

CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS AND OUTDOOR ARTS IN FRANCE



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CIRCOSTRADA & ARTCENA

Circostrada

Circostrada is the European Network for contemporary circus and outdoor arts, co-funded by the European Union and supported by the French Ministry of Culture. 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

ARCHAOS, FAI-AR, IN SITU & LIEUX PUBLICS

Archaos - Pôle Nationale Cirque & BIAC

Archaos, an emblematic contemporary circus company, moved to Marseille in 2001. It quickly opened up its space to other artists. Archaos became a National Circus Centre in 2012, and its main missions are :

- Supporting circus creation through residencies and co-productions with contemporary circus companies.
- Maintaining an artistic and cultural presence in the southern region by programming shows, organising cultural events and supporting contemporary circus professionals.
- Organisation of the BIAC - Biennale Internationale des arts du Cirque throughout the Southern Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region

www.archaos.fr

Organised by Archaos, BIAC - Biennale Internationale des Arts du Cirque is a festival held every odd-numbered year for a month in January/February. A not-to-be-missed international festival, BIAC attracts over 110,000 spectators to the PACA region over the course of a month. BIAC is a collaborative festival organised with 55 of the region's cultural organisations. 66 shows are programmed for 230 performances. Archaos supports the creative process, and for the 2025 edition, 30 of the shows programmed were co-produced by Archaos. BIAC is an international event that attracts more than 600 professionals each year, including more than 300 during the week of professional meetings.

www.biennale-cirque.com

FAI-AR

The FAI-AR is the leading school for artistic creation in public space. It runs a post-secondary programme designed for young artists wanting to develop their professional skills for creating and producing artistic productions in public space. The FAI-AR also offers continuing education courses, masterclasses and MOOCs (free and bilingual).

FAI-AR aims to foster innovative, cross-disciplinary artistic development: practices including arts and public space, site-specific approaches, contextual arts, locally-focused writing, landscape theatre, participatory arts, and relational aesthetics. FAI-AR's objective is to pursue high-level training and help create bridges between different disciplines.

www.faiar.org

IN SITU - European Platform for Artistic Creation in Public Space

IN SITU is the European platform for artistic creation in public space. It is led by Lieux Publics, European and national centre for artistic creation in public space, located in Marseille, France and co-funded by European Commission. It takes the form of an international consortium of 20+ programmers that, since 2003, supported more than 300 artists working outside conventional venues. IN SITU PLATFORM 2025-2028: PLATFORM is an innovative and efficient support programme that will run from 2025 to 2028. It aims to identify and support 200 emerging artists creating in public space and non-conventional venues in Europe.

www.in-situ.info

Lieux Publics

Lieux publics is a National Center for Art in Public Space and European production hub, located in the Cité des arts de la rue in Marseille, France. Funded by the Region, the City Council and the Department, Lieux publics also benefits from the continuous support of the European Union since 2003. Lieux publics acts as project leader of the European network IN SITU, bringing together more than 20 partners worldwide. The activities of Lieux publics include hosting and coproducing unique artistic projects, distributing regional creations and of off-site events in Marseille and its surroundings, managing the Cité des arts de la rue and ensuring the general coordination of IN SITU, the European platform for the artistic creation in public space as well as other international projects.

www.lieuxpublics.com

FOREWORDS

Welcome to Marseille, a city of connection and exchange, and to this inspiring moment where Circostrada's Annual General Meeting meets the 10th anniversary of the Biennale Internationale des Arts du Cirque. It feels good to gather again when global uncertainties—geopolitical tensions, environmental crises, and economic challenges—dominate our news feeds, fueling anxiety and encouraging isolation. Shared creativity and international cooperation are more vital than ever when the temptation to turn inward looms large. The practice of circus embodies trust, solidarity, and mutual support—values essential to addressing today's challenges. These same principles have fueled the BIAC's success over the years, made possible by over 50 committed partners collaborating to reflect, share, and pool resources. Each edition of BIAC attracts professionals from across the globe, drawn to Marseille to experience pioneering performances, tackle shared challenges, and forge connections that often lead to impactful international projects. At Circostrada, we do believe in the transformative power of international cooperation by working together, across disciplines, geographies, and perspectives. These values are also at the core of Circostrada's newest project spanning from 2024 to 2028, CS VOICES counting on the renewed support of the European Union. Building on the success of CS BODIES, this initiative champions "situated and unannounced voices," amplifying local and marginalised perspectives through participatory research, training, and advocacy to foster meaningful change in cultural policymaking and artistic practices. This year, aligning Circostrada's AGM with the vibrant energy of the Biennale creates a unique space for dialogue, inspiration, and collective action. Performances and roundtables will spark fresh ideas and connections. As a highlight, the first publications of CS VOICES provide insight into the French context of contemporary circus and outdoor arts, complemented by a toolkit on touring in France and a BIAC case study on sustainability. This AGM is more than a networking opportunity—it's a call to action: how can we amplify the transformative values of circus to meet today's challenges head-on?

Simon Carrara

Deputy Director of Archaos - Pôle National Cirque

Alice Brunot

Circostrada Network Coordinator / Head of International Development at ARTCENA

Carried along by the protest movement of the 70s, artists from all walks of life turned upside down the codes that had traditionally corseted the circus, while others took to the streets to invent unique adventures and relationships with the public. Since then, this new kind of art has spread to all areas of everyday life, constantly inventing new forms and transforming the ordinary to revive the pleasure of shared emotion as much as the democratic spirit of the public space and the big top.

Today, thanks to proactive public policies, France is a fertile breeding ground for creation that continues to renew the contemporary circus and outdoor arts. This is reflected in the variety of shows, the flowering of production and distribution venues, and the multiplication of support schemes mentioned in this publication.

ARTCENA, the French National Centre for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts coordinates the Circostrada network, co-funded since 2003 by the European Union and the French Ministry of Culture, as part of its mission to support artists and professionals in carrying out their projects, as well as the development of the circus, street and theatre arts and to promote contemporary creation.

With Circostrada, which brings together 168 organisations from 45 countries, ARTCENA works to facilitate cooperation in Europe and beyond, encourages innovation in favour of ecological transition, digital transformation and the evolution of practices, and contributes to the recognition and structuring of these arts, which embody the values of daring, solidarity and inclusiveness that our societies so desperately need.

The organisation in France, in partnership with the Biennale internationale des arts du cirque de Marseille, of the network's first general meeting, which marks the launch of CS VOICES, Circostrada's new project for 2024-2028, reinforces this commitment based on a strong conviction: getting together with peers, exchanging, sharing and doing things together feeds the inspiration of each individual, encourages collective intelligence and stimulates creativity for the benefit of audiences.

We look forward to many fascinating discussions, inspiring professional encounters, artistic discoveries and pleasures to share during this General Meeting, as we chart the course for the future together!

Gwénola David

Managing Director of ARTCENA

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CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS: CREATIVE TO THE CORE – AN OVERVIEW THE SECTOR IN FRANCE¹

For the past fifteen years or so, the term “contemporary circus” has been used to describe an artistic movement that was in fact born fifty years ago. In truth, it would be more accurate to label it “creative circus”, or “artistic circus”, in light of its long-standing traditions and its trademark techniques.



By Jean-Michel Guy

Jean-Michel Guy is a research engineer for the French Ministry of Culture and Communication, focusing on sociological surveys of live performance and cinema audiences. Passionate about contemporary circus, he has authored works such as *Les Arts du Cirque en France en l'An 2000*, *Avant-garde Cirque!*

(2002), and *Le Chant des Balles* (2004). He co-wrote the film *Un Rêve de Cirque* (2002) and the DVDs *Esthétiques du Cirque Contemporain* (2007). He teaches at circus schools and co-founded *La Scabreuse*, contributing to several circus productions and performances.

Having remained unlabelled up until 1985, contemporary circus was initially named *nouveau cirque* (new circus in English), a term still in use today in France and elsewhere. However, it would be more accurate to save this label for the genre as it presented in its early days, which ran from 1968 to 1995, at which point a new concept emerged as dominant until 2005: the circus arts. Since then, we have now entered its third age, the age of “contemporary circus”. Some commentators believe this period is on the wane, arguing

that the word “contemporary” is either too restrictive or too vague to encompass the full complexity and diversity of the forms of circus that currently exist. Let’s look at some of the key developments that occurred along the way.

