

AGM
PUBLICATION

CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS & OUTDOOR ARTS IN GERMANY



ARTCENA

ARTCENA is the National Center for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts, supported by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates Circostrada and is a permanent member of its steering committee. It works in close collaboration with professionals in the sector and offers them both publications and digital resources via its web platform. It also develops mentoring and training actions, tools and services to help them in their everyday practices. It supports contemporary creation through national support programs and encourages the international development of these three sectors.



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EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR
CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS
AND OUTDOOR ARTS

Circostrada is the European network for Contemporary Circus and Outdoor Arts. Created in 2003 with the core mission of furthering the development, empowerment and recognition of these fields at European and international levels, over the years the network has become an important anchoring point for its members – 158 organisations from over 43 countries – and a key interlocutor in the dialogue with cultural policy makers across Europe.

FOREWORD

The forthcoming publication offers a comprehensive panorama of the vibrant landscape of contemporary circus and outdoor arts production in Germany. It explores the rich tapestry of community dynamics, environmental influences, and contextual circumstances that shape these disciplines. Moreover, it takes a thoughtful stance on the common red-thread weaving through the third year of the CS BODIES project led by Circostrada, offering a nuanced exploration of its significance and implications.

The articles you are about to read have been collected within the frame of Circostrada Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Germany, set to take place in the cities of Karlsruhe and Rastatt, nestled near the banks of the River Rhine and conveniently linked by a comfortable tram ride lasting approximately 30 minutes.

Rastatt, with its historical roots dating back to 1084, may be smaller with around 50,000 residents, but it boasts a rich heritage. Since 1993, it has been the proud host of Germany's largest outdoor arts festival, the tête-à-tête festival. In 2024, the festival takes place between May 29th and June 2nd, and offers freely accessible performances at various venues throughout the city, along with special evening shows. This year, as Rastatt commemorates the 175th anniversary of the Baden Revolution, it serves as an ideal setting to explore the intersection of outdoor arts and democracy. The tête-à-tête festival embodies this fusion by fostering encounters, facilitating dialogue and nurturing a sense of community.

Karlsruhe, founded in the baroque era and home to approximately 300,000 inhabitants, stands as a significant city in southwest Germany. Notably, the socio-cultural centre, TOLLHAUS, offers a diverse programme encompassing various genres. Since the 1980s, contemporary circus has been a focal point of TOLLHAUS's programming. Moreover, since 2016, TOLLHAUS has annually hosted the ATOLL Festival for contemporary circus art each September. For the Circostrada AGM, TOLLHAUS is organising a condensed version of this festival called ATOLL Extra, offering a unique glimpse into Germany's vibrant and burgeoning circus scene, including presentations hosted by the German Federal Association for Contemporary Circus.

We encourage you to seize the opportunity presented by these days filled with exchange and inspiration, fostering new partnerships, sharing ideas, and embracing the transformative power of contemporary circus and outdoor arts. Let the arts embolden us to push boundaries and perceive the world through a fresh lens!

Bernd Belschner, Johannes Frisch, Stefan Schönfeld for **TOLLHAUS | Karlsruhe**

Kathrin Bahr and Julia von Wild for **zweifellos.net**

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Foreword written for the Annual General Meeting of Circostrada co-organised with TOLLHAUS | Karlsruhe and zweifellos.net, in the frame of ATOLL extra and tête-à-tête festivals (May 28-June 1, 2024, Karlsruhe and Rastatt, Germany).

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This publication should be mentioned as follows: 'Contemporary Circus & Outdoor Arts in Germany, Circostrada, Paris, May 2024.'

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Graphic design

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May 2024

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CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS AND OUTDOOR ARTS IN GERMANY: FROM “OUTCASTS” TO RECOGNISED ART FORMS

By Nicole Ruppert



© Sarah Rauch

Nicole Ruppert has a degree in literature and has worked as a freelance cultural manager for over 30 years. She was introduced to street theatre in the early 1990s when she experienced productions from Spain, France, and Italy for the first time. Her fascination for this form of theatre has remained with her ever since. Currently, Nicole Ruppert runs an event agency that is specialised in theatre in public space. As a curator, she has been responsible for various festival formats in public space for decades. This includes the programme of the 'International Street Theatre Festival Holzminden' and the 'Neuhardenbergnacht'. She is also a co-founder of BUTIÖR and has been involved in the association on a voluntary basis for many years. In 2023, she took over the chairmanship together with Clair Howells.

In comparison to the various stages of human life, the performing arts in public spaces can be likened to being in their midlife. If childhood, adolescence, professionalisation and institutionalisation have been mastered, what are the midlife crises or major changes to follow? In the forty years of its history, professional structures, networks, a market of festivals and a large number of professional artists and ensembles have developed. The following text takes a look at the history, the status quo and the current challenges.

Childhood and Youth

The term street theatre was mainly defined in Germany during the 1968 movement. Artistic impulses can be derived from the Festival of Fools¹ movement in Amsterdam and the Netherlands in the 1970s, which was characterised by spontaneity and improvisation. Theatre as political action had already lost its significance by the 1980s, when West Germany experienced a cultural boom in an emerging adventure and leisure society. Numerous festivals and events were organised in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Culture became an important part of the image of local authorities, and the summer months in particular, when municipal theatres

closed, were discovered as a time for festivals. This was accompanied by a desire to revitalise town centres and pedestrian areas and to bring culture to where the people were. In the 1980s, a few pioneers invited the first productions, mainly from southern Europe, to come and perform. As a result, more and more municipalities discovered street theatre as an art form that could reach and draw people into city centres. At the same time, circus arts conquered the pedestrian zones. European street theatre groups took advantage of this boom. Extensive touring at very favourable financial conditions made West Germany an important Eu-

ropean market for performing arts in public space. Since the events were generally free of charge, the summer programmes and festivals enjoyed great popularity. Audiences of several thousand people were more the rule than the exception.

As the possibilities of performing developed, artists increasingly explored public space as a site of artistic freedom. Although relatively few artists produced outdoor works throughout Germany in the 1980s and 1990s, interest in the art form grew steadily. One of the pioneers was Cologne-based performance artist Angie Hiesl, who has

¹ The annual International Festival of Fools went on from 1975 to 1984 in Amsterdam and was a comedy convention of alternative comedy and clown acts. Jango Edwards was one of the primary organizers and performers.



Grotest Maru TIMEBANK, ViaThea Festival, Görlitz 2013 © Andreas Kermann

been developing site-specific dance and theatre projects at the interface of visual and performing arts since the mid-1980s. The action theatre group pan.optikum, founded in Berlin in 1982 and based in Freiburg since the 1990s, should also be mentioned as one of the first outdoor art groups. In 1990s, many new theatre groups were founded that produced exclusively for public venues. Companies which have become inter-

nationally renowned include Theater Titanick (Münster / Leipzig), antagone theatreAktion (Frankfurt am Main), Theater Anu (Berlin), Grotest Maru (Berlin), Theatre Fragile (Detmold / Berlin), Ton und Kirschen Theater, to name but a few. The theatre makers were infected by the street theatre virus during their years of teaching and travelling in Southern Europe and brought this art form back to Germany.

Growing Pains

The economic crisis in Germany at the end of the 1990s, following the reunification, had a significant impact on the cultural sector. Municipal administrations and cultural institutions faced financial pressure, leading to budget cuts. Summer programmes focusing on artistic approaches in urban spaces decreased around the turn of the millennium. Free outdoor events were transformed into income-generating locally limited events. The global economic

crisis worsened the situation, with local authorities facing increased costs in social sectors. Organisers struggled to finance elaborate productions or guest performances by European groups.

The financial requirements meant that in many cases the artistic quality of a production was no longer the key criterion for an invitation, but rather the price alone. German companies were also affected by these consequences

and saw a massive decline in their guest performances. In particular, ensembles with complex technical and personnel requirements were gradually dependent on tours abroad in order to maintain their infrastructure in long-term. As a result of the financial pressure, it became necessary for the actors to organise themselves more strongly, to network and to articulate the special requirements of artistic work in the public space.

Growing Up - Professionalisation and Institutionalisation

While the 1980s and 1990s were characterised by a strong development in terms of the number of groups, festi-

vals, and performance opportunities in general, the 2000s and 2010s were characterised by professionalisation

and institutionalisation. In 2006, 20 professionals of the genre founded the Bundesverband Theater im Öffent-

lichen Raum e.V. (Federal Association of Theatre in Public Space), or BUTIÖR. It represents the interests of organisers, artists, and producers with the aim of strengthening the performing arts in public space in the long term. Its focus is on the specific aesthetics and special production conditions, and it sees itself as a lobby and network on a national and international level. Its members are over 140 individual artists and ensembles. When the association was founded, it was decided to abandon the genre term street theatre. The negative image attached to the term was to be changed by naming it the Federal Association of Theatre in Public Space.

In 2011, slightly later, artists from the contemporary circus scene came together and founded the New Circus Initiative, from which the BUZZ Federal Association emerged in 2018. It also pursues the cultural-political recognition of the genre as an art form within the performing arts, the structuring and professionalisation of the scene and supports the approximately 190 members in improving their production and working conditions. A milestone on the way to cultural-political recognition of both genres was joining the Bundesverband Darstellende Künste e.V. (Federal Association of Performing Arts) as an associate member, which safeguards the interests of the performing arts. This status led to more visibility regarding the specific characteristics of the art forms, the production conditions, and the actors themselves. The Fonds Darstellende Künste enabled access to networks of the independent performing arts at state and national level as well as increased financial support for projects in public space.

