

AGM
PUBLICATION

CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS & OUTDOOR ARTS IN LITHUANIA



ARTCENA

ARTCENA is the National Centre for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts, created by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates Circostrada and has a permanent seat on its Steering Committee. It works closely with sector professionals and offers them publications and multimedia resources through its digital platform. It develops mentoring, training, tools and services to help them in their daily practices. It provides support to contemporary creation through national programmes and encourages international development of these three sectors.

This publication
was edited
by Circostrada

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EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR
CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS
AND OUTDOOR ARTS

Since 2003, Circostrada Network has been working to develop and structure the fields of circus and street arts in Europe and beyond. With more than 140 members from over 40 countries, it helps building a sustainable future for these sectors by empowering cultural players through activities in observation and research, professional exchanges, advocacy, capacity-building and information.



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FOREWORD

These are certainly peculiar times to investigate the living body/ies theme of the current Circostrada triennial project. We are slowly ushering in a global pandemic, a war is raging in Europe, and a report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change just confirmed that without “immediate and deep carbon emissions reductions across all sectors, limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees is beyond reach¹”.

“What are we going to do about it?”. We know we need a planetary shift in consciousness, we know we need to take action now, and we know that eco-judgement and eco-anxiety won’t help us move forward. And with a little bit of *chutzpah* - and lots of care, thoughtfulness, and dedication - we can also put together the first Annual General Meeting of Circostrada in the Baltics, in the frame of Cirkuliacija, the international contemporary circus festival taking place each year in Kaunas, Lithuania.

Still, living body/ies are getting hurt just 700 km away from Kaunas, aggressive bodies trying to overcome bodies of will. Only 1500 km from Kaunas lies what used to be the city of Mariupol, where bodies are under the ruins, cannot be buried, and cannot be saved. Yet, here we are, meeting artists and cultural workers, discovering the local scene, and presenting an art form in which we manifest bodies that hold, bodies that catch, bodies that communicate and bodies that observe and take that in.

In the upcoming days, we will have the chance to meet up with almost everybody working in the field of contemporary circus and outdoor arts, a very dynamic ecosystem counting, however, less than a dozen active actors each. The story goes that, in Lithuania, contemporary circus arrived the other way around than the “traditional way” - other countries had artists bring in the art form and then producers and organisations appeared. This also means that Lithuania had almost no local artists when producers and a couple of independent venues and festivals appeared and that each artist had big expectations to fulfil.

This time, Cirkuliacija - a festival that happens each year in a different neighbourhood - has big shoes to fill and we are extremely happy to host the network members here. Even though, in these highly challenging times happiness does not come without guilt, yet it is more important than ever to remind ourselves of the mission each one of us stated in the beginning of our journeys, the mission that gave our work meaning. This Annual General Meeting will be even more special this year because many network members haven’t had the opportunity to meet for quite some time, and also because Kaunas is one of the three current European Capitals of Culture, together with Esch-sur-Alzette in Luxembourg and Novi Sad in Serbia.

During these days, the living body/ies theme will gain new meanings: meanings that may not bring clear and right solutions, but our actions might inspire. Inspire and act.

Gildas Aleksa

Artistic Director of the theatre company of Teatronas and Cirkuliacija International Contemporary Circus Festival

Stéphane Segreto-Aguilar

Circostrada Network Coordinator / Head of International Development at Artcena

Foreword written for the Annual General Meeting of Circostrada co-organised with Teatronas, in the frame of Cirkuliacija festival (June 8-11, 2022, Kaunas, Lithuania).

¹ Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change. You can access the full report here: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-3/>

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CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS AND OUTDOOR ARTS IN LITHUANIA: WHERE DO WE STAND AND HOW DID WE GET THERE?

By Aušra Kaminskaitė



Aušra Kaminskaitė is a performing arts critic based in Vilnius, Lithuania. She graduated from Theatre Sciences at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. Her Master thesis was based on analysis of contemporary acting methods and their complexity.

Since 2011, Aušra Kaminskaitė has been publishing her reviews on theatre, dance and contemporary circus performances, as well as interviews and articles on cultural topics in Lithuanian newspapers, magazines and web pages. She was the first one to get an award from the Lithuanian Association of Performing Arts Critics. Since 2017 she has been a lecturer at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre.

Though contemporary circus and outdoor arts are among the oldest art forms in the world, a lot of today's artists and art-lovers consider them as new, and therefore marginal art forms. Especially in Lithuania, where citizens have lived under harsh Soviet occupation for 50 years and were restricted from a lot of interesting phenomena developed in Western countries. This text includes a bit of historical context and some notifications on education, international festivals, artists and aesthetics of Lithuania-based circus and outdoor arts.

I would have loved to start this article with a panegyric on Lithuanian contemporary circus and outdoor arts, however, I must admit that in most Baltic countries, these fields are still at the very early stage of their development and therefore we are not quite there yet. Being aware of this reality, it is no surprise if Lithuanians, foreigners and all those showing a strong interest in these fields do not consider the country to be a reference place for these art forms. And there are reasons for this.

For those living in countries which have not been occupied during the last few centuries, or those living in countries where the weather temperature barely drops under 0°C, I must enlighten them with some knowledge about the Lithuanian context, which is not too favourable for outdoor arts and

contemporary circus. When contemporary circus emerged in the early 70's and started spreading all around

Western Europe and North America, Lithuania was under occupation of the Soviet Union and its inhabitants



© *Walking the Line* by Benjamin Vanderwalle, SPOT festival. Photographer: Mantas Repečka

were kept far away from the so-called “capitalist culture”. While in Western societies circus was being developed, Lithuania as well as other Soviet-occupied territories were only starting to get acquainted with modern – or what we are used to call – traditional circus. This circus genre was fully funded by the Soviet government at the time and worked as propaganda. Soviet circus artists were considered among the best in the world and performances were not supposed to encourage the audience to rethink anything – they were regarded as mere entertainment for the population. The Soviet government was therefore against opening up to other ‘unknown’ forms of circus, as it would not have served its interests but quite the opposite. Not only did it

restrain circus from growing professionally, but it also condemned circus to be dependent on government’s funding and requirements.

Outdoor arts in Lithuania have been facing some similar issues. For example, immersive pieces like guided tours, performances in front of restaurants or any other crowded public spaces, etc., usually enact freedom in the audience who faces it either by choice or by accident. Thus, it was not perceived as a suitable art form for the government and outdoor artists did not have enough freedom of expression as well as opportunities to learn from Western countries during Soviet occupation. That being said, the most problematic issue in Lithuania lies in the weather

conditions. Summer season is pretty short and often rainy. It might not sound like a huge problem, however it is mostly for onstage open-air performances with technical devices and for circus artists who find it dangerous to perform under rainy conditions (especially acrobats).

Despite all this, today Lithuania has grown a lot and is finally ready to present its first contemporary circus phenomena and a little bit of outdoor arts as well. In that regard, international festivals bear the primary role in presenting these art fields as well as inspiring artists and giving them first opportunities to learn from professionals.

International festivals – a trampoline for local professional art for instance

The first one to introduce contemporary circus to Lithuania was the legendary festival LIFE. Part of the programme of 1999 was dedicated to huge contemporary circus performances. However, this ambitious programme led to the bankruptcy of the festival (the audience was not ready to pay as much for seeing circus as what the organisers had anticipated) instead of fostering the development of contemporary circus in Lithuania. That aside, some LIFE programmes included good quality outdoor arts, which are still remembered for a few of them as the best shows ever performed in independent Lithuania.

The biggest push and impact on young artists to learn and perform contemporary circus came along with the international festival New Circus Weekend, established by Audronis Imbrasas in cooperation with the French Culture Institute. First held in 2006, the festival is still taking place in Arts Printing House, the best-known area for non-governmental artists and arts institutions in Lithuania. The festival is organised in Vilnius annually, though in 2021 its name was



© *Try Again* by Taigi Cirkas. Photographer: Julita Dargytė

changed to Helium. For most Lithuanian artists and the general audience, New Circus Weekend was the first encounter with contemporary circus.

In 2013 a new festival emerged. It was called Contemporary Circus Festival Kaunas 2013 and was held in the second biggest city of Lithuania – Kau-

nas. It was initiated and organised by theatre company Teatronas, led by Gildas Aleksa, who wanted to present his circus performance *Maya* and all then Lithuanian circus artists, most of whom actually performed outdoor shows. Two years later, in 2015, Teatronas changed the festival’s name to Cirkuliacija while maintaining the focus on the Lithuanian

repertoire and on improving the quality of Lithuanian artists' skills by organising workshops with foreign professionals. After a few years, Cirkuliacija developed its current conception: a strong international festival which takes part in Kaunas' districts located further from the city centre and in small Lithuanian towns. Besides artistic programmes, the festival usually includes workshops for emerging artists and daily activities for native communities of the districts. The tradition of outdoor arts festivals in Lithuania is older than that of circus.