Nouveau cirque (1968-1995)

Looking back, we might consider that Jules Cordière’s *Palais des Merveilles* (1968), marked the very first animal-free “creative” circus show, soon followed by

¹ This article is an adaptation of the series of articles ‘An overview of contemporary circus’ written by Jean-Michel Guy in 2019 and published in the Magazine of ARTCENA. You can read the original articles here: www.artcena.fr/en/education-artistique-et-culturelle/panoramas/panorama-du-cirque-contemporain

Bonjour Circus, where “soap bubbles were crushed by hammer” at 1971’s Festival d’Avignon. What was this “other circus”, as it was called when it first broke onto the scene? Initially, nothing more than a handful of young performers with an interest in circus, the vast majority of whom were not from circus families. Acrobatics, juggling, and trapeze work were all learnt through workshops or sessions with circus artists that were described as “non-traditional” up until 1985, or through “books”, as Bernard Kudlak, founder of Le Cirque Plume, recounts. It took until late 1974 for the very first circus schools to open. Imbued with a deep respect for the old ways of circus, these performers initially had no intention of challenging or revolutionising it. Instead, they aimed to harness its techniques and rules, such as using music or theatre in their highly political performances: shows with a “point of view” as was said at the time, shows for the people, in the public sphere. They didn’t know one another, but formed an ideological and artistic movement that included the very first “street theatre” companies. It wasn’t until 1978 – thanks to Aix, Ville Ouverte aux Saltimbanques, an event that brought together the “pioneers” of this movement, and the 1980s companies kick-started by graduates of the very first circus schools – that a collective awareness of serving as representatives of a new genre began to take root, before they then shifted into embracing their differences with “traditional” circus. It didn’t take long for a vocal ideological, but not commercial, competitiveness to arise between the two sides. The companies at the time (Archaos, Les Oiseaux Fous, La Compagnie Foraine, Le Cirque Plume, Le Puits aux Images, which went on to become Cirque Baroque), remained faithful to the ring and circus tent, but performed no animal acts. Other common ground emerged, such as their clear taste for theatrical narrative, or at the very least staging that broke with the tradition of using acts, preferring instead to focus on vignettes linked by a “common thread”, and “prowess for prowess’ sake”. Nouveau cirque was long defined by its differences with traditional circus because of the difficulty inherent to finding a clearly visible overarching ‘meaning’ to the many facets of its unique expressive forms. And yet this ‘meaning’ can be described in a single word: creativity. By this we mean two things: that the performances of a single company differ from one to the next, and that the style of a single company visibly differs from one to the next. Diversity is inseparable from nouveau cirque, because it fundamentally stems from the core value of art in the western world: originality, with all the many factors that go with its (writers, works, signature styles). The pioneers of nouveau cirque, initially entirely privately funded, were soon clamouring for acknowledgement of their “mainstream” artistic value, long granted to theatre and dance, in addition



Game Over - Cie Archaos, 1996 ©Philippe Cibille

to access to public grants and funding. In France, they received the recognition they sought in 1982, and shifts in how circus art evolved became intrinsically bound to cultural policy. “Circus policy” dates back to 1978, with the financial aid (perhaps even ‘rescue’) package that France’s Ministry of Culture set up for circus. Before then, the government had zero interest in this “art form”, with the circus’s public-sphere issues being primarily handled by the Ministry of Agriculture due to their use of animals. Three years later, and France’s socialist government took things further, laying the groundwork for an unprecedented new initiative: creating a national graduate-level circus school, ushering in a creative grant for circus writers, and providing assistance for traditional venues in innovating in their stage design. Since then, the French State’s support for circus has been unwavering, and was even bolstered in 2001 with the ‘year of the circus’ scheme.

Circus arts (1995-2005)

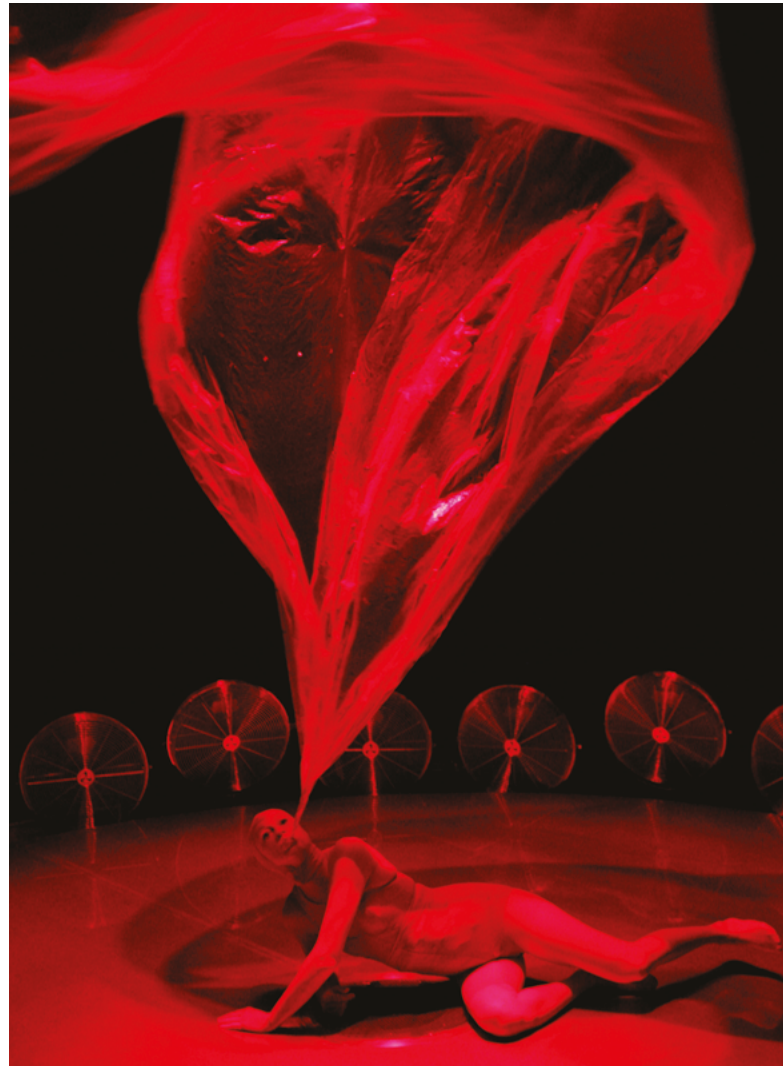
In 1995, one performance met with spectacular acclaim: *Le Cri du Caméléon*, Josef Nadi’s final-year show as part of the seventh graduating year of the CNAC (France’s National Centre of Circus Arts, established a decade earlier). An intricate combination of dance, theatre and circus, this performance art was impossible to pigeonhole, and heralded the dawning of a new age: combined arts. Yet the starting point for this combination was not “circus” in the sense of a series of rules and hallmarks (a big top, a ring, a variety of disciplines), but rather “circus arts”, each

of them breaking free from the circus itself, giving rise to single-discipline shows that became the new norm. Most were “small-scale” affairs performed solo or in pairs, but this chapter also saw the emergence of “large ensembles” bringing together a number of performers: *Les Arts Sauts* (a show performed by the eponymous trapeze art troupe), *Le Grand C* by the XY acrobatics company, *Rain/Bow Arc Après La Pluie* by juggler Jérôme Thomas, and in late 2005, *Le Fil Sous La Neige* by Les Colporteurs, the first ballet performed by high-rope artists. This phenomenon swept across the circus arts, including the most original among them: diabolos, BMXs, contortion, balancing acts, and beyond. In a symbol of the unprecedented scale of this revolution, the notion of circus arts in the plural crept into the names of companies and institutions: The École Nationale des Arts du Cirque de Rosny-sous-Bois, the Syndicat des Nouvelles Formes des Arts du Cirque, the Année des Arts du Cirque (2001/2002), a major highlight organised by the French Ministry of Culture, that would go on to lastingly elevate the symbolic and economic status of the circus in France.

Contemporary circus (2006 to the present day)

Compared to the diversity seen in literature, music, and film, and the categories in which we are used to placing them, circus in its many guises appears to remain somewhat lacking. Yet the profusion of innately original shows has ensured that diversity in the circus has been rising exponentially since 2006.

