



FLANDERS TODAY

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The powers that be

Flanders' 10 most influential women on work, convictions and choices

Sabine Clappaert

In 1908, 15,000 women marched through New York City demanding shorter hours, better pay and voting rights. The following year, National Women's Day was observed in the US, eventually spreading to the rest of the world and recognised every 8 March. As statistics on work, violence and poverty show, the struggle for equity continues. We spoke to three of Flanders' most influential women about their jobs, their personal lives and their dedication to their convictions

Mieke Van Hecke *Director-general, Flemish Secretariat of Catholic Education (VSKO)*

As director-general of the VSKO, Mieke Van Hecke is one of the most influential figures in Flemish education, with the organisation representing 64% of primary schools and 75%

of secondary schools in Flanders, as well as boarding schools, centres for adult education and university colleges.

"My power is linked to my position, not my person," says Van Hecke. "Because I represent such a big majority of our educational system, of course people pay attention to what I have to say on behalf of our members."

With degrees in law and criminology and a habit of speaking her mind in no uncertain terms – she recently famously argued that "everyone deserves a second chance, even Michelle Martin" – yet also deeply religious, Van Hecke has an unusual profile to hold a powerful position in an organisation closely linked to the Catholic church.

"I am not afraid to speak from my own conviction," she told *De Standaard* last year. "I try to keep the difference between my personal and professional views as minimal as possible. It's not

that hard, primarily because I am also willing to admit when I have had to change my point of view."

All too often, she tells me, "people in public functions are too

"My feminism is that I make my own choices; don't let anyone foist anything on you"

afraid to doubt or question themselves. But how can you be authentic without doubt? And what is wrong with adjusting

Pictured above, from left: Marleen Temmerman, Mieke Van Hecke and Sandra De Preter

Complementary colours

Painter Luc Dondeyne celebrates his 50th with not one, but two exhibitions

Christophe Verbiest

Flemish painter Luc Dondeyne, who turns 50 later this year, sums up his recent career with *Distances*, a book illustrating all his works since 2002, and two exhibitions. Bedrijvencentrum Concentra in Antwerp hosts a selection of those paintings, while the exhibition *Elsewhere* in Mechelen's Galerie Transit is a collection of brand new works.

Bedrijvencentrum Concentra is a business complex that houses the editorial staff of Flemish newspaper *Gazet van Antwerpen*. It's not a place you would expect to visit an exhibition of paintings, especially as some of them are scattered throughout the editorial offices.

"It's not the white cube a museum normally is," Dondeyne admits. "But I like the confrontation between my paintings and reality. I think my work is able to resist it." To be clear: Visitors can freely enter the offices to see the works.

"Most of the paintings are made in three, four days," the artist explains as he guides me through the exhibitions. "The hardest part is knowing when you have to stop." It's a pertinent issue for any painter, certainly. "When I was young, I had a tendency to keep adding paint. That wasn't always right. Only in the past decade have I been really pleased with my work."

Not that he rejects all his older works. "I experimented a lot, and sometimes that led to good things, but not consistently."

Dondeyne, who lives in Kapelle-op-den-Bos, Flemish Brabant, grew up in Brussels and studied graphic arts at the city's Sint-Lukas University College. "I was better at graphic arts than at painting," he says. "But after my studies, I realised it wasn't what I wanted to do: I couldn't fully express myself. I was extremely interested in colours. It was a period of searching." He spent the next five years teaching himself to paint. But he doesn't regret his training as a graphic artist. "It taught me to think analytically."

In 1998, he went back to school and completed a Master in Fine Arts in Painting. Was there still a lot to learn? "Certainly. It broadened my view on painting." It's not a coincidence, he says, that a few years later, he was finally happy with his work. "You should never despair. In the end, you'll find your way."

One night in Paris

The exhibition *Elsewhere* at Galerie Transit is named after one of the paintings, which offers a fascinating view of Paris. "I had visited the Gerhard Richter retrospective in the Centre Pompidou and exiting the space, I was struck by the light: Night was falling, but it wasn't dark yet. It's a city view, but the image is also anthropomorphic: You can see a face in it. Although I only discovered that after I had completed it."

