

wallonia and brussels

summer 2018

wab
magazine

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technical knowhow with quality of life



FASHION FORWARD

YOUNG DESIGNERS TO WATCH
GRADUATE IN BRUSSELS

- Boys in blue: celebrating the Smurfs
- And the winner is... Wallonia rewards its top exporters



Editorial

A simple design, strong identity and a social image: that's how Ice-Watch managing director Jean-Pierre Lutgen explains the success of his company. After he was voted manager of the year 2017 by Trends-Tendances magazine, we thought it was high time to profile the man behind the Bastogne-based brand as it marks its 10th anniversary. Another familiar image – also marking a significant milestone – are the Smurfs, the little blue cartoon characters that are being feted in Belgium on the occasion of their 60th birthday. We trace their history from early sketches by cartoonist Peyo to their current digital presence. For our summer edition, we also explore some of the attractions that make Wallonia such a popular cultural and tourist destination, including the underground world of the Grotte de Han, nocturnal choral concerts at the sumptuous Villers abbey and modern music at a farmhouse-turned-studio and performance venue. Plus there are other seasonal highlights in our cultural agenda. Enjoy!

Don't forget to download **the WAB magazine app**, now available for Android and iOS. Go to Google Play or iTunes and keep up-to-date with news and events in Wallonia and Brussels.

Wallonia and Brussels - Contact

AWEX Wallonia Export-Investment Agency
www.awex.be

WBI Wallonie-Bruxelles International
www.wbi.be

Welcome Offices
www.investinwallonia.be



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12

4 News and business updates from around the region

6 Profile: Jean-Pierre Lutgen, the man behind international jewellery brand Ice-Watch

8 Wallonia rewards its pioneering businesses at export awards ceremony

12 Mitral Technologies moves from the US to Liège to work on alternatives to open-heart surgery

14 Meet Jackie Daire, multitasking principal of a Brussels international school

15 Night of the Choirs: a musical extravaganza in a magical setting

16 Blue is the colour: Why the Smurfs are everywhere you look this summer

21 Jean-Philippe Darcis, master of the macaron, shares the secrets of his success.

23 Go underground for a new show illuminating 200 years of local history

24 The former farmhouse attracting top names in the music world

26 Three young Brussels-based designers to keep an eye on

28 Panorama: Belgian car design turning heads in Milan

30 Our pick of cultural events in Wallonia and Brussels



16



30

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Cover: Cyril Bourez, La Cambre show 2018
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BRIEFS

A team of researchers including neuroscientist Julie Bakker of the University of Liege, presenting to the annual meeting of the European Society of Endocrinology in Barcelona, have found that the **brain structure of men suffering from gender dysphoria** is similar to that associated with women. Bakker believes brain scans could eventually be used to provide better support for children who are diagnosed with gender dysphoria – the feeling that their assigned gender does not match their personal sense of identity. The research has been criticised by transgender advocates, however, who argue that the matter is one for personal choice and not for medical definition.

The Belgian Grand Prix will **continue to take place at Spa-Francorchamps** until at least 2021, Walloon economy minister Pierre-Yves Jeholet has announced. The Walloon region signed a memorandum of understanding with Liberty Media, owners of the Formula One Grand Prix, L'Echo reports. For this year's event in August, more than 200,000 tickets have already been sold.

Indian company Petiva, which makes a 100% natural, calorie-free sugar, is investing **€150 million** in a plant at Seneffe industrial park that will eventually create 75 jobs. The pilot plant is planned for 2020. Walloon minister-president Willy Borsus signed an agreement with Petiva for the production of rare sugars in Wallonia on a state visit to India in November last year. Produced from beet and sugar cane, the sugars have a low glycaemic index and anti-bacterial and antioxidant properties.



© Anthony Dehez

Winning whisky

Liège distillery Belgian Owl picked up two prestigious prizes in Valence in France in June. The respected independent organisation Monde Selection awarded it the International Quality Award and the International High Quality Trophy, which rewards companies that win prizes in three consecutive years. A thousand companies from 92 countries representing 3,000 products took part in the annual event, judged by 80 experts including Michelin-star chefs. Belgian Owl, created by Etienne Bouillon (pictured above), produces a selection of single malts from barley grown in the fertile soil of the Hesbaye region.

belgianwhisky.com

ABBEY STARS IN NETFLIX SERIES

The abbey of Villers-la-Ville was one of the locations for the Netflix series Sense8, it has been revealed. Shooting took place in secret, with the abbey unable to reveal details of the project while filming was going on. The series, the second season of which finished in June, is the story of a woman who commits suicide in a church in the US. Her soul becomes mixed with the souls of seven other people from various parts of the world, who go on to share their experience of living together. The producers of the series were attracted to the abbey – whose ruins often form the backdrop for theatre productions and concerts – when they saw photographs in a magazine. “The actors were surprised at the beauty of the location,” said Christelle Quinet, in charge of events at the abbey. “Everyone was very polite and respectful. And the weather was on our side. It was a fine experience, for the crew, the actors and for the abbey staff.”



MONS SCIENTISTS WIN ROBOTICS CONTEST

A team from the University of Mons has come first in an international robotics competition. The challenge concentrated on mechatronics, a field that includes various disciplines such as mechanical engineering, electronics, computer engineering and telecommunications engineering. The team – called the Monsquetaires – did battle against others from Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Greece, Romania, the UK and Serbia. The competition is organised within Europe but is open to students from around the world; teams from Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Canada also took part.

WALLOON FIRMS BACK RED DEVILS IN RUSSIA

Three Walloon companies were among the 11 chosen by the Belgian authorities to back up the national football team at the World Cup in Russia this summer. EVS is a video production company based in Seraing near Liège, which specialises in providing slow-motion replays for TV viewers at home and spectators in stadiums. The company provided all the equipment and operation for replays, content management and archival of video material.

WNM, also from Seraing, provided wireless video and audio intercom linking the 12 stadiums where the tournament was played, as well as 12 sound engineers to manage the system on behalf of TV production companies. Another six sound engineers were tasked with distributing audio to TV stations across the world. And Wollux from Mouscron provided communications textiles: flags, stickers, banners and floor coverings for companies providing services at the World Cup, as well as for the Royal Belgian Football Association. “This is a fine international shop window for our businesses,” said Marc Lambotte, CEO of technology industry federation Agoria. “Orders for Belgian companies amount to around €15-€20 million.”

Meanwhile, Charleroi company DreamWall has created a 3D virtual football stadium that was used by the French TV station TF1 to show matches. It features a full stadium of virtual players and even what the company calls teleportation – players can be moved around at will. DreamWall is a partnership between public broadcaster RTBF and media company Dupuis.