The longest running one is called Šermukšnis (English *Rowan*), firstly held in 1985. Including some gap years, the festival has already been held twenty-one times in Klaipėda, the port city of the country. The programme of the festival presents a lot of outdoor arts forms, even though the predominant performances remain black box shows brought to the open-air stage.

Including Šermukšnis, Lithuania is nowadays lucky enough to have three international outdoor arts festivals

hosted in the three biggest cities. We can also mention SPOT festival in Vilnius, held by Arts Printing House since 2018 and ConTempo festival held by Gintarė Masteikaitė - who had been leading New Circus Weekend from 2015-2018 - and located in Kaunas. Both festivals include Lithuanian and international artists and tend to expand the festivals' geographical areas further from the city centre.

Skills are being developed faster than schools

As is already the case for contemporary circus, outdoor arts festivals are among the rare institutions that create opportunities for artists to learn professional skills and provide the opportunity to create and perform some pieces for the audience. Though some disciplines are taught in universities. e.g. the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre Acting Master programme includes street theatre as well as clowning. Some students also experience clowning classes as well as floor acrobatics (which sometimes is hidden under 'stage movement' subject). However, there is no specific programme dedicated to circus artists or outdoor arts in any Lithuanian university.

On the other hand, there are few spaces available and suited for learning circus in Lithuania. Besides gymnastics schools and Lithuanian modern circuses with family-training traditions, there is a famous school for children in Šakiai. As one of its owners, Raimondas Januševičius states that "there are more children who want to enter the school than what teachers can embrace."



© Cirko Sapiens. Photographer: Vytautas Ališauskas

In October 2020, the first centre for contemporary circus in Lithuania opened its doors. It is called Cirko Sapiens, established by Teatronas and led by Monika Citvaraitė-Lansbergienė. If it started as a school where children, teenagers and adults could learn circus skills, the centre has already been de-

veloped into a residency space. It must be noted that Cirko Sapiens is not the first centre working on new circus productions; indeed, the [Lithuanian Dance Information Centre](#) has been doing it a few years longer.

Public policies support

In Western countries the first contemporary circus artists emerged from the modern (traditional) circus field, however in Lithuania this transformation did

not happen. One can only guess the reason lies in the fear of artists to start doing one's own things without any social and financial guarantees. Circus and

outdoor artists in Lithuania can only finance themselves via project-funding, managed by the [Lithuanian Council for Culture](#), the main state funding organi-

sation for non-governmental arts. Even so, outdoor arts do not have a separate section for projects. The circus section was established a few years ago but still gets fewer applications than any other section, when compared to theatre, music, literature, arts and even dance to some extent..

The number has been growing - especially in the last two years - but this in-

crease is not as fast as we would like to believe. Since there's less competition in the circus section than in any other, some creators choose to apply as a circus project even though the content is more suitable for theatre. This usually happens when artistic projects include clowning - an indescribable genre which, however, is usually perceived as circus in Lithuania. Same goes for outdoor arts - if the project includes

clowning (which is often the case for outdoor arts performances), artists apply as circus projects. This also exposes a problem of recognition for the arts. For example, despite the uniqueness of the outdoor performance *Arrived*, by Jūratė Širvytė and Adrian Schwarzeiner, they must officially show they are doing circus or theatre instead of proudly presenting themselves as outdoor artists.

Reconised, but...

Though circus and outdoor arts in Lithuania are already represented by professional artists and high-quality festivals, these arts forms are still too often considered as amateur ones. Therefore, a huge part of the potential audience just ignores such events. The most efficient way to persuade them to go and watch outdoor arts or circus shows for the first time is to label these performances 'theatre pieces with some extra elements' (e.g. circus skills, open-air stage). Indeed, theatre in Lithuania is the highest recognised stage art and there are at least two reasons for that. Firstly, older generations are used to theatre as the only way to oppose the Soviet regime without getting punished (in that regard, theatre of metaphors¹ was perfect for it). Secondly, Lithuania happened to have a bunch of great theatre directors who satisfied the taste and necessities of Lithuanian audiences (some directors were even popular abroad). Therefore, audiences trust theatre and it is easier to attract people to contemporary genres while 'pretending' they are invited to watch theatre.

In 2011, the first contemporary circus performance presented on stage in



© *Follow Me* by Be Flat, Cirkuliacija. Photographer: Donatas Ališauskas

Lithuania was awarded for the year's best performance for children with a Golden Cross of the Stage - the highest theatre award in the country. This was a great recognition for the genre because it established circus as equally capable of offering a high-class performance. Though, it is important to note that circus back then was still acknowledged as being part of the art-for-children field. Producers and artists in Lithuania must still fight this stereotype.

What about awards for outdoor arts? As far as I can remember, none of such artworks were awarded as best performances. Though *Glaistas*, which is produced by *Operomanija* (started as contemporary opera-orientated company, now working with various genres) and is a tour through the territory of former Vilnius Ghetto for Jews during the Second World War, was awarded with the Golden Cross for the year's best dramaturgy.

¹ Theatre of metaphors is a type of dramatic theatre where metaphors and other artistic means for indirect speech are the main expressive means in a show. Lithuanians also name it 'the Aesopian language' since in such performances, as well as in Aesopian tales, nothing is said directly - the audience must interpret a lot to understand what creators wanted to say. This was a useful tool for a dissident movement against the Soviet regime.

Training of professional artists

The first Lithuanian contemporary circus performance was called *Stebuklingas medis* (Magic Tree) and was staged by juggler Mantas Markevičius, who before worked a lot as an outdoor artist (and still does). After this, he staged two more circus performances for adults but these were not successful and he stepped back from the professional stage.

Almost a decade passed since Lithuania could claim to have a good basis for professional contemporary circus to grow and blossom. Step by step, the small circus community is evolving and now includes those studying or graduated from circus schools, as well as self-trained artists who have been continuously attending workshops and creating short performances for outdoor festivals.

In 2022, there are two contemporary circus companies in Lithuania: Taigi Cirkas is based on aerial acrobatics performances since its members Konstantin Kosovec and Elena Kosovec are both rope artists (though Konstantin has experience in other forms of acrobatics and Elena works on circus dramaturgy). They create performances for both black boxes and outdoor areas.

The second company is called Kanta Company and started its activities in the country in 2021. All three members (Lithuanian Kęstas Matusevičius, Finnish Aino Mäkipää and American Lyla

Goldman) have graduated from the same school in Finland - Salpaus Circus Artist Education. All of them also work as teachers in Cirko Sapiens. Kanta Company still has one performance in their repertoire (*Clothes and Us*) and it is intended for children.

Contemporary circus artists in Lithuania are better known as individual creators rather than members of companies. And the variety of their disciplines is also a sign of the growth of Lithuanian contemporary circus level. Monika Neverauskaitė, the first Lithuanian contemporary circus professional, specialises on Cyr wheel and handstand. Izabelė Kuzelytė, who just started learning at FLIC (Italy), has worked with aerial silks for many years. Paris-based Giedrė Degutytė mixes clowning and hula-hoop, while Kaunas-based Džiugas Kunsmanas and Eneas Vaca Bualo work as a duet for hand-to-hand acrobatics and contact improvisation.

One should not forget clowning - a discipline that connects circus, theatre, outdoor arts, variétés, etc. Marija Baranauskaitė and Žilvinas Beniušis, who both studied with Philippe Gaulier are the best examples of professional clowning as an important part of the development of contemporary circus in Lithuania.

Considering outdoor arts, there are no such companies in Lithuania. There was one in the late 90s (1995-2000),

the outdoor theatre Miraklis, whose established artist Vega Vaičiūnaitė had been creating only outdoor or site-specific performances. A bunch of nowadays well-known Lithuanian artists and culture workers took part in the activity of this community. However, all performances were suspended due to the early death of V. Vaičiūnaitė.

A few years ago, the Lithuanian theatre director Agnius Jankevičius established the company Bad Rabbits, which was strongly devoted to creating a street theatre festival featuring Lithuanian outdoor artists and international ones. This was a content-wise successful project. Based on relevant political topics, performances were healthy-aggressive, filled with dark humour and always free. That's probably one of the reasons why the company had to slow down its creative process. It has not been active on streets for a couple of years already.

