

004 Boris' Suitcase

For 200 years the suitcase has been a trusty companion of students who come to study in Ghent. For a long time, they were made from hard cardboard or leather, but in recent decades plastic suitcases on wheels have taken over the market. Since then, suitcases rattling along pavements have become a very audible and familiar sound in student cities.

This suitcase belonged to the engineering student Boris Ermolinsky (b. 1906), who came from a wealthy noble family that fled the revolution in Russia in 1917. After seven years in Chisinau in Romania, Boris travelled on to Ghent. From 1924 to 1928 he studied at Ghent University, obtaining a degree in Mechanical Engineering. After graduating, he went to work for the Antwerp company *Anc. Etablissements Champy Frères*. At the age of 29 he married Lydie Ernestine Van Hecke. The couple never had children. When they died, shortly after each other in the 1980s, a great many of their possessions were

donated to the Russian Orthodox Church in Brussels.

Even before the Second World War, foreigners made up a significant part of the Ghent student population. Their numbers rose dramatically after 1860. In 1872 more than 30 per cent were of foreign origin. Most came from eastern Europe and wanted to be engineers. They were often extremely grateful to the university for this chance to study. One expression of this gratitude was to be seen when the foreign students gave a party flag to the *Société des Etudiants* (Students Association). The ceremony took place in the Assembly Hall in Voldersstraat in the presence of Ghent politicians and academic notables, officers of the garrison stationed in Ghent, students and many ordinary citizens of Ghent.

For all foreign students, their Ghent adventure began with a suitcase containing their clothes, textbooks and — perhaps most importantly — something that reminded them of home. (p.v)



005 The Liberation Crèche

It's the end of the 1960s. A group of students are staging a sit-in right in front of the rector's office along with their children and babies. The call for childcare is also being voiced at other restless universities. At the Sorbonne in the aftermath of May '68 a *crèche sauvage* was set up; at the Freie Universität in Berlin there were *Kinderläden*; and in the Amsterdam Maagdenhuis the students organised the first *kresj*.

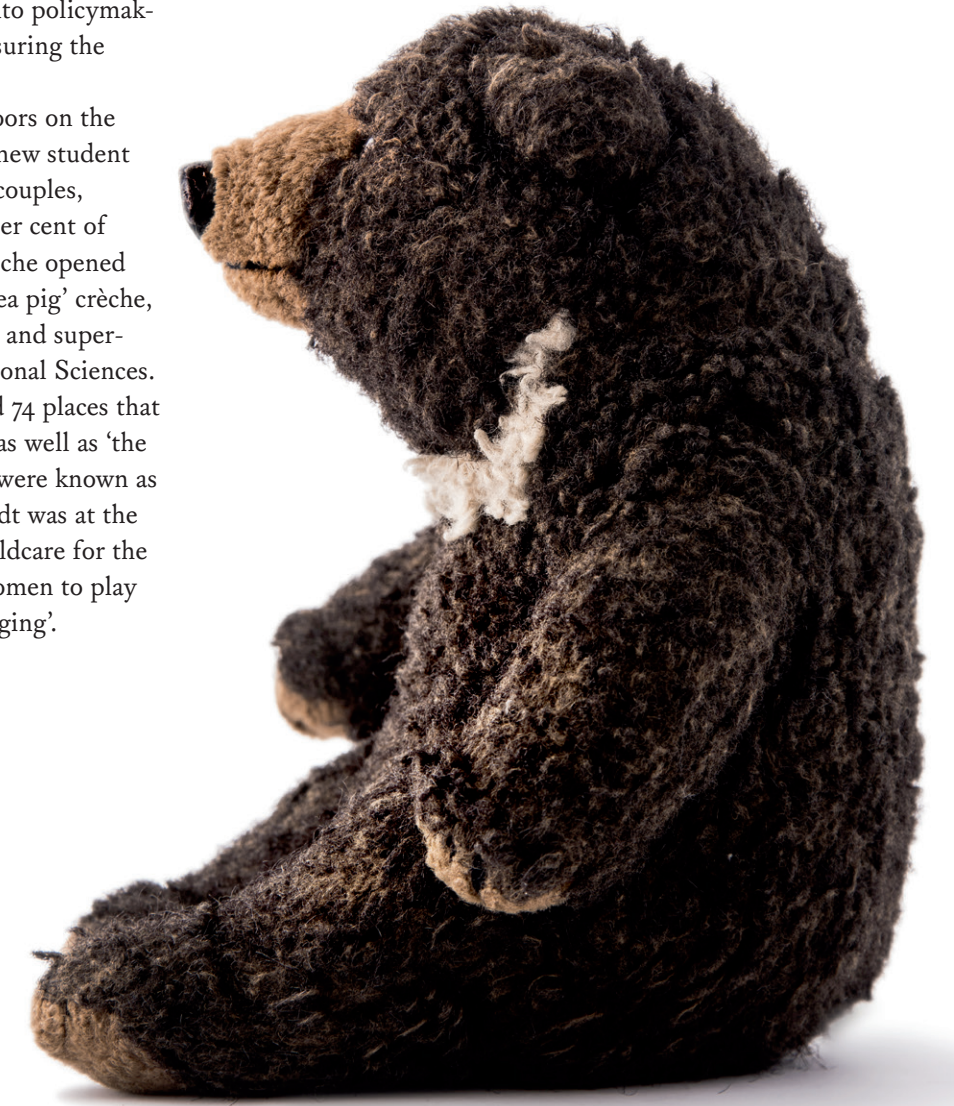
Like the condom and the abortion issue, the crèche was also part of the call for sexual liberation in the anti-authoritarian years.