Without seeking to categorise these works into subgenres – which would only serve to deny their inherent uniqueness –, we might nevertheless draw up an inventory of the aspects by which the many styles of circus significantly differ or align. The most obvious of these aspects are the spaces in which they are performed. While the big top lives on with a hundred-odd “contemporary” shows performed in a ring or tent, alongside another hundred or so “traditional” circus shows, this is far from being the present-day circus’s natural habitat: indoor venues, whether small or sweeping, now reign supreme, if not in the imagination, then in practice. A large number of companies prefer to perform “at street level”, often in broad daylight. Others pop up in the unlikeliest of venues, such as museums, libraries, and even forests. The latest newcomer to the scene is “screen circus”, made up of audio-visual and digital works created by circus artists, generally designed to be viewed on a television screen or computer. This briefest of inventories skips over the many other forms that ‘circus tents’ (ultra-small, gigantic, square, hemispherical) or venues (traditional black boxes, performers among the audience, thrust stages) can take. United in tone, some of the works share

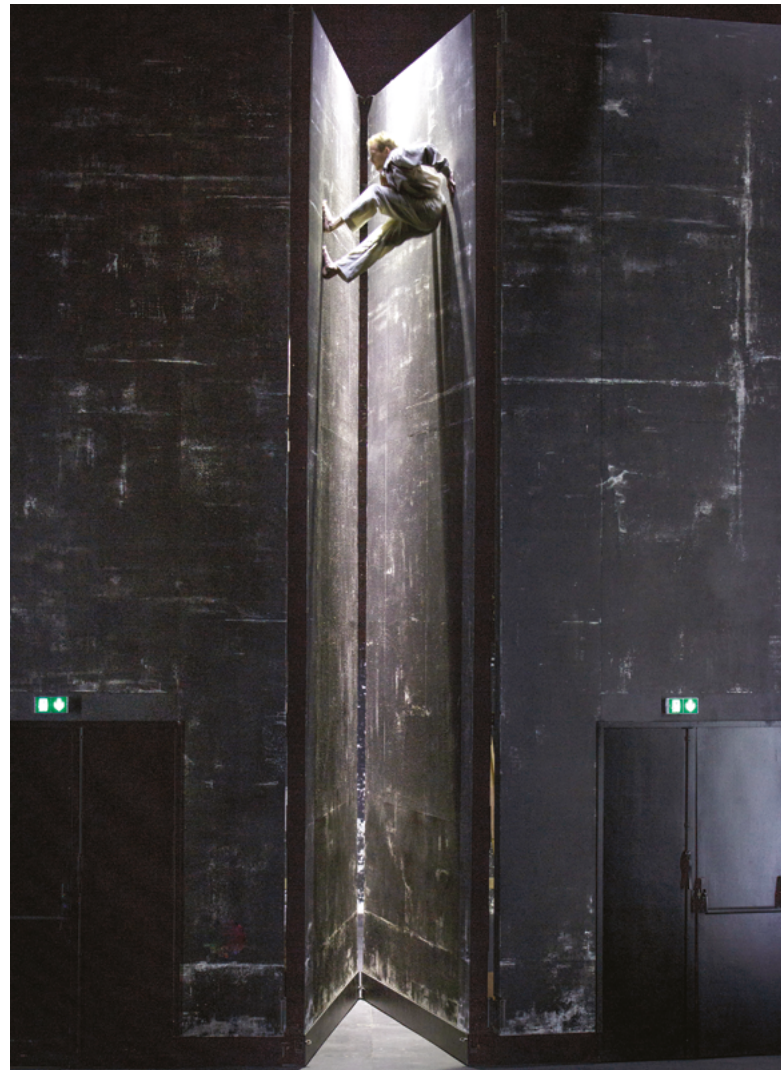


Vortex - Cie Non Nova ©Jean-Luc Beaujault

a “family resemblance”: the circus scene is structured into aesthetic or stylistic movements or currents, with each choosing to emphasise a particular aspect deemed more essential to the artistic act. One such trend might be the “street-level” artists who are extremely attentive to the role played by their audiences and how accessible their messages are, although this does not prevent them from sparking intrigue or surprise (as seen in the Acoreakro company or the Cheptel Aleïkoum collective), while another might be the “performers of the novel”, who do not necessarily aim to unsettle, but shift the focus of their work onto a specific aspect, sometimes highly abstract, and always new to the audience, as seen in Chloé Moglia’s work on suspension or Yoann Bourgeois’s probing at the idea of balance. For the street-level performers, the emphasis is on a “rustic-” or perhaps even “pauper-” inspired aesthetic, in which the grandiose is achieved with nothing much at all, harking back to the small circus of yore with a nostalgia-tinged inflection, a tribute to the ingenuity

of the little people, and an ode to the spartan. The Trottola circus is the best-known example of this, but the philosophy was very much alive as far back as the 1990s and Pocheros. With respect to “novel” circus, the growing number of “genre-bending” performers deserve a mention here, artists who are categorised as circus performers despite themselves, such as Phia Ménard, Aurélien Bory, Yoann Bourgeois, or the Vimala Pons and Tsirihaka Harrivel duo, all of whom are impossible for the average audience member to pigeon-hole: is it dance, theatre, live music, or performance art? Yet all have circus backgrounds, and show reverence to the genre while radically overhauling it. Nikolaus or Ludor Citrik the clown are just as novel, as are the very many “artists of the absurd”, the eccentric, the off-beat, those who trade in the knowing art of titillating or provoking their audience.

The direct descendant of the two aforementioned movements, contemporary circus is now supported by a specialist network of public institutions working to create, perform, showcase, and promote shows. The unprecedented rise in the number of circus schools, students, companies, shows (roughly 500 in France), pro-circus theatres, circus-friendly cities, and festivals, now make it more closely defined by its diversity than ever before. European-wide networks of platforms (venues, festivals, schools) have widened its market considerably, with the Internet doing the same for its audience. The number of major shows showcased in prestigious venues is rising year after year. A community of researchers, academics, archivists, and critics are continuing to build awareness of its power as an art form in sections of society that had until relatively recently considered it to be minor. In short, contemporary circus has been elevated.



Espace - Aurélien Bory - at Festival d'Avignon in 2016
©Christophe Raynaud de Lage

FROM STREET THEATRE TO ARTS IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

For just over five decades, the outdoor arts sector in France has been lent substance and structure like nowhere else in Europe. Let us take a closer look at how this art form emerged and developed, the way in which it was given a framework, and the crises and changes it has endured.



By Anne Gonon

Writer, journalist and critic Anne Gonon completed a PhD in outdoor arts audiences in 2007. She has written a number of books on outdoor artistic production (including *IN VIVO, les figures du spectateur des arts de la rue*, *Bienvenue chez vous ! Culture O Centre, aménageur culturel du territoire* and *Tout ouïe, la création musicale et sonore en espace public*).

She has a special interest in the role of the spectator and site-specific cultural and artistic projects. She is currently pursuing a career in the field of communications.

It was the mid-20th-century. The context was a scene characterised by breakaway avant-garde movements, and a move to acknowledge and catalogue fringe trends and hybrid disciplines. It was against this backdrop that outdoor arts emerged as a fantastic embodiment of major cultural and artistic shifts. It's often said that outdoor arts are as old as time itself. From Ancient Greece's Dionysia to the medieval Mysteries, from travelling fairs to the wandering performers at Paris' Boulevard du Crime, actors have always taken to the great outdoors. The pioneers of the modern movement hit the streets in the 1970s, armed with awareness of

the heritage they were tasked with keeping alive. They decided to bring the theatre outside, with one clear goal in mind: to reappropriate this ancestral art form they believed had been shut away behind closed doors, and thereby reserved for a handful of elites. Street theatre exploded onto the scene against a backdrop of intense political and social unrest. Its ties with this distant past were vocalised, yet were somewhat idealised, too. The truth was that this new form of theatre was deeply rooted in its time, influenced by more recent political artistic movements, from Dadaism to situationism, drawing on agitprop and happenings along the way.

The street performers of the time were on a mission to mingle with and seek inspiration in society, occupying the beating heart of the city as a physical hub and symbolic metaphor for community. They believed in accessible culture for all, working in specific communities, and providing free entertainment. Their quest for new aesthetic experiences with a political bent led to them questioning the role of performers and the theatre in society today, resulting in shows that combined playfulness with physical experience, circus arts and acts of prowess, music, patter, visual arts, and more.

These artists fused a range of different practices and pioneered the idea of a multi-disciplinary approach to theatre. They let their instincts guide them, taking payment in the form of coins collected at the end of their shows, connecting with passers-by and audiences directly. They allowed themselves complete freedom in form and format. Right from the get-go, their philosophy was buoyed by an undercurrent of transgression and rebellion, a desire to flirt with the boundaries of the spaces they used, and innovation in their relationships with the audience. The Théâtre de l'Unité was one of this movement's pioneering companies, and asserted that "the people may survive without the theatre, but the theatre cannot survive without the people". This troupe is as boundary-breaking now as it was back when it performed its *La 2CV Théâtre* in 1977, a show that embodied a movement that stayed true to its roots: a deft combination of humour, poetry, and politics.



1789 secondes - Compagnie Internationale Alligator at Chalon dans la rue, 2009 ©Michel Wiart



La vengeance des sémis - Cie Le Phun
©Jean-Pierre Estournet

The golden age of outdoor arts

Street theatre exploded in France in the 1980s, with companies demonstrating mind-blowing inventiveness packed full of reimaginings, trickery and sleights of hand, and epic set designs. The Royal de Luxe, Délices Dada, Iltopie, Les Piétons, Le Phun, Kumulus, Oposito, la Compagnie OFF, Décor Sonore, L'illustre Famille Burratini, and Cacahuète all emerged, to name but a few. The 1980s gave birth to a number of companies that went on to leave their mark.