Previously mentioned duet of Lithuanian artist J. Širvytė and director, artists, clown A. Schvarzstein from Spain own company [Senųjų menų studija](#) and have been creating successful outdoor performances. Their works are well known to the audience of all outdoor arts festivals mentioned above, as well as to the audience of international festivals. I presume, these artists are best known for their shows on the streets, even though they do not name it as their main art form. And that's probably it.

Aesthetics: Two Ways

It is impossible to categorise the aesthetics of outdoor arts in Lithuania. I have already mentioned deliberately aggressive political performances by Bad Rabbits. Pieces made by J. Širvytė and A. Schvarzstein are usually gently funny and are visualised in vintage style. A lot of other outdoor shows are based on classical theatre, puppet theatre,

circus, amateur theatre, etc. and there it is pointless to seek to compare their aesthetics and categorise them.

On the other hand, it is quite simple to do that with Lithuanian circus as performances that are not intended for children are always either comedies or existential shows.

In the latter [Helium](#) festival, Kanta Company presented their work-in-progress aimed at an adult audience. This show was a research of physical communication of human bodies' and was expressed via hand-to-hand and contact improvisation techniques. As one could expect, it turned out to expose a slow process of exploring each other's movements in an

existential mood. Such aesthetics, when artists go deeply into themselves and look for a dramatic way to express their perception of life, I would name the dominant one in Lithuanian contemporary circus. This direction is always chosen by Taigi Cirkas and once was even taken by Džiugas Kunsmanas in his work *Mood*.

I stress even because most of Kunsmanas' creative works tend to be comic rather than dramatic ones. Comic shows are the second most popular direction in Lithuanian contemporary circus and, actually, in outdoor arts as well. The roots of such aesthetics lay in clowning – a genre which connects a lot of art forms together.

In Lithuania, a country which was never known for having a good sense of humour, the growing popularity and improvement of clowning art is an extremely positive sign. In theatre, we barely have comedies and let's not even start to talk about their quality. Now we have professional comedians (in the broadest way of the concept) who studied in respectful schools with great artists. If clowning is being adapted mostly in the theatre field rather than exposed as an independent art form or a part of the circus field, its popularity and presence on stage is giving the audience a new perspective on the arts.



© *Arrived*. Photographer: Dainius Putinas

Developing an audience is an extremely difficult task. For a long time, artists were hoping that people would come and watch their works, especially if they showed them for free. However, it is important to grow an audience which pays for the tickets and values good quality art in any art form. Finally, professional artists and experienced producers are working on audience development in cities, towns, and district areas. And even though theatre is the best developed stage art form in Lithuania, dance and circus professionals are those who work in regions most successfully.

As one might have noticed, circus in this publication got more attention than outdoor arts. Too often, we see outdoor shows as belonging to other art forms, as if they were just brought out of black boxes. Yet, too often we think of circus as a children-entertainment. These and a lot of other stereotypes arise from ignorance. And ignorance can be destroyed by knowledge brought by good experiences. All those mentioned in the article, as well as a lot of those who were not, work hard on it and results are already obvious.



© *Stebuklingas medis*. Photographer: Dmitrij Matvejev

ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DESCRIBING CREATIVE BODIES

By Renida Baltrušaitytė



Renida Baltrušaitytė, PhD student of sociology at Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania. She is writing a thesis about contemporary circus artists in the Baltic region, focusing on their bodily experiences. She is a former Project Manager (2016-2022) of the contemporary circus festival Cirkuliacija.

In the Lithuanian primary education and public discourse, there is a pejorative connotation of circus and outdoor arts that does not reflect the real picture. In practice, the only opportunity to get acquainted with high-quality cultural examples of these art forms remains through international festivals taking place in Lithuania. If this newly developing art field has been growing significantly over the past few years - the opening of the very first contemporary circus centre in Kaunas is a perfect illustration of this - however, the constant opposition between contemporary and traditional circus is still an impediment to the recognition of circus as an art form worthy of attention and worthy of a well-informed audience.

Common understanding of contemporary circus and outdoor arts in Lithuania

For a long time, circus and outdoor arts in Lithuania have been introduced to children without responding to its current diversity. In fact, both art forms are presented as a unified low-value cultural activity. Such conclusions can be drawn from the descriptions and depictions of these art forms in the Lithuanian educational system, be it in alphabet books, primary and other educational publications, or other works for children. Most of the time both arts are labelled as circus, almost always without distinction of any kind, mostly described from the

perspective of traditional circus, as well as characterised as “an impressive but trivial cultural entertainment”.

During school years, a great possibility for cultural organisation lies in the state-funded extra curriculum programme “Cultural Passport”¹. “Cultural Passport”, enables you to get acquainted with the arts once a year. Unfortunately, access to this programme from the perspective of applying artists is very difficult, especially for circus and outdoor arts

educational activities. From the perspective of school children, they are able to choose from a range of circus activities (e.g. interactive circus show, circus performances, circus educational workshops) but in fact half of them are almost the same for years; the other half are designed to introduce you to a more traditional form of circus. In 2019, none of the 96% of schools using this programme chose to offer free circus activities to school children. All of this leads to a paradoxical situation which was mentioned

¹ More: <https://kulturospasas.emokykla.lt/renginiai?cat=55>

in the 2021 study¹ conducted by the Association “Knowledge Economy Forum”, namely that without this programme and the Lithuanian Council for Culture projects, students would not have the opportunity to take part in circus activities at all, yet very few schools give the possibility to children to discover circus.

In the Lithuanian public discourse, circus is often a metaphor for political and media chaos that does not change the position of this periphery art. The word “circus” often becomes a metaphor for something chaotic and negative, the actions of politicians or political situations in the media are often described as a circus.

Nevertheless, there is still a silver lining here - you can also learn about circus and outdoor arts in Lithuania at several festivals featuring a professional and highly qualitative artistic programme. Those festivals take place in three major Lithuanian cities: *Helium* (Vilnius), *SPOT* (Vilnius), *Cirkuliacija* (Kaunas), *ConTempo* (Kaunas), *PLARTFORMA* (Klaipėda). In 2017, the *Cirkuliacija* festival started focusing on the periphery microregions of Kaunas, which until then were not reached by



© Martynas Plepys

cultural events, and since 2021 it has started transporting the contemporary circus and outdoor performing arts programme to the periphery regions of Lithuania as well. Helium festival has also launched a programme to move away from the city centre and the festival organisers are also complementing the programme with activities in Visaginas. The other festivals are also spreading their artistic programmes beyond the city centre. Educational events, like creative workshops for school children

in *Cirkuliacija 21*, take place in parallel with these festivals, but it is usually intended for those who have at least some movement practices.

In any case, the cultural supply and diversity of the cultural events taking place in the frame of the festivals make it possible to say that they are the greatest influence in forming understanding or getting acquainted with contemporary circus and outdoor arts in Lithuanian society in general.

Describing the creative bodies: experts vs. artists

Circus as an art form with a deep tradition and considerable historical weight, distinguishes itself by the way circus artists use their body, which is usually connected with the specific apparatus through the discipline of circus. In this multifaceted phenomenon, one can see the results of the work of artists, which is inseparable from the tests of courage and fear or even physical capacities. Throughout history, circus and outdoor arts have been marginalised at different times, it was extremely popu-

lar but at some point, it was also considered an example of both high and low culture. And according to Bouissac² (2010), respect and appreciation of circus as an art form is quite recent.

Disagreement in conceptualization

Generally, when periodising circus, the terms are used in very different ways. Sometimes they are separated or grouped: the terms classical, modern, traditional, contemporary, new circus

are often used. Even though most circus scholars are using them to identify the specific periods of circus history, on the contrary, sometimes some of these terms are used interchangeably as synonyms.

Analysing how experts in Lithuania describe circus and outdoor arts, one can notice an existing disagreement over the description. If we refer to foreign literature, the usual division of circus is into two types - traditional and contem-

¹ “Impact Assessment of Cultural Education Activities”, 2021. Research conducted by: Association “Knowledge Economy Forum” (Arminas Varanauskas, Gintarė Zinkevičiūtė), Monika Petraitė, Unė Kaunaitė (expert consultations).

