

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Creativa Brussels

Belgium's biggest fair for crafts, hobbies and creative pursuits, including painting, ceramics, sewing, cake decorating and scrapbooking. Workshops for kids and adults. *12-15 March, 10.00-18.00; Brussels Expo, Belgiëplein 1; €11*

www.brussels.creativa.eu

Carnival in Hasselt

Miss Carnival? Well, get yourself to Hasselt this weekend because there the festivities take place halfway through Lent. Children's Parade and Crazy Pub Crawl on Saturday, International Parade and festivities on Sunday. *13-15 March; Hasselt city centre; free*

www.uitinhasselt.be

Messing with the Marollen

A guided tour of the Marollen neighbourhood of Brussels, focusing on social history and urban renewal. Includes the Justice Palace, Brigittinen Chapel and Sint-Pieter Hospital. Reserve via website. *14 March, 13.30-17.00; Justice Palace, Poelaertplein, Brussels; €11*

www.brukselbinnenstebuiten.be/

Youth Book Week

Humour is the theme this year for Flanders' festival celebrating children's literature, organised in co-operation with schools, libraries, bookstores and publishers. See website for complete programme. *14-29 March, across Flanders*

www.jeugdboekenweek.be

Traditional Sword Dance

The tradition of sword dancing in Flanders goes back hundreds of years. Since 1970, the group Lange Wapper has been recreating this ceremonial dance every year in Antwerp, accompanied by drums, pipes and flutes. *15 March, repeating performances between 8.40 and 13.30; Handschoenenmarkt and Grote Markt, Antwerp; free*

www.visitantwerpen.be

Care Day

Open House at hospitals and health-care centres across Flanders. Guided tours, demonstrations, kids' activities, info sessions. See website for participating institutions in your area. *15 March; across Flanders; free*

www.dagvandezorg.be

Bringing history into the future

Flemish wood carver recreates relics stolen from English abbey



Denzil Walton

More articles by Denzil \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.PATRICKDAMIAENS.BE

A little over a year ago, the Benedictine Abbey of St Michael's in Farnborough, England, received some visitors. Every year, thousands of people come to see this magnificent 19th-century abbey.

But these particular visitors weren't your typical heritage lovers; they didn't queue up and pay their £3 for the one-hour guided tour. Instead, they broke into the abbey under cover of darkness, entered the crypt and stole historic framed prayers in French and Latin from the tomb of Prince Louis, son of Napoleon III (and nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte).

Prince Napoléon Eugène Louis Jean Joseph Bonaparte was the only child of Emperor Napoleon III of France. He died aged 23 while fighting for the British Army under Lord Chelmsford in the Zulu War in South Africa.

When his body was retrieved from the battlefield, a number of handwritten prayers were found in his wallet. These were returned to his mother, Empress Eugénie, who had them engraved and mounted on intricately carved wooden frames. The works were placed in the family's crypt in Farnborough Abbey. Until their theft last February, they were used regularly by monks during mass.

Despite the efforts of local police and an international appeal among antique dealers, the prayer frames have not been retrieved, so thoughts turned to their replacement. "The frames were made by an unknown wood carver in incredible detail. Finding someone to make exact replicas was always going to be a difficult task," abbot Cuthbert Brogan told local reporters.



© Henry Van Belkom

Few reach the level of woodcarving skills possessed by Limburger Patrick Damiaens

After making some initial enquiries, Brogan stumbled upon the website of Patrick Damiaens, an ornamental woodcarver in Maaseik, Limburg. "After seeing pictures of what he is capable of – in particular the highly detailed and delicate floral designs – we knew we had found someone capable of equalling, or maybe even exceeding, the work of the original craftsman."

Following discussions about the project, the job was awarded to Damiaens. "It was a great honour to be asked to carve replicas of these beautiful prayer frames," he tells me. "I was also very excited about the challenge involved, as the level

of intricacy and detail in the originals is exceptional. For much of

the time, I will be carving under a powerful magnifying glass."