© Visit Brussels / Jean-Paul Rémy

BRUSSELS AMONG WORLD'S BEST CITIES TO BE A STUDENT, SURVEY SHOWS

Brussels is in the top 50 cities in the world to study in, according to a report by global higher education company QS. As the capital of Belgium and the seat of the EU and other international institutions, the city is known for its international diversity. Higher education in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation has become open and multicultural, opening doors to many internships and job opportunities, the study said. Meanwhile, the Wallonia-Brussels Campus – the agency that promotes higher education in Wallonia-Brussels abroad – took part in the 70th conference of the NAFSA in Philadelphia, US, at the end of May. NAFSA is the world's largest institutional exhibition in the field of higher education, bringing together thousands of academic delegates sharing their international experiences.



© Belga/Bruno Fahey



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Jean-Pierre Lutgen

In 2007, the entrepreneur created a colourful brand of silicon wristwatches in Bastogne and called it Ice-Watch. Since then, over 20 million have been sold in 55 countries, the brand has a turnover of around €42 million, and he's been named manager of the year 2017 by Trends Tendances



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There is no need to be a Swiss watch-maker or based in a capital to be successful

Why call your brand Ice-Watch?

For the values conveyed by the word 'ice': transparency and purity. I came across silicon during my first professional activities, when I was running a company selling promotional articles like silicon wristbands. It's a very smooth material, very pleasant on the skin, and it offers so many possibilities when it comes to shape, colour and printing. Since I was already in touch with many silicon suppliers in China, it seemed the natural choice.

What's the secret of your success?

A concept based on the social value of change, and on a strong identity. The design is simple but always recognisable. By offering watches at affordable prices, the brand invites change. By making them available in

a wide range of shades, the timepieces can be adapted to the life and moods of those who wear them, whatever their activities, whether it's work, sport or leisure. It has made their appeal intercultural and inter-generational. Establishing distribution networks in Europe has added international success, and we have brought out new designs in new materials without losing our identity.

When did you know your venture might become a success?

It was our first time at Baselworld in 2008, the most important watch fair in the world. Professionals perceived our concept and business model as a real and viable novelty.

What is the biggest lesson you've learnt?

Despite many handicaps, we can still succeed in a saturated market. There is no need to be a Swiss watch-maker or based in a capital to be successful. You need a concept, a solid marketing approach and to be surrounded by good people. We've made these things happen from Bastogne.

What does the future hold?

We are excited about the new collection of Tintin watches we've recently released with our partners Moulinsart. We need to continue to innovate to maintain a sustainable business. Our objectives are to stabilise our market share in Europe, as well as growth in Asia, the US and Canada. We also want to develop the visibility of the brand on social networks.

How do you like to relax?

I like to spend it with my family. But I also get a lot of pleasure from contemporary art, so I give myself the time to visit galleries and discover the work of new artists and photographers.

What's the most memorable speech or quote you've heard?

I like a sentence by Louis Pasteur: "chance favours prepared minds". A good manager is someone who needs to be prepared for opportunities but also give others the desire to make things happen.

ice-watch.com





Shine on

Wallonia's companies rewarded for their excellence on the world stage

By Sally Tipper & Sarah Crew

The 16th edition of the biannual Grand Prix Wallonie took place in the regional capital Namur at the end of May, to award prizes to a top flight of local companies for their export success. In the presence of three Walloon ministers and in front of a packed audience, the Wallonia Export-Investment Agency (Awex) showed its appreciation for outstanding sales performances. After receiving numerous applications, Awex rewarded five companies for their track record in exports – within Europe and globally – while a sixth prize, the jury's special mention, was awarded to one of the region's flagship companies abroad.

Mention Exceptionnelle

For the third year in the history of the contest, the jury decided to present an exceptional prize to a business for the continuing excellence of its export performance. The winner, UCB, based in Braine l'Alleud, is a global pharmaceutical company dedicated to research and development of treatments for patients with serious immune and central nervous disorders. Created in 1928 in Brussels by Emmanuel Janssen, UCB invests more than €1 billion in R&D each year. On receiving the award, managing director Jean-Christophe Tellier said: "We are there for the patients, serving as

a link between patients and scientists." This is reflected in the company's motto: Inspired by patients, driven by science. Highlighting the importance of innovation and constant renewal, Tellier cited new research on auto inflammation, which enables women suffering from chronic inflammatory disease to be treated during pregnancy.

ucb.com

Grand Prix Wallonie à l'Exportation

The Grand Prix Wallonie à l'Exportation rewards a business that has significantly improved its export performance and its position in the EU. Winning company Lasea specialises in extremely precise laser micro-machinery, offering precision to a level of 0.2µ, or 1/250th the diameter of a strand of hair. Based in Liège, it has also had a base in Bordeaux since 2012 and has recently opened sites in the US and Switzerland. It has installed 250 machines in 27 countries on four continents, providing expertise for the pharmaceutical, medical, electronic and watch-making industries. For managing director Axel Kupisiewicz, innovation has been key to the company's success, "and developing business internationally was necessary because of the niche nature of our prod-

ucts". In an emotional tribute, Kupisiewicz thanked his family, his dedicated team and his self-employed father for sowing the seeds of his own entrepreneurship.

lasea.eu

Prix Wallonie à l'Exportation Grande Exportation

Presented to a company performing well in exports outside the EU. The winner this year is Euresys, an SME founded in 1989 and based at the Sart Tilman science park in Liège. Euresys designs, manufactures and provides equipment used for image acquisition, storage, processing and display, as well as software dedicated to image processing and analysis. Its products are exported throughout the world, from the parent site in Wallonia and from smaller bases in Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai and California. More than 80% of its sales are to countries in Asia, according to managing director Marc Damhaut. Today, Korea, Taiwan and increasingly China represent a growing market. While sales and technical support are concentrated in Asia and the US, design and fabrication remain in Liège.

euresys.com



© Emmanuel Briot

• Thales Alenia Space



• Euresys



• UCB laboratory



Prix Wallonie à l'Exportation Europe

This prize rewards businesses enjoying export success within the EU. The winner, Thales Alenia Space, is a world leader in the aerospace industry. With seven sites in Belgium, it provides spatial electronic applications for satellites and launchers, is a major player in the electronics of European launchers, and will be the only company in Europe to automatically produce solar panels for satellites. It is the main supplier of onboard electronics for the Ariane 5 satellite, designing and manufacturing more than 50% of the electronic systems on each launcher. Managing director Emmanuel Terrasse said he was "naturally very proud

that a small part of Wallonia is orbiting the planet Mars aboard the Galileo satellite". He pointed out that export was part of Thales' DNA and represented almost 100% of its sales.

thalesgroup.com

Prix Tremplin Grande Exportation

Destined for an enterprise for whom the average value of its exports over the past three years is less than 70% of its turnover and which is particularly distinguished by its performances outside the EU, this prize was won by Ampacimon. Created in 2010,

the company – based in Grâce-Hollogne, near Liège – has developed innovative systems that allow it to equip electric networks around the world with its Dynamic Line Rating technology, which is widely used in smart grids. "Export is a must-have and it's necessary to believe in distant markets to achieve growth," said managing director Frédéric Vassort. Export is also a question of survival for the Liège University spin-off, which was also "on its own in certain markets due to its technical know-how".