The realisation that there is a link between female employment and childcare, that being an ideal mother is not the be-all-and-end-all, and that community childcare can be a liberating factor, was slowly filtering through into policymaking. In 1970 an important decree was signed ensuring the subsidisation of crèches.

In 1973 one of the new crèches opened its doors on the ground floor of Home Corneel Heymans. The new student residence was reserved exclusively for married couples, which at that time constituted just over seven per cent of the student population. A second university crèche opened in 1969 and had a separate status: it was a 'guinea pig' crèche, set up by William De Coster, and was managed and supervised by the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences.

The University Social Sector Crèche offered 74 places that could be occupied by 'the children of students' as well as 'the children of personnel'. The childcare assistants were known as 'the crèche hippies'. Educationalist Paul Ryelandt was at the helm. He summed up the forgotten ideal of childcare for the students of the magazine *Schamper*: enabling women to play a role in society by means of 'communal upbringing'.

However, the then rector, Daniël Vandepitte, entertained no illusions. Even the offer of furnished apartments with childcare at incredibly affordable rates would not stop some students from continuing to label the university as 'an authoritarian, repressive, fascist' institution. A fluffy teddy bear, from the university crèche, is a reminder to the contrary: it is a symbol of a university that used its sparse resources for the emancipation of women. (rm)



025 Basket for the Seed Exchange

The Ghent Botanical Gardens are unique in Flanders, because they are the only ones affiliated to a university. In botanical gardens the aesthetics are often secondary to the educational and scientific objectives of the collection. Collections of living material in botanical gardens and arboreta are often built up from the exchange of seeds with associated gardens.

A list is made of the harvested species, the *Index Seminum* or index of seeds, which is then shared with the botanical world. In the twentieth century these 'Indices' were printed annually and sent out by post. Nowadays many gardens have an online version.

In this way the Botanical Gardens can exchange seeds with around 400 institutions worldwide and it has been a member of the International Plant Exchange Network (IPEN) since

2005. This network imposes a strict code of conduct on all participating gardens in matters of acquisition, maintenance and transfer of plant materials. The material can only be used for research, education or exhibitions. The system was adopted by Botanic Gardens Conservation International, the international society of botanical gardens. This groups together about 500 botanical gardens and arboreta around the world and is in charge of protecting plants and seeds on all continents.

Every year approximately 2,500 seed samples arrive at the Ghent Botanical Gardens. Most of them go directly into the seed bank. Around 600 samples are sown for the purposes of growing new plants. The exchange system ensures that plants around the world can be grown in the Botanical Gardens, regardless of political borders or problem areas. (ag)



026 Edible Nest

It has to be one of the world's most expensive dishes, in China among other places: soup made from the nests of a particular Asian swift. Bird's nest soup. The nests used, *sarang burung* in Javanese, are made exclusively of saliva that the male bird excretes during the breeding season from its extremely dilated sublingual gland (under the tongue), and are found in dark caves high up on rock faces. They become soft and sticky when made into soup. They are said to be a delicacy, and an aphrodisiac. Even Charles Darwin wrote about them when talking about the rituals of the Chinese. Of course, cunning traders also introduced lots of fake nests on to the market, made of seaweed or gelatine.