From bite-sized to epic scales, travelling performances to fixed settings, there was something for everyone. Ingenious 'mad scientist' types created reality-bending machines, while random pop-up performances sparked interaction from passers-by and huge 'traffic jams'. A fine example of this was Générrik Vapeur, a company based in Marseille founded in 1983 that described itself as 'a trafficker of actors and machines', embodying this combination of performance, set design, and contraption-based creativity. In 1988, Générrik Vapeur produced *Bivouac*, a parade of men with blue-painted faces and legs, carrying barrels that they ultimately assembled in a large pyramid. This blue army swarmed the streets, using benches and lampposts as props, climbing fountains, and drawing the spectators into their frenzied parade.

Alongside this, festivals began popping up, shaping the stages on which outdoor arts could be showcased. City councils became street performers' closest allies and

supporters. In 1986, Michel Crespin founded the Aurillac street theatre festival, and Pierre Layac and Jacques Quentin followed suit the year after with Chalon dans la rue in Chalon-sur-Saône. To be able to rehearse and produce their shows, many companies began setting themselves up with their own spaces, often abandoned warehouses.

Michel Crespin founded Lieux Publics in 1983, France's very first official hub for outdoor arts performers. This marked the beginning of the French Ministry of Culture's support for a professional sector in full swing, one home to performers and artists who shied away from, and sometimes even shunned, institutional help and attention, considering it to lie contrary to their ideals. This structuring process gathered speed in the 1990s, just as the number of shows being performed rocketed. Festivals were fully booked. Audiences were more than turning up.

Once known as "street theatre", the term "outdoor arts" began to be used, with "arts" in the plural deemed important in emphasising the multi-disciplinary aspects of the field. The sector had embarked on a journey of self-discovery, and a quest for validation. In reality, outdoor arts have always been characterised by an openness in aesthetic approach, and the way in which they encompass a broad church of forms and formats, a testimony to their capacity for endless reinvention. The founding of France's Fédération Nationale des Arts de la Rue in 1997 was evidence of this. This professional association aimed to "defend the collective ethics and values linked to members' specific creative needs, meaning using the city as a stage while generating new artistic forms (in terms of original approaches to the notion of performance, to the relationship to audiences, and to methods of production and showcasing used). At the dawning of the new millennium, the outdoor arts scene experienced a breakthrough, with residencies, international festivals, companies with global exposure, and mass crowds marking a turning point in the field. Yet public funding and state support in particular remained limited, with the sector still as financially fragile as ever. Many companies were forced to create while existing hand to mouth.

The rise of "public arts" or "arts in the public space"

The early 2000s brought to light a certain number of dichotomies within the sector. The heavy hand town councils had in outdoor arts funding led to artists fearing they would be weaponised, used to further council communication, community, and potentially even economic concerns. The outdoor



Bivouac - Cie Générrik Vapeur

arts' disruptive, political flavour had weakened. The festivals, meanwhile, were accused of straitjacketing production and imposing constraints and restrictions linked to crowd management of the audiences that flocked to the venues. Alongside this, a new chapter had begun in the move to structure street arts. The "Centre National des Arts de la Rue" (CNAR)¹ label was ushered in and awarded to nine residency spaces, and the FAI-AR (school for artistic creation in public space) was launched as the sector's very first professional outdoor arts course. Just as it looked as if this move was reaching completion, two major changes erupted, leaving their mark on the millennium's first two decades.

While festivals continued to serve as the number one platform for companies, seasonal scheduling was growing. This allowed artistic teams to perform throughout the year, while giving venues the breathing space needed to move away from a strictly events-focused approach, deepening their ties with their regions and local communities instead. Venues became homes and hubs, rather than mere stages, the artists absorbed into the space through an approach that prioritised long-term collaborations, with fully immersive residencies. Cultural activities and public relations were expanded and highlighted, allowing companies to engage with local communities on a deeper level. This marked the age of "regional cultural and artistic" projects, featuring works

¹ The CNAR (Centre National des Arts de la Rue, National Centers for Outdoor Arts in English) label was succeeded in 2010 by the CNAREP label (National Centers for Outdoor and Arts in Public Space).

inspired by their local context. Changes were afoot in the terminology used, too, with “public arts” emerging as a term. Once again, “arts” are given in the plural, in a nod to ever more intense multidisciplinary aspects on two levels: firstly, in the productions themselves and the many different practices they encompassed, and secondly, in the venues, with dancers, fine artists, and graffiti artists leaving their studios to rub shoulders with one another, as well as architects, put to work in creating pop-up structures. The “public space” replaced the street, and naturally the effect this went beyond mere semantics. Indeed, performers and schedulers were reaching beyond the street and the city, taking over the suburbs, the countryside, the forests and the fields. This choice of term was also a way of reasserting the political intent behind the artistic act brought out from inside bricks-and-mortar venues, an intentional reference to philosopher Jurgen Habermas’ notion of “public space”, a place in which to meet, exchange, debate with the Other, a public stage and platform, buoyed by a sense of freedom. In this sense, fifty years after its emergence, outdoor arts have held true to their founding spirit.

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Ourse - Cie Bélé-Bélé ©Loïc Nys

THE INTERVIEW CORNER: VOICES AND VIEWS FROM CULTURAL LEADERS AND ARTISTS FROM FRANCE

INTERVIEW WITH GUY CARRARA, SIMON CARRARA AND RAQUEL RACHE DE ANDRADE

©Teresa Suarez



Guy Carrara, an artist, writer and director, was involved in the creation of the Archaos company in 1986. Raquel Rache de Andrade, an actress and acrobat, joined the company in 1988 and went on to codirect the company's creations and then the Pôle National

Cirque. Simon Carrara joined the company in 2001 and was involved in setting up the company in Marseille as administrative and financial director, before setting up BIAC - Biennale internationale des arts du cirque with Raquel and Guy in 2015.

Archaos was originally a circus company dedicated to the creation and touring of shows. In 2001, it set up a permanent base in Marseille with the opening of a permanent venue, which was assigned the Pôle National Cirque (PNC)¹ label in 2011. Can you describe the different stages in this development and the intentions that guided it?

As an international company emblematic of contemporary circus, we chose to settle in Marseille in 2001, after a fruitful collaboration with Le théâtre du Merlan, scène Nationale (now Le ZEF). We very quickly rented a 1200m² space for our rehearsals, where we also welcomed other companies for creative residencies, co-produced shows and opened a training space for professional artists. The project began as the project of a company concerned about the issues facing the sector, and keen to get involved in the transfer of knowledge and to play a part in supporting other artists. We were self-missioned out of conviction, and public funding came very gradually. Then, in 2011, the Ministry of Culture offered to give us the Pôle National Cirque label. The essential missions of this label are to support creation and distribution, as well as ongoing training for professionals in the sector, amateur practice and cultural, artistic and educational initiatives.

Since 2015, Archaos has been organising the BIAC - Biennale internationale des arts du cirque, which will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2025. In your opinion, how does the organisation of such events strengthen cooperation between circus cultural structures on a regional scale, while contributing to the influence and development of contemporary circus internationally?

The BIAC is a collaborative event that could not exist without the partnerships of more than 50 cultural organisations in the southern Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA) region. At a local level, collaborations during BIAC and upstream of each event create a virtuous ecosystem that combines company residencies, co-productions and programming. Since the creation of BIAC in 2015, there has been much more circus programming overall in the southern PACA region by mainstream cultural structures. The number of established companies has also increased considerably (currently around 50 companies). The cultural vitality of our region means that we can present the widest possible range of contemporary circus formats and aesthetics. The programme is highly attractive to

1 National Circus Center in English.

French and international professionals, who will be able to see 18 shows, including 8 new works, during the week of professional meetings, and take part in intense discussions on issues of concern to our industry. For companies, it's a gateway to the international stage. A major festival like BIAC in a major metropolis, like Marseille, provides the media coverage needed to make contemporary circus better known to the general public. And we hope that this will encourage other major cities to set up major circus festivals, which are essential if this artistic movement is to be recognised in Europe and the rest of the world.

BIAC's programme features a large number of tent shows, notably in the specially dedicated Espace Chapiteaux. Why did you decide to promote big tops, especially in a city like Marseille?

The big top is part of the collective imagination and evokes the magic of the ephemeral. BIAC needed a heart, a nerve centre where it would be possible to put on a series of different shows, a place that exuded circus aesthetics. The big top is a wonderful tool for attracting new audiences. BIAC's Village chapiteaux is both a fantastic tool for welcoming a large audience for a month and a very important iconographic emblem for promoting the contemporary circus around the world.