ampacimon.com

Prix Tremplin Europe

This prize is awarded to a company for whom the average value of its exports over the past three years is less than 70% of its turnover and which enjoys particular success within the EU. The award this year was won by Pollet, based in Tournai, which specialises in research, manufacture and commercialisation of environmentally friendly cleaning products. Managing director Jean-Nicolas D'Hondt, who represents the eighth generation of the family firm, thanked his team when receiving the award, saying "without them we could not do it". He explained that Belgium represented too small a market for its products, centred largely on floor cleaners, so it had turned naturally to France, with further export success following in North American and Chile.

pollet.eu



• Jean-Nicolas D'Hondt of Pollet

Where the heart is

Innovative start-up moves from US to Liège to develop treatment against cardiac valve condition

By Andy Furniere

Brussels-born medical technology entrepreneur Jean-Paul Rasschaert had been active in the US for more than 20 years, but he returned to his roots after the Walloon region made him an offer he couldn't refuse. His newest start-up company, Mitral Technologies, was launched in Minneapolis in 2014 and moved to Liège in December last year, with strong support from the region.

Rasschaert co-founded Mitral Technologies to develop a medical device that would enable the treatment of mitral valve regurgitation, a common cardiac valve pathology, using minimally invasive methods. The process leading up to its move to Liège started two years ago when Rasschaert met the honorary consul of Belgium in Minneapolis.

In the meantime, Mitral Technologies has raised €3.2 million, of which about €3 million has come through Walloon funds and the rest through business angels. The start-up team, with Rasschaert as CEO, established itself at an incubator at Liège's new Val Benoît site.

"Most of the funding is non-dilutive, which means we have a very stable basis to lead the company in the right direction," says Rasschaert. "We are very happy with the

support and now want to give something back, through our approach of thinking outside the box." Other incentives for the move were the opportunities for scientific collaborations through the Sart Tilman campus of the University of Liège, and the availability of specialised staff.

The potential of Mitral Technologies' innovation is huge. About four million people in Europe and the US are affected by mitral valve regurgitation, a condition in which the heart's mitral valve doesn't close properly, allowing blood to leak backwards into the heart instead of flowing to the rest of the body. The condition may have mild symptoms like shortness of breath but in severe cases can lead to dangerous complications, including heart failure.

"The common treatment is highly invasive open-heart surgery to repair the valve, but about half of the patients, two million in Europe and the US, cannot undergo this surgery because they are already too weak," says Rasschaert. "Our technology would help them in a non-invasive way, through a catheter inserted in the thigh."

He says patients undergoing the new treatment will in some cases be able to leave the hospital the next day, instead of having to spend about 10 days there – as

is often the case after open-heart surgery. Another advantage of the new technology is that it would work according to procedures that are already used by specialists to treat other conditions, so it would be easy to introduce it.

There is already a similar device on the market, MitraClip, but the innovation of Mitral Technologies would decrease the risks for patients. "The MitraClip works via an artery on the left side of the heart, and the formation of a blood clot there can have deadly consequences," explains Rasschaert. "Our device would function via veins on the heart's right side, where clots don't have such a dangerous impact." The development and testing of the patented technology will take between four and five years.

Marc Foidart, deputy director-general of public-private investment company Me-invest in Liège, said in a statement that the project had genuine economic value. "It also reinforces the emergence of a cardiology cluster in the Liège region, in particular following the recent installation of Miracor here as well," he said. Miracor is an Austrian start-up that is also developing medical devices against heart diseases. It moved to Liège from Vienna at the beginning of the year.



© Getty Images/Monkeybusinessimages



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We are very happy with the support and now want to give something back

Jean-Paul Rasschaert

MEET THE BRUSSELS EXPAT



Jackie Daire from the UK is the principal of ACE of Brussels school

I always say that, as teachers, our primary role is not only to educate children but to prepare them for their role as an adult in the workplace. Our job is to give our students the qualifications and the tools to be able to choose what they want to do with their lives. Education is a hugely important part of this process but so is learning the soft skills needed for working as part of a team. We actively teach how to negotiate, how to handle challenging situations, how to manage stress, how to see failure as a positive experience.

There is no such thing as a typical working day. For example, today I started with a coffee before greeting everyone at the school gate. I then had to show a delivery driver how to reverse down our drive, I had a phone conversation with a parent, I collected slugs with the children, I taught poetry with our seniors, I interviewed a potential new teacher and helped my curriculum coordinator arrange some training courses. That was all before morning break!

My main challenge at the moment is getting ready for the next academic year. Schools carry a huge amount of data and I'm balancing how to ensure the school is GDPR-compliant with enabling the staff to have the information they need to do their job. Our school is a family. Truly. I'm here to protect and nurture everyone: students, families and staff. We have small classes so I know all my children and their teachers and parents very well. I instil this sense of family into everyone and, as a family should, we all support each other.

I live in Brussels and adore the place for its diversity. I've lived all over the world and this is one of the most fun places to be. I love that I have access to so many activities. I'm a huge fan of live concerts, both rock and classical, and being based in Brussels means I can go and listen to all my favourite music, wherever it is. I've lived in Belgium a while now so I think I know Wallonia quite well but I'm always discovering new gems. I'm a nomad; I get itchy feet and have to travel but I love to come back to Brussels.

aceofbrussels.com



Sounds in the abbey

Concert promenade promises a musical experience to remember

By Sarah Crew

Stroll around the romantic ruins of Villers Abbey while listening to performances by internationally renowned singers on 24 and 25 August. The annual Night of Choirs consists of a series of 20-minute concerts staged in various nooks and crannies of the former Cistercian abbey. A rotating programme enables the audience to listen to each performance while wandering around the extensive grounds.

On the bill this summer: Slovenian a capella choir Carmet Manet, winner of the Euro-

vision Choir of the Year in 2017; Australian singer-songwriter Lisa Gerrard, accompanied by the Mystère des Voix Bulgares in a specially adapted concert for the occasion; male Irish ensemble M'ANAM singing traditional Celtic songs; a capella English group The Swingles, five-time Grammy award-winners; French tenor Amaury Vassili and his choir in a lyrical set; and Gospel Chorus from Paris performing spirituals.

All the artists will gather at the end of the evening for a finale performance, followed

by a breathtaking firework display that lights up the sky to round off the atmospheric event.

