC MODELS, the continental and mediterranean models are more vulnerable to ageing and globalisation

THE GENERATION PACT REDUCES THE NUMBER OF EARLY RETIREMENTS BY A HALF IN 2012

[1] On the job market during 2004

SOURCE: TRENDS&JOBS/PETERCAM
**MINISTER BOURGEOIS WANTS SELF-REGULATION AGAINST VIOLENCE AND SEX ON TV**

**FF EDITOR**

A worried mother from Brasschaat has handed a petition with 12,500 signatures to Media Minister, Geert Bourgeois (N-VA). She wants scenes of violence and sex on TV to be banned before 9.00 p.m. A commission would have to monitor that and censor programmes if necessary. Trailers for horror films or for programmes with a lot of violence and sex which are shown later in the evening, violent Japanese cartoons which are broadcast in the mornings – according to the woman submitting the petition, the boundaries of what is permissible are exceeded all too often.

According to Media Minister Geert Bourgeois (N-VA), parents, the government and the media sector should collectively assume their responsibility. He says there cannot be any question of a censorship committee. He advocates the introduction of a “viewing indicator”, a system of self-regulation which assesses programmes and classifies them according to age.

He points to the Netherlands, which was the first country to introduce such a general classification system for the audio-visual sector, in 2001. Picturegrams show in an instant whether the programme contains violence, sex, swearing or discrimination. On the screen and in the television guide, little icons indicate what age group the programmes are suitable for.

The minister is now asking the Flemish Media Council to examine the feasibility of a Flemish viewing indicator.

The broadcasting companies are not really taken with the idea, because the system is expensive and time-consuming. They also point out that they already have a system whereby certain programmes are given a label indicating 16+, which is mentioned in the TV magazines, and that trailers for the late evening are never shown before children’s programmes.

**WWW.MINISTERGEERTBOURGEOIS.BE**

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**THE YOUNG RUBENS AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY**

“A MASTER IN THE MAKING” SHOWS THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS EARLY ANTWERP PERIOD, HIS YEARS OF APPRENTICESHIP IN ITALY AND HIS FIRST MASTERPIECES

The work of the young Peter Paul Rubens is on show at London’s National Gallery until 15 January. It shows the work of the hand of the master himself, when he did not yet have an extensive workshop with apprentices. In the exhibition the first room shows how the very young Rubens was still under the influence of Brueghel and the Antwerp mannerists. This style changes during his stay in Italy, between 1600 and 1608. Under the influence of the great masters Raphael and Michelangelo he learns how to master the drawing of the human anatomy and he also intensively studies the colour and light compositions by Titian and Caravaggio. His obsession with movement and the sparkling direction of the action scenes added the unmistakable Rubens hallmark. “A master in the making” shows the development of his early Antwerp period, his years of apprenticeship in Italy and his first masterpieces (FF).

**JAN VAN HOVE • DE STANDAARD • 27 OCTOBER**

In Italy Rubens became better acquainted with Renaissance art and for the first time saw the classical statues and monuments which at that time were being widely excavated. Thanks to the wide range of influences he assimilated, his talent matured extremely quickly. On the basis of ninety paintings, drawings and sketches in oils, the exhibition illustrates how the local Antwerp painter grew into a superstar of his time during his journey. The quality of the ensemble is overwhelming. Only a powerful museum such as the National Gallery is able to bring together so many works on loan of this calibre. The exhibition organisers were thus able to bring together, and hang side by side, three versions of The Judgement of Paris. The pieces come from Vienna, London and Prague respectively. Step by step the three versions show the enormous progress that Rubens made in Italy. The cool, rather stiff figures in the first painting have, a few years later, turned into sensual people adopting the most gracious poses.

The fireworks only really begin in the second room, which houses the first works created in the Italian period. Saint George’s horse from the three-metre-high canvas Saint George and the Dragon, dominates the whole room. The vigour with which the blowing mane is painted, the light effects on the horseman’s helmet and armour, the horror of the monster’s wide-open mouth: this is the mark of a born painter finally able to paint to the tune of his ambition.

“What makes Rubens unique is that he could paint what he wanted,” says David Jaffé, the curator of the exhibition. The feel for drama, unbridled painting, the show of strength: it all belongs to the essence of Rubens’ genius.