Damiaens is always looking for jobs that push his technical skills to the limit and even force him to develop new skills, he says. He will spend some time in museums in Paris acquainting himself with original carvings done in the very ornate Napoleon III-style. This includes detailed acanthus leaves, small satyrs and the emblems of the emperor.

The original prayer frames were made of walnut, as will be the replacements. "Walnut is ideal for this type of job, thanks to its very fine grain," he explains.

Damiaens has sent cuts of French walnut to a furniture maker, which will make the frames and pass them onto Damiaens to carve. The largest of the three measures 60 x 80 centimetres.

Damiaens has photographs of the originals, from which he'll make technical illustrations before he sets to carving. When the prayer frames are completed, he hopes to travel to Farnborough for their official unveiling next year.

WHO IS PATRICK DAMIAENS?

- The only full-time ornamental wood carver in Flanders
- Studied furniture-making at Sint-Jansberg College in Maaseik for six years and ornamental wood carving at the Don Bosco Institute in Liège for four years
- Works in close co-operation with a staircase maker, two cabinet makers, a panel-builder and a furniture restorer
- Has customers throughout the world
- Has been awarded this year's Ereteken van de Arbeid (Belgian Gold Honour Badge of Labour). This recognition of his skill is awarded by the Koninklijk Instituut der Eliten van de Arbeid (Royal Institute of the Elites of Labour)
- Does not own a mobile phone, has flown only once and has never visited England

BITE Foodie events

It's the start of the season for festival-goers and revelry-seekers of all kinds, with people slowly rising out of hibernation to attend an ever-increasing number of events across the region. From now through the summer months, there will be no chance to twiddle your thumbs, especially for the foodies among us. A few highlights this month include Kerk Food Festival and Sunday Foodcamp, both in Ghent, and Leuven's Amuse-Gueuze.



© Courtesy Amuse-Gueuze

The first edition of Kerk Food Festival last year was an immediate success, which is hardly surprising with a concept like Food Trucks and Cocktails. This year, the organisers have booked 16 trucks to fill the spacious covered hall, ranging from the Dutch Weed Burger, with its 100% vegan "healthy fast superfood", to Epicurus with its artisanal organic ice cream. Add in the free entrance, quality DJs and entertainment for the little ones, and you couldn't ask for a more perfect family outing. *20 March, 17.00-23.00; 21-22 March, 11.00-23.00; Kerkstraat 24, Ghent*

www.tinyurl.com/kerkfoodfest

Beyond the monumental gateway of Ghent's beautifully renovated Old Fish Market lies an inner courtyard just begging to be used for something like Sunday Foodcamp. This new event kicks off on 22 March and continues through mid-October, featuring a different caterer or food truck every Sunday. Enjoy fine wine and finger food from the friendly chaps over at mobile wine bar and food truck Le Van Rouge, for example, or

lick your fingers clean after a tasty grilled meal prepared by the Korean barbecue chefs at Mokja. *22 March to 11 October, 18.30-22.30, Oude Vismijn, Sint-Veerleplein 5, Ghent*

www.tinyurl.com/sundayfoodcamp

The idea for food-pairing event Amuse-Gueuze (pictured) was born of a love for two very Flemish creations: gueuze beer and fine food, both prepared by passionate people with respect for nature. And so the exclusive event was launched, a five-course meal featuring pure, authentic dishes served with lambic and gueuze beers, those wonderfully tart, spontaneously fermented brews that are so unique to the Flemish region. This third edition will take place in Leuven, but places are limited, with just four seats left at the time of writing. But never despair, the organiser assures me there will be a fourth edition of Amuse-Gueuze come autumn. *12-14 March, 19.00, Het Land aan de Overkant, Léon Schreursvest 85, Leuven*

\ Robyn Boyle

www.amusegueuze.com