This is a very special swift, as mentioned on the reverse of the piece. The saliva nest is still present. But the eggs and baby birds, which it must also have contained, have gone, and the nest is attached to a bit of rock. The 17-year-old Henry I, Prince of Orange, brought this object back with him as a souvenir from Java in 1837 — the Netherlands and Belgium had already been separated for seven years by that time. And that was also the year when it ended up in the university's zoological collection. Nobody really knows how. We do know that there were many Orangists in Ghent at the time, and that the friendly links with the Dutch royal family were still strong. Back then, the Dutch royals still donated pieces to the university set up by their king, William I. (pdr)





047 Chair in Human Rights

On Tuesday 22 November 2016, Peter Piot travelled from London to Ghent for the official award of the Amnesty International Chair by Eva Brems. The next day he gave a guest lecture at Ghent University. The AI Chair is awarded annually to someone who has made an exceptional contribution in the area of human rights. It arose from the merging of two of Eva Brems's jobs. When she was chair of Amnesty Flanders, she wanted a great prestigious public event. She had in mind something like the Oxford Amnesty Lectures. The then rector, Paul Van Cauwenberge, jumped at the idea and proposed creating a Chair with an accompanying budget. The first occupant of the Chair was the then secretary-general of Amnesty, Irene Khan.

With a view to a broad societal image, the formal ceremony usually takes place in the Vooruit Arts Centre, which has

since become a partner in the social valorisation of the Chair.

Although AI did not really emerge out of the university, there are close links between them. Jan Ouvry, the first chairman of the Ghent Amnesty working group, was a history student. Jacques Van Keymeulen became the next chairman, and remained so for 20 years.

Peter Piot studied medicine in Ghent and is perhaps best known for his leading role in the fight against AIDS. He is currently director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. From 2007 to 2014 he was chairman of the King Baudouin Foundation. In recent years, the Chair has been awarded to the writer Dave Eggers, Sister Jeanne Devos, anti-death penalty lawyer Clive Stafford Smith and the Egyptian women's rights activist Nawal El Saadawi. (ag)

048 Royal Seal

Joseph Pieter Braemt designed this seal, which depicts a crowned shield in the centre, surrounded by two olive branches. William I, King of the Netherlands, conferred the shield on Ghent University. The official description reads as follows: *clad in lapis lazuli, and Minerva's head in gold: flanked by an orange branch on the right and a laurel branch on the left in their natural colours. The chief of black charged with half a silver lion rampant, crowned in gold, red tongue and claws (it being Ghent), the shield topped by the state crown and underneath the motto: inter utrumque, which refers to the acquisition of wisdom and knowledge.* The lower part of the shield shows Minerva, goddess of wisdom and knowledge, protector of the arts, sciences and crafts. There is an owl on her helmet. She is

flanked by an orange branch to the left, a reference to the former royal household, and a laurel branch on the right, symbol of peace and victory.

The seal sits in a copper box, at the bottom of which are two grooves for attaching to a document. The curators' committee of the university commissioned Braemt to produce this seal for the academic senate. That was the academic board of the *ordinarii* (full-time professors), convened and chaired by the *rector magnificus*. A copper impression of the seal was incorporated in the laying of the first stone of the Assembly Hall along with other objects on 4 August 1819. Braemt exhibited a wax impression at the Ghent Triennial of 1820. (ag)



056 Gruesome Beauty

The blindfolded cadaver of a foal with bound feet is typical of Berlinde De Bruyckere's art. It lay motionless and fragile on a rough wooden table in the *Post Mortem* exhibition (2015). For this artistic study of dead bodies, the artist worked as always in close collaboration with scientists from the Ghent University Morphology Department, which looks for suitable horses or deer bodies.

Post Mortem was held in a place that both fascinates and frightens people: the autopsy rooms at the Rommelaere Institute, the neo-gothic building in the Bijloke neighbourhood where the Forensic Medicine laboratories are situated. Up to six months before the exhibition, bodies were still being dismembered.

The staff from the Morphology Department helped choose the location for the setting of the foal. They opted for the library, a 'soft' cocoon that also felt threatening due to the legal function of the building. To protect it from this, a blanket was placed over the foal's eyes.

Berlinde De Bruyckere (b. 1964) grew up in the Ghent harbour district called the Muide, where she still has her studio in a building belonging to the Catholic boys' school. She now belongs to the handful of names in the Belgian art world that cause a buzz abroad. This is what she says about her horse installations: 'Horses are much more dead than people. A dead horse is the death of its innocence. It is a powerful metaphor.' The horses also caused the Ghent scientists to look differently at their own study objects. Sometimes for the first time. They saw afresh the poignant beauty in the bodies, a capacity they had lost.

De Bruyckere's horses are sometimes inspired by photos from the First World War, but the inspiration for this one came from the painting *Agnus Dei* by the Spaniard Francisco de Zurbarán. De Bruyckere's foal is as formidable as Zurbarán's lamb. Simultaneously gruesome and beautiful. A still life of an animal that barely had a life. (p.v)



059 Fashionable Belvedere

There is nothing quite like the view of the city from the high windows of the belvedere on the Book Tower. After the renovation, and the construction of a large lift and new staircase, everyone will be able to enjoy it.