The 12th-century monastic ruins are a jewel in the crown of Wallonia's cultural heritage. Situated in the Brabant Walloon countryside, the site is easily accessible from Brussels. It welcomes visitors all year round and offers activities for all the family.

nuitdeschoeurs.be





True blue

The Smurfs turn 60 this year, and a spectacular immersive exhibition is part of the celebrations of the little blue creatures who have conquered the world

By Clodagh Kinsella

When cartoonist Pierre Culliford (aka Peyo) sketched his first Smurf, he could have had no idea that his creatures would one day be a household name around the world. But as a raft of major events, launches and exhibitions marking their diamond jubilee this year proves, the mini blue beings (“three apples high”) have spawned a mighty empire.

It all began on 23 October 1958, in Belgian comic-strip journal *Spirou*. In Peyo’s ongoing medieval series *Johan and Peewit*, a Smurf emerged from behind a rock after almost being stepped on. It was an inaus-

picious debut – but the public immediately took to the oddities, and soon they were the stars of their own show: first short stories, then comic books.

To keep up with public demand, Peyo created his own studio in 1964, in Uccle. Two decades later, his daughter Véronique launched IMPSS, which manages all rights linked to the Smurfs, and has overseen their leap from the page to toothbrushes, T-shirts and theme parks – plus a Spanish village, Juzcar, painted blue. Today the 35-strong Smurf team, including an archivist and commercial department, is based in Genval, Walloon Brabant.

BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

Veteran cartoonist Jeroen de Coninck is a leading illustrator at IMPS.

How long have you illustrated the Smurfs?

I came to the studio in 1990, when I was 36. In the beginning I didn't know the Smurfs that well, I was too old, and hadn't seen them on TV, although I knew Peyo's albums. I thought: The Smurfs? I'll last two years. Since then I've probably drawn 10,000 Smurfs. It's impossible to count.

What was it like working with Peyo?

Peyo would take my drawings away and the next day he'd come to the studio with tracing paper covered in corrections. You had to tell your story clearly so people could immediately tell what it was, but it couldn't be simple either. Once he took us to the forest and made us lie down to see the world from a Smurf's perspective. But it didn't really work!

Why do you think they're so popular?

You can explain many things to children through Smurfs and they think about it and draw their own conclusion. There's a Smurf policeman story where children learn not to act immediately. It's more fun than saying, you must do this or that. Everyone can empathise with a Smurf too.



As the empire expands, however, the books remain key. "They're less than 10% of the annual turnover, but for brand-building they're the base of the pyramid," says Fabienne Gilles, head of publishing at IMPS. "It's important to us that the Smurfs aren't just an image on a chewing gum packet. There has to be something behind it – values, joy – and kids discover that through the stories and TV series."

The Smurfs' transition to the screen, which was pivotal to their rise, dates to the 1980s, when American studio Hanna-Barbera created nine much-loved TV series (272 episodes) that are still broadcast around the world. Head to the Smurfs' YouTube channel today and you can watch in 41 languages. The books have reached 90 territories and sold more than 35 mil-

lion copies – with three films, produced by Sony Pictures, paving the way for further expansion (the first two grossed \$1 billion worldwide). The Chinese market is an area of particular growth, says Gilles, with IMPS recently partnering with new publishers across multiple categories. "Educative titles are something we really dig into," she says. "We have Smurf comics with LingoZING!, an English-language app for non-natives. In Germany there's a mathematics app, and in France a collection where you learn the school curriculum with Smurfs in a fun way. A really new thing we've started is bilingual English and simplified Chinese editions."

Much like IMPS sends digital kits to theme park creators to mould Smurf figurines, publishing partners can use a style guide



• Visitors come up against Gargamel, the Smurfs' foe



• Virtual reality at the Smurf Experience

to make their own activity books. The comics, being more complicated to make (each takes a year to design), stay in-house. The most recent, *The Smurfs and the Dragon of the Lake*, struck a nostalgic tone; other birthday spin-offs include six mini-stories first published in Spirou as cut-out-and-create folders, and a Peyo coffee-table book due in October.

It's Smurcharnise and promotions that dominate though, accounting for 75% of IMPS's total revenue. According to merchandising head Tim Verschure, food and drinks are bestsellers – with 60,000 tons of Haribo Smurfs sweets sold every year. "We have around 700 active licensees and submit each one to certain qualifications," he says. "Do they fit in with our vision? Do they comply with our goals? We need

to ensure a quality level in our products." Franchisees pay IMPS royalties from 3%-35%.

With 2018 declared Smurf Year by the Belgian government, the imps are running riot – showcased on the latest Brussels Airlines plane and on 55,000 commemorative stamp sets. In June, a Smurf mural was unveiled opposite Brussels Central station, with 101 Smurf paving stones leading to the Grand'Place, temporarily turning blue at nightfall (another mural is planned for Rochefort). And the Smurfs will serve as the mascots at September's Comic Strip Festival in the capital.

But the showpiece event is the Smurf Experience, a huge exhibition at Brussels Expo. "It unfolds like a story. On enter-

ing, the public have the sensation that they're getting smaller until they're Smurf-sized," says Orphée Cataldo, co-founder of Charleroi's Dirty Monitor, the company behind the show's video segment, which spans holograms and motion-capture. A market-leader in the Belgian audiovisual sector, especially known for its 3D mapping and VJing expertise, Dirty Monitor started as an artist collective 12 years ago and has since worked on big launches at Dubai skyscraper Burj Khalifa, as well as an immense Bruegel projection in Montreal and an upcoming Alice in Wonderland-themed show in Seoul.

The Smurf Experience is one of their biggest projects to date, and not just physically. "There are bits using virtual reality – video feedback, or photo booths where

visitors merge with the decor,” says Cataldo. “We needed a lot of people with different skills. We created all the scenery from the Smurfs’ world, and then reanimated models of all the characters.”

When Gargamel, the Smurfs’ foe, traps the public in a cage, the project uses 3D mapping, she explains. “Then there’s a moment where you return to the village on a stork’s back via a VR headset, and arrive and party with the Smurfs. It all ends well: you see yourself dancing, with the Smurfs teaching you the steps. It’s a paradise of new technologies.” Visitors enter through doors made up as comic-book pages. IMPS has high hopes for the show, and its in-house illustrators have been pivotal in creating the designs for the immense four-and-a-half-metre-high sets, which are animated by Dirty Monitor’s projections – like waterfalls running over pages.

The Smurfs have kept up with more than just technology: August sees the release of the second girl Smurfs book – a major turnaround (the “Smurfette principle”, nodding to the group’s sappy heroine, is used to describe productions with a lone female in the cast). “We think she’s a bit too conventional,” admits Gilles. “Society is more gender-neutral now and we’re trying to go in that direction too.”

Initially introduced in tandem with 2017 film *Smurfs: The Lost Village*, about the discovery of a new girl-only village where women rule the roost, oblivious to men, the female spin-off has already provided a fruitful new avenue for IMPS. “The first edition of *The Smurfs and the Girls’ Village* was really welcomed by the public and new audiences – maybe more girls bought it, or fans of the movie,” says Gilles. But it’s not all change. “Smurfette will always be Smurfette,” she says.

smurf.com
smurfexperience.com



STAGING THE SMURFS

Stephan Uhoda is the CEO of Liège- and Brussels-based events and communication company Cecoforma, which produced the Smurf Experience.