² Paul Bouissac (b. 1934) is sociologist, Professor Emeritus at the University of Toronto (Victoria College). His publications in English and in French include books, monographs, and articles dealing with the ethnosemantics of the circus and the semiotics of gestures, Paleolithic rock art, and animal communication. More: <https://semioticon.com/people/bouissac.htm>

porary. In Lithuania, when talking about today's traditional circus, people often refer to the concept of "modern circus", which is used in international circus research to describe a completely different period. Such a choice is a bit confusing, but it can be used purposely because the term "traditional circus" has pejorative overtones in the discourse, it is heavily associated with the old circus remnants, while completely inaccurate. The other misunderstanding lies in the tendency to use the "new circus" concept to describe today's contemporary circus. This, again, distorts the true meaning of the term when looking at foreign scholar literature. At academic level, scholars in Lithuania write about circus mostly by using the concepts of traditional versus contemporary circus. Although we can agree that in fact, such a division of circus into two parts may lead to some tense dualistic oppositions.

Lithuanian art funding

The position of circus in society has almost always been unstable.

Throughout history it has been adored as well as marginalised then again regarded as a noble art. Unfortunately, traditional circus in Lithuania is still commonly considered as a primitive and scandalous form of circus. Due to this, there is also a noticeable desire to distance oneself from being part of a peripheral art, as well as from being often associated with entertaining content and even questionable artistic quality. So, most of the time, when communicating about contemporary circus and outdoor arts, there is a need to emphasise secession from traditional circus.



© G. Žaltauskaitė

One can see that while contemporary circus is evolving and promoting itself, on the other hand, traditional circus does not seem to be willing to change its common negative perspective. This is also partially reflected in the funding programmes. In 2014-2019, almost 70 percent of contemporary circus and outdoor arts artists were funded through the Lithuanian Culture Council on cultural programme projects rather than through individualised grant programmes. Despite the fact that practically all the artists come from the contemporary circus field, circus is one of the areas that also receives the least scholarship funding in general.

If the contemporary circus field keeps evolving, we have also been witnessing recent changes in traditional circus as well. In 2021, traditional circus communicates more openly about its educational activities and at the same time, traditional circus has started to receive state funding for its projects. Such fi-

nancial assistance is likely to help put a stop to the communication gap in the traditional circus and educate people about circus, as well as outdoor arts' diversity. This may also help to neglect opinions about traditional circus being anything but art.

Misunderstandings in the research

There are very few commissioned research works available in Lithuania. In the past two years more research has started to mention circus but there is still little attention paid to the specificities of the circus community and its rapid change. Fortunately, there has been a growing trend in public cultural institutions to analyse these art forms, there are also researchers from the academic field talking about circus but it is still hard to see the whole picture. Because of this, most of the time there is still a need to rely on experts working inside the field.

Artists talking about contemporary circus and outdoor arts: profile of the professional practitioners

In Lithuania, contemporary circus artists are mainly concentrated in Vilnius and Kaunas. There are also some artists who return to share their finished work

and work-in-progress from abroad. Actually, when artists were asked about their living, they opened up about feeling like outsiders of the society. Some

of them said this comes from the fact they do not care that much about things, like the latest fashion or being rich and having a lot of stuff. At some

point, it is possible to say that being a practitioner of this field makes you a little bit more aware of what you really need because you travel a lot.

On the one hand as a performer, I feel like I should create a more serious image [laughs] of myself, but on the other hand, since I'm from the circus and I'm used to living very simply, I can't even change my shoes, they are usually torn. I like to start moving on the street sometimes, to do something, so I tear apart my clothes very quickly and somehow I don't pay attention to it. I feel that other circus artists stand out there too.
(contemporary circus artist)

Considering the quantitative data of artists' research, they are still facing a lot of questions: is there a need to involve social clowns, which artists are professional enough to be included, are they contemporary enough, etc. Due to this, it is difficult to assess how many circus artists and outdoor art artists are out there. Moreover, there is practically no research about traditional circus artists, just like it is impossible to count artists performing outdoor.

It is said that contemporary circus depth and outer boundaries tend to become blurred and intertwined (Besone 2017: 174). For instance, in the Ita-

lian contemporary circus, it is stated that circus definitions or boundaries are not relevant to practitioners. Circus is named and categorised from the outside (usually cultural policy), but those boundaries are later rethought and redistributed by the practitioners themselves. Both an overly strict definition of this area and its absence can have equally negative consequences. Practitioners of contemporary circus and outdoor arts in Lithuania also express concern about the separation:

I don't really like to separate them a lot because I also think contemporary circus shows can fit into the traditional scene and the other way round.
(contemporary circus artist)

Following this, some of the artists express their unwillingness to separate traditional and contemporary circus as much as the communicative part needs. Some of them don't even want to introduce themselves as "contemporary" artists. Others keep introducing themselves as "circus artists" or just "performers" if they involve bodily practices in their creative work from other fields. On the one hand, the artists said that traditional circus has derogative associations, so at the beginning of their career, they wanted to distance themselves from it. It can be

explained by the fact that some artists express their concerns about this separation and their appreciation of circus' history, and they don't want to say that what they do is somehow a totally new and different thing.

What is more important to creative bodies?

Another problem lies in the fact not to talk about circus as an art form. When there is such a narrative around circus, it affects artists a lot. As artists said, most of the narrative is applied like this: there are several doubts always around their work. Firstly, is the artist creating contemporary performances? Secondly, is the artist not doing too much athletics and not too much entertainment? And if the artists look like doing so, they are associated with traditional circus and thus sometimes not to an artist but a show-man or show-woman.

Besides these doubts about their work, they are also dealing with the problem of lacking places to train. Artists express their appreciation for Cirko Sapiens, a space specially dedicated to contemporary circus. At first glance, it may look like it's not a big deal, but in fact artists are facing a real issue when it comes to finding a place to train.

Interviewer: *Are there many places to work?*

Contemporary circus artist: *Almost non-existent in fact. Professionals who are engaged in solo practice have basically already found places where they are welcome. [...] The only one is Cirko Sapiens, which is specifically dedicated to circus practice. This is the unique place in Lithuania at the moment...*

The other thing is that they have this obligation to prove that they are real artists and are able to create. The last part is hard to endure sometimes because artists are dealing with this problem of a need to not only create but also communicate about the field. And



© Donatas Ališauskas

if it is not possible to live their artistic life, they go elsewhere, where there is no need for agitating the field. We will get an evaluation when this art form becomes more popular [...] I have

to thank a lot of people who are trying to make this happen, because artists [...] don't want to do that either... that kind of agitation there... They just want to go elsewhere to do their own performances,

live their own maximum artistic life now. (contemporary circus artist)

Conclusions

In Lithuania probably the only opportunity to get acquainted with high-quality cultural examples of contemporary circus and outdoor arts remains through the programme of international festivals. When talking about artists, they are still facing real issues - not being able to fully commit to their creative work or to find a place to train. For

some, this is what leads them to leave the country.

Recently, there has been an increase in attempts to analyse circus and outdoor arts, but it is still hard to see the whole picture. Most of the time, circus is named and categorised from the outside (usually cultural policy makers)

but those boundaries are later rethought and redistributed by practitioners themselves. This can explain why some artists express their concerns about this separation and by their appreciation of circus history, they don't want to introduce themselves as "contemporary" as somehow part of totally new and different art.



THE INTERVIEW CORNER: VOICES AND VIEWS OF LITHUANIAN CULTURAL LEADERS AND ARTISTS



INTERVIEW WITH GILDAS ALEKSA



Gildas Aleksa is a theatre director from Lithuania. He is the head of the organisation Teatronas, which founded the contemporary circus festival Cirkuliacija and recently opened the first contemporary circus centre in the country Cirko Sapiens.

You are the artistic director of the contemporary circus festival Cirkuliacija, you recently opened a circus centre Cirko Sapiens, and you are also part of the company Teatronas. What do you think is still missing in Lithuania when it comes to contemporary circus? What would be needed to empower the sector and its players even more?

The main aspects that we are lacking for further substantial contemporary circus development in the country are two: mental and economical.

The first aspect involves the fact that some organisations and producers were waiting for circus to happen in the country, and as a result they put a lot of pressure on the few professional artists we have. It affects natural growth and puts stress in the creative process. Even though we don't even have the culture of watching unfinished projects in Lithuania, it seems that our strong side is judgement and the requirement of fast and amazing results.

The second aspect concerns the market: there are enough cultural centres in the country for artists to tour locally,



© Cirkuliacija

but the market is non-existent and the stereotype of traditional circus still prevails in the minds of the audience (both positive and negative expectations).