During the Covid pandemic, both associations were able to acquire project funding for special programmes via the nationwide Neustart Kultur funding programme. These special funds enabled numerous artists to work on productions that did not exclusively fulfill market requirements. The federal associations



Dressing the city ©Roland Kaiser

received funding for their own projects. BUTIÖR developed Out & About programmes in 2020 and 2021, focusing on reflection and analysis of the genre's positioning in social and political contexts, as well as the artistic use of public space. The follow-up project focussed on sharing knowledge about the basics, production conditions, and challenges of artistic work in public spaces.

Together with BUZZ, the nationwide Artist Lab vis-à-vis was successfully realised in 2022, where different groups of artists came together to reflect on current aesthetics, spaces of experience and meeting places between art and viewers, changing production and working conditions, – and

above all on external perception by audiences and the media.

In addition to the BUZZ, networks for contemporary circus have recently emerged at state and regional level. Zirkus ON is a nationwide creative alliance for circus arts that offers a residency and mentoring programme to support artists from contemporary circus in developing their own pieces. 16 protagonists from the circus scene in Baden-Württemberg launched a state association (LaZZ BW) two years ago, and the New Circus Ruhr project office in North Rhine-Westphalia, which is funded by the state, has the express aim of making the art form visible in the Ruhr area and anchoring it permanently in the region.

Festivals and Event Centres as Incubators for Young Art Forms

As already described, summer programmes, and festivals played a decisive role in the spread of outdoor arts and later also of contemporary circus. The first festivals were primarily founded in small West German towns such as Detmold, Heppenheim, Holzminden, Rastatt and Schwerte. Most of these festivals still exist today. In the eastern parts of Germany, the number of comparable formats was and still is small. The International Street Theatre Festival ViaThea in Görlitz should be mentioned as a pioneer for the art form in East Germany. The cross-border festival was founded in 1995 and, with its high artistic quality, is one of the genre's reference projects. In addition to Görlitz, the boulevard festival in Wismar and the Hutfestival in Chemnitz have also established themselves as new festivals in the eastern federal states. In addition to the presentation of productions, festivals also play a key role in the networking of actors and organisers.

They contribute significantly to the visibility of the performing arts genre and are key players in achieving cultural-political recognition of this art form. Year after year, the festivals mobilise tens of thousands of spectators and thus promote encounters and cultural exchange while at the same time offering low threshold access to contemporary art forms. Festivals are active in national and international networks

and contribute to the theoretical discourse and content-related debate on the genre. They consider themselves partners of the artists and therefore make a decisive contribution to strengthening the scene.

However, the festival landscape has also been experiencing artistic setbacks for ten years now. Local authorities, whose budgets have shrunk so much that they are less and less able to raise fees and production costs, are increasingly relying on festivals where the artists "play on hats", i.e. rely on the favour of the audience to cover their costs. This works very well at well-established festivals that have built up a loyal and willing-to-pay audience over the years. Examples include the festivals La Strada in Bremen (partly through income from hats) and Pflasterzauber in Hildesheim. This tends not to be the case with newly founded festivals. Here, the artists' income depends very much on their commitment to attract an audience and the communication skills of the local municipality. In terms of contemporary circus, the TOLLHAUS cultural centre in Karlsruhe appeared on the map of this new art form back in the early 1990s. It was also one of the first co-producers of the GOSH group, which performed there regularly. The Flottmannhallen cultural centre in Herne also began presenting the new circus in the 1990s.

Otherwise, it was mainly music and theatre festivals that offered the genre a stage. The Munich Tollwood Festival and the Düsseldorf Altstadt Herbst Festival (renamed the Düsseldorf Festival) are the most notable, regularly presenting international guest performances and also appearing as co-producers. In the 2000s, Chamäleon Berlin was founded, which in the following years developed into the most important production and performance venue for contemporary circus.

Still, the number of theatres that regularly invite contemporary circus to guest performances is small. For the most part, it is mainly open-air festivals for the performing arts in public space that programme the genre, an event format that has mainly developed in parks. In an enclosed area, the audience is offered a programme lasting several hours and featuring numerous different productions for an entrance fee. As a rule, these productions must not exceed 30 minutes and must be able to be performed several times a day. This purely formal "requirement profile" is becoming the selection criterion for most organisers, so that productions with an entertainment character, quick consumption, coupled with comedy and show elements, now predominate in the programme design.

Characteristics of the Performing Arts in Public Space

German contemporary circus and German outdoor arts share several similarities. Both genres show diversity in terms of disciplines and forms and are characterised by their happening nature, the co-presence between actors and spectators and performative actions. Generally, the productions are not based on literary texts or text templates; they are

developed in collective work processes. Both contemporary circus and outdoor arts use a variety of artistic means of expression, including music, dance, mask theatre, pyrotechnics and video and multimedia art. Of course, contemporary circus increasingly utilises circus techniques such as juggling, aerial artistry and acrobatics, techniques that can also

be found in theatrical performances. The forms range from circus solo performances, walk acts or audio walks to mobile structures and technically elaborate scenographies. The productions are dedicated to current topics, tell stories about places or have abstract or fairy tale-like content. Outdoor arts is strongly defined by the space as an artistic venue.

The three-dimensionality of public space, or three-dimensionality in space - i.e. the opening upwards in particular - is also a key characteristic

of both art forms. Both art forms claim to reach audiences that tend to stay away from traditional places of cultural experience, and they fulfil this claim. It

is therefore only logical that numerous artists belong to both genres (and national associations).

Midlife Crisis or New Challenges?

Although the starting points of artistic work may be different - physicality on the one hand, public space on the other - both art forms have succeeded in acknowledging their own characteristics in recent decades, positioning themselves confidently within the spectrum of the performing arts and initiating innovations. There is no question of a midlife crisis. However, theatre in the public sphere is facing a generational change. Numerous founders of companies from the early days of the genre will soon have reached the age of retirement. How can this change

succeed without losing the wealth of experience and expertise? There is a lack of recognised training paths in public theatre in Germany, so where should the next generation come from? Further challenges for artists and producers are the issues of diversity and participation. There is a lack of diversity in the companies, but also in the themes of productions or in the programming of events in public space. Public space as a place for encounters, artistic freedom and social participation is being increasingly restricted, with commercial and private interests

taking centre stage. On the other hand, theatre makers are feeling the dynamic of the artists in contemporary circus, who are receiving an enormous boost not least from the genre's international allies. From this momentum, theatre in public space can draw new inspiration. Both genres are now positioned in such a way that they benefit from entering an exchange, sharing experiences, and joining forces. The goals are the same, so the ways to achieve them can be different.



Critical Mess, *Superorganism* © Eberhard Nacke

ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

CONNECT: CREATE, MAINTAIN, AND CELEBRATE CONNECTION ¹

By Mirjam Hildbrand



© Valeria Miropolska

Mirjam Hildbrand works as an author, lecturer, and consultant as well as a dramaturge and programmer in the field of contemporary circus. Together with the allies from Zirkus FahrAwaY and others she helped building up the venue Station Circus in Basel (Switzerland), where she works as artistic director. Mirjam Hildbrand completed her PhD in Theatre Studies with the publication of her book “Theaterlobby attackiert Zirkus. Zur Wende im Kräfteverhältnis zweier Theaterformen zwischen 1869 und 1918 in Berlin” (Brill 2023) ².

I see such a variety of people in the audience of a circus performance in a tent, in a theatre or outdoors. Circus promotes wide accessibility and doesn't need a specific language. The shared presence that occurs over the duration of a circus performance always touches me. Such concurrence with others is rare in these times of filtered bubbles of experience, of isolation and loneliness. I vividly remember a performance of *Le Vide, essai de cirque* at the Monfort Théâtre in Paris a few years ago. An empty space: simply nine vertical ropes, foam mats, a few tables, a radio and electronic equipment. There sitting opposite me on the other side of the stage, a group of disinterested teenagers are suddenly transfixed, astonished, open-mouthed.

The piece by Fragan Gehlker, Alexis Auffray and Maroussia Diaz Verbèke refers to Yves Klein's 1958 exhibition *Le Vide* and the subsequent performance *Saut dans le vide* (1960) and draws on Albert Camus' 1942 essay *Le mythe de Sisyphe*. Camus' work is cited at the beginning of the performance as the audience make their way to their seats past written signs

on blackboards. One of these states, “Le mythe de Sisyphe d'Albert Camus”. In the Greek myth, Sisyphus is condemned to eternally push a boulder up a mountain that once at the top, immediately rolls back down. In *Le Vide*, Sisyphus is embodied by vertical rope artist Fragan Gehlker, who during the performance climbs up the ropes, does impressive aerial tricks, then by yanking or letting go of the ropes, falls to the ground onto the mats, to start all over again. Towards the end of the performance, a blackboard sign suggests that this Sisyphus, as Albert Camus conceived his, must be considered as happy. For the French philosopher, Sisyphus symbolises us, human beings who by accepting the absurdity of our repetitive task discover a happy state of being (cf. Camus 1955).