How did the Smurf Experience come about?

IMPS came up with the idea of a special event for the 60th anniversary of the Smurfs, and Cecoforma obtained a licence agreement for the project. We’re responsible for all aspects of it: concept creation, artistic direction and staging the event in Brussels and abroad.

What were the biggest challenges?

The Smurfs are recognised around the world, and so much has already been produced based on their universe. We had to create something innovative and surprising while conserving the identity of the Smurfs, and appealing to children and parents alike. Another challenge was the size: larger-than-life sets filling 1,500 square metres – and the fact that this is going to travel the world for five years, so has to be really resistant.

How big is this project for Cecoforma?

We manage about 250 events a year and have worked in more than 100 countries. For the show we raised €5 million through public funds – including the tax-shelter scheme for living arts projects – and private investment. We’re expecting around 250,000 visitors.

cecoforma.com



Sweet genius

Master chocolate maker Jean-Philippe Darcis hosts exclusive French patisserie event

By Sarah Crew

The world's elite pastry chefs descended on Spa to cook up a storm of desserts for 800 privileged guests earlier this year. For the flagship event of the week-long Relais Desserts seminar, some 75 chefs served up a feast of 7,000 sweet treats. The centrepiece was a banquet table overflowing with artistic creations, from glistening chocolate work and mountains of choux buns and macarons to spun sugar and fruit confections.

Each year, the worldwide Relais Desserts collective gathers its 80 members – an elite group of pastry chefs from France, Belgium, Japan, Australia and Italy – to share their passion and experience. With Verviers-based artisan Jean-Philippe Darcis hosting this year's get-together, it was an opportunity to showcase the talent and skills of local pastry chefs – from DelRey, Ducobu and Wittamer – as well as the attractions of Wallonia itself.

Darcis and his team organised visits to numerous sites, including the Spa-Francorchamps race circuit, Waterloo, the town of Verviers and his own chocolate workshop. The visitors also had a chance to discover some local specialities and meet the people behind the produce. “They really had a superb image of Wallonia; as much in its welcome and its infrastructure as its quality of life,” says Darcis.



© Hervé Demarteau

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There was enormous pressure, but everything ran perfectly

Jean-Philippe Darcis



• Jean-Philippe Darcis (left) with chefs from home and abroad

© Hervé Demarteau

If the Relais Desserts is less known in Belgium than in its home country, France, Walloon pastry chefs need little promotion abroad. “Wallonia has always had a high standard in patisserie,” says Darcis. “We are a close neighbour of France, the top patisserie country in the world, so we have regular contact with its chefs and find a lot of inspiration there.”

As a chef and entrepreneur, Darcis may be accustomed to pressure, but how did he find the experience of receiving such an illustrious group of guests? “It’s indescribable; a lot of pride, honour, stress and friendship. There was enormous pressure for everything to be perfect, but everything ran perfectly.”

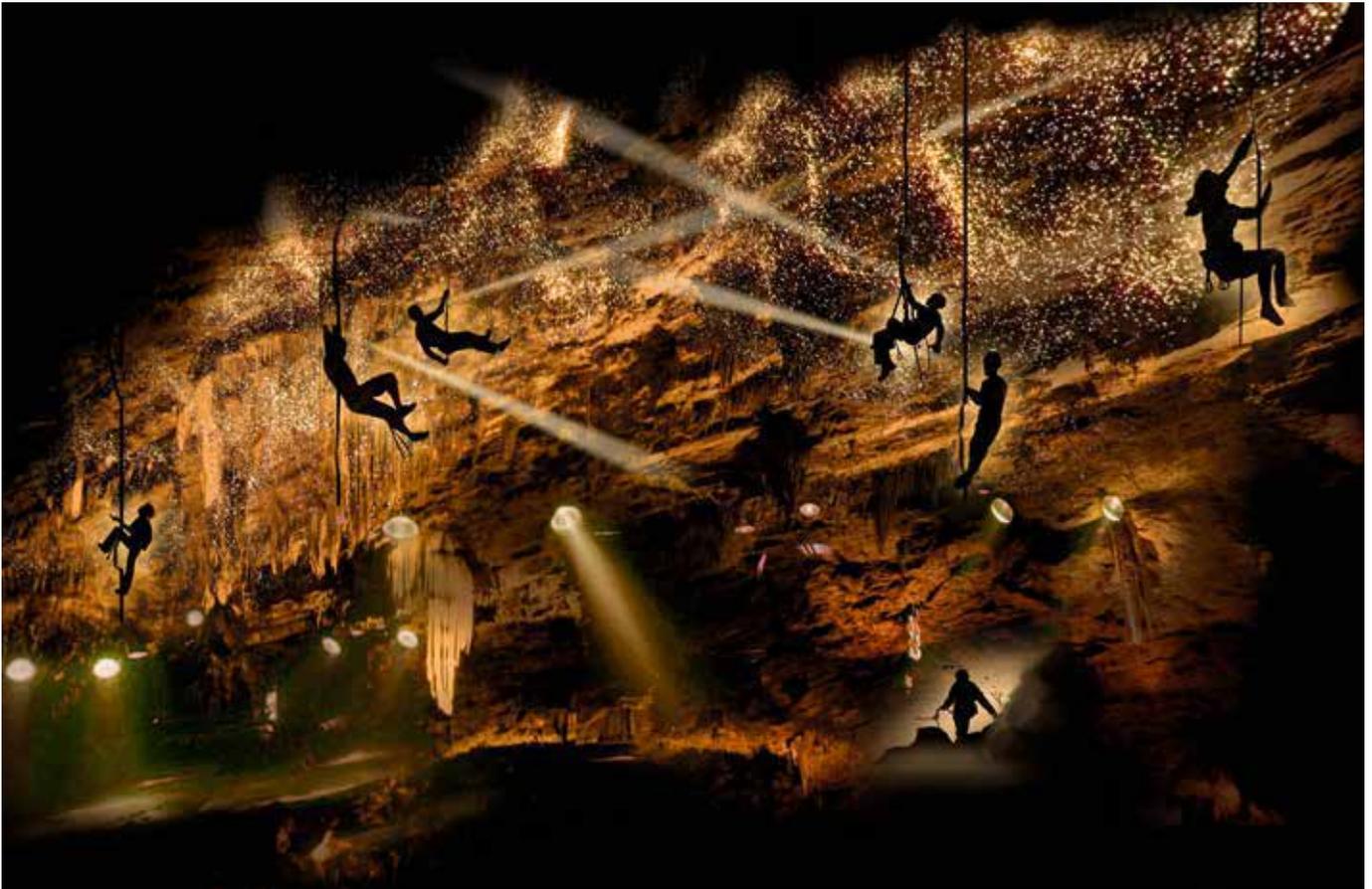
Darcis, an ambassador for Belgian chocolate and pioneer of macaroon production in the country, opened his first establishment in 1996 at the age of 25. In 2016, he opened an atelier in Verviers, a temple to chocolate. While travelling the world to discover new flavours and the highest quality cocoa beans, his close work with farmers has led to him manufacturing his own chocolate blend.