When architect Henry van de Velde decided to house the university library in a tower, he was immediately faced with a problem. How do you finish off the top without making the whole thing look tacky? He decided on a belvedere in the form of a Greek cross, a pattern that was already integrated into the ground plan and in the inner courtyard pond. This impressive space, eight metres high and split into two levels, was designed to host university receptions. The sober, distinguished area was finished with parquet, black marble, lots of wood and high glass sides. Each of the four corners contained terraces with horizontal canopies.

In 1939 the Book Tower was complete. Then the Second World War broke out. The belvedere was used by the occupying forces as an observation post, complete with anti-aircraft artillery. After the war damage was repaired in 1950, the space resumed its representative role. The belvedere became a university club. In 1960 the billiard table was brought upstairs. A real labour of love, since the lift was too small, and the colossus had to be heaved upstairs on top of the lift roof.

The fashionable club ambiance didn't last long. The crowning glory of the tower suffered from water damage, and the restoration in 1971 was inexpertly done. Even though the belvedere was again put to use for meetings, for the library staff's New Year's party and for the occasional student party, it had lost its original allure. The building of which the university was so proud had gone into decline.

The turning point came in 1992, when the building was officially listed as a monument. However, it was a private individual, André Singer, who got the restoration going. The tower and its belvedere will be restored to their former splendour, new accents will be introduced, and the whole building will sparkle once more on the highest geographical point in Ghent. (pg)