You might think *Le Vide, essai de cirque* is an intellectual piece. Yes and no. *Le Vide* deals with questions of human existence while being astonishingly spectacular and captivating. At the beginning of the performance, musician Alexis Auffray operates a device that causes weights at the end of a rope at the ceiling to come

loose. These weights wrench at a rope that falls rapidly down onto a table which breaks on impact. At the same time, Fragan Gehlker grabs the other end of the rope and is hauled high up into the air. This initial startling moment works with the daring aerial tricks to create apprehension for the audience. Might the musician operate the device again? Will another rope break? What if he pulls the lever when the artist is hanging metres above the ground? This sense of wild possibility underpins the astonishment of the cool teenagers, who by the end of the show clap enthusiastically. Do they recognise Camus' conception of Sisyphus and the notion of absurd existence? Who knows! Yet, to be honest this does not really matter. What does matter is that these young people were present in the performance, and at the same time present with audiences of many ages and social backgrounds.

Like other circus productions, *Le Vide, essai de cirque* opens up simultaneous and various modes of reception. As a spectator, I may or may not find myself pondering my own absurd exist-

¹ Translation by Sue McClements

² In english: “Theatre lobby attacks circus. On the Turning point in the balance of power between two theatre forms between 1869 and 1918 in Berlin”

tence, although the arresting events on stage break any possibility to get lost in thought. Furthermore, circus performances with completely different aesthetics time and again also create encounters between the different 'bubbles' that make up the audience.

With *Les Voyages* – another internationally touring performance – the French *Compagnie XY* creates such opportunity for encounters between audiences, and also dissolves boundaries between artists and audiences. This project finds around twenty acrobats from the company embark on a journey through public space. If you watch the short, beautiful video documentation of the individual editions of *Les Voyages* on the Vimeo platform (<https://vimeo.com/showcase/9617741>), you can't help noticing the connections that develop between the acrobats and passers-by. Smiling and laughing faces can be seen behind windows, old people watch from their balconies, pedestrians stop to stare. In the course of their journey through the urban spaces, the acrobats approach chance passers-by, they lift a person on a bicycle or a chair and then gently place them back on the ground unharmed. The artists repeatedly invite people to become part of their acrobatic architectures. You can see a pedestrian at the top of a human pyramid, two acrobats shoulder to shoulder with an older woman, or city dwellers and acrobats connected, holding hands to form a human chain. The passers-by involved accept acrobatic invitations, trusting and allowing themselves to be lifted, carried and supported. The video documentation reveals concentrated and joyful expressions, spontaneous hugs after a moment on acrobats' shoulders, and people with tears in their eyes. *Les Voyages* generates moving magical moments in urban spaces, both literally and figuratively. Through their artistic prac-

tice, the acrobats create connections between people, form temporary communities between strangers.

These connections rely on mutual trust, and also make us laugh. For me, these connections are like a form of medicine, an antidote to a fragmented social climate inflamed by a political shift to the right and the rise of right-wing extremism. Connections between different kinds of people are the basis of social dialogue. They are a cornerstone of democracy.

Circus and outdoor arts can be a space of possibility and a source of inspiration. The circus has always been a positive point of reference for artists and thinkers particularly in times of social upheaval and aesthetic reorientation, as it was for the historical avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s (cf. Jürgens/Hildbrand 2022). In the 1970s and 1980s, European and North American theatre-makers looking for new forms of creation, performance, and audience communication, and for alternative venues to bourgeois cultural institutions, were also inspired by circus. This movement in the 1970s gave rise to a significant street art scene and to the emergence of some of the first Nouveau Cirque companies (cf. Maleval 2010: 21-32, Dumont 2021: 189-193)³. We are building on this development today.

These movements turned to circus to see beyond the limitations of their times. Circus was the place to find playful and radical answers to urgent contemporary questions. We also face such urgent social issues today, even though we might not wish to see or admit it. Yet, we must address these issues artistically. However, there are two points I want to highlight that are related to this demand. First, the broad accessibility and potential for social

participation of circus artists and their creations must not be instrumentalised. Instead, organisers, producers, artists, festival directors, cultural commentators, patrons, politicians, spectators, all of us must work together to ensure our society guarantees a diversity of art forms. Second, we must take care not to romanticise circus and outdoor arts as socio-political action that can change the current political climate. This change requires far more: overarching connections, robust resources, endurance and resilience beyond the field of artistic production.

Still, we have room to manoeuvre in the here and now, in our everyday practice. A look back at the times around 1900 helps me to see this clearly. Artist associations were founded in Germany, then the German Empire, from the 1880s onwards, primarily with the aim of collective protection against various social risks, joint force against employer associations and improvement of social standing and networks. In 1901, vaudeville and circus artists founded the *Internationale Artisten-Loge* (IAL), an association that quickly grew into the largest and most politically significant German organisation of and for artists. From 1902, the association published the weekly *Das Programm*, an important trade journal with sections in English, French and Russian. The members met regularly in various locations, in Germany as well as in Moscow, Vienna, Paris, Amsterdam, London, Brussels and New York, where the association had branches. From 1908, the IAL was also affiliated with the British Variety Artists Federation (VAF), the French *Union Syndicale des Artistes Lyriques* and the US *White Rats Artistic Association*, and subsequently jointly founded the World League of Artistic Organisations in Paris in 1911 (cf. Hildbrand 2023, 214-219). Around 1900,

³ Note: In the 1970s and 1980s, independent circus established not only in France but also in German-speaking countries. Many groups, projects and artists, including *Die Fliegenden Bauten* in Germany and events in the former Berlin Tempodrom and Kunsthau Tacheles, have been largely forgotten, even though they also shaped international independent theatre and the Nouveau Cirque movement. Over this time, there was also a rise in street arts, including many jugglers, and an increase in children and youth circus also with the Berlin Tempodrom. Since the 1990s, variety theaters have again flourished in Germany, particularly under the GOP umbrella structure. These are important employers for artists, and still form a counterbalance to the independent work today.

mobility and networks across countries and continents were part of the self-image of circus and vaudeville artists.

However, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, the multilingual *Programm* was published in German only, and was accompanied by a deliberate “Germanisation of the artists’ language” (Das Programm, 06.12.1914, no p.). For with the outbreak of war, the moment had also come for the artists to support the “endeavours of the German Language Association” to “encourage the German people to avoid foreign words and to cleanse the German language of foreign words [...]” (ibid.). The IAL therefore suggested alternative terms to the technical terms borrowed from French or English. ‘Variété’ theatres should henceforth be called ‘Schau- or Buntbühne’, the ‘Saison’ now ‘Spielzeit’, the ‘Clowns’ now ‘Spaßmacher’, and “‘Chapiteau’ and ‘tent’ of course are now called ‘Zelt’” (ibid.).

The war years had a devastating effect on the multilingualism of the profession and the artists’ sense of identity, and

also on international mobility and transnational alliances and networks. In 1917, *Das Programm* stated that access to the international labour market would no longer be guaranteed for German artists after the war. The Russian Artistic Association had already excluded its German members in autumn 1914. The VAF followed suit at the beginning of 1916 and decided to ban German and Austrian artists from performing up to three years after the end of the war. The French *Union Syndicale des Artistes Lyriques* had also joined this decision (see Das Programm, 15.04.1917, no p.). The World League of Artistic Organisations, founded three years before the outbreak of war, was in ruins. And even worse, the solidarity between professional colleagues and artists was broken. In February 1921, individual national associations came together in Rotterdam to re-establish the World League. However, an ongoing dispute between the British and German associations led to the new *Ligue Mondiale des Organisations des Artistes*, based in Brussels, being founded without the British VAF (cf. Hildbrand 2023, 282f.).

But this *Ligue Mondiale* has left virtually no trace, despite the re-establishment of alliances after the First World War. It was no longer possible to build on those networks established prior to 1914. The four years of war thus signalled a profound caesura in the transnational practice of artists, the extent and complex consequences of which we can only speculate on today.

Nowadays, multilingualism is part of our working environment. We are connected via transnational training programmes and working partnerships as well as transnational professional networks such as *Circostrada* (cf. Kreuzsch 2020). History can teach us that circus and outdoor arts hold profound potential, which may not be immediately self-evident yet is nevertheless highly political. Performances can bring us together in one place for a certain time and like those astonished teenagers at *Le Vide* and the *Les Voyages* pedestrians lifted aloft, performance can transform us. So, let’s not deprive ourselves of connection, but cultivate and celebrate all that connection has to offer.

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THE INTERVIEW CORNER



INTERVIEW WITH KATHRIN BAHR & JULIA VON WILD



© Daniela Buchholz

Kathrin Bahr (M.A. in German Literature) started out working as a freelance cultural producer and public relations consultant in Bremen. In 2012, together with Julia von Wild, she founded the cultural office [zweifellos.net](#), which successfully organises outdoor art events. Festival formats such as La Strada unterwegs and the ParkPerPlex Festival were created under her direction. Since 2015, she is artistic co-director of the international festival for outdoor arts tête-à-tête in Rastatt and since this year she is curating the international street culture festival in Nordhorn.