Taking part in competitions abroad has been important to him, too. “I have participated in a lot, but it’s difficult now to organise my time,” he says. “It’s chefs from my atelier who take part now and it’s always a positive experience. It helps open up the mind, meet other people

sharing the same passion, exchange the latest innovations, perfect techniques and promote the Darcis brand abroad.”

As for the future, the priority is consolidating the business in Belgium – which employs 50 people – and continuing to increase exports by developing new markets and additional outlets. “In September, we will be happy to finally inaugurate a new boutique in Taiwan,” he says. Darcis also runs an academy in Verviers, providing demonstrations and courses for groups of at least eight people, at beginner or intermediate level.

darcis.com



Into the light

Spectacular new show lights up ancient underground attraction

By Hannah Rodriguez

One of Wallonia's leading tourist attractions is set to be illuminated by a new sound-and-light show. The show at the Grottes de Han cave complex has been created by Luc Petit, a Brussels-based artistic director who has previously created high-profile music and light shows for Disney and Franco Dragone.

The show, called Origin, will incorporate video mapping and laser technology to tell the history of the caves. Spokesperson Rebecca Van Bogaert says visitors will have a 360° experience from a platform in the Weapon Hall,

the second largest chamber in the cave complex. "The show will plunge the visitors into a succession of magical universes, retracing the origins of the cave and the world," she says. "It will be the world's most astonishing underground show. Luc Petit is a magician of the scenic arts and we've already put the finishing touches to the totally new cave lighting. Each chamber is more awe-inspiring than the last."

A vintage tram takes visitors 4km to the site to begin a walking tour through a series of 10 chambers. A recently installed LED lighting system further illuminates the cave complex

for visitors. The new show lasts approximately five minutes, with music by local composer Benoît Chantry performed by 30 musicians.

Located near the town of Han-sur-Lesse in Namur province, the caves were formed more than 500,000 years ago by underground erosion from the Lesse river. They were first explored in 1817; last year the attraction recorded 13% annual growth in visitor numbers, thanks in part to events marking its bicentenary.

grotte-de-han.be

Barnstorming

Unique music venue attracts names large and small

By Karen McHugh

With its name thought to come from the old Walloon word for 'nice view', Ferme du Biéreau started life as a barn and has become an intimate, iconic venue that's hosted some of the biggest names in Belgian music. Opened 13 years ago, it was in 2008, under the directorship of Gabriel Alloing, that the venue really started to flourish. It was one of seven farms on land bought by the Université Catholique de Louvain in the early 1970s; the university decided to dedicate some of the buildings to art, and the Ferme du Biéreau was born.

The result is a main hall that can hold 400 people sitting, or more than 600 standing. "It has very nice old beams. It's warm, it's comfortable and cosy. And it's listed," says Alloing. Funding comes by way of Wallonia's culture ministry and the city council, combined with ticket sales, and there is strong collaboration with both the university and the city council.

All genres are embraced at the Ferme de Biéreau, from jazz, rock and pop to classical and world. It welcomes up-and-coming artists from across Belgium and has hosted big names such as Hooverphonic, Arnaud and Puggy over the years. "That's our motto, that we are open to any kind of music – as long as it's good, of course!" says Alloing. "There are not many other places like ours. It's a unique experience. It's outside the city, it's quieter; the fact that it's an old farm makes it different. That's the added value of the place."

Artists also enjoy its uniqueness. "The musicians love it because we really do insist on the quality of the sound and making it welcoming and professional. They really like it. The contact between the musicians and the audience is really easy and cool, and it has a family dimension that you probably don't get in other venues," he says.

One of their most famous acts was on the cusp of stardom when he played at the farm in 2009; he's since gone on to dominate the Belgian pop scene. For RTBF show D6bels on Stage, recorded at the farm, Stromae was called on to replace an ill Milow. "The presenter of the show had told us, 'There's a new guy, he's cool, he's getting a bit more famous on the internet,'" recalls Alloing. "The producer of the show said, 'Come on, we have no time for that – we need famous people.'" But when Milow cancelled, it was at very short notice. "The producer went back to the presenter, asking, 'Who's this guy you're talking about? Stromae? Can you get his phone number?' They called Stromae, and less than three months later he was a star."

New projects and collaborations are always in the works at Ferme du Biéreau. Its newest venture, a Nina Simone musical, is being co-produced with other partners and will be exported beyond the farm in January. With the yard and stables also due to be renovated next year, the farm continues to draw from its roots to go from strength to strength.

fermedubiereau.be





© Mabamiro

Dress sense

Three young designers stood out at the end-of-year show of renowned Brussels fashion school La Cambre

By Saffina Rana



• Cyril Bourez

© Etienne Tordoir/Catwalkpictures

When it comes to internationally renowned fashion schools, the reputation of La Cambre Mode[s] is up there alongside Central Saint Martins in London. Established in 1986 as part of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Visuels de La Cambre, the Brussels fashion school produces graduates who have consistently taken key roles at some of the best fashion houses in Paris and Milan. Alumni include Anthony Vaccarello, creative director at Yves Saint Laurent, Julien Dossena, creative director at Paco Rabanne, and Cédric Charlier, who was artistic director at Cacharel before leaving to create his own brand in 2012. It's no surprise then that the graduation show weekend each June is a hot date in

Europe's designer circles. Presided over by an international jury, it showcases the end-of-year collections of all years, most importantly those of graduating fifth-year master's students, whose collections open the door to their futures.

This year's exceptional master's talent includes Cyril Bourez, with his double award-winning collection of paternity wear. "It started with me wondering what I wanted to be in the future and the first thing that came to my mind was that I want to be a father, I want to have children," he explains. "I thought about how I would like to interact with my children and how my clothes should be if I want to carry them for long periods of time, play

in mud or keep them dry from the rain, and what it does to the shape of clothes if a child pulls at trousers or you sit a child on your shoulders."

Handmade babygrows and kangaroo pockets appear on sweaters and smocks to carry and cuddle children, extra sleeves are attached for anyone else who might also want to snuggle, wraparound oversized coats protect from the elements, jeans turn into boots and waterproofing detail allows for puddle splashing. Bourez wins the Mad Brussels (Mode & Design Center) Award of €1,000 towards a professional lookbook and the 254 Forest Award of professional advice for video and website creation.