What we could do and aim for to empower the sector is to create a national need to attend contemporary circus shows. To be able to achieve this objective, several steps are needed: firstly, we need to teach all possible venues

in the country about the definitions of programming, booking, residencies and open calls. At the moment, all these words are nowhere to be found in the vocabulary of cultural operators outside the three biggest cities in the country. Yet, each city and town has a cultural centre funded by the municipality. Secondly, we need to bring more contemporary circus (quantity) and



© Cirko Sapiens

more challenging shows (quality) in order to tackle the stereotype that exists, no matter which city you operate in. Overcoming these two stages should help develop a market that would then create a more burning need for new artists (currently we have around nine).

What would be your next step with Teatronas? For instance, are you planning on including more contemporary circus in the repertoire of Teatronas to offer a seasonal programme?

We have tried to present circus shows in our repertoire during the season, but somehow we still live in a circus-happens-during-festivals mentality. So we are planning on trying and combining theatre and circus in shows in order to grow theatre-goers into performing-arts goers. The tradition of theatre in the country is super strong and the language of both arts is very different, yet it is possible to merge the arts, especially in the beginning of the development on a national level and many other countries have proved it so.

Are there any notable differences or similarities between the Baltic countries when it comes to contemporary circus? If so, which ones are more striking?

The most visible are the differences: Lithuania has two independent festivals, Latvia has a state-funded organisation and a building (now under construction), Estonia has a huge amount of years and experience in circus education. It is amazing to see that what one country has, the other does not. Yet, we are similar mentally and it is unbelievably easy to cooperate and join forces in order to develop the art in the whole region.

It is quite difficult to describe the aesthetic differences since there are not as many shows created to see the whole context. At the moment, I could say that Estonian artists are creating circus shows that have a very theatrical vocabulary. They use acting or literature as a starting point to exhibit their circus language. Something similar almost happened in Lithuania, but now the Lithuanian artists try to dive into deep and problematic topics (depression, social pressure etc.) and try to use physical expressions that mirror the effect of the problems on their bodies. Latvia has an artist that has amazing skill, but he is seen more in collaboration with Lithuanian artists and recently - with Estonian artists.

What is the added value of being a member of various regional, national, and international networks?

From my point of view, I divide networks into small and big. Smaller, i.e. regional networks such as Baltic Nordic Circus Network for example, are perfect for collaborations and joint projects. In this network you have the physical capacity to know everybody, their strengths and challenges. The network itself initiates new projects and strategies for its members to join or hop in, so it is very much long-term-activity-oriented. The activities are divided into thematic problems that we could solve as a network in the region and each organisation joins into the activities it cares about the most or has the necessary resources to contribute. Furthermore, it is very important that the network is self-reflective and is capable of switching the focus of its "issues" when they stop being relevant or when the situation and context simply require concentrating on something bigger. Bigger networks, like Circos-trada, are always surprising with new connections, people who are in the network but I still don't know. And most importantly are capacities - bigger networks have a wider reach to give more diverse practices a platform to be seen and heard in the European context and these capacities become extremely valuable in the long-run of an organisation.



INTERVIEW WITH GINTARĖ MASTEIKAITĖ



Gintarė Masteikaitė is a highly motivated producer, artistic director and cultural leader. She focuses her work on developing partnerships at the international and national levels, implementing new initiatives (festivals, international collaborations, dissemination programmes, residencies, etc.), mentorship, advocacy and lobbying for the dance and circus arts sectors, as well as fundraising. Since 2017 she is the Director of the Lithuanian Dance Information Centre. In parallel, she is also the Artistic Director of the New Baltic Dance Festival in Vilnius and of ConTempo, the new International performing arts festival in Kaunas. Since 2018, she has been working as a curator of performing stage arts at Kaunas - European Capital of Culture 2022, where her focus is on the new performing arts initiatives, strategy, co-productions, international relations & networks, audience development of the performing arts field.

You are actively involved in the contemporary circus field as Artistic Director for an international festival ConTempo in Kaunas and in contemporary dance as the Artistic Director of New Baltic Dance festival in Vilnius. What are the crossing points between these two arts forms and how do they influence each other?

I sincerely believe that dance and circus are always intertwined: the body is the ultimate tool for telling stories in both fields. The element of success lies not in music, text or visual decisions, but in the harmony of the body and the personality of the creator. Although circus and dance have evolved as separate creative areas over the years, there has been an increasing number of recent encounters between these two - and this is the biggest achievement for both performers and viewers. Circus provides space for experimentation, freedom and courage, actively expands the knowledge of how to work with the audience in non-traditional spaces, outdoors, while dance brings more depth to creative methodologies, thought development and storytelling. If these areas happen to unite, success is very likely.



© Lukas Karvelis, New Baltic Dance. Photographer: Donatas Ališauskas, 2021

How visible are Lithuanian artists on the international stage - be it for contemporary dance or circus? What is still missing for Lithuanian performing arts to thrive?

It is difficult to compare areas with very different lifespans across the country. Contemporary dance accounts for more than four decades of activity, while the circus takes its first yet very bold steps. Despite the existence and experience of these fields, creatives in both of them are severely lacking spaces, institutions and education that would make a significant impact on fortifying dance and circus. Despite the shortcomings, contemporary circus and dance communities are

very active both nationally (this was very evident during the pandemic) and internationally by initiating new programmes, actively seeking new expressions, collaborating with institutions in different art fields, belonging to major international performing arts networks and organisations. Many members of the younger generation have established themselves in the international space: they work with famous choreographers, represent Lithuania at various events, are noticed in international competitions (e.g. choreographer Anna Marija Adomaitytė, selected for the Aerowaves network, Dovydas Strimaitis, who was invited to present his dance performance (work in progress) in *Danse élargie* competition).

In recent years, you've been bringing contemporary performing arts into the regions in Lithuania; with the world pandemic in 2020 New Baltic Dance implemented the first film programme. Would you say you've managed to reach and build a greater audience that way? What's your strategy for developing new audiences in the long term?

My primary and only strategy when working with and developing the audience is to establish a high level of trust and open dialogue with the audience, regardless of their experience in participating in or observing examples of contemporary performing arts. The message I find the most important is that it is both good not to understand as well as understand something, even if it is written or explained by your neighbour otherwise. This message often has a huge impact on the audience, allowing people to relax and learn new things curiously and without obligation, including contemporary dance and circus. Consistent work with the regions, the search for new formats to reach the spectators (free events, films, collaboration with a national TV broadcaster, creative projects such as "[Dance Plus City](#)") undoubtedly contribute to the spread of contemporary performing arts and the broadening of the fan base. Openness and trust certainly form strong bonds between the organisers and the audience.



© Rhizome company, ConTempo festival. Photographer: Martynas Plepys, 2021

When we talk about arts in public space, dance is the discipline that seems to have taken over. How can you analyse this trend and how do you see the development of outdoor arts in Lithuania?

If you had asked me this question four or five years ago, I would have said that there is not much to talk about. Over the past couple of years, however, the situation has drastically changed: we have several successful creative projects for public spaces in cities and towns, and performing arts festivals in the summer actively presenting not only international works but also those created by local artists for public spaces. Increasingly, performing artists are able to move performances created for ordinary theatrical venues into open spaces. Due to the peculiarities of the climate, Lithuania will probably never become a mecca for outdoor arts but the processes are happening and the results are more and more gratifying.



INTERVIEW WITH DŽIUGAS KUNSMANAS



Džiugas Kunsmanas graduated in 2017 from Vytautas Magnus University and acquired a Bachelor's degree in cinema and theatre acting. From 2017-2019, he studied acrobatics and hand to hand specialty at the contemporary circus school FLIC Scuola di Circo (Italy). During that time, he worked between dance, theatre and circus. In 2017, he was nominated for physical performance *Nutricula*, directed by Yassen Vassilev. He now teaches at Cirko Sapiens, the first contemporary circus space in Lithuania, which is part of the theatre group *Teatronas*. Džiugas is an active member of the Contemporary circus association of Lithuania. He takes part in the project of the European Capital of Culture Kaunas2022, where he collaborates with the contemporary circus director Roberto Magro.

You contributed to the organisation of the contemporary circus festival *Cirkuliacija*. The festival will now celebrate its 7th edition in June 2022. How do you regard the evolution and development of contemporary circus in Lithuania over the past 10 years?