© Daniela Buchholz

Julia von Wild is a freelance cultural producer based in Bremen who has long been active as an advocate for pop and club culture in Germany. Together with Kathrin Bahr, she operates the cultural office [zweifellos.net](#) focussing on artistic direction and festival production and is co-director of the international outdoor arts festivals tête-à-tête in Rastatt and ParkPerplex in Norderstedt. Since 2022, she is now also active in politics as an assistant to a Green Party member of the Federal parliament.

You are co-directors of [zweifellos.net](#) – Büro für Kultur, an office that advises cities, institutions, communities, and companies on the conception, planning, organisation, and implementation of cultural projects. Could you highlight three major projects you got involved with in the last ten years?

We have brought two festivals to life, in other words we have built them up from the ground up. One is the ParkPerPlex Festival in Norderstedt/Schleswig-Holstein, which always takes place at Whitsun for two days, and the other is our pilot project La Strada on the road, which we organised for 10 years until 2018, and which has developed into an inclusive festival in terms of the large number of volunteers and team members with intellectual disabilities. Since 2015, we are also res-



Cie Les Mesdemoiselles © Max Hartmann

possible for the artistic direction and production of the international festival for outdoor arts tête-à-tête in Rastatt/Baden-Württemberg. This festival is the largest festival for outdoor arts and

contemporary circus in Germany and takes place every two years. We have been responsible for three editions of this festival so far and we have taken it to the next level.

As artistic co-directors of the outdoor arts festival tête à tête in the city of Rastatt, one of the largest festivals of its kind in Germany, what are the key challenges of organising an outdoor arts event at such a large scale, and how do you tackle them?

As the artistic directors of an international festival for theatre in public spaces and contemporary circus such as tête-à-tête in Rastatt, we face various challenges that need to be mastered.

On the one hand, there is the international programme, which should be as enjoyable as it is challenging, and which should entertain, amuse, touch, confront and make people think. In doing so, we want to reach the local audience, offer the scene a presentation platform for new, innovative productions and at the same time present high-quality shows to a professional audience. Our aim is to select a programme that reflects diversity and a sense for new artistic trends to position tête-à-tête as a modern, progressive festival in the unique setting of a magnificent baroque town. Furthermore, we are convinced that there is no recipe for success that can be repeated, but that eternal change and renewal are the very essence of this artistic genre and keep it alive. Therefore, every edition of the festival is absolutely special.

In addition, organising a large-scale outdoor arts festival presents several challenges for audience development. As mentioned previously, curating a diverse and engaging programme that appeals to a wide range of tastes and interests is crucial for attracting audiences. Ensuring that the festival is accessible to a diverse audience, including those with disabilities or reduced mobility, can also be challenging in public spaces and requires careful planning. Encouraging audience participation and engagement throughout the festival like providing interactive activities, workshops, and opportunities for interaction with artists also enhance the overall audience experience.

On the production side, many different crafts are involved in the organisation of a festival of this size, all of which together make up the big picture. Their interaction requires careful planning and coordination of all artistic and logistical aspects, from technical equipment to programme design, from transport to catering, from accommodation for the artists to support for the volunteers, from marketing to the security concept. It takes months of planning to ensure that the event runs smoothly.

Another point is the financing. Organising a festival of this size is a costly affair that requires solid funding. Despite the funding from the city, we rely on sponsors, grants, and ticket sales to cover the costs and make the festival a success.

And then there's the weather. As the festival takes place outdoors, we are heavily dependent on the weather. Rain, wind or extreme heat can affect the performances, and a parallel infrastructure - invisible at best - is needed to provide alternative venues in case of bad weather.

All in all, organising an open-air theatre festival like the tête-à-tête in Rastatt is a complex task that requires a great deal of planning, flexibility, and teamwork.

What is the rationale for including international artists in the programming of the tête-à-tête festival; and what do these artistic projects bring to the festival, the region, and your audience?

The inclusion of international artists in the programme of the tête-à-tête festival brings a multitude of benefits for the festival, the region, and the audience: they enrich the festival with diverse artistic styles and perspectives, enhancing the quality of the events with innovative approaches and new trends. In addition, the international programme stands for diversity and cosmopolitanism, which helps to improve the festival's reputation

and appeal to new target groups. The high-class performances from different countries bring fresh ideas, not only inspiring local audiences but also attracting visitors from other regions, which promotes tourism and boosts economic development through additional income from overnight stays and gastronomy.

Altogether, international artists help to make the tête-à-tête festival a unique cultural event that radiates beyond the borders and makes a lasting contribution to cultural diversity, regional development, and artistic dialogue.

How would you say arts in public space play a role in promoting solidarity?

Arts in public space play an important role in promoting solidarity, as it brings people together uniquely, regardless of age, origin, or social status, arousing emotions and stimulating reflection.

Just as the festival crosses genre boundaries with playful ease, the art form can break down barriers between countries and in people's minds. The cosmopolitan aura of the event promotes awareness of collective issues such as diversity, participation, equality, sustainability, and intergenerational justice.

By reflecting on current challenges and putting them up for discussion, arts in public space can promote solidarity and inspire people to work for positive change. By portraying diversity and inclusion on stage, performances can help to promote solidarity between different groups and break down prejudices.

Overall, art in public space is an important factor in solidarity-building by bringing people together, reflecting on social issues and enabling empowerment through art. Through creative productions and interactive performances, outdoor arts can help to build bridges between different groups and strengthen a society based on solidarity.



INTERVIEW WITH BERND BELSCHNER & STEFAN SCHÖNFELD



© Samuel Mindermann

Bernd Belschner lives in Karlsruhe, Germany. In addition to training as a bookseller and studying social pedagogy, he became involved early on in the independent cultural scene on a voluntary basis, initially as an organiser of music events. In this context, he also co-founded the Tollhaus cultural association in 1982. Between 1992 and 2023, he was employed full-time as managing director at Tollhaus. Since 2023, he has been the artistic director for circus, dance, and cabaret. He was an advisory member of the Cultural Committee of Karlsruhe City Council for 20 years. He is a co-founder of the ATOLL Festival, on the board of the State Association of Contemporary Circus in Baden-Württemberg, and represents the Tollhaus in the European network circusnext.



Stefan Schönfeld is based in Freiburg, Germany. Originally active in the music and event industry. He has been working since many years in the circus world as a producer, director, and consultant for artists, companies and projects. He is a co-founder of the ATOLL Festival in Karlsruhe and a member of the festival management. As artistic director of momentlabor Freiburg, he produced and directed several stage productions. As “Outside Eye” he is supervising German contemporary circus creations. Stefan is also a drummer, curator of the Freiburg festival “No Elephants”, member of the advisory board of Kulturzentrum E-Werk Freiburg, and board member of ZirkusOn (creative alliance for contemporary circus productions in Germany).

Since the early years of Tollhaus Karlsruhe, its programming has reflected the development of contemporary circus in Germany. What were the main challenges during the past 40 years, and how did you overcome them?

It was and is a long process that was dependent on economic and spatial conditions. It started in the eighties with clowns and jugglers who often performed on the street. At Tollhaus, the first contact with contemporary circus came about in 1988 when we invited the French circus Cirque de Barbarie to Karlsruhe for several guest performances in a circus tent. In 1990, we met the then still very young Franco-German company GOSH and have taken the new circus to our hearts ever since. Back then, we didn't have a permanent venue and received almost no public funding. The work was done by us on a voluntary basis, and the fees and other costs had to be covered mainly by ticket sales. Sometimes we organised larger concerts, for example,

in order to finance smaller or loss-making productions from the surplus.

Since 1992, we have had a permanent venue and also full-time staff to organise and run the cultural programme. Our subsidies have increased, but we still finance around 85% of our costs with our own income.

As our income and, correspondingly, the programme has steadily expanded, we have been able to set priorities, at the latest since we opened our large hall. One of these focal points is contemporary circus. A major challenge for us was the transformation from a show organiser to a supporter of contemporary circus. We have gradually developed this in small steps. With co-productions, with the ATOLL Festival since 2016, and with a circus residency since 2019. This was possible thanks to a great deal of (voluntary) commitment and private and public project funding. Our recipe: just do it if we are convinced, start small and persevere.

Could you explain the principles and values that structure the actions of the Tollhaus Karlsruhe as a socio-cultural centre?

There is a large network of socio-cultural organisations in Germany which are very important for the cultural infrastructure. In my opinion, there are many connecting elements between socio-culture and contemporary circus in relation to social developments such as issues of sustainability and diversity. As a socio-cultural organisation, we were and are not focused on contemporary circus, but are always open to new and exciting developments in a broad cultural field. An essential aspect for Tollhaus is the collaboration with and especially the presentation of current productions from the independent scene. Social relevance is important to us, as is the connection to the audience. We also try to attract new groups of visitors, and contemporary circus is a very good medium for this, as it often appeals to people of all ages, beyond language and education,



Knot On Hands at Atoll © Bernadette Fink

with constantly new elements in a special way. We are interested in interdisciplinary projects.

It is fundamentally important for Tollhaus to be an open house for large sections of the population. This is why we organise a wide variety of cultural events across different genres. It is also very important for us to collaborate with groups from civil society and other cultural and cultural-political organisations, to which Tollhaus makes rooms available. Voluntary work is still an important part of our DNA, as part of our grassroots orientation. Tollhaus is a well-known and important institution for the region and the country. As part of the independent scene, we have been advocating for public political recognition from the beginning, striving for acceptable working conditions, e.g. in terms of social security.