**WWW.NATIONALGALLERY.ORG.UK**

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Send your email-adress to info@focusonflanders.be and receive a password for www.focusonflanders.be
**CULTURE**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

- **Until 10 November: Klaskus, 12th Interna-
tional Dance Festival Leuven, Dance meets music, the Royal Ballet, Leuven, www.klaskus.be 016/320 320
- **1 November: Joshua Redman ‘Elastic Band’, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- **2 November: Gerry Allen Trio, Flagey, Brus-
sels; info: www.flagey.be www.audijazz.be
- **3 November: Vivace Symphonic Orchestra of Flanders, conducted by David Angus with Liviu Prularu, violin, Ouverture Ruy las by Mozart, violin concerto for violin by B. Britten and first symphony by Tchaikovsky, De Singel, Antwerp (www.desingel.be)/ Conservatory, Brussels and Concertgebouw, Bruges (www.concertgebouw.be)
- **3 November: Frank Gratkowski Double Quartet, jazz, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **4 November: Chris Foris Quartet, Sounds Jazz Club, Brussels; info: 02/512.92.50 www.audijazz.be
- **4 November: Luke/Maneos Costa (Greece), concert, De Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **4 November: Looking for Reynolds, Nestor, Frenkel, Argentina [Film, music band], Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
- **5 November: Malatifa Arnaout (Portugal), Fado, De Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **5 November: Maria Farantouri, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- **6 November: Jazzactuel Presents: Dave Dou-
glas Katz Sextet, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels, info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- **8 November: Pink Martini, big band, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 2/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- **8 November: Alexei Lubimov, piano with Mozaffar Haydn, Webern, Schönberg, Clementi, Pelesic, De Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **8 November: Approximations/contradictions in concert, Lieder by H Eislner, web project by Ana Torfs, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **7 November: Frank Peter Zimmermann viol-
in, Schiff Heinrich cello and Christian Zacharias piano with piano trio by Franz Schubert Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
- **8 November: Philarmonia Orchestra, Es-
pakka Salonen conductor with Musorgsky, Bartok and Taneyksy Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
- **10 November: John Scofield Trio and Roy Hargove & RH Factor, De Warande, Turn-
hout; info: 01/416.69.91 www.audijazz.be
- **10 November: Rodolfo González de Rassinos-
setrio, Sounds Jazz Club, Brussels; info: www.audijazz.be 02/512.92.50
- **10 November: Dedonderdagen, (the Thurs-
days) with defacto-plscheuk, directory 2: songs of love and war, Het Collectief, Marc Vanrunxt (dance), bl tntum juniors, Roland Seidel & Achim Stermeg, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **10 November: Tracy Bonham [USA], concert, De Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handels-
beurs.be
- **10 November: Antony o/ The Johnsoans, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels, info: www.abconcerts.be 02/512.92.50
- **11 November to 4 December: Raster-Noton (Ger m), project, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be
- **11 November: Daniel Quartet with Shostakovich Integrale, Concertgebouw, Brussels, info: www.concertgebouw.be
- **11 November: The Open Country, Sounds Jazz Club, Brussels; info: www.audijazz.be 02/512.92.50

**EXPO**

- From 5 February onwards: Retrospective Bettina Rheims (photography), Museum van de Panockinghoven, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be www.europalia.be 02/507.85.95
- **Until 31 December: Avant-garde from Russia 1900-1935, exhibition, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be www.europalia.be 02/507.85.95
- **Until 30 April: Pains exhibition, Museum Ghuislail, Ghent, info: www.museumghuislail.be
- **Until 26 February: The Trans-Siberian Express: fascinating facts about the route to Vladivostock, KMSK, Cinquantenaire, Brus-
sels, info: 02/742.72.11
- **8 November: Sabena, Air Nostalgie, Photo Museum, Antwerp, info: www.fotomuseum.be 03/242.93.00
- **Until 5 February: Europalia Russia: Katri-
- **Until 31 December: Rubens, Jordaeans and Van Dyck, Arenshuis, Bruges, info: www.brugge.be, 050/44.87.12
- **Until 29 January: Exhibition: Toys in girls’ hands, Toy museum, Mechelen, info: 015/55.70.75 www.speelgoedmuseum.be
- **Until 13 November: Blueprint Belgium, Sint-Pietersrab, Ghent, info: www.blueprintbelgium.be 09/43.97.30
- **Until 5 February: The Blue Rose – Symbolism in Russia, Museum of Elsene; info: 02/515.64.22
- **Until 27 November: Jan Bussens, exhibi-
tion, Museum van Deinze en de Leie streek, Deinze; info: 09/381.96.70
- **Until 4 December: Information/Transforma-
tion, Extra City, info: 0484/42.10.70
- **Until 26 November: Photo Antwerp, photo exhi-
bitions in Antwerp, info: www.fotowinter-
pen2005.be
- **Until 31 December: Extragavant, rediscover-
y of the Antwerp Mannersets ; KMSK, Antwerp, info: 03/236.78.08 www.museum.antwerpen.be/kmska

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