Village Chapiteaux of BIAC at Plage du Prado in Marseille
© Matthieu Colin

What more needs to be done to strengthen the contemporary circus sector and its players in France?

By creating a large-scale creation biennial and pooling the resources of numerous partner cultural structures, we wanted to provide coherent support for creation, distribution and the possibility of international touring for the companies presented. But the professionals in our sector have noted that the resources dedicated to developing training in Europe have not been matched by sufficient resources for distribution. In France, the resources of the National Circus Centres (PNC), which support creation, are far too modest to enable distribution commensurate with the stakes represented by the young artistic teams graduating each year from all the top European schools. This lack of resources jeopardises the entire artistic creation chain, from emerging artists to established performers, but also, and above all, creations under circus tents and large-format creations for large theatre stages.



Envol - cie Hors Surface during BIAC ©Pierre Gondard

THE INTERVIEW CORNER: VOICES AND VIEWS FROM CULTURAL LEADERS AND ARTISTS FROM FRANCE

INTERVIEW WITH ALEXIS NYS

©Leonor Lumineau



In 2007, Alexis Nys founded Productions Bis, a production company dedicated to live performances and unconventional projects, supporting public space artists and developing international cooperation initiatives. At the same time, he joined the association Animakt, a 'living workshop for the arts, connections, and culture,'

where he took on the role of artistic coordination and institutional development until 2022. In January 2023, he was appointed director of Lieux Publics, CNAREP, which oversees the Cité des Arts de la Rue, a space for artistic, ecological, and social experimentation located in the northern districts of Marseille.

Since the early years of Lieux Publics, founded in 1983, its actions in terms of support for the creation of projects within local communities as well as artistic programming have reflected the development of the outdoor arts in France. What have been the main challenges over the last 40 years and how has Lieux Publics met them?

Lieux Publics was founded in 1983 by Michel Crespin and Fabien Jannelle, with the support of the Ministry of Culture. This international centre for encounters and creation for artistic practices in public places and open spaces in cities was set up at La Ferme du Buisson, in the new town of Marne-la-Vallée. This marks the beginning of a desire to reach out to audiences in forsaken spaces, and to support artists in these new urban environments. After this first phase of development, with the jesters and *cogne-trottoirs* who built the first companies, and which saw the emergence of historic teams who would become the driving forces behind the outdoor arts network for almost 40 years (Generik Vapeur, Ilotopie, Transe Express, Royal Deluxe...), Lieux Publics moved to Marseille in 1990.

Michel Crespin was attracted by this world city, with its many public spaces and pressing issues, where he could develop artistic practices for a major metropolis.

From 2001, Pierre Sauvageot took over as director and continued the transformation of the institution, until it became part of the CNAR network, now CNAREP: the addition of the final two letters for '*et de l'Espace Public*' (public space in English) symbolises the broadening of our network's practices. From street theatre to the outdoor arts, with the arrival of dance in particular, and then the arts in public space which incorporate a multitude of new forms of writing, which Lieux Publics has supported the development of over the years, through programmes such as Sirènes & midi net and Remue-Méninges. At the same time, Lieux Publics founded the IN SITU network, the main European network for arts in public space, and which has evolved over the years to support the artists and operators who are part of it, in the new forms of writing for the public space. With my arrival in 2023, a new phase in the life of the Centre National will begin, putting the public, working-class neighbourhoods and art rooted in society back at the heart of our concerns

Lieux Publics is based at the Cité des arts de la rue, a 36,000-square-metre hub dedicated to performing arts. This space unites a dozen organisations, creating a comprehensive network of expertise, and is located in the northern districts of Marseille. Could you elaborate on the principles and values that

drive the work of Lieux Publics as a centre for creation and distribution, particularly in relation to its unique social and geographical context?

Lieux Publics was initially one of several residents of the Cité des Arts de la Rue, from 2013 to 2022, before an amalgamation with the APCAR (Association de Préfiguration de la Cité des Arts de la Rue) gave it responsibility for managing the site. This is a fundamental change that will have an impact on the entire structure of the national centre, creating a new hybrid object that combines artistic, ecological and social issues. What national centre today can boast of running a back-to-work scheme or managing a stream on its site? These new elements allow us to structure an innovative relationship with the territory, with shared creation at the heart of its programme, and various tools for neighbouring residents to appropriate. This is a fundamental challenge for the development of the structure today, which must succeed in thinking of its action in concentric circles starting from the Cité des arts de la Rue: first in the northern districts of Marseille, then in the public spaces of Marseille and the metropolis, on a national scale to defend the development of the outdoor arts and the public space, and on an international scale via the IN SITU network and our emerging partnerships around the Mediterranean. The circle then comes full circle between the neighbourhoods, where many residents have historic links with the other side of the sea. To come back to the question, the process of building relationships with neighbouring districts is based on a permanent inside/outside logic: residencies at the Cité des Arts de la Rue that are exported to neighbouring districts, performances that are part of district programming, and regular invitations to residents to come and take over the site for times of conviviality, ambitious cultural actions or shared creations. One of the key words here is involvement and participation: an encounter with art involves an encounter with the creative process and the participation of as many people as possible, which helps to reintegrate artistic creation into society.

What strategy guides the international actions of Lieux Publics as a European creative hub, and more specifically as coordinator of the IN SITU platform?

After 20 years of continuous development, the IN SITU network is about to undergo a major transformation with the launch in early 2025 of the IN SITU Platform: a Europe-wide support and guidance system for emerging artists. Until now, the network has chosen to support a



Lieux Publics at La Cité des Arts de la Rue in Marseille

limited number of artists over the long term, in order to create spaces for exchanges and projects that have been virtuous: a framework conducive to experimentation for artists, encounters between artists and operators, and the sharing of resources and know-how that has enabled the entire network to develop its skills. But this left little room for openness, for the regular entry of new artists. We now want to put this expertise and these accumulated skills, both among the artists and among the operators, at the service of emerging artists on a European scale, fully aware that developing an artistic project in the public space is particularly difficult in many European contexts. Over the next four years, we will be issuing several calls for applications, inviting artists from all over Europe to present their projects within our network, so that they can benefit from tailor-made support to take the first steps in their professional development on an international scale. Alongside IN SITU, Lieux Publics is also asking itself other questions about international development. As explained above, we work on the basis of our territory, and Marseille is an open city, very connected with the Mediterranean area, so it is very relevant to work in this direction. On a personal level, this is one of the reasons why I came to Marseille, because I've run a number of cooperation projects in the Middle East and North Africa in the past, so it was easy to get back in touch with this network. It's a page yet to be written, but there are regular exchanges with partners in Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco. Finally, I'm talking to partners in other world cities, such as Barcelona and Brussels, to work together

with artists who are looking at the issue of art in the city and public spaces in outlying areas.

Since 2010, Lieux publics has been one of the 13 CNAREP (Centres nationaux des arts de la rue et de l'espace public) accredited by the French Ministry of Culture. What do you think still needs to be done to strengthen the outdoor arts sector and its players in France?

Despite the appearance of these labels a few years ago and the gradual structuring of our sector, it remains fundamentally fragile. Lieux Publics, which is one of the big national centres, barely reaches the scale of the small national stages, while managing an infrastructure of 36,000 m². This gives an idea of how far we still have to go to strengthen the network of outdoor arts players, at a time when the public space is a major issue for our society. These spaces are managed on the basis of questions of safety, flow and commercial functionality, whereas they should be meeting places and, by creating common ground, help to bridge the divides that are widening in a polarised world. So what actions should be taken... first and foremost to strengthen the players in the sector, to help stabilise the dozens of fragile structures that are the breeding ground for creation outside dedicated cultural venues. Then we need to cross-fertilise, bring together the different professional sectors and invite all the cultural players to take over the public space, drawing on the expertise accumulated over 40 years of developing the outdoor arts. Beyond the outdoor, the big question for several years, and for some time to come, has been that of the participation of as many people as possible in the cultural life of our country. Linking the issues of popular education to those of art, rebuilding culture, or rather cultures. It's a question that must guide all those involved in the cultural world on a daily basis, and it's not an easy one to answer from one institution, but it must be at the heart of our concerns.



Side by Side - cie Kamtchatka in collaboration with Lieux Publics, Citron Jaune, Le Sémaphore and the city of Martigues

CROSS-INTERVIEW WITH CAMILLE & MANOLO

©Philippe Metsu



Camille & Manolo, centaur artists and co-directors of the Théâtre du Centaure, are working towards the realisation of a utopia: the centaur, the link between man and animal. This research has given rise to artistic forms, both intimate and event-based, on the frontiers of theatre, contemporary

circus, dance and visual arts, which have travelled the world. Based in Marseille, between the city and the countryside, the Théâtre du Centaure is also a place where art and nature come together with the rhythm of the seasons.