Since 2016, Tollhaus has bundled its commitment to contemporary circus with the organisation of the ATOLL Festival. How do you think the organisation of such events contribute to the development of contemporary circus?

A festival like ATOLL, which is one of the few events in Germany dedicated exclusively to contemporary circus, is able to make developments in the industry visible thanks to its programme options. Different formats, themes and forms of expression find space under one festival roof. The audience is introduced to all current forms of contemporary circus in a festival programme. At ATOLL, we experience that festival visitors usually watch more than just one, perhaps better-known production, but rather become interested in more and curious about other, less well-known formats and artistic forms of expression.

Work-in-progress performances, audience discussions, workshops and industry get-togethers are also an essential part of this. At a festival, the artists receive feedback, can exchange ideas and network, as many players come together in a short period of time.

What actions are still needed to strengthen the contemporary circus sector and its players in Germany?

I can point out three key elements for the development of the industry here. Firstly, there is a broad-based structure in the children's and youth circus sector, with training and education opportunities. For artists who want to develop professionally, however, there are virtually no training opportunities or degree programmes. The only option is to study abroad. This means that fewer very talented artists are able to develop, and those who study abroad often do not return to Germany.

This in turn is linked to the second element, the lack of structure in the area of residencies and training centres.

Thirdly, especially in comparison to other forms of performing arts, Germany is still a developing country when it comes to promoting contemporary circus. Funding programmes for development, research, and production in circus are rare and underfunded.

The industry in Germany is dynamic and positive - but it needs professional training programmes, a better infrastructure in the area of residencies and training, as well as funding structures for development, research and production. The lack of structures is at odds with the public's appreciation of the art form.



INTERVIEW WITH XENIA BANNUSCHER



© Will Blenkin

Xenia Bannuscher (she/they) is a circus maker and choreographer from Germany. They graduated from Codarts University of the Arts in 2020 and co-founded the collective Sinking Sideways, in which they are artistic co-director, performer, and producer. Currently, the company is touring its two shows *René* and *Cécile* internationally. Xenia also regularly writes about circus in the German circus magazine *tadaa* and is a part of other artists' projects, on and behind stage. At present, Xenia lives in the German countryside, thinking about how to implement circus in rural Bavaria.

You have completed your studies at Codarts, with a background in dance and gymnastics. Today, you define yourself as a circus maker, dance acrobat, choreographer, and a dancer. How are these different practices being intertwined in your work, and how do they influence each other?

I feel like labelling one's work can be difficult, and it very often results in a label put on in regard to a potential audience. There is this whole question about "what is contemporary circus", and there are even different understandings of the term "contemporary circus", with alternative labels such as "new circus" or "circus art" being used and interpreted differently in different countries. The labelling of my own practice is always a way of positioning myself within all these questions, and depending on who I am talking to. It is an attempt to communicate what I am doing in words, while what I am doing on stage is not words.

Concretely, I feel like my work - for example with my collective Sinking Sideways - is very much a mix of these different labels. I trained as a dancer from an early age on and got to choreograph small pieces. This will always influence my personal style and vocabulary. I love to see, as well as to create choreographic work. The performances we made with Sinking Sideways are choreographed and counted from beginning to end, and very much on the

border between circus and dance. After studying at a circus university for 4 years, specialising in dance acrobatics, and creating and performing mainly in the circus scene since then, I'm strongly rooted in this field. The label "dance acrobat" felt a bit off right after school, as I disliked the idea of being limited to this one thing - at the same time I neither can nor wish to deny the influence this discipline has on my work. Acrobatic movements often can be a starting point for me, from where I then try to break it down or dive deeply into the choreographic possibilities. "Circus maker" fits better to describe what I am doing - which is "something with circus" - and adding the label "choreographer" finally made me feel like this pile of descriptors might be somewhat representative of what I am doing. I'll continue searching.

How do you see contemporary circus being perceived in Germany today?

The first thing that comes to my mind is how much the perception changed since I started my studies. Before I went to circus school, I had no idea contemporary circus existed, and it was totally by chance that I entered this scene. So 2015, in preparation for my applications to circus highschoools, was the first time that I looked into circus in Germany. Already back then there was a network established (which is now the Bundesverband Zeitgenös-

sischer Zirkus - BUZZ) to connect circus makers and venues in Germany and to make it known as an artform. I am very grateful to all the people who put in the energy and time to help the German circus scene grow. I am profiting from it myself immensely.

So from my point of view, from within the German circus scene, there is a sense of belonging and there is definitely palpable progress and more and more resources available. At the same time, I have insight into the circus field in Belgium, the Netherlands and France, and I feel the network in each of these countries is tighter, and - especially in France and Belgium there are incredible resources available which we - at the moment - can only dream of in Germany.

The general population from my perspective has little to no understanding of what contemporary circus is or that it even exists, just like me before I went to circus school; I imagine there is again a difference between certain regions within Germany. Where I live - the total countryside - there is no performing possibilities and if you'd ask a person on the street about circus they'd probably think of traditional German circuses or big tops, or of Cirque du Soleil. So, from my perspective, there has been a lot of progress, and there is lots of growing still to be done.

What are the main challenges you face as a circus artist in Germany?

First up, I really think these challenges are totally different depending on what style of circus you do in Germany. There are circus artists who work in “varietés”, there are street performers, there are people who do abstract work, those who do a mix of these things or something completely different. I don't know first hand how the situation is for artists who focus on variété or street shows, but from my perspective there potentially is already a better infrastructure regarding that type of circus (variété theatres, street theatres festivals). As a circus maker who mainly works with my own company, which produces abstract evening-length shows, the main problem is to find performing possibilities. If I could only work in Germany, I would not be able to live from my work. There still are too few festivals and theatres that consider taking contemporary circus into their programs. And it is tied to a lot of organisational work to make something happen outside the by now established venues/festivals.

I'm lucky to have entered the scene at a moment where a lot of work has been done by other artists, and circus lovers already. Thanks to them the possibilities to get funding have increased a lot. Regarding residency places I feel that there are more and more possibilities, but to be completely honest we usually work with organisations in other countries which just offer better working conditions.



Cécile a performance by the collective Sinking sideways © Rudy Carlier

Can you give us an insight into your future plans?

After graduating from Codarts in 2020, I founded my collective Sinking Sideways together with Dries Vanwalle, and we produced and created two shows back to back. Since the beginning of 2023, we have been touring these pieces, and we managed to build an amazing team around us that supports us with production, selling, and technical questions. Still, the 3 years after school were incredibly intense and I really overworked myself. I went close to a border I want to stay away from in the future. So, one of my current goals is to actively work towards a better balance, to give importance to my life outside of work and to find ways of working sustainably, in all different regards. This is a question I'm also interested

in researching artistically. Apart from this - which is a political topic already - I want to become more active in my political activism. I, like many others, am scared of what is happening in the world at the moment and I cannot just watch. I often feel like the contemporary circus scene portrays itself as an apolitical place (and of course, this is not true for everybody). And I hate it. So I feel a very strong urge to look for different ways of politicizing my work and the whole scene. We have to take responsibility in society and be vocal and active to change things. Not necessarily on stage, but maybe behind.

I am looking forward to continuing the work with my collective. Next to that I want to develop my own work, continue writing about circus, and collaborate with other artists on different levels.



INTERVIEW WITH CLAIR HOWELLS



Clair Howells is an actor and artistic director of Theater Titanick. Born in Melbourne, Australia, she has lived in Europe for over 30 years. She trained at the Scuola Internazionale di Teatro (Rome, Italy) and with Philippe Gaulier (Paris, France). In 1990, she co-founded Theater Titanick in Münster, Germany. Since then the company has toured internationally with over 1000 performances worldwide. She is curator of the FLURSTÜCKE Festival in Münster. She is a co-founder of the German Association of Theatre in Public Spaces and has been on its board since 2012.

In your experience, what are the particularities of creating in the public space in Germany?

Performing arts in public spaces creates a setting that brings people together in a cultural event, providing a platform for exchange and discourse and creating identity. This art form is widely known and accepted among the population in Germany.

However, this is not reflected in the funding: although Germany is proud of its rich cultural history and its national budget for culture is very high, only a small percentage goes to the independent sector and only a tiny fraction reaches the performing arts in public spaces. There is a presumption on the part of many funding bodies that the genre lacks content and artistic quality. It is often seen as light entertainment for the masses.

The funding system is largely based on juries that select the companies, artists and projects to receive funding. There are very few specialists from our genre on the juries.

For many years, individual artists in the independent scene did not receive funding to develop their projects and experiment. During COVID, artists could apply for funding to do research without necessarily having to produce. This subsidy has since been reduced.

Unfortunately, contrary to many other European countries, we have no unemployment benefits for freelance artists. Less money for artists to nurture and develop their art means more pressure to succumb to the mainstream.

Performing in public spaces requires permits and the support of local authorities. The rules have become strict regarding noise pollution, public safety, pyrotechnics and the use of public services. The city is increasingly driven by the needs of the commercial sector and more and more urban space is privately owned. If the rules are taken literally, it is almost impossible to organise events in public spaces. This is not to say that there are no cities where such cultural events take place, however it is often due to the hard work and perseverance of passionate organisers and artists.