A lot has changed for the artists. There are now more local and international contemporary circus groups, some of the students came back to work in Lithuania - including myself -, more people are investing in this art form and this has a big impact. Besides, the festival *Cirkuliacija* itself has changed since the very first editions; back then, we could mainly see small groups of artists or students coming here to teach and perform, and this was a very important step for me and many people to start their circus careers. Now I am constantly meeting with professional performers and friends coming from all over the world to work at the festival. For the audience, as a result of *Cirkuliacija*, the first contemporary circus centre in Lithuania, *Cirko Sapiens*, was created very recently and now everyone has the opportunity to learn and practice circus. At the same time, this also enables artists from the Baltic states to work together. That means that the Lithuanian contemporary circus community is growing and local artists can be seen performing together with well-known circus companies.

In your opinion, what relationship do audiences have with contemporary circus in Lithuania?

The relationship of audiences to contemporary circus really depends on the type of work presented. There are a few examples, one of which started at festival *Cirkuliacija* with the *Performance for the 66 Balconies and one terrace*, directed by Roberto Magro. In this performance, a group of artists performs directly under the balconies of people who, for the most part, have never encountered circus before. This idea worked out great and it continues in different formats and districts thanks to the festival. Another example is the *Radio Angles* project, which was

launched four years ago in the little town of *Linksmakalnis*, where people are gladly joining and actively participating, some already performing in the events that are happening in the local streets, parks, but also indoors with professional artists.

But most opportunities to see circus still happen during festivals *Cirkuliacija*, *New Circus Weekend* (renamed *Helium* in 2021) and *ConTempo*. Each of them has grown their own audiences over the years and these keep coming back. *Cirkuliacija* and *ConTempo* make a point of changing the location of the events taking place in the frame of their festival, the idea is to go to the audience instead of waiting for the audience to come to them. This way many



© Džiugas Kunsmanas, *Mood* - Co-production with *Teatronas*. Photographer: Donatas Aliskauskas



Mood, co-production with Teatronas. Photographer: Karolina Latvytė Bibiano

people have the opportunity to see circus performances for the very first time and these performances turn out to happen in front of their home. Helium festival is a little more attached to its place, which is why the audience is more consistent, people already know what to expect.

What are the main challenges as a circus artist in Lithuania?

The main challenge is the lack of spaces to work and perform. In this regard, the new circus centre Cirko Sapiens got a lot of attention, even during the pandemic; artists were seeking opportunities to work or participate in workshops happening here. The hard part is that it takes a lot of effort to build a space which, ideally, would fit the needs of many different disciplines. And maintaining this space seems almost impossible, especially at the moment. That's something that has never really happened before here, only those who attend festivals know what contemporary circus is and even less are willing to try. This art form is very new in Lithuania and there are very few artists from other fields who would be willing to invest time and collaborate with circus performers. I guess big communities, huge training centres with a suitable place to perform would

be wonderful in a perfect world, however the current situation pushes you to be both a creator and a performer. This is a big challenge but at the same time a lot of people come to circus precisely for this reason, to do their own work.

You started the creative process of the performance *Mood* during the Covid pandemic. The creative process focuses on the action of falling and the images it raises, as well as on the "depressive body". Could you reflect on the physical and psychological effects you experienced while creating this performance? What did you learn about yourself?

I've learnt a lot while creating my solo piece *Mood*. First of all, I've learnt that you should always seek contrasts for the things you are dealing with and how you react to them. It goes for your approach to art and the creative process related to it, especially while working alone during the pandemic and creating a solo piece about falling and depression. It can help you a lot for instance, by bringing your creation and state of mind into places you haven't experienced before. Somehow, I felt the need to make that kind of show for this specific period and see how I would deal with it. At the beginning I

wanted to create a reason to push myself, to make a performance that would be very physically demanding. In this sense *Mood* is successful and helped me endure hard times, even developing new acrobatic skills. At least it seemed so at the beginning. Later on, the creation process became repetitive and there were sometimes days when I was unlocking the door of the space where I was working, looking around and without taking off my shoes, I would close the door and leave it to maybe come back a better day. A lot of questions arose after this experience, trying to find a reason and motivation to work, but a lot of people have asked themselves similar questions during the covid lockdown. My fellow dancers also felt like the training space had become a place that you wish to avoid and spend time there only if necessary. This gave me time to think and explore the real motivation and reasoning behind my choice to do circus. When did I decide to become an artist? Why would I make such a show? In the end I feel grateful for the experience I had while creating and performing *Mood* as it helped me to get a bigger perspective on creating and performing shows. I feel humbler in a way; I learnt a lot and now I can clearly see that there is still so much more to understand. I think every artist should go through creating a solo piece, it is an important step as a creator. The performance I did would probably be completely different if I were to go through the creative process again now, as I am in a different stage as a person as well.



INTERVIEW WITH SIGITA IVAŠKAITĖ



Sigita Ivaškaitė is a dramaturg based in Vilnius (Lithuania), working mostly with contemporary dance artists. Since 2014 she has worked with stage director Yana Ross and *Be Company* organisation, creating memorable and socially active works. One of her first collaborations with independent dancers - “*Contemporary?*” - won the highest theatre award of the country “Golden Stage Cross”. Sigita Ivaškaitė received her Master’s degree in Theatre studies in Lithuanian music and theatre academy, while already working as a stage manager in Lithuanian national opera and ballet theatre, as well as in independent Vilnius City Opera company. Since 2009 she publishes critical and analytical publications in periodical culture press, prepares press releases and interviews with various creators for Lithuanian press. Since 2018 Sigita publishes independent articles in her theatre blog “*Critical habit(at)*”.

How do you apprehend the notion of public space(s) in Lithuania?

The first thing that I think about when I hear the notion “public spaces” is the courtyard of every building that I have lived in. It is a somewhat liminal space, where your everyday life goes from private to public. Living in the city centre, people always appreciate their space and try to secure it as private, but it will always have the eyes of your neighbour on it - a spectator.

As for public spaces in the city, we don’t necessarily always find the right contrast between “living in” a space and “using” it. What I mean is that for a long period of time, public spaces were seen more as a space to walk in, maybe sit down for a while, but only some groups of interest would find a way to use the space for their concrete needs. Most Lithuanian city centres had to come out of the leftovers of Soviet architecture and city landscaping, very brutal and cold. Now we are on a visible trend to move towards a European capital public spaces vision. The trick here is not to overlay it with “functional spaces”, once again trying to impose what “should be done” in this exact place.

I remember when I was a kid and watched British or American TV series, it looked so fantastic to see the characters go have a picnic in an urban space of the city. Now I understand that it is



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more about your state of mind, rather than a tradition or a number of public spaces that were “made fit” for any kind of gatherings.

How do contemporary performing arts fit in and interact with public space(s)?

As a country of great traditions of drama theatre and long wintertime, Lithuanians perform quite rarely in public spaces. Also, while speaking about any kind of outdoor arts tradition, one must remember the long Russian occupation time that Lithuania had to endure. For a long time, public space was neither a safe place nor a free one, it was a

controlled space. The biggest outdoor events would be music concerts in parks, arenas, etc.

In time, with the liberation of arts, the liberation of space followed. I guess as in many cities, the music and any kind of painting, visual arts are the most common to be seen on the streets. It is still less common to see performing arts in public spaces as standalone artistic initiatives, most often they take place in the frame of a festival. On the other hand, I do see a spur of new ideas and new performing art forms emerging out of the pandemic. While trying to survive in spite of the restrictions, many artists went to perform outside or found new forms of expres-

sion that led them out of stages and black boxes, starting with video solutions and ending up with installations, audio experiences or even artistically guided city tours. It was exciting to witness how an artist who was locked out of his home stage, would find new and closer connection to his audience, as well as inviting new audiences, just by chance, by performing in front of their home windows. Also - but this should be a separate subject - we must not forget the other active public spaces of the digital world, that have gotten more and more important in interacting with contemporary arts in everyday life.

As a copywriter working with the public space, what kind of environment are you attracted to?

As I tend to work with artists who always have a quite clear concept from the very beginning, I tend not to choose, be attracted to some places or ideas, but try to see what the combination of all those choices can bring up. In the variety of works that I do almost daily, a very important part of it goes to set design. With that in mind, in the last few years I got extremely attracted to the excursion form of a show. Usually using differently operating audio guides, these walks or rides through the town or a sole neighbourhood create a movie-like experience, unique for every spectator. It is not only where you will lead him/her to look, but what he/she will choose to see. And even if it is also usually the case in all theatres, the number of variables here is much bigger. What also attracts me is the fact that the city plays its own role and artists may not even need to fix the space, make a special setting for the action. Every city has its character and persona, and it is such an amazing experience to invite people to see and experience it.