The bluish, purplish sky reminds



A new view on Paris in Luc Dondeyne's "Elsewhere"

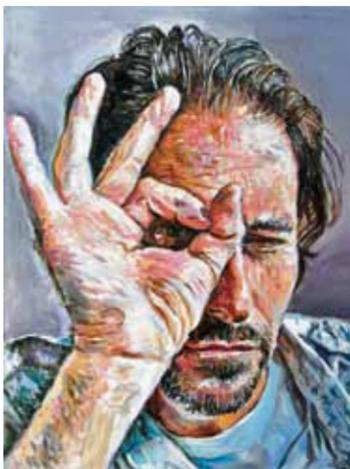
me, not for the first time, of the colours of Claude Monet. "Or the Impressionists in general," Dondeyne points out. "They often use complementary colour contrasts. So do I, but I certainly don't call myself an Impressionist."

He adds that he didn't "cheat" with the sky. "That's really how it looked that evening. In the past, I would have shied away from painting such a sunset because it easily can turn out corny." But Dondeyne doesn't carry around those kinds of fears anymore. When he was young, the painter worked with models in his studio or went into nature to paint landscapes. Now he starts, like a lot of his contemporaries, from photos. "It really has altered my work," he says. "With live models, you have to create the image on the spot. With photos, you can wait until you feel like it. Plus, you can take a photo of a moment you would not have the chance to paint in real time. Basically, it gives me more freedom."

Contrary to what you might expect, the photos are not always staged. "Because I use photos, the paintings partially document my life," says Dondeyne. One of the most impressive paintings of recent years is "Invisible World". It shows his son in the bath, rubbing his eyes and that way covering most of his face. "It was his reaction to seeing me come in with my camera," the painter laughs. "He knew what was going to follow."

Teacher's pets

Like many artists, Dondeyne combines his own work with teaching. He's still doing the latter, two days a week. "At first I had no choice: I needed the money. But it never impaired my creativity. On the contrary: I always got a lot of feedback from my students. Growing older, this has become even more important than it was in the beginning. Even if financially I didn't



The self-portrait "Illustration"

need to teach anymore, I would not quit it completely."

The students are an important reason to keep teaching, but there are more. "I've built quite a network thanks to that job," says Dondeyne. "Also, being isolated in my study seven days a week is not an attractive perspective."

Dondeyne teaches at the Secundair Kunstinstituut, or Secondary School for the Arts, in Ghent, where Michaël Borremans has been his



"Split Second" is a homage to 19th-century French painter Gustave Caillebotte's "Baigneurs, bords de l'Yverres"

colleague for 10 years. "I remember the moment he became a star in the international art world. For him, it was quite a surrealistic experience. He didn't expect it anymore." And does Dondeyne ever wonder why Borremans got his breakthrough and he didn't? "Sure, but I know that a lot of factors are at play. Talent is, of course, an important one, but it has also to do with your contacts and the chances that you take – or not."

UNTIL 17 MARCH

Elsewhere

Galerie Transit,
Zandpoortvest 10, Mechelen

UNTIL 30 JUNE

Distances

Bedrijvencentrum Concentra,
Katwilgweg 2, Antwerp

► www.transit.be

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

De slimste gemeente, or The Smartest Town, premieres on 11 March on channel Vier. Hosted by Michiel Devlieger of *De laatste show*, *De slimste gemeente* follows the same format as *De slimste mens ter wereld* (The Smartest Person in the World), Flanders' most popular quiz show. A team of participants from different municipalities will battle it out to see which town is the cleverest.

The darkly humoured drama *Clan*, the story of the surviving family of a much-hated dead man, was the big winner at the Night of the Flemish Television Stars last weekend, bringing home three prizes: Best Actor for Dirk Roofthoof, Best Drama and the public prize Most Popular Programme. Among the other awards were Tine Embrechts (*Quiz Me Quick*) for Best Actress, Jeroen Meus' *Dagelijkse kost* for Best Lifestyle programme, and *Tegen de sterren op* for Best Comedy for the third year in a row.

The Flanders Audiovisual Fund (VAF) received an **International Shorts Visionary Award** at the recent Shorts Awards in Los Angeles. The award was partially in recognition of the four Oscar nominations of Belgian shorts in the last 10 years – all with support of the VAF – and also for the way in which the fund supports and promotes the genre. The VAF is a project of the government of Flanders.

Martin Scorsese, a major exhibition currently showing in Berlin about the lifetime achievements of the American film director, has been scheduled to run in Ghent. The exhibition will open during the 40th anniversary of the International Film Festival of Flanders in October. Scorsese is a living legend of modern American cinema, responsible for such iconic films as *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull* and *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

Wim De Vilder is **leaving the channel Eén programme *Koppen*** at the end of this season after a decade of co-anchoring the news magazine. De Vilder (pictured) will continue as anchor of VRT's evening news *Het Journaal*, as well as begin working on the programme *Het jaar 2015*, which follows eight prominent Flemings for five years.