You regularly work for commission-based projects. Could you highlight three major ones in which you recently got involved with?

For over thirty years, Theater Titanick has created and performed productions for and in public spaces internationally. Our artistic aim is to tell stories by combining acting with large-scale scenography and structures. In addition to the productions we create for touring, we often create pieces for specific milestones in a city. We transform the history and essence of the event into an artistic production for the city,

creating scenes and images that engage the senses, create new narratives and reach a diverse audience. We work with local actors, musicians and dancers as well as local schools, theatres and dance companies, involving a wide range of people.

AUF ACHSE (on wheels) was devised as a performative tour through the ruins of the industrial complex where our factory hall is located. Locomotives and railway carriages were built here for 120 years. Numerous scenes were created: giant wheels were set in motion by acrobats; a horde of mud-covered creatures emerged from mounds of earth; a field of locomotive axles was brought to life with by a pulsating choreography of dancers; interviews with former workers were transformed into electronic sounds that bounced off the dilapidated walls.

FUTURE NOW was commissioned by the Leipzig Opera as a huge spectacle involving young people on the square in front of the opera house. Titanick ran a project with school students: How do we want to shape our future? Their utopia was transformed into scenes with the elements fire, earth, wind and water, accompanied by the opera choir and ballet company

GOLDRAUSCH - Goldrush celebrated the 250th anniversary of the jewellery industry in Pforzheim and involved over 200 actors and musicians. A giant

gold treasure chest was driven through the city and opened up to reveal its hidden treasures: the workers arrived to a deafening drum beat, fire was used to manufacture a long gold chain and in the end a dance around the towering maypole paved the way for the future.

Since 2011, you have been curating **Flurstücke**, which is an international festival for theatre, dance, film and performance in the public space and takes place every four years in Münster. How are these different art forms being intertwined during the event, and how do they influence each other?

The festival is curated by four different bodies: Theater Titanick for theatre in public spaces, Theater im Pumpenhaus for dance, Filmwerkstatt Münster for film and video and Kunsthalle Münster for performance.

We aim to present outstanding German and international art projects that are designed for the public space, transforming the city for four days with provocative and innovative projects that are accessible to a wide audience. All the curators are specialists in their own fields, giving the festival a broad and diverse mix.

We often have themes that run through the festival. One of the themes of the 2024 edition is post-colonialism. So the different genres will approach the same theme from different perspectives: we have an installation of African artefacts that will be accompanied by the ambient compositions of a Kenyan musician; a company from Catalonia will offer the audience a guided tour of an abandoned building that could be a new home for newly arrived immigrants; the people of Münster will be invited to reconstruct a building from the old zoo where the eccentric director once held exhibitions of people from different cultures.



© AUF ACHSE, Photographer Martin Jehnichen

What are the main challenges you face as an outdoor arts company in Germany? What actions are still needed to strengthen the outdoor arts sector and its players in Germany?

The main challenge for Theater Titanick is financial. Our international bookings have been drastically reduced since COVID and our ongoing funding has been cut. The cost of running a company with a production space and infrastructure is high. As we do not perform in theatres, we need our own tour equipment. There is no funding for this; we can only apply for funding for the artistic process. Furthermore, the amount of funding does not depend on the size of the company, so we receive the same amount as smaller companies, even though our productions tour with an average of 20 people.

We have to apply for funding from several institutions in order to reach our budget, so we spend a lot of time writing applications and even more time preparing the accounts for audit. We have been lobbying for an increase in our funding and for simplified administrative procedures.

Scenic structures are tightly controlled and we often need a construction book, which involves a complex technical and structural analysis by registered engineers and is very expensive.

We also face a challenge in the transition to the new generation. In the current economic climate, where culture is an optional expense, it is difficult to encourage young people to take the risk and responsibility required to run a company. It is also increasingly difficult to recruit, especially in the technical field. Many of the members of our team have moved on to other areas of work since COVID.

In order to strengthen our genre, we need specific funding for artists and companies in the public space. We need to make the quality of our work visible to the politicians and the people who make decisions about funding. We need to encourage journalists to write about our work and increase the literature and critique. We need our genre to be recognised as an art form by universities and colleges so that courses can be set up and funded. Our association (BUTIÖR) has been lobbying for this recognition since the early 2000s. We have come a long way through our advocacy and unity. But there is still a long way to go.



INTERVIEW WITH MATTHIAS ROMIR



© Christian
Martin

Matthias Romir grew up with the European juggling-scene festivals in the 1990s. At the age of 18, he created his first busking show. After studying special education in Würzburg, Germany and Budapest, Hungary, he finally made his passion into his profession in 2008. He has mainly been touring his own shows ever since. Matthias has identified as a juggler until he discovered the power of red nose clowning for himself while touring with the German Division of Clowns Without Borders in Sri Lanka and Iran between 2011 and 2014. Along with his solo work at theatres and street festivals, he also regularly lends a quirky touch to variety shows and cross-genre productions. He has toured with the Tiger Lillies' Freakshow, The Funky MaMa Fire Crew and with Circus Quantenschau, among others. Since around 2016, Matthias has worked as a director, outside eye or coach for various artists in the field of circus, magic and street theatre. He has curated the Gala Show of Nuremberg Juggling Convention, currently the biggest Juggling event in Germany, since 2009. In 2023 he took over the Artistic Direction of ZirkArt Festival, an Outdoor Festival for Contemporary Circus in Forchheim, Germany.

As a self-taught circus artist, you have a history of performing both indoors and outdoors. In your experience, what is the value of performing contemporary circus in/ within public spaces?

Three main things come to my mind that distinguish a performance in a public space from one in a theatre.

The first one is the impact of the surrounding: theatres are protected spaces that are designed to allow both the artist and the audience to concentrate fully on the performance. That is great for me as a performer, because I can fully concentrate on what I want to deliver without always having to create attention. When outdoors, you will have to take care not to lose people's attention, and you can't completely block out what is happening around, and certain things might find their way into the show. I personally like this aspect, because it's an element of chance that makes every show unique. Of course, it also has its downsides, as sometimes you just get interrupted in a bad moment.

The second is the low threshold: the theatre is an elitist place. Outdoors, there is at least the chance that



© Jens Mittelstenscheid

someone who would never go to the theatre will spontaneously be carried away by the show. I like that idea.

Finally, the third is the weather: I like this aspect sometimes more, sometimes less. When I started performing on the street, I learnt that I have to think carefully about how to "make my show work". I do my best not to neglect what I have learned outdoors when I perform on the stage and vice

versa. Even in the protected setting of a stage, you shouldn't lose sight of the fact that a show has to work. In the same way, when performing on the street, you should not forget what you actually want to show and have something to offer beyond just "a show that works".

You have experience with solo works as well as collaborative works. How do you find that these different work processes complement each other in your practice?

I'm a very sociable person. Nevertheless, I mostly work alone. Even in most of the "ensemble" shows I've worked in, my solo work was just woven into the overall work. It's often the case in circus and variety theatre that something is sold as an ensemble, which is actually a bunch of soloists thrown together. Nevertheless, at the end of the evening, you are a group that receives the applause together for the overall performance. That can be very nice. And there are so many wonderful things that you can't do on your own, such as being accompanied by live music or interacting with other performers, which I particularly enjoy. Of course, sometimes you are involved in a scene that you don't think is one hundred percent convincing. I often have to overcome that, but it helps me to say: this isn't my show, I didn't make that decision.

Likewise, I used to tour with a fire show duo for six years. It was a fun show to play, but most of all I enjoyed travelling in the company of someone very familiar to me. The show came to a natural end without us ever officially breaking up. One reason was certainly that my solo work has always been more important to me.

In recent years, I gained more experience with ensemble work in the role of director or outside eye. What I find great about it is that you can suddenly create things that you could never do on your own. I'm much better at coming up with ideas than I am at realising them. It's great when others turn your fantasies into reality. However, as much as I love doing this job for others, I find it difficult to allow anyone to intervene in my own work. Of course, this slows down the work process immensely. I always wait for the moment when everything just happens to come together, and I can no longer contain myself. That can take time.

In addition to your work as an artist, you are also as active as a festival curator. What types of performances do you look for when curating a festival?

I'm still a newcomer in my role as festival curator. I've only been running a festival since last year. So, I don't see myself in a position to speak in general terms, I can only say what I look out for at our little festival. At ZirkArt, we show contemporary circus outdoors. Last year, the festival took place in a somewhat reduced form on a small site. There were never two shows on at the same time. In this setting, the dramaturgy of a festival is actually quite similar to that of a show, because the audience doesn't choose what they can see and when. So, I primarily made sure that the shows complement each other and offer a good rhythm and a varied overall experience. Something to laugh at, something to marvel at, something to think about, something for the heart. I try to show as wide a range of today's circus as possible and cater to different tastes. But I wouldn't go so far as to book something that I don't like myself just because people might like it.

I want to feel passion, joy of playing, approachability, a bit of anarchy and a certain vulnerability in the performances I book. I like to present at least one show that I think will polarise, because then people know what to talk about. Furthermore, I also try not only to book at least as many women as men but also to present different role models. Unfortunately, it is still necessary to show that women in the circus can present themselves differently than just young and physically attractive.