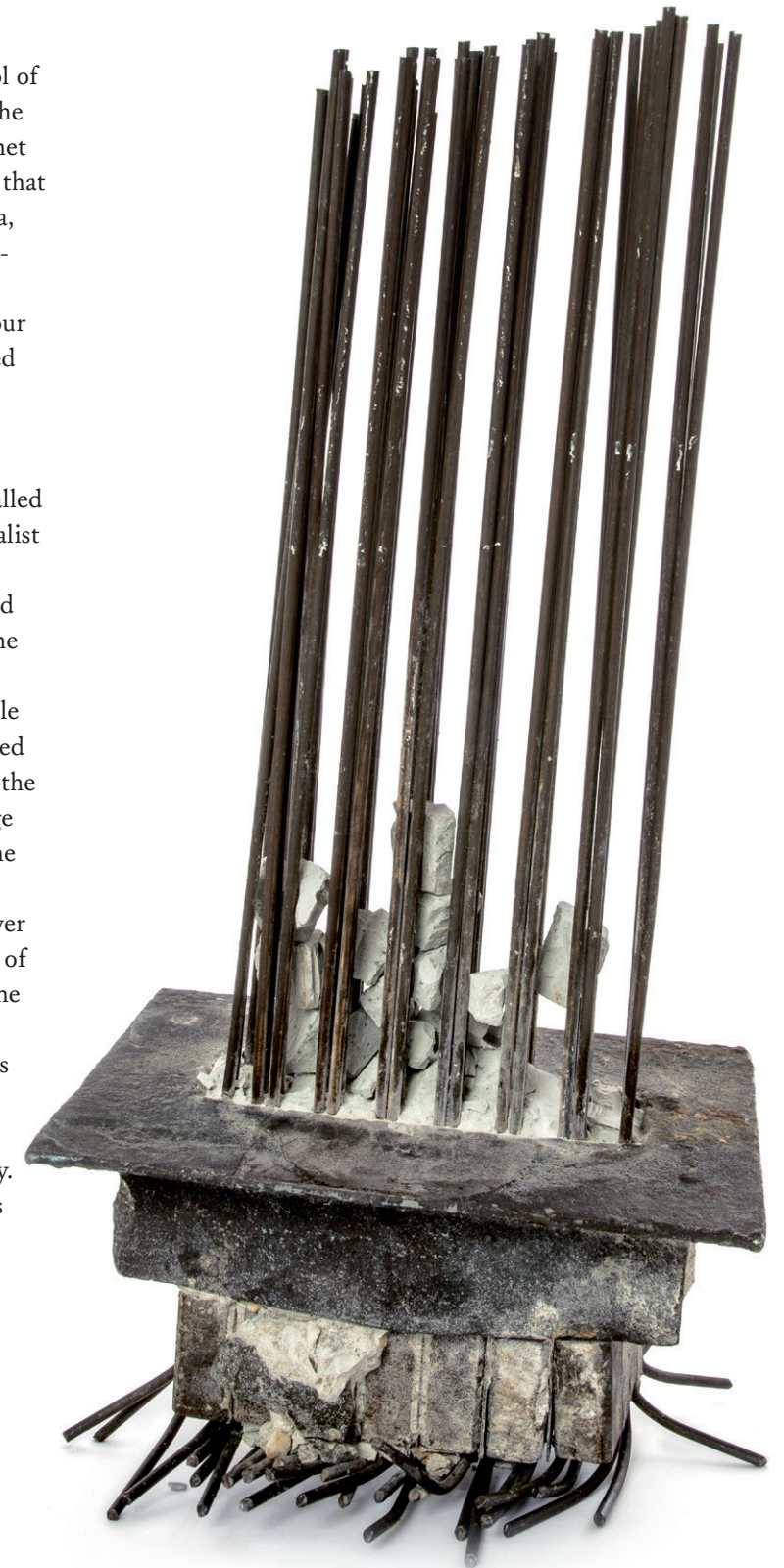


060 Concrete Icon

Erected on the highest geographical spot in Ghent, the *Boekentoren* (Book Tower) quickly became an iconic symbol of the city. And yet the ground-breaking design, created by the world-famous architect Henry van de Velde in 1933, was met with a barrage of criticism. Nevertheless, creating a tower that also functioned as a book depot seemed like a brilliant idea, and meant that books could be preserved in optimal conditions. The structural work for the 64-metre-high building was not finished until 1939. The Book Tower consists of four basement levels and 20 storeys above ground, and is topped with a coquettish belvedere. In the evening, this crowning glass glory lights up like a blinking beacon, a symbol of science, wisdom and knowledge.

In order to create his modernist tower, Van de Velde called on the expertise of Gustave Magnel (1889-1955), the specialist in reinforced concrete who was already internationally renowned. Magnel graduated as a civil engineer in 1912 and returned to Ghent University seven years later to set up the Laboratory for Concrete Research. His whole career was dedicated to concrete. Magnel not only played a crucial role in the construction of the Book Tower, but was also involved in the construction of other eye-catching projects, such as the Koekelberg Basilica and the Walnut Lane Memorial Bridge in Philadelphia, the first pre-stressed concrete bridge in the United States.

In 2005 the university decided to restore the Book Tower properly. Over the years the building has been the subject of various refurbishments, which were carried out partly at the expense of the original concept. In discussion with the Flemish Government Architect, the task of restoration was entrusted to the Robbrecht and Daem architectural firm. The work began on 1 March 2012, with the laying of the underground depot beneath the inner garden of the library. Three underground levels can accommodate 40 kilometres of bookshelves, meaning that a precious heritage can be preserved in the best possible climatic conditions. (pg)