Since 2016, the Théâtre du Centaure has been located near the Parc National des Calanques, in a venue thoughtfully designed to address the challenges of ecological transition and featuring a big top. Based on your experience, what are the benefits of showcasing contemporary circus in such a space, particularly in a city like Marseille?

The Théâtre du Centaure is located in France's second largest city, right on the edge of the Parc National des Calanques. It's a link between the city and nature, just as the Centaure is a link between humans and animals. Centaurs, of course, do not exist, they are a utopia. The Théâtre du Centaure is therefore a heterotopia, a concrete place where we bring to life a utopia, that of a hybrid being, half-human, half-animal. It's a permaculture third-place that we built ourselves like a children's hut to house our imaginary world. We worked with Indonesian carpenters to build a wooden palace without cutting down a single tree. We live here with our horses to invent another world.

As a new form that invents itself, contemporary circus intrinsically thinks about its time. Here, between the city and nature, the Centaures question our relationship with the living and with otherness. How can we be together with all living things? How can we think about the world in

terms of what brings us together? Here in Marseille, a port city open to the diversity of the world, we are inventing desirable narratives. Because beauty today is political. For us, it's the wild, hybrid beauty of the Centaurs.

Your artistic approach focuses mainly on the relationship between animal and human, developing a unique approach around the figure of the centaur in shows with equines. In your opinion, what is the place of the animal in the contemporary circus today?

Our artistic approach, centred on the intimate relationship between humans and animals in a poetic quest for symbiosis, illustrates a lifestyle choice as much as a vision of the world. By living and working with our horses, whom we regard as our family or as 'halves' of ourselves, we are defending a deeply embodied and respectful approach to living things. At a time of collapsing ecosystems, global warming and the Anthropocene, it is essential to rethink our relationship with living things. The separation that humanity has established between itself and nature, and between the different elements of society - ages, genders, functions, social classes - is leading us towards a societal and ecological dead end. Art is a space that can question

this distancing of otherness. The contemporary circus, like society as a whole, has followed a trajectory that aims to protect animals but which, paradoxically, distances them from our lives and our imaginations. The challenge today is not to place humans and nature in two mutually exclusive modes. Living things are not 'the other'. Nature is not something else that we destroy or protect, but something else that we conceive of as being outside ourselves, so that we can visit it on holiday. This distancing reinforces the disconnection between humans and the rest of the living world, contributing to an impoverished vision of the world and a crisis of sensitivity. On the contrary, we believe that everything is connected, that we are part of the living world and that it is possible to reinvent an artistic and ethical relationship with it. This requires in-depth knowledge and a committed and engaging choice of lifestyle. Our horses embody this approach: by including them in our creations not as dominated beings, but as equal partners, we show that it is possible to co-create ecosystems that are rich in meaning and diversity. It is imperative to give a voice back to animality in art, not by reproducing old models, but by inventing a new dramaturgy rooted in deep, respectful, symbolic and symbiotic relationships between humans and living things. Working with animals as part of an artistic process creates a rich and diverse ecosystem, both on stage and in the collective imagination. Being an artist means giving yourself the right to reinvent the world. For us, that means the poetic creation of half-human, half-animal hybrid



Entre Chiens et Loups - Théâtre du Centaure
© Anne Zorgdrager



Théâtre du Centaure ©Christophe Taniere

creatures known as Centaurs. Whether they're playing Genet, Shakespeare or Melquiot, or dancing without words, the Centaurs express a sensitive relationship, a coexistence and co-creation with the living that is not only possible, but perhaps necessary to meet the challenges of a world in search of meaning and balance.

You've been co-directing the company since 1992. What are the particularities of working as a duo?

Our duo, often humorously nicknamed 'Manila and Camollo', reflects the extent to which our personal and professional lives are intertwined. This close relationship, both with our horses and with each other, is at the heart of our approach. What unites us is stronger than anything that might separate us, and it's this strength that fuels our work. Being together, living together, doing together, working together - it's not easy, but it's extremely rich. If an idea doesn't convince the other, it's often a sign that it needs to be reworked. We complement and balance each other: where one might get carried away, the other moderates; where one doubts, the other encourages. This dynamic pushes us to go further while keeping our feet on the ground. The risk of such a duo is the accumulation of ideas. When our two imaginations get carried away, it's sometimes difficult to choose. Fortunately, our team helps us to prioritise.

What are the main challenges you face as circus artists in France?

Art and culture used to be the prerogative of a French model. In the past, politicians in France gave themselves legitimacy by defending a culture that was free to question power. Today, extreme right-wing ideas have so infused the circles of power that it is fashionable to cut subsidies for 'wokist activists'. Today, in the land of the Enlightenment, some people are openly seeking to gain media legitimacy by attacking a culture labelled as elitist and anti-establishment. Tomorrow, it won't be enough to resist, we'll have to invent. Contemporary circus, with its shared risk-taking, its need for mutual aid and its desire to surpass itself, is perhaps the artistic space par excellence for inventing common ground. It's the place where we can invent another world, one that is shared and resilient through mutual help. For us Centaurs, the challenge is simple: to invent another world through poetry. A poetry of living beings. The Centaurs do not exist, they are a utopia, a contemporary mythology to question our times and perhaps invent the stories of anticipation of a world in the making. What if the hybrid were our future? That's the idea behind our current project. *Entre Chiens et Loups* (*Between Dogs and Wolves* in English) is rooted in a long-term, lifelong approach. After more than thirty years of research into the utopia of the centaur, this creation goes right to the heart of the project. It's a quest for symbiosis in otherness, a listening to others in the mirror of their language. In today's dislocated world, this is what we want to convey. The dance of a woman and a man becoming one with four black horses is a poetic, political and philosophical dream that touches every culture and every generation. With no text but carried by the magnificent music of Agathe Di Piro and Walid Ben Selim, this creation seeks a universal language that opens up and connects, from one shore to the other, from one culture to the other, from one world to the other. After a series of preview performances for BIAC, the work will be performed next June by the sea in Sète, before being taken to the other shores of the Mediterranean in 2026. It's the pursuit of a dream: to poetically inhabit the world as Centaurs.

THE INTERVIEW CORNER: VOICES AND VIEWS FROM CULTURAL LEADERS AND ARTISTS FROM FRANCE

INTERVIEW WITH EDITH AMSELLEM

©Lila Pithon



Edith Amsellem founded the ERd'O company in Marseille in 2012 with a strong desire to create theatre in nondedicated venues. The question of women's place in society, drained of prejudice and demeaning clichés, is the central theme of her creations. The company's repertoire includes five shows: *Les Liaisons dangereuses sur terrain multisports*, *Yvonne*,

princesse de Bourgogne sur château-toboggan, *J'ai peur quand la nuit sombre*, *Virginia à la bibliothèque* and *Vous êtes ici*. For 2026, she is preparing *Le Grand Défilé*, winner of the 2023 Écrire pour la rue¹ prize.

Your artistic career began with dance and theatre. Since 2012, you've been artistic director of the company ERd'O, for which you create shows in the public space. What triggered your interest in working in the public space?

The artistic experience that started it all dates back to 2000, when director Anne Marina Pleis invited me to join her 'Taxis-Théâtre' venture. She offered artists a concept for 3 or 4 spectators: to stage a drama in a car, using the city as a backdrop. I co-directed *État Civil*, based on Michèle Grangaud's work, for Marseille, *Le Grand Cahier*, based on Agota Cristof's work, for Brussels, and *Ubik*, based on Philip K. Dick's work, for Metz. This adventure was decisive. It opened my eyes to the relevance of real space as a backdrop to fiction. I learnt to look at the city, to superimpose it on the stories, to choose settings to make the words resonate. And above all, I experience the delicious friction between reality and fiction, triggering all sorts of improbable accidents that sow confusion in the minds of the spectators: the theatre becomes truer than life in

this poetic reality distorted by the prism of fiction. There was a new awareness, a new soul, as if theatre could be augmented by space and life. When I set up the ERd'O company in 2012, I was looking to recapture something of that experience. I'm looking to put works of fiction or theatre into perspective with particular spaces that can reveal these works by making them vibrate in the reality of today's world. Finally, I realise that from one show to the next, I have embarked on a kind of journey, inviting emblematic places in the city to play their own role in the function that constitutes them. Over the last 11 years, multi-sports pitches, children's playgrounds, parks, gardens, forests, libraries and soon heritage sites have all been the backdrops for the projects I've chosen to stage.