In addition to the shows, I pay attention to the ambience: decoration, music, cuisine, and, above all, enough time to meet, exchange impressions and escape everyday life together for a moment.

Do you apprehend audiences differently while being an artist on stage or a festival curator behind the curtain? If so, how?

Foremost, as a festival curator, I try to spend as little time as possible "behind the curtain". If I want to understand my own festival, I have to experience it myself as a spectator. That's probably the biggest difference: I'll probably never experience my own show as an audience member.

I understand everything I do on stage as a dialogue with the audience. I do things to provoke certain reactions, and these reactions in turn do something to me. Also, I have to pay close attention to what is happening to my audience any time during the show. As a curator, I can take a more relaxed approach. If everything is well-prepared, I can actually pursue my main task during the festival relatively calmly, which I see as ensuring that the artists feel comfortable and keeping an eye on the overall programme. I just have to be able to let go, trust the artists and my team that they will manage, and accept that at a certain point I no longer have too much influence on what is happening.


Another big difference is that as an artist I very often play the same programme for a different audience, whereas as a festival organiser I always create a new programme for more or less the same audience.


SECTORAL MAPPING OF GERMANY

This mapping was conducted by Circostrada, Tollhaus and zweifellos.net in collaboration with key sectoral stakeholders from Germany. It is not intended to be exhaustive but aims to provide a general overview of contemporary circus and outdoor arts in the region at the time of publication.

ARTISTS

You can find lists of artists and groups on BUTIÖR and BUZZ websites.

BUTIÖR:  <https://theater-im-oeffentlichen-raum.de/en/mitglieder/all/>

BUZZ:  <https://bundesverband-zeitgenoessischer-zirkus.de/en/verband/mitgliederliste/>

FESTIVALS

Aerial Arts Festival

Discipline: Circus

Location: Berlin

Contact person: Zinnia Nomura & Florian Bögner - Project Leader


 <https://www.aerialartsfestival.de/>

ALLES MUSS RAUS

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Kaiserlautern

Contact person: Andreas Meder & Matthias Mandos - Directors

 <https://www.alles-muss-raus-festival.de/>

at.tension

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Lärz

Contact person: Kulturkosmos - Organisation


 <https://www.attension-festival.de/de/festival>

ATOLL Festival

Discipline: Circus

Location: Karlsruhe

Contact person: Bernd Belschner & Stefan Schöfeld - Artistic Directors


 <https://atoll-festival.de>

Berlin Circus Festival

Discipline: Circus

Location: Berlin

Contact person: Josa Köbel - Artistic Director


 <https://www.berlin-circus-festival.de/>

BILDSTÖRUNG

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Location: Detmold

Contact person: Sabine Kuhfuß - Artistic Director


 <https://bildstoerung.net/>

Blue Balloon Festival

Discipline: Circus

Location: Nordhausen

Contact person: Steffi Böttcher - Artistic Director

 <https://www.studio44ev.de/>

boulevART

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Location: Wismar

Contact person: Andreas Meder - Director

 <https://www.boulevart-festival.de/>

CircusDanceFestival

Discipline: Circus

Location: Köln

Contact person: Tim Behren - Artistic Director

 <https://www.circus-dance-festival.de>

Composé Festival

Discipline: Circus

Location: Jena

Contact person: Friedemann Ziepert - Managing Director

🌐 www.compose-festival.de

Düsseldorf Festival

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Düsseldorf

Contact person: Christiane Oxenfort & Andreas

Dahmen - Artistic Directors

🌐 www.duesseldorf-festival.de

Festival Perspectives

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Saarbrücken

Contact person: Célia Galiny - Project Manager

🌐 www.festival-perspectives.de

Freeman Festival München

Discipline: Circus

Location: München

Contact person: Michael Heiduk - Director

🌐 <https://pepearts.de/>

Gassensationen

Discipline: Circus & Outdoor Arts

Location: Heppenheim

Contact person: Martin Fraune - Director

🌐 <https://gassensationen.de/>

Internationales Straßentheaterfestival Holzminden

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Location: Holzminden

Contact person: Nicole Ruppert - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://www.holzminden.de/tourismus-freizeit/kultur/strassentheater-festival/>

Internationale Straßentheaterfestival Ludwigshafen

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Location: Ludwigshafen

Contact person: Monika Schill - Director

🌐 <https://www.ludwigshafen.de/lebenswert/kultur/festivals>

Internationales Straßenkulturfest Nordhorn

Location: Nordhorn

Contact person: Kathrin Bahr - artistic director

🌐 <https://www.nordhorn.de/kultur-freizeit/strassenkulturfest>

Just for Fun

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Location: Darmstadt

Contact person: Iris Daßler & Rainer Bauer - Artistic Directors

🌐 <http://www.justforfun-darmstadt.de/>

Kleines Fest

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Location: Hannover

Contact person: Casper de Vries - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://www.kleinesfest-hannover.de/hannover/kleines-fest/>

Kulturpflaster

Discipline: Circus & Outdoor Arts

Location: Regensburg

Contact person: Tine Christa - Director

🌐 <https://www.kulturpflaster.org/>

KunstFestSpiele Herrenhausen

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Hannover

Contact person: Ingo Metzmacher - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://kunstfestspiele.de/>

LA STRADA

Discipline: Circus & Outdoor Arts

Location: Bremen

Contact person: Frederieke Behrens - Director

🌐 <https://lastrada-bremen.de/>

LOFFT Zirkus trifft Tanz

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Leipzig

Contact person: Anne-Cathrin Lessel - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://www.lofft.de/>

Lurupina Festival

Discipline: Circus

Location: Hamburg

Contact person: Andree Wenzel - Artistic Director

🌐 www.lurupina.de

No Elephants!

Discipline: Circus

Location: Freiburg

Contact person: Stefan Schönfeld - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://www.momentlabor.org>

PACT Festival

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Tübingen

Contact person: Elisabeth Weiß - Project Manager

🌐 <https://pact-tuebingen.de/>

ParkPerPlex Festival

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Location: Norderstedt

Contact person: Kathrin Bahr & Julia von Wild -
Artistic Directors

🌐 <https://www.parkperplex.de/>

Play

Discipline: Circus

Location: Berlin

Contact person: Anke Politz - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://chamaeleonberlin.com/en/>

Ruhrfestspiele

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Recklinghausen

Contact person: Anna Fentrop & Lilja Kopka -
Artistic Directors

🌐 www.ruhrfestspiele.de

Sommerwerft & Winterwerft

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Frankfurt

Contact person: Bernd Abraham & Bernhard Bub -
Directors

🌐 <https://sommerwerft.de/>

SpielART

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: County Oldenburg

Contact person: Lisa Rinne - Director

🌐 <https://spielart-geest.de/index.html>

STAMP Festival

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Location: Hamburg

Contact person: Tom Lanzki - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://www.altonale.de/stamp-festival/>

tête-à-tête

Discipline: Circus & Outdoor Arts

Location: Rastatt

Contact person: Kathrin Bahr & Julia von Wild -
Artistic Directors

🌐 <https://www.tete-a-tete.de/index.php>

Theaterfestival Isny

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Isny

Contact person: Peter Neubert - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://theaterfestival-isny.de/>

Tollwood

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: München

Contact person: Bianca Schmitz & Werner Buss -
Artistic Directors

🌐 <https://www.tollwood.de/>

Via Thea Festival

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Location: Görlitz/Zgorzelec

Contact person: Christiane Hoffmann - Director

🌐 <https://www.viathea.de/>

Von Nord nach West - Werkstattbühne on tour

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Location: Germany

Contact person: Gert Rudolph - Director

🌐 <https://www.nordnachwest.de>

Welttheater der Straße

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Location: Schwerte

Contact person: Holger Ehrich - Director

🌐 <https://www.welttheater-der-strasse.de/>

Winterzirkus

Discipline: Circus

Location: Potsdam

Contact person: Franka Schwuchow & Jens-Uwe
Sprengel - Artistic Directors

🌐 <https://www.t-werk.de/festival/winterzirkus>

Zeit für Zirkus Festival

Discipline: Circus

Location: Germany

Contact person: BUZZ / Marina Rieger -
Project Manager

🌐 <https://zeitfuerzirkus.de/>

ZirkArt Festival

Discipline: Circus & Outdoor Arts

Location: Forchheim

Contact person: Matthias Romir - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://www.jtf.de/zirkart>

Zirkustheater Festival Dresden

Discipline: Circus

Location: Dresden

Contact person: Heiki Ikkola - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://zirkustheater-festival.de/>

SCHOOLS

CircArtive School

Discipline: Circus
Location: Gschwend
Contact person: Sven Alb - Managing Director
🌐 www.circartiveschool.de

Cirque Intense

Discipline: Circus
Location: Neuenburg
Contact person: Robert Eisele - Managing Director
🌐 <https://cirque-intense.de/>

Seneca Intensiv

Discipline: Circus
Location: Berlin
Contact person: Inga Groß - Artistic Director
🌐 www.senecaintensiv.de

Staatliche Artistenschule Berlin

Discipline: Circus
Location: Berlin
Contact person: Martina Räther - Director
🌐 <http://www.artistenschule-berlin.de/>

ARTISTIC VENUES

Burghof

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Lörrach
Contact person: Timo Sadovnik - Director
🌐 <https://www.burghof.com/de>