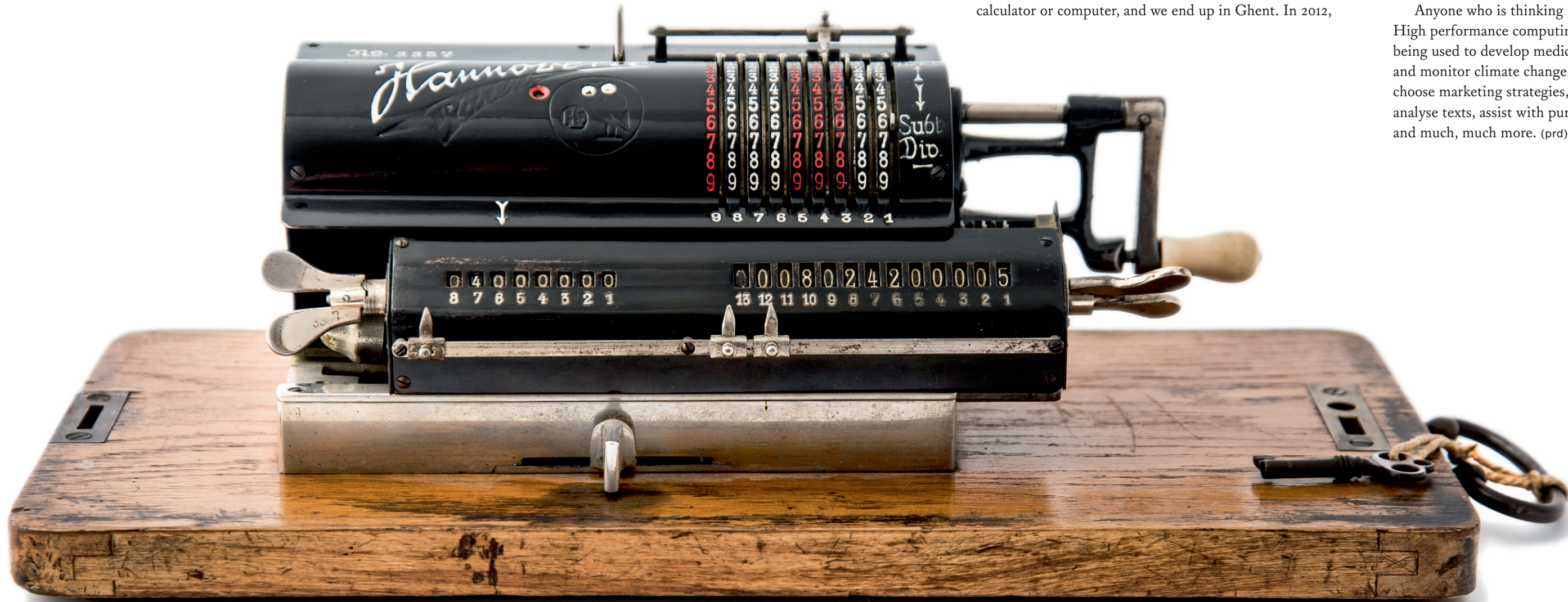
070 Ghent's Mathematical Genius

The story of commercially viable calculating machines began at the end of the nineteenth century. One of the German firms that entered the market after the First World War was Hannovera Rechenmaschinenfabrik (German firms like to use the chic Latin form of their city as their company name: Berolina, Lipsia, Brunsviga, etc.). Hannovera produced 4,000 examples of this AK model and related accessories, each weighing 6 kg. You could use them to add, subtract, multiply and divide, thanks to a set of gears, a lever and a counter. The owl's eyes changed colour, depending on the direction in which the machine turned: red represented 'minus'; white meant 'plus'. However the gadget was not a success: by 1933 Hannovera's counting days were over.

Letting humanity make a great leap forward, bypassing the Second World War, we go to the first 'real' electronic calculator or computer, and we end up in Ghent. In 2012,

the Flemish government installed Belgium's first Tier 1 supercomputer in Ghent University's new data centre. There are some impressive figures involved. Its calculating capacity is around 150 teraflops. 'Flops' expresses the number of calculation processes per second and 'tera' stands for a factor of 10¹², a trillion. A huge number, in other words. Number of processors: 8,448. Storage capacity: 600 TB, or a heap of DVDs around 120 metres high. Dimensions: 10 by 4 by 2 metres. Among the top 500 fastest computers in the world, the Tier 1 supercomputer stands at number 118. Since then, its computing power has increased. Currently the Ghent collection of supercomputers is clocking up around 400 teraflops, 400 trillion calculations per second. You could manage a maximum of one. Thus humankind is consigned to the role of snail.

Anyone who is thinking 'this is nothing for me' is wrong. High performance computing (HPC) or supercomputing is being used to develop medicines, improve weather forecasting and monitor climate change, design vehicles and aeroplanes, choose marketing strategies, optimise medical interventions, analyse texts, assist with pure and efficient energy production, and much, much more. (prd)





078

Shark-Neck

In the final years of his rule over Germany, Otto von Bismarck gave his name to a group of islands that are part of Papua New Guinea, and that belonged to Germany between 1884 and 1914. The 31 sparsely populated Ninigo Atolls, where this necklace comes from, are part of the archipelago. We also know how this piece of jewellery came to be in Berlin in 1905: at that time German traders built up collections of objects from the Black Islands (Melanesia). It was purchased in Berlin for the Ghent *Institut de Biogéographie* (Institute of Biogeography) and its ethnographic collection.

The necklace consists of 21 vertebrae from a species of small shark. They are attached to tiny rods cut from the *tridacna* shell and partly coloured in shades of red and light brown. We also know of other Ninigo jewellery, such as combs, woven bracelets, rings in tortoise shell, and so on.

Animals and their parts used in Melanesian objects often refer to ancestors, and are used as symbols or may be used like an amulet to ward off things. That, for example, is the case with pigs' teeth that are integrated into jewellery. They are a symbol of strength. (pdr)

079

Red Bonnet

Many objects from the ethnographic Melanesia collection serve as decoration for the body, especially at ceremonies for circumcision, initiation, marriage and ancestor cults. They include headbands, armbands, neck collars and necklaces, belts, beard decorations, dance aprons and chest jewellery. They are made from shells, animal vertebrae and teeth, beads, fibres, feathers, seeds, wood and suchlike. This conical hat consists of two parts: a thin plait of fibres in spiral form, to which feathers have been attached, mostly red. Its shaft consists of two seeds of the coix plant, a grass that is sometimes poetically referred to as Job's Tears. A finely twisted cord below possibly served as a chin strap, to make it sit more firmly.