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

The work of the company ERd'O is at the intersection of two networks, that of theatre and that of the street arts. We are supported not only by the CNAREP, but also by

¹ Created by the Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques (SACD) and the Directorate General for Artistic Creation (DGCA) of the Ministry of Culture, "Écrire pour la rue" aims to support multidisciplinary writing for public spaces by providing authors and creators with guidance during the research phase that precedes the writing process.

the *scènes nationales*, the *scènes conventionnées* and the *théâtres de ville*², which are increasingly open to outdoor programming. We operate between two worlds with very different workings, timeframes and means of production. The particularity of creation in the public space that jumps out at me, and that I deplore, is that there is much less funding to operate, produce and distribute. And then there's always that depreciatory thing, a lack of recognition, a subcategory. Having said that, creation in the public arena is endowed with some absolutely formidable production facilities in the form of the CNAREPs. They are rare and precious tools, often run by skilled and passionate teams. They are homes for artists, places to live and work where we are given the keys when we arrive. This trust, this autonomy and this absolute freedom to immerse oneself without constraint are the necessary conditions to be able to plunge into the throes of these specific creations.

What are the main challenges you face as an outdoor arts company in France? From your point of view, what solutions could be implemented?

As an outdoor arts company, the major challenge is to be able to tackle any societal subject in the public space without being censored by politics. I'm also thinking of the security restrictions that can sometimes cut us off. But the big challenge is how to continue, how to last in the current context! As a company, putting on a production these days has become a real obstacle course. Co-production budgets are plummeting and our short-term solution is to increase the number of partners. I'm also worried about the institutions: the southern region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, for example, has just announced a considerable cut in its cultural budget, which will have an impact on the structures. But in order to cushion the impact of this cut, the organisations are going to reduce their programming, and in the end it's the companies that will suffer... If I had any solutions, I'd be happy to share them with the whole profession, but to be honest I don't. I feel terribly pessimistic. I'm feeling terribly pessimistic these days, and I must admit that sometimes I find myself thinking about how I'd go back to work if we no longer had the means to operate! For the moment I'm staying in the fight with the ERd'O team.



Les liaisons dangereuses sur terrain multisports
© Antoine Icard

What can you tell us about your next project, *Le Grand Défilé*?

Le Grand Défilé is a participatory show for heritage sites that will explore the female gender through the atypical settings, historic-prestigious places where the poetry of the space can magnify the show. These buildings will allow me to dramatise the parade and immerse the public in a unique dimension. Symbolically, I think it's important to make room for women on these heritage sites, just as fashion does. The challenge will be to come up with a minimalist scenography that can fit into these special spaces without betraying or distorting them. In the first part, the audience will be invited to a fashion show featuring archetypal panoplies of the female gender. In the second part, the audience will be able to follow the young women backstage to witness the deconstruction of the archetype and see the person behind the costume emerge. For the audience, the show will be a physical exercise in deconstruction, a journey from the artificial to the natural, from the mannequin to the human, from the coat rack to the individual. In this show I'm going to give the floor exclusively to girls. By girls I mean people who identify with the female gender. People always ask me when I present this project: Why

2 *Scènes nationales, scènes conventionnées* and *théâtres de ville* are structures that are specific to French cultural policy on performing arts. For more information, check out <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Thematiques/theatre-spectacles/Le-theatre-et-les-spectacles-en-France>

only girls? Because girls' bodies, whether clothed or not, are in some way available, not only desired but coveted, often appropriated, sometimes violated. Because girls need space to talk about themselves, because girls need to be given room to express themselves, because I want to create a territory, a world where girls can tell their stories to each other, without being cut off, contradicted or paraphrased. The casting will be made up of 3 professional actresses and 10 amateur actresses from each venue. The girls will have to be willing to expose themselves and be part of a group with a body-related practice (theatre, dance, circus, gymnastics, synchronised swimming, cheerleading, figure skating, majorettes, etc.). The show is due to premiere in spring 2026.



J'ai peur d'aimer rougir - cie ERd'O
©Christophe Maillot

SECTORAL MAPPING OF FRANCE

This mapping was conducted by Circostrada. 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.

You can also find out about more Circostrada members based in France via <https://www.circostrada.org/en/members> > *Map View* > selecting the *France* country filter.

ARTISTS/COMPANIES

To check out France's contemporary circus and outdoor arts artists' and companies directory, you can directly connect to the online *Annuaire* of ARTCENA → <https://www.artcena.fr/annuaire>

What is it

This online professional directory for the performing arts provides access to essential contacts for your practice. To develop your projects, understanding the organisation of outdoor arts, circus, and theatre is crucial. A comprehensive overview of these sectors and the identification of potential collaborators, such as creation venues, festivals, companies, and partners, is indispensable.

The ARTCENA directory is divided into five sections:

- A general directory of organisations in contemporary circus, outdoor arts, and theatre.
- Four thematic directories detailing specific activities of these organisations:
 - Festivals
 - Reading committees
 - Writing residencies
 - Grants and subsidies

How it works

To find out more about French contemporary circus and outdoor arts artists/companies, you can use the Directory by selecting filters such as > **Compagnie/Cirque/Arts de rue/France** and then select **Affichage > Liste**, if you wish to browse a list, or **Affichage > Carte**, if you wish to browse a map.

FESTIVALS / CONTEMPORARY CIRCUS

BIAC - BIENNALE INTERNATIONALE DES ARTS DU CIRQUE



Based in: Marseille

Contact: Simon Carrara - Deputy Director

<https://biennale-cirque.com/>

CIRCA



Based in: Auch

Contact: Stéphanie Bulteau - Director

<http://www.circa.auch.fr>

FESTIVAL D'ALBA LA ROMAINE

Based in: Alba-la-Romaine

Contact: Alain Reynaud - Artistic Director

<https://lefestivaldalba.org/>

FESTIVAL RENCONTRE DES JONGLAGES



Based in: La Courneuve

Contact: Vincent Berhault - Director

<https://maisondesjonglages.fr/>

FESTIVAL UTOPISTES

Based in: Lyon

Contact: Mathurin Bolze - Artistic Director

<https://utopistes-ciarc.fr/>

LE MANS FAIT SON CIRQUE

Based in: Le Mans

Contact: Richard Fournier - Director

<https://leplongeoir-cirque.fr/le-festival/>

SPRING



Based in: Cherbourg & Elbeuf

Contact: Lancelot Rétif (Acting Director of La Brèche Cherbourg, Pôle National Cirque Normandie) & Stéphanie Alaux (Coordinator for the SPRING Festival Cirque Théâtre Elbeuf, Pôle National Cirque Normandie)

<https://www.festival-spring.eu/>

TEMPS DE CIRQUES

Based in: Alès

Contact: Sylviane Manuel - Director

 <https://laverrieriedales.fr/festivals/>

TEMPS FORT CIRQUE



Based in: Rennes

Contact: Olivier Daco & Géraldine Werner - Co-directors

 <https://www.ay-roop.com/>

VILLAGE DE CIRQUE



Based in: Paris

Contact: Rémi Bovis & Marie Chapouillé - Co-directors

 <https://www.2r2c.coop/>

FESTIVALS / OUTDOOR ARTS

CERGY, SOIT!

Based in: Cergy-Pontoise Agglomeration

Contact: Sébastien Bris - Artistic Director

 <https://www.cergysoit.fr>

CHALON DANS LA RUE



Based in: Chalon-sur-Saône

Contact: Nathalie Cixous - Director

 <https://www.chalondanslarue.com/>

CRATÈRE SURFACES - ALÈS INTERNATIONAL OUTDOOR ARTS FESTIVAL



Based in: Alès

Contact: Olivier Lataste - Director

 <https://cratere-surfaces.com/>

FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DE THÉÂTRE DE RUE D'AURILLAC

Based in: Aurillac

Contact: Frédéric Remy - Director

 <https://www.aurillac.net/>

FESTIVAL FURIES



Based in: Châlons-en-Champagne

Contact: Jean-Marie Songy - Artistic Director

 <https://www.furies.fr/>

FESTIVAL DE RUE DE RAMONVILLE

Based in: Ramonville


Contact: Oliver Soubles-Benavente - Coordinator

 <https://festivalramonville-arto.fr/>

FESTIVAL PRIMO

Based in: Roissy Pays de France Agglomeration

Contact: Jean-Raymond Jacob - Artistic Director


 <https://oposito.fr/-primo-evenement-en-amont-des-.html>

LES INVITÉS DE VILLEURBANNE



Based in: Villeurbanne

Contact: Nadège Prugnard - Director

 <https://invites.villeurbanne.fr>

VIVA CITÉ

Based in: Sotteville-lès-Rouen

Contact: Anne Le Goff - Artistic Director

 <https://www.atelier231.fr/>

LES RIAS

Based in: Quimperlé

Contact: Caroline Raffin - Director

 <https://www.lesrias.com/>

LES TURBULENTES

Based in: Vieux-Condé

Contact: Virginie Foucault - Director

 <http://leboulon.fr/>

STRUCTURES / CONTEMPORARY CIRQUE

List of the 14 Pôles National Cirque (PNC)