Chamäleon

Discipline: Circus
Location: Berlin
Contact person: Anke Politz - Artistic Director
🌐 www.chamaeleonberlin.com

E-Werk

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Freiburg
Contact person: Sofie Anton - Production Manager
🌐 www.ewerk-freiburg.de

Flottmannhallen

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Herne
Contact person: Janina Fenske - Artistic Director
🌐 www.flottmann-hallen.de

Katapult

Discipline: Circus
Location: Berlin
Contact person: Daniela Titze - Artistic director
🌐 <https://katapult.berlin/>

Lofft Das Theater

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Leipzig
Contact person: Anne-Cathrin Lessel - Artistic Director
🌐 <https://www.lofft.de/>

Ostpassagetheater

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Leipzig
Contact person: Matthias Schluttig - Artistic Director
🌐 <https://ost-passage-theater.de/>

Pfefferbergtheater

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Berlin
Contact person: Christine Ritter - Managing Director
🌐 www.pfefferberg-theater.de

Societaetstheater

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Dresden
Contact person: Heiki Ikkola - Director
🌐 <https://www.societaetstheater.de/>

Sudhaus

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Tübingen
Contact person: Adalbert Sedlmeier - Director
🌐 <https://www.sudhaus-tuebingen.de/>

T-Werk

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Potsdam
Contact person: Franka Schwuchow & Jens-Uwe Sprengel - Artistic Directors
🌐 <https://www.t-werk.de/>

Theater Tempus fugit

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Lörrach
Contact person: Karin Maßen - Director
🌐 <https://fugit.de/>

Tollhaus

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Karlsruhe
Contact person: Bernd Bellschner - Artistic Director
🌐 www.tollhaus.de

UFA Fabrik

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Berlin
Contact person: Daniela Titze - Artistic director
🌐 <https://www.ufafabrik.de/en>

Zirkus Mond

Discipline: Circus
Location: Berlin
Contact person: Max Mohr - Director
🌐 <https://zirkusmond.de>

ASSOCIATIONS

BAG Zirkus

Discipline: Circus
Location: Germany
Contact person: Sven Alb - Board Member
🌐 <https://www.bag-zirkus.de/>

BUTIÖR (Federal Association for Outdoor Arts)

Discipline: Outdoor Arts
Location: Germany
Contact person: Clair Howells - Board Member
🌐 <https://theater-im-oeffentlichen-raum.de/en/home/>

BUZZ (Federal Association of Contemporary Circus)

Discipline: Circus
Location: Germany
Contact person: Jenny Patschovsky - 1st Chairwoman
🌐 <https://bundesverband-zeitgenoessischer-zirkus.de>

Forum Neuer Zirkus

Discipline: Circus
Location: Germany
Contact person: Cox Ahlers - Board Member
🌐 <https://forum-neuer-zirkus.de/>

Inthega

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Germany
Contact person: Bernward Tuchmann -
Managing Director
🌐 <https://www.inthega.de/>

LAZZ Ba-Wü

Discipline: Circus
Location: Baden-Württemberg
Contact person: Bernd Belschner - Board Member
🌐 <https://lazz-bw.org>

Neuer Zirkus Ruhr

Discipline: Circus
Location: Ruhrgebiet
Contact person: Christian Strüder - Board Member
🌐 <https://neuerzirkus.ruhr/>

ZirkusON (creation alliance for circus arts)

Discipline: Circus
Location: Germany
Contact person: Alice Greenhill - Managing Director
🌐 <https://www.zirkus-on.de/en>

RESIDENCY SPACES

Katapult

Discipline: Circus
Location: Berlin
Contact person: Oli Pinchbeck - Director
🌐 <https://katapult.berlin/>

Maschinenhaus

Discipline: Multidisciplinary
Location: Essen
Contact person: Fabian Sattler - Board Member
🌐 <https://www.maschinenhaus-essen.de/>

Schloss Bröllin

Discipline: Circus
Location: Fahrenwalde
Contact person: Joachim Mohr - Board Member
🌐 www.broellin.de

Tollhaus

Discipline: Circus
Location: Karlsruhe
Contact person: Britta Velhagen - Managing Director
🌐 <https://www.atoll-festival.de/zirkus-im-tollhaus/residenz/>

Zirkusmühle

Discipline: Circus & Outdoor Arts

Location: Kelbra

Contact person: Jana Korb - Director

🌐 <https://luftartistin.de/produktion/circusmuehlekelbra/>

TRAINING SPACES

Artistenkombinat

Discipline: Circus

Location: Leipzig

Contact person: Antonia Stelse - Board Member

🌐 <https://www.artistenkombinat.de/>

CCCC

Discipline: Circus

Location: Köln

Contact person: Dominikus Moos - Manager

🌐 <https://cccc.cologne/>

Circuleum

Discipline: Circus

Location: Stuttgart

Contact person: Timon Schilling - Manager

🌐 <https://www.circuleum.de/>

Circus Hub

Discipline: Circus

Location: München

Contact person: Michael Heiduk - Manager

🌐 <https://circushubmunich.com/>

Katapult

Discipline: Circus

Location: Berlin

Contact person: Oli Pinchbeck - Director

🌐 <https://katapult.berlin/>



Open Space

Discipline: Circus

Location: Bochum

Contact person: Thorsten Bürger - Manager

🌐 www.openspace.ruhr

Q-Space

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Berlin

Contact person: Elizabeth Williams - Managing Director

🌐 <https://q-space.berlin/>

Vuesch

Discipline: Circus

Location: Berlin

Contact person: Daniel Megnet - Manager

🌐 <https://vuesch.org/de/home/>

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND/OR FUNDING BODIES

Fonds Darstellende Künste

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Germany

Contact person: Holger Bergmann - Managing Director

🌐 <https://www.fonds-daku.de/en/>

Goethe Institut

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Germany & Worldwide

Contact person: Dr. Wolf Iro - Manager

🌐 <https://www.goethe.de/de/kul.html>

OTHER

Internationale Kulturbörse Freiburg (Fair)

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Location: Freiburg

Contact person: Karola Mohr - Project Manager

🌐 www.kulturboerse.de

Performance Paderborn (Fair)

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Location: Paderborn

Contact person: Stefan Hermanns - Director

🌐 <https://www.paderborn.de/microsite/performance/index.php>

Tadaa Magazin

Discipline: Circus

Location: Germany

Contact person: Dominikus Moos - Director

🌐 <https://tadaamagazin.de/>

ZirkusPlus Online Platform

Discipline: Circus

Location: Germany

Contact person: Jonathan Völzer - Managing Director

🌐 <https://zirkusplus.de/>

ABOUT CIRCOSTRADA, ARTCENA, TOLLHAUS AND ZWEIFELLOS.NET

CIRCOSTRADA

Circostrada is the European Network for Contemporary Circus and Outdoor Arts.

Created in 2003 with the core mission of furthering the development, empowerment and recognition of these fields at European and international levels, over the years the network has become an important anchoring point for its members and a key interlocutor in the dialogue with cultural policy makers across Europe.

In a few words, Circostrada is:

- A community of contemporary circus and outdoor arts professionals linked together by common values and aspirations, who advocate for greater recognition and more structured cultural policies.
- The voice and reference network of contemporary circus and outdoor arts in Europe.
- A group of passionate and committed individuals who meet several times a year at the network's events.
- A network dedicated to its members, engaged in facilitating the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and good practices at European and international levels.
- A digital resource platform that provides thematic publications, observation tools and news on contemporary circus and outdoor arts, available to all free of charge in English and French.

🌐 www.circostrada.org

ARTCENA

ARTCENA is the National Center for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts, supported by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates Circostrada and is a permanent member of its steering committee. It works in close collaboration with professionals in the sector and offers them both publications and digital resources via its web platform. It also develops mentoring and training actions, tools and services to help them in their everyday practices. It supports contemporary creation through national support programs and encourages the international development of these three sectors.

🌐 www.artcena.fr

TOLLHAUS | KARLSRUHE

In its history the 1982 founded Kulturverein TOLLHAUS very early was attracted by physical theatre, dance, the acrobatic arts of circus and street theatre. End of the 80's TOLLHAUS started to collaborate regularly with the French-German Rock-Circus Gosh and invited famous representatives of Cirque Nouveau.

As a socio-cultural organisation, TOLLHAUS is focused on contemporary circus, but is open to new and exciting developments in a broad cultural field. The program consists of many different artistic genres, especially music and all kinds of performing arts. An essential aspect for the TOLLHAUS is the collaboration with - and especially the presentation of current productions from - the independent scene. In 2016 TOLLHAUS focused its engagement for the contemporary circus in ATOLL Festival, which has been held annually in September ever since. Beside the Berlin CRCS festival ATOLL was the first festival in Germany exclusively designed for contemporary circus arts.

🌐 <https://tollhaus.de>

ZWEIFELLOS.NET

zweifellos.net, based in Bremen, is a cultural agency specialising in managing cultural events, festivals and projects. Led by Julia von Wild and Kathrin Bahr, zweifellos.net offers a wide range of services and is responsible for the artistic direction and production of ParkPerPlex and tête-à-tête festival. Collaborating closely with artists and stakeholders the agency strives to create unique and inspiring cultural experiences.

🌐 <https://zweifellos.net>