• Rebecca Szmidt

© Etienne Tordoir/Catwalkpictures



• Clément Grangier

© Etienne Tordoir/Catwalkpictures

Rebecca Szmidt took the inspiration for her final-year master's collection from Kurdish women combatants fighting IS to keep their emancipation. "These are very strong women, warrior women. Women who know what they want," she says. Usually aged between 18 to 25 and dressed in standard army issue uniforms, some wear colourful floral scarves over their heads and faces to protect from sand and dust. Szmidt transposes these into balaclava-like hoods and headdresses, tied fetishistically with knots, symbolising strength, power and the tension between perceived masculine and feminine roles. Nothing is as it appears; feminine swathes that appear to be skirts in a riot of pattern and colour are actually practical culottes

made with new engineered textiles. Despite its rampant exoticism, the collection is a coherent and beautiful assault on the senses. It has won Szmidt the Elle Academy award, Etoile de Bazar Award and Atomium Award, which will ensure her magazine exposure, a multimedia documentary and a €2,000 start to professional life.

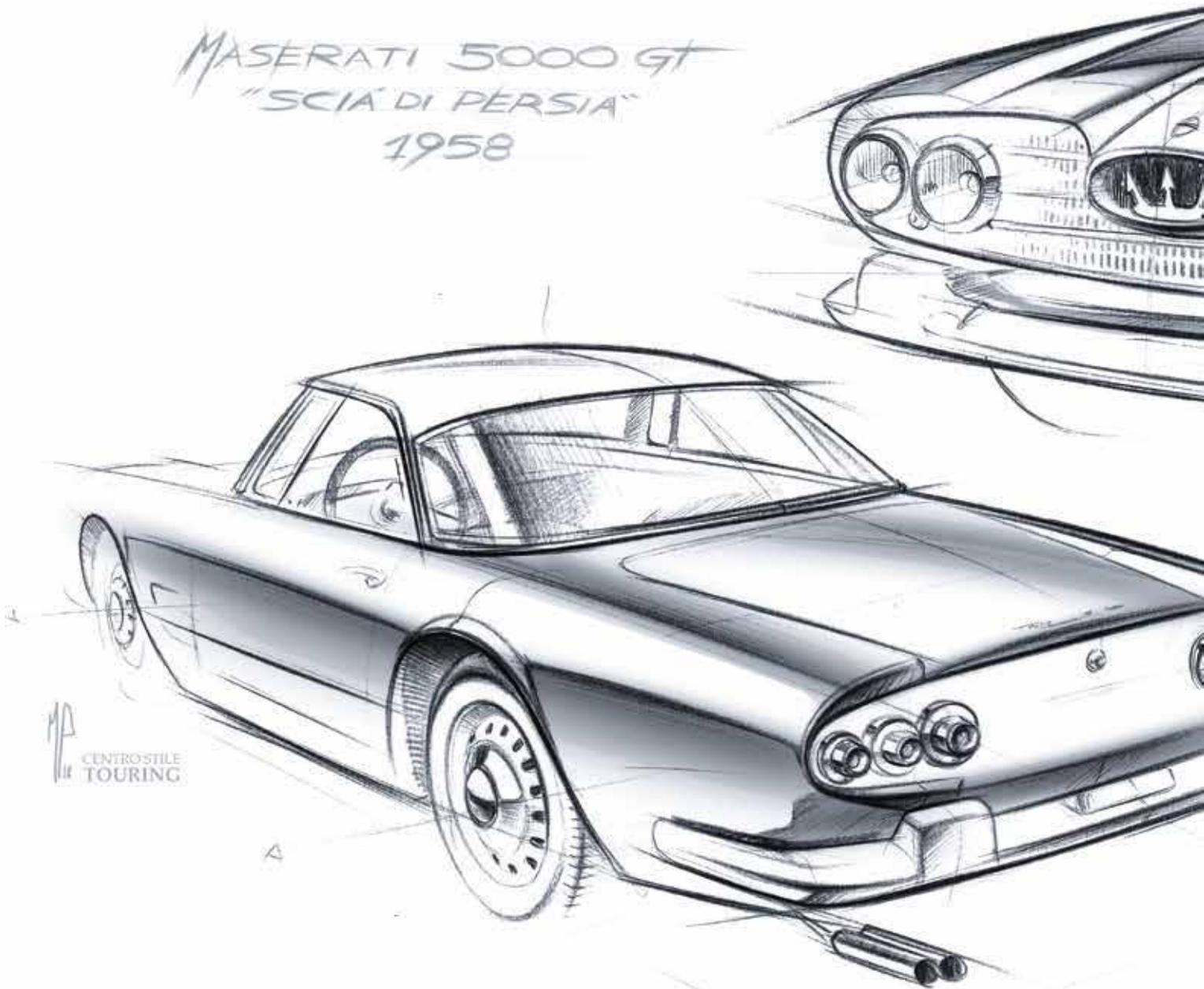
There's a fluidity and sway to the 12 looks that make up Clément Grangier's final-year collection, winner of the Pascaline Smets award. Grangier's inspiration comes from the 1975 Chantal Akerman film *Jean Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, in which a day of a woman unfurls in real time. "I was always interested in the relationship of garments

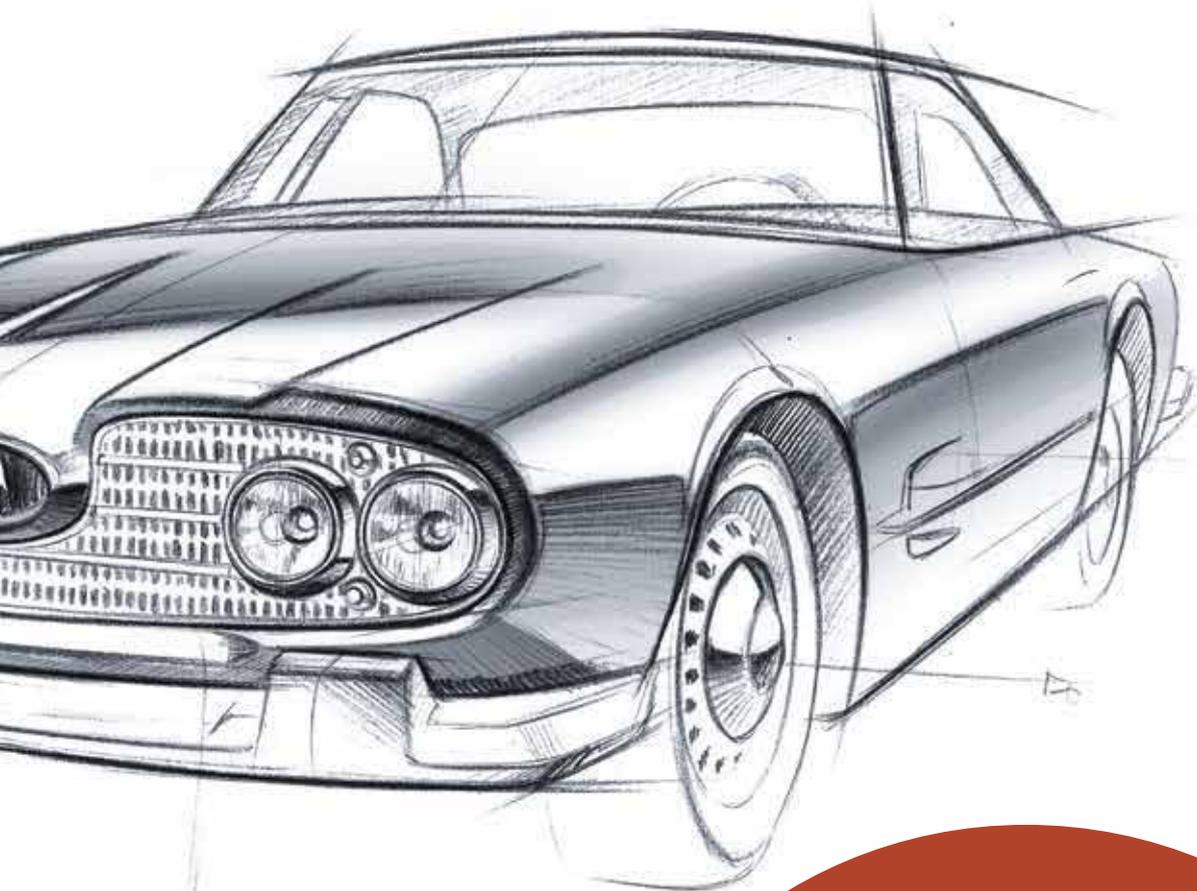
to daily life, and in this film, we can really see every movement, what's happening in real time in a day. I decided to take movement and depict it with clothes," he says. The award provides for a dedicated 15-day pop-up space to show his collection, a communication plan that offers national and international visibility and a prize of €2,500.