We know too that the people of New Britain, where the hat comes from, adorned their bodies during various ceremonies, but there is no other information on the use of headwear. For information about objects like this, we often depend on one or a handful of researchers at most, who happen to be in the right place at the right time. Their blind spots also become ours. The hat ended up in Berlin — where it was bought in 1905 for Ghent University — because New Britain was a German protectorate from 1884 to 1914. The island colony was then called New Pomerania and German merchants eagerly collected local artefacts. (pdr)



094 The Grains of Time

Ghent University's Archaeological Museum has one of the most important collections of antiquities in the country. The collection is extremely diverse and contains finds from the Mediterranean world and Northwest Europe. Since 2000, it has been located in Het Pand, the former Dominican monastery in the city centre. The majority of objects are stored in the depot, but the most remarkable pieces are on permanent display.

Ever since the founding of the university, space has been reserved for archaeological collections. This was how the Assembly Hall came to have a *cabinet d'antiquité* (antiquities gallery). The crucial impetus for building up the museum collection came from Canon Martin De Bast (1753-1825), one of the founders of the university. He bequeathed his substantial collection of prehistoric, Gallo-Roman and medieval finds from the former County of Flanders. His legacy also included the impressive eighteenth-century cork model of the Pantheon, which is now exhibited in the library of Het Pand. During the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century the collection was further expanded by various donations and purchases.

It was above all after the Second World War that archaeology in Belgium became strictly scientific. The current department acquired a great reputation in the archaeology of Northwest Europe, but the overseas missions also led to remarkable results. The ban on exporting archaeological artefacts meant that no more foreign objects were added to the collection, only domestic finds. One example is this hourglass, the purpose of which is not entirely clear. Was it used to determine the duration of a lesson or the period in which a thesis had to be defended (55 minutes)? In the past, hourglasses were a symbol of the rapid passage of time (*tempus fugit, irreparabile tempus* — time flies, so use it wisely) or of the short life given to man (*memento mori*/remember that we all must die). (pg)



095 Pocket Microscope with Flea

The first students at Ghent University obtained their PhDs in 1818 and 1819. One of them was Josephus Livinus Boddaert (1793-1866), a doctor of medicine. This pocket microscope belonged to him and stayed in the family. It sits in a little box that also contains a glass slide with a flea inside.

Microscopes were carried around for the purposes of conducting medical, biological and forensic research in situ. The first microscope was invented by the Dutchman Sacharias Jansen around 1595. Antoni Van Leeuwenhoek is often incorrectly said to be the inventor. He was not. He was, however, the first scientist to make significant improvements to the microscope.

In 1664, the microscopic scientific research undertaken by the Englishman Robert Hooke led to the ground-breaking book *Micrographia: or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses*, in which he describes in minute detail a plant cell, a fly's eye and a flea.

Joseph Boddaert's name is mentioned in the 1855 *Wegwyzer* (guide) to Ghent, in the list of 'surgeons' in the *Burgerlyk hospitaal gezegd de Bijloke* (Bijloke civilian hospital) and among the 'doctors in obstetrics'. The Boddaert family belonged to the medical elite in Ghent for a century. (ag)



112 The Pantheon in Cork

Anyone who beholds the Emperor Hadrian's wonderful Pantheon on Piazza della Rotonda in Rome will to a certain extent also be looking at the front of Ghent University's Assembly Hall in Voldersstraat, which also provides the university's logo. (Only pedants will comment on the fact that the Roman temple and its Ghent successor have eight columns, while the blue logo only has seven.) But this did not happen by chance: when Ghent University was founded, neoclassicism was the accepted architectural style for high-status buildings. And neoclassicism avidly imitated Graeco-Roman temples, the Pantheon being the perfect example. In Ghent, the young architect Louis Roelandt followed suit with his design for the front of the Assembly Hall in about 1820.

On this façade, as on the Pantheon, there is a Latin inscription, in this case in honour of the person who commissioned it, King William I. It is highly likely that William was also the donor of a truly magnificent item in the Ghent collections: a model, largely in cork, of the Pantheon. On a scale of 1:65, this mini-Pantheon is the work of the Roman architect and cork modeller Antonio Chichi (1743-1816), who copied a series of more than 30 buildings from ancient Rome. His models served as teaching aids. Wealthy, mainly German, connoisseurs also bought them as souvenirs. You can admire them in a number of European museums, although now there is a certain snobbish reaction against cork modelling, which was extremely popular in the eighteenth century.

When the model is open and you can see the building in cross-section, you will realise just how much attention Chichi devoted to his models. Even the colours of the marble inside the antique Pantheon are copied. We know that one of Chichi's sources was the engravings by his compatriot and contemporary Piranesi.