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When thinking of public space(s) - what role do you envisage for that/these space(s)?

As I have started to mention in my previous answer, I adore when the space is considered as a partner, as a character. Everyday walking in our towns we tend to forget how beautiful and vivid they are, how many stories they can tell. A performance in public space might just be the right opportunity to see your own town's soul from a new perspective. Why do we appreciate other countries more or think their towns are more spectacular? Because while being there, we give all our attention to the new surroundings, looking for directions, trying to get the grip of its mood, etc. We read them, we try to understand them and do not take anything for granted. This is what we start to do while experiencing art, so this is what happens when you get the residents of a city or a neighbourhood, to look at their public spaces through the lens of art.

Architecture, as well as all city planning, has its own unique history; buildings themselves are monuments to different styles, epochs and, naturally, are related to the history of the years in which they were built and used. Every touch, move, sign done in front of a space enters into dialogue with

that silent history, and that brings up many new meanings, that of an artwork in a clear, specifically constructed space. So yes, I love when art in public spaces does not try to change or adapt the space, but uses itself to connect with it, to make it its partner.

You seem to be well connected to the international scene of contemporary performing arts. How does this international dimension influence your work? What does it bring you?

Firstly, with my work in different areas I got connected with many art forms: opera, dance theatre, drama, musical theatre, contemporary circus and even exhibition production. And from all those different disciplines, a new international connection always comes in. Each time it shows me that our struggles are the same, and the rightfulness of our decisions do not have to be undermined by ourselves. It is hard to notice when you are not a “young artist” anymore, as it is to comprehend your value. By putting yourself out to a wider context, you can not only get valuable experience and knowledge, but see yourself in it and appreciate your own uniqueness as the main strength of art making. It sounds so obvious but it gets forgotten too often.

BALTIC SECTORAL MAPPING

This mapping was conducted by Circostrada and Teatronas in collaboration with key sectoral stakeholders from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. It is not intended to be exhaustive but aims to provide a general overview of contemporary circus and outdoor arts in the Baltics at the time of publication.

LITHUANIA

FESTIVALS

Cirkuliacija

Location: Kaunas

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Gildas Aleksa - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://teatronas.lt/en/circulation>

Spot

Location: Vilnius

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Contact: Jolita Balandytė - Director

🌐 <https://www.menuspaustuve.lt/en/festivals/spot>

ConTempo

Location: Kaunas

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Contact: Gintarė Masteikaitė - Programme Curator

🌐 <https://www.contempofestival.lt/en/>

PlartForma

Location: Klaipėda

Discipline: Outdoor Arts

Contact: Goda Giedraitytė - Programme Curator

🌐 <https://2021.plartforma.lt/en>

Helium

Location: Vilnius

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Jolita Balandytė - Director

🌐 <https://www.menuspaustuve.lt/en/festivals/helium>

SCHOOLS

Cirko Sapiens

Location: Kaunas

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Monika Citvaraitė-Lansbergienė - Managing Director

🌐 <https://teatronas.lt/en/circus-sapiens>

Kauno cirko meno akademija ("Baltijos cirkas")

Location: Kaunas

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Ieva Variakojytė-Reynström - Project Manager

🌐 <http://www.cirkas.lt/langen/Pagrindinis/>

Alytaus cirko studija "Džūkija"

Location: Alytus

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Albertas Chazbijavičius - Director

🌐 <https://www.ambercirkas.lt/dzukija/>

Cirko studija "Šypsena"/Šakių cirko mokykla (Šakių kultūros centras)

Location: Šakiai

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Raimondas Januševičius - Founder

🌐 <https://sakaiaircus.lt/>

RESIDENCY SPACES

Cirko Sapiens

Location: Kaunas

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Monika Citvaraitė-Lansbergienė - Managing Director

🌐 <https://teatronas.lt/en/circus-sapiens>

Arts Printing House

Location: Vilnius

Discipline: Performing Arts

Contact: Ineta Pliakaitytė - Project Coordinator

🌐 <https://www.menuspaustuve.lt/en>

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND/OR FUNDING BODIES

Lithuanian Council for Culture

Location: Vilnius

Contact: Lina Žilytė - Programme Coordinator

🌐 <https://www.ltkk.lt/en/>

INFO CENTER

Lithuanian Dance Information Center

Location: Vilnius

Discipline: Dance and Circus

Contact: Gintarė Masteikaitė - Director

🌐 <http://dance.lt/new/en/home/>

ARTISTS/COMPANIES

TAIGI CIRKAS

Location: Vilnius

Discipline: Circus

- Izabelė Kuzelytė

- Elena Kosovec

- Konstantin Kosovec

Contact: Konstantin Kosovec - Company Founder

🌐 <https://taigicirkas.wixsite.com/taigicirkas>

KANTA COMPANY

Location: Kaunas

Discipline: Circus

- Lyla Goldman

- Kęstas Matusevičius

- Aino Mäkipää

Contact: Kęstas Matusevičius - Company Founder

🌐 <https://www.kantacompanycircus.com/>

INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS

Džiugas Kunsmanas

Location: Kaunas

Discipline: Circus

🌐 <http://dance.lt/new/en/db/dziugas-kunsmanas/>

Giedrė Degutytė

Location: London/Paris

Discipline: Circus

🌐 <http://dance.lt/new/en/db/giedre-degutyte/>

Monika Neverauskaitė

Location: France-based

Discipline: Circus

🌐 <https://soloneviena.wixsite.com/monika>

Marija Barauskaitė

Location: Vilnius

Discipline: Circus

🌐 <http://dance.lt/new/db/marija-barauskaite/>

OTHER

Dūmų fabrikas

Location: Vilnius

Discipline: Circus (rigging possibilities)

Contact: Greta Zakarevičienė - Director

🌐 <https://www.dumufabrikas.lt/>

FESTIVALS

Re Riga!

Location: Riga

Discipline: Circus and outdoor arts

Contact: Mārtiņš Ķibers - Creative Director

🌐 <https://reriga.lv/>

Sansusi

Location: Aknīste

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Contact: Armands Siliņš - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://sansusi.lv/>

SCHOOLS

Riga circus school

Location: Riga

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Marī Sanžarevska - Director

🌐 <https://cirks.lv/en/circus-school/about-circus-school/>

Circus studio Jaunība

Location: Daugavpils

Discipline: Circus (traditional)

Contact: Marija un Jevgeņijs Čirkovi

🌐 <http://dkp.lv/kolektivi/cirka-studija-jauniba/>

Circus studio Jaunība

Location: Riga

Discipline: Circus (traditional)

Contact: Juliāna Buslovska - Director

🌐 <https://www.vefkp.lv/lv/kolektivi/amatierteatri/cirka-studija-jauniba/29/>

Circus studio "Arlekīns"

Location: Salaspils

Discipline: Circus (traditional)

Contact: Mihails Basmanovs - Director

🌐 <https://www.salaspilskultura.lv/interesu-izglitiba/cirka-studija-arlekina/>

Circus and dance studio "Vivat"

Location: Daugavpils

Discipline: Circus (traditional)

Contact: Katrīna Paukšta - Director

🌐 <http://vivat.lv>

ARTISTIC VENUES (PROGRAMMING)

Rigas cirks

Location: Riga

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Māra Pāvula - Director

🌐 <https://cirks.lv/en/>

RESIDENCY SPACES

Rigas cirks

Location: Riga

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Māra Pāvula - Director

🌐 <https://cirks.lv/en/>

Sansusi

Location: Aknīste

Discipline: Multidisciplinary

Contact: Armands Silins - Artistic Director

🌐 <https://sansusi.lv/>

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND/OR FUNDING BODIES

Latvian Ministry of Culture

Location: Riga

Discipline: Performing arts

Contact: Andra Rutkēviča - Cultural Policy Department

🌐 <https://www.km.gov.lv/en>

INFO CENTER

Rigas cirks

Location: Riga

Discipline: Circus

Contact: cirks@cirks.lv

🌐 <https://cirks.lv/en/>

🌐 <https://www.facebook.com/VSIARigascirks>

OTHER

Next Door Circus - Platform for contemporary circus in the Baltics

Location: Riga

Discipline: Circus organisation

Contact: Aleksey Smolov - Board member

🌐 <http://nextdoorcircus.org/>

ARTISTS/COMPANIES

Aleksey Smolov

Discipline: Circus

🌐 <https://www.instagram.com/aleksey.smolov/>

Maija Sukute

Discipline: Circus

🌐 <https://www.instagram.com/maijasukute/>

Dmitrij Pudov

Discipline: Circus

🌐 <https://www.instagram.com/dmitrijspudovs/>

Valery Elastic

Discipline: Circus

🌐 <http://valeryelastic.com/>



ESTONIA

Note: The venues and residencies marked with * are open to programming contemporary circus and have the possibility to fill in the technical needs required by circus shows. All the other venues regularly programme contemporary circus.