The Brussels Invest & Export prize of €2,000 for the most promising fourth-year master's student went to Marguerite Barroux to help organise an internship at an internationally renowned house of fashion.

lacambre.com

MASERATI 5000 GT
"SCIA DI PERSIA"
1958





THE ITALIAN JOB

Showing off its sleek lines at the Geneva Motor Show this spring was Carrozzeria Touring Superleggera's new four-seater Sciàdipersia. Unusually for an Italian stable, the company's head of design is a Belgian, Louis de Fabribeckers. He is the man who was given the task of reinventing the iconic 1952 Disco Volante, while retaining an aerodynamic body, a sporty feeling and a timeless design. A bespoke red model made for an individual client turned heads at the Geneva show, with a limited-edition version set to follow. Head of the design team since 2007, de Fabribeckers says he is inspired by the unique tradition of Italian coachbuilders. Originally from Hainaut, de Fabribeckers studied architecture at ESA Saint-Luc in Brussels before pursuing automobile design at Valenciennes in northern France.

touringsuperleggera.eu



1

Floris Hovers © goods



3

© René Burri/Magnum Photos



4

© movingproductions



2

© Wotubilis

EXHIBITION 1
STOP GROWTH! DESIGN AND NO-GROWTH

The design and innovation space lives up to its name in the this show that questions the role of designers in a world more interested in personal development than acquiring possessions. Discover examples of open-sourced social design and explore environmentally sustainable projects. The former coal mining site is also hosting family activities this summer, with a programme for all ages.

• 1 JULY-21 OCTOBER
CID, GRAND-HORNU
cid-grand-hornu.be



FILM

2 WOLUBILIS OPEN-AIR CINEMA

Some fine cinema returns for this annual summer event on the square behind Woluwe-Saint-Lambert's cultural centre. Movies are shown on a big screen every Wednesday evening and the programme is diverse, kicking off on 4 July with French comedy *Le Brio*, which sees a xenophobic professor forced to work with a foreign student. Other highlights include Belgian war drama *Insyriated* and the American Oscar-winner *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*. Films are in their original language with subtitles in French.

• 4 JULY-29 AUGUST
BRUSSELS
wolubilis.be

EXHIBITION

3 MAGNUM CONTACT SHEETS

This travelling exhibition is showing in Belgium for the first time. It traces key historic moments since the world-famous press agency was founded, from the D-Day landings and May 1968 uprising in Paris to the protests in Tiananmen Square. While contact sheets have now all but disappeared in the digital age, they are a testimony to the skill and art of the photographer. Within the ancient walls of a former monastery, visitors can also see a short projection about Belgium by Magnum photographers.

• UNTIL 2 DECEMBER
STAVELOT ABBEY
abbayedestavelot.be

FESTIVAL

4 CHASSEPIERRE

This international street art festival is an annual highlight in Wallonia. The event entertains with street theatre, comedy and circus, in a village in Luxembourg province. The theme *Libres Délires* invites the public to escape daily life for the weekend, with a one- or two-day pass giving access to countless shows.

• 18 & 19 AUGUST
CHASSEPIERRE (FLORENVILLE)
chassepierre.be

FESTIVAL FEVER

As the Chassepierre street arts festival prepares to celebrate its 45th edition, Charlotte Charles-Heep is marking her fourth year as artistic director. The Frenchwoman provides a preview of an event that takes over the idyllic village that gives the festival its name.

The festival was started in 1974 by poet and village resident Marie Fizaine; it was called *Poésie Village*, centred on poetry and crafts. This summer, more than 50 companies from all over the world will be performing. The programme changes annually and the challenge is to cover various disciplines and reach a wide audience. It has to be entertaining as well as exploring new trends in street theatre, such as the digital arts.

The unifying theme is fantasy, inviting spectators to enter into a world of frenzy and delirium in various forms: poetic, spiritual and comic, offering a little bit of escapism from daily life. In one act, there is something close to medical delirium featuring a rock group and a psychiatric ward; in another, we see a clown in a cell. Delirium can also be spontaneous, such as the evocation of liberty in rock'n'roll music. Another interpretation is taking a classic text, as one theatrical group does, and connecting it to something as basic as cooking a quiche.

If I had to pick some highlights, I would have to mention our artists in residence, like Belgian theatre group *Victor B. Chemin de Terre* are also from Belgium; they perform theatre focusing on consumer consumption. And *Les Souffleurs Commandos Poétiques* from France are part of a new European network whose criteria include the relationship between nature and humankind. The rural beauty of the village provides a countryside atmosphere and the festival needs no other scenography.

chassepierre.be



Feel inspired



Wallonia, a world of opportunities

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in 14 years

400 M CONSUMERS
reachable
WITHIN ONE DAY

Very high density of
UNIVERSITIES and higher
education establishments



6 COMPETITIVENESS
CLUSTERS in
LEADING-EDGE sectors

an exceptional
**QUALITY
OF LIFE**



Highly skilled
AVAILABLE
WORKFORCE



70% — of business
turnover comes
from **EXPORTS**



Wallonia.be