The Pantheon model, of which only three are known in the world, is on the Flemish Government's List of Masterpieces. As such it is regarded by the Flemish Community as an important, even vital, object. (pdr)



153 The Last of the Administrators

Before the introduction of the posts of logistics and academic administrators, who are responsible for the day-to-day activities of Ghent University together with the rector and vice-rector, a large percentage of their tasks were carried out by the general administrator. This important management function existed from 1972 to 1991, after the abolition of the office of deputy chair of the administrative board.

The administrator was appointed for a renewable term of eight years by the board. He attended the meetings of the board and the permanent office in an advisory capacity, and was responsible for administrative, financial and budgetary management. The administrator was in charge of the university's buildings, prepared the draft budget, managed the funds not associated with Chairs or academic services, and managed the personnel in the general administration. He was director of his office, the departments of information, documentation, continuous training, social and general business, and the departments of personnel, accounting, building and technical services.

In 1987 his broad area of authority was curtailed and much of it was handed over to the rector. From then on, the administrator was still responsible for board and office decisions, but not academic decisions. In practice, he was left supervising the maintenance of university buildings. He prepared the budget before it was presented to the board by the rector, and collected data for the periodic budget controls. His services were transferred to the rector's office. The position of administrator disappeared in 1991. The office was successively filled by Etienne Van der Straeten (1972-1979), Wilfried Desot (1979-1987) and Walter Van Espen (1987-1990).

Upon his appointment as administrator in 1987, Van Espen had already enjoyed a 20-year career at Ghent University: first as manager of the student restaurants and residences and the crèche, later of the secretariat and the financial administration of the Social Sector. (pg)



154 Scientist-Entrepreneur

As a 20-year old, the chemist Leo Baekeland (1863-1944) combined his academic work with industrial activities. In 1887, together with his colleague Jules Guequier and the latter's wealthy wife Valérie Gleesener, he set up a partnership under the name 'Dr Baekeland et Compagnie'. Baekeland relinquished the copyright on his inventions, and Gleesener introduced the necessary capital. He did however have a back-up plan, keeping possible American patents for himself.

In 1889, two days after his marriage to the daughter of Théodore Swarts, the professor with whom he worked as an assistant, Baekeland travelled to the United States. There he made contact with like-minded entrepreneurial scientists and decided to give up his scientific career for the business life. In the US he built up an amazing career.

Baekeland developed Velox, the first commercially successful photographic paper. In 1907 he took out a patent on the resin Bakelite, the very first plastic, a product that would shape modern life. The excellent insulating properties of the material made Bakelite especially suitable for radios and telephones, plugs and sockets. The industrial applications were incredibly wide-ranging.

During the First World War, Baekeland was a member of the Naval Consulting Board, under the leadership of Thomas Edison. This son of a road-builder and a housemaid was especially proud to be able to use his technological knowledge to help the war effort in his second fatherland. He also made generous donations for the advancement of scientific research and in 1928 made a financial contribution to the founding of the National Fund for Scientific Research in Belgium. In 1939 Leo Baekeland was awarded an honorary doctorate from his alma mater, Ghent University. (pg)



Concern for the Galapagos

These ten white bags contain rocks taken from the Galapagos Islands during a Ghent University geological expedition in 1962. This scientific journey was undertaken at the request of UNESCO and the Charles Darwin Foundation, which safeguards the natural state of these volcanic islands.

Scientists were very concerned about the conservation of the environment and biodiversity on the islands, which are home to many unique animal and plant species. Because of their location, the islands have seen relatively little colonisation by animals from the mainland since they came into existence. As a result, animals that arrived over the course of time were able to evolve independently of their fellow species on the mainland and many endemic species emerged.

The greatest threat to the vulnerable ecosystems were the tourists. This influx of people brought more and more new, undesirable plant and animal diseases and germs to the islands, posing a threat to the indigenous flora and fauna. Moreover, at that time an increasing number of farmers arrived from the Andes, encouraged to migrate there by the Ecuadorean government. The researchers were asked to map the soils on the islands. On the basis of the information obtained, it was hoped that the islands could be protected against further exploitation.

Not all rocks that the university is interested in are formed on planet Earth. The oldest meteorite in Belgium crashed down near Ghent University's site in Sint-Denijs-Westrem on 7 June 1855. The people who discovered it described the rock as 'round, glowing hot with a thin molten crust and a striking smell of sulphur'. It weighs 700 grammes and is kept part of the time in the Natural History Museum in Vienna and partly in the Vatican State Meteorite Collection. (pv)