FESTIVALS

EPICIRQ

Location: Tallinn
Discipline: Circus
Contact: Grete Gross, Lizeth Wolk - Festival organisers
🌐 www.epicirq.com

TaDaa! Festival

Location: Tallinn
Discipline: Outdoor arts
Contact: Dan Renwic - Festival organiser
🌐 www.tadaafestival.org

Badoom Tss

Location: Pärnu County, Tori
Discipline: indoor outdoor, educational festival/convention for circus enthusiasts.
Contact: Dan Renwic - Festival organiser
🌐 <https://www.facebook.com/EstonianCircusConvention>

SCHOOLS

OMAtsirkus

Location: Tallinn
Discipline: Circus/Acrobatics
Contact: Heidi Kann - Director
🌐 <http://www.omatsirkus.ee/>

Folie

Location: Tallinn
Discipline: Circus
Contact: Terje Bernadt - Director
🌐 <http://www.tsirkus.ee/>

PartnerAkro

Location: Lääne-Harju vald
Discipline: Circus/Acrobatics
Contact: Kadri Ridaste - Director
🌐 <https://partnerakro.ee/#>

Tsirkusekool

Location: Tallinn
Discipline: Circus
Contact: Vello Vaher - Director
🌐 www.tsirkusekool.ee

ARTISTIC VENUES (PROGRAMMING)

Vaba Lava*

Location: Tallinn
Discipline: Circus and performing arts
Contact: Liisa Liksor - Executive Assistant & International Projects Manager
🌐 www.vabalava.ee

Heldeke!

Location: Tallinn
Discipline: Circus and performing arts
Contact: Dan Renwic - Director
🌐 www.heldeke.ee

Sakala3 theater*

Location: Tallinn
Discipline: Circus and performing arts
Contact: Laura Papper - Coordinating Manager
🌐 <https://www.sakala3.ee/>

Kanuti Gildi Saal*

Location: Tallinn
Discipline: Circus and performing arts
Contact: Priit Raud - Artistic Manager
🌐 <https://saal.ee/>

Luidja Tsirkusetalu

Location: Hiiumaa County
Discipline: Circus among other arts, tent (travelling everywhere), outdoor
Contact: Helena Ehrenbusch - Director
🌐 <https://www.tsirkusetalu.com/>

RESIDENCY SPACES

Sakala3 teater*

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Circus and performing arts

Contact: Laura Papper - Coordinating Manager

🌐 www.sakala3.ee

Sõltumatu tantsu lava*

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Circus/Dance

Contact: Triinu Aron - Managing Director

🌐 <https://stl.ee/>

Viljandi koidu seltsimaja/ teatrihoov*

Location: Viljandi

Discipline: Circus and performing arts

Contact: Evelin Lagle - Managing Director

🌐 <https://www.facebook.com/Viljandi-Teatrihoov-105260419663584>

Luidja Tsirkusetalu*

Location: Hiiumaa

Discipline: Circus among other arts, tent, outdoor

Contact: Helena Ehrenbusch - Director

🌐 <https://www.tsirkusetalu.com/>

Pardimäe Lokaal*

Location: Viru-Nigula

Discipline: Circus among other arts, indoor/outdoor

Contact: Kaja Kann - Director

🌐 <https://pardimaelokaal.weebly.com/>

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND/OR FUNDING BODIES

Cultural Endowment of Estonia

Location: Estonia

Contact: Kerli Kasak - Project Manager of drama foundation

🌐 <https://kulka.ee/>

INFO CENTER

Estonian Contemporary Circus Development Centre

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Grete Gross - Coordinator

🌐 <https://www.facebook.com/tsirkusekeskus>

ARTISTS/COMPANIES

Circus Sabok

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Kert Ridaste / Saana Leppänen

🌐 www.duosabok.com

Big Wolf Company

Location: Tartu

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Grete Gross, Lizeth Wolk (and visiting artists)

🌐 www.bigwolfcompany.net

Duo Schokokaboom

Location: Hiiumaa

Discipline: Circus among other arts and outdoor arts

Contact: Helena Ehrenbusch, Ulrike Jäger - Artists, company founders

🌐 <https://schokokaboom.wixsite.com/schokokaboom>

Carousel Company

Location: Pärnu

Discipline: Circus

Contact: Ireen Peegel, Jaakko Repola - Artists, company founders

🌐 <https://www.facebook.com/carouselcompany/>

Anna Krazy

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Circus (outdoor)

Contact: Anna Kristin Peterson McCarthy - Artist

🌐 <https://www.facebook.com/annakr.azy/>

Kadri Hansen

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Circus (aerials)

🌐 <https://www.kadrihansen.com/>

Dan le Man

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Circus, online, hosting, comedy

Contact: Dan Renwic - Artist

🌐 <https://dan-le-man.com/about/>

Laura Kivistik

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Circus (aerials)

🌐 <https://www.laurakivistik.com/>

Grete Gross

Location: Tartu

Discipline: Circus (aerials)

🌐 www.bigwolfcompany.net

Lizeth Wolk

Location: Tartu

Discipline: Circus (aerials)

🌐 www.bigwolfcompany.net

Sylvain Oulala

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Circus (street)

Contact: Sylvain Pomme - Artist

🌐 <https://www.sylvainoulala.com/>

Ireen Peegel

Location: Pärnu

Discipline: Circus

🌐 <https://www.facebook.com/carouselcompany/>

Jaakko Repola

Location: Pärnu

Discipline: Circus

🌐 <https://www.facebook.com/carouselcompany/>

Meelis Kubo

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Magic

🌐 <http://meeliskubo.com/en>

Charlekas

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Magic

Contact: Karl Eelmaa - Artist

🌐 <https://www.charlekas.com/>

Richard Samaruütel

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Magic

🌐 <https://samaruutel.ee/>

Keviniski

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Magic

Contact: Kevin-Chris - Artist

🌐 <https://www.thekevinski.com/>

Piip ja Tuut

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Clowning

Contact: Haide Männamäe, Toomas Tross - Artists, company founders

🌐 <https://piipjatuut.ee/>

Tulegrupp Flaamos (Fire troupe Flaamos)

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Fireshows

Contact: Maarja Roolah, Liina Eller, Elyca Edovald, Ilmi Laur-Paist, Olavi Laurimaa - Artists, company founders

🌐 <https://www.facebook.com/flaamos/>

Mironof Show

Location: Läänemaa

Discipline: Clowning and other

Contact: Aleksandr Mironov, Katja Mironov - Artists, company founders

🌐 <https://mironofevents.com/>

Kert Ridaste

Location: Tallinn

Discipline: Circus

🌐 www.duosabok.com

ABOUT CIRCOSTRADA, ARTCENA AND TEATRONAS

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 Centre for Circus, Street Arts and Theatre.

Created by the French Ministry of Culture, Artcena is a national rallying point that aims to strengthen the foundation and growth of circus, street and theatre arts. Keeping an open attitude and lively outlook, it works closely with sector professionals while also addressing the needs of teachers, students and researchers.

It coordinates Circostrada and has a permanent seat on its Steering Committee. Artcena works towards its missions in three main areas: sharing of knowledge and resources through a digital platform; supporting professionals via mentoring and training; promoting and strengthening the circus, street arts and theatre fields by carrying out international development projects.

🌐 www.artcena.fr

Teatronas

Teatronas is an organisation that works with the development of contemporary circus and producing theatre shows in Lithuania.

While the theatrical work of Teatronas aims to create abnormal pieces of drama by interpreting classical works in a surprising manner (Shakespeare in soviet apartments, Five-acts of tragedy presented as a five fine-dining meals dégustation etc.), their work on circus has done the opposite. It tries to legitimise a completely young art form by mentoring artists, negotiating with policy makers and having one of the biggest contemporary circus festivals in the country - Cirkuliacija. In between the pandemic waves, Teatronas has managed to open the first and only centre for contemporary circus named Cirko Sapiens. Now the centre has an international residency program, housing various workshops and training spaces for professionals and functions as the only contemporary circus school in the country with public presentations.

🌐 www.teatronas.lt

CIRKULIACIJA

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FESTIVALIS



KAUNAS

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