→ <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Thematiques/Theatre-spectacles/Le-theatre-et-les-spectacles-en-France/Poles-Nationaux-du-Cirque-PNC>

LA CASCADE PÔLE NATIONAL CIRQUE



Based in: Bourg St Andéol

Contact: Alain Reynaud - Director

 <https://lacascade.org/>

LA CITÉ INTERNATIONALE DES ARTS DU CIRQUE (Pôle national cirque in prefiguration)

Based in: Lyon

LE CARRÉ MAGIQUE PÔLE NATIONAL CIRQUE DE LANNION-TRÉGOR

Based in: Lannion-Trégor

Contact: Philippe Le Gal - Director

 <https://www.carre-magique.com/>

LE PALC PÔLE NATIONAL CIRQUE

Based in: Châlons-en-Champagne

Contact: Jean-Marie Songy - Director

 <https://www.lepalc.fr/>



CIRQUE JULES VERNE PÔLE NATIONAL CIRQUE D'AMIENS

Based in: Amiens

Contact: Yannick Javaudin - Managing Director


 <https://www.cirquejulesverne.fr/>



LE PRATO PÔLE NATIONAL CIRQUE DE LILLE

Based in: Lille

Contact: Célia Deliau - Director

 <https://www.leprato.fr/>



CENTRE CULTUREL AGORA PÔLE NATIONAL CIRQUE DE BOULAZAC

Based in: Boulazac

Contact: Frédéric Durnerin - Director

 <https://www.agora-boulazac.fr/>

LE SIRQUE PÔLE NATIONAL CIRQUE DE NEXON EN NOUVELLE-AQUITAINE

Based in: Nexon

Contact: Martin Palisse - Director

 <https://www.lesirque.com/>

LA VERRERIE D'ALES PÔLE NATIONAL CIRQUE OCCITANIE

Based in: Alès

Contact: Sylviane Manuel - Director

 <https://www.polecirqueverrerie.com/>

CIRCA PÔLE NATIONAL

Pôle national cirque en Occitanie

Based in: Auch

Contact: Stéphanie Bulteau - Director

 <https://www.circa.auch.fr/>



LE PLONGEOIR – CITÉ DU CIRQUE PÔLE CIRQUE LE MANS SARTHE PAYS DE LA LOIRE

Based in: Le Mans

Contact: Richard Fournier - Director


 <https://www.leplongeoir-cirque.fr/>

ARCHAOS – PÔLE NATIONAL CIRQUE

Pôle national cirque Méditerranée

Based in: Marseille

Contact: Simon Carrara - Deputy Director

 <http://www.archaos.fr/>



THÉÂTRE FIRMIN GÉMIER / LA PISCINE PÔLE NATIONAL CIRQUE D'ANTONY ET DE CHÂTENAY-MALABRY

Based in: Châtenay-Malabry

Contact: Delphine Lagrandeur & Marc Jeancourt - Co-directors

 <https://www.theatrefirminagemier-lapiscine.fr/>

LA BRÈCHE PÔLE NATIONAL CIRQUE DE NORMANDIE

Based in: Cherbourg-Octeville

Contact: Lancelot Rétif - Acting Director

 <https://www.labreche.fr/>



CIRQUE-THÉÂTRE D'ELBEUF PÔLE NATIONAL CIRQUE DE NORMANDIE

Based in: Elbeuf

Contact: Hélène Cadio - Head of International Relations

 <https://www.cirquetheatre-elbeuf.com/>



STRUCTURES / OUTDOOR ARTS

List of the 13 Centre National des Arts de la Rue et de l'Espace Public (CNAREP):

→ <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Thematiques/theatre-spectacles/Le-theatre-et-les-spectacles-en-France/centres-nationauxdes-arts-de-la-rue-et-de-l-espace-public-cnarep>

ASSOCIATION ÉCLAT - LE PARAPLUIE

Based in: Aurillac

Contact: Frédéric Remy - Director

 <https://www.aurillac.net>

SOAR - QUELQUES P'ARTS

Based in: Boulieu-lès-Annonay

Contact: Palmira Picòn - Director

<https://www.quelquesparts.fr>

LES ATELIERS FRAPPAZ

Based in: Villeurbanne

Contact: Nadège Prugnard - Director

<https://www.ateliers-frappaz.com>

L'ABATTOIR

Based in: Chalon-sur-Saône

Contact: Nathalie Cixous - Director

<https://www.labattoir.com>

LE FOURNEAU

Based in: Brest

Contact: Caroline Raffin - Director

<https://www.lefourneau.com>

LE BOULON

Based in: Vieux-Condé

Contact: Virginie Foucault - Director

<https://www.leboulon.fr>

LE MOULIN FONDU - COMPAGNIE OPOSITO

Based in: Garges-lès-Gonesse

Contact: Jean-Raymond Jacob - Artistic Director

<https://www.oposito.fr>

L'ATELIER 231

Based in: Sotteville-lès-Rouen

Contact: Anne Le Goff - Artistic Director

<https://www.atelier231.fr>

SUR LE PONT

Based in: La Rochelle

Contact: Bruno de Beaufort - Director

<https://www.cnarsurlepont.fr/>

PRONOMADE(S)

Based in: Encausse-Les-Thermes

Contact: Philippe Saunier-Borrell & Marion Vian - Co-directors

<https://www.pronomades.org>

L'USINE

Based in: Tournefeuille

Contact: Fanny Bordier - Acting Director

<https://www.lusine.net>

LAVAL

Based in: Pays de la Loire

CNAREP in prefiguration

LE CITRON JAUNE - COMPAGNIE ILOTOPIE

Based in: Port Saint-Louis-du-Rhône

Contact: Pascal Servera - Director

<https://www.lecitronjaune.com>

LIEUX PUBLICS - CENTRE NATIONAL DE CRÉATION EN ESPACE PUBLIC

Based in: Marseille

Contact: Alexis Nys - Director

<https://www.lieuxpublics.com/fr/>

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND/OR FUNDING BODIES

FRENCH MINISTRY OF CULTURE

Contact: Alexandra Nafarrate - Head of the Outdoor Arts and Puppetry Department - DGCA - Délégation au théâtre et aux arts associés (Delegation for Theatre and Associated Arts)

Contact: Valérie Deulin - Head of Circus arts and Dramatic writing - DGCA - Délégation au théâtre et aux arts associés (Delegation for Theatre and Associated Arts)

<https://www.culture.gouv.fr/en>

INSTITUT FRANÇAIS

Contact: Vanessa Silvy - Project Manager Performing Arts / Circus, Street Art, Puppetry

<https://www.institutfrancais.com/en>

SCHOOLS


You can check out the list of all schools on the FFEC - Fédération française des écoles de cirques's website:

<https://www.ffec.asso.fr/ecoles/>

Contact: Raphaël Vigier - Director

FAI-AR SCHOOL FOR ARTISTIC CREATION IN PUBLIC SPACE

Contact: Loïc Magnant - Director

 <https://www.faiar.org/>



UNIONS


SYNDICAT DES CIRQUES ET COMPAGNIES DE CRÉATION (SCC) (Union of Circuses and Creative Companies)

Contact: Yannis Jean - General Delegate

 <https://www.compagniesdecreation.fr>

FÉDÉRATION NATIONAL DES ARTS DE LA RUE

Contact: Lancelot Simier - Director in charge of institutional relations and association management

 <https://www.federationartsdelarue.org/>



OTHER

CIRCUSNEXT - EUROPEAN CIRCUS LABEL

Based in: Paris

Contact person: Sabrina Abiad - Director

 <https://circusnext.eu/en/>

IN SITU - EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR ARTISTIC CREATION IN PUBLIC SPACE

Based in: Marseille

Contact: Rosalie Gonzalez - Coordinator

 <https://www.in-situ.info>

TERRITOIRES DE CIRQUE (Association of Structures for Artistic Production and Distribution)

Based in: Bordeaux

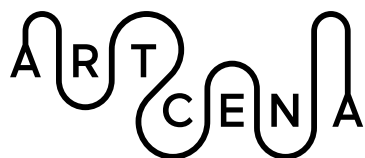
Contact: Delphine Poueymidanet - Coordinator

 <https://territoiresdecirque.com/>



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 - 168 organisations from over 45 countries - and a key interlocutor in the dialogue with cultural policy makers across Europe.



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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