



FINAL EVALUATION REPORT 2013-2017

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Culture

Funded by the European Union

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Introduction

CircusNext is one of the few European cooperation programs in the field of performing arts that articulates the artistic and professional dimensions at the heart of the same project. Because of its temporality, its many facets and the diversity of its actors, it has an originality that has made it a key player in the contemporary circus sector in Europe in recent years. In just a few years, CircusNext has become a label that not only guarantees innovation and artistic excellence, but also conveys the values and vision of artistic work and the profession of circus artists and cultural operators in the sector of contemporary circus.

This final evaluation report focuses on the 5-year program CircusNext 2013-2017. It includes the evaluation of:

- Two support schemes in 2013-2014 and 2015-2016,
- One European Season of Circus Arts in 2016-2017.

CircusNext 2013-2017 gathered artists, experts of the circus field, directors of festivals and of venues and raised new questions on the aesthetics, politics and techniques of circus. The whole operation experienced and explored different means and ways of making, creating, producing and programming circus in Europe today.

After two identification and support schemes for emerging authors in 2013-2014 and 2015-2016, CircusNext goes to a new step in 2016-2017 with diverse activities, from laureates touring and support to the promotion of spaces to think and build the future together.

The project aims at qualifying a creation process, renewing production methods, strengthening European cooperation, and encouraging the evolution of national cultural policies. Arisen from the observation that emerging artists and companies encountered real difficulties in their creative process, CircusNext wishes to discover and nurture these new creators and to foster new ways of working within the field of circus arts. Considered as one of the main support schemes for emerging authors and creators in this field, CircusNext asserts its objective of accompaniment and support to artistic creation and promotion.

Different objectives were targeted during the whole project:

- Identifying and accompanying emerging authors,
- Mentoring artists and cultural operators,
- Recognition of circus as an art form,
- Targeting new territories and new audiences,
- Giving visibility to new writings in circus arts,
- Producing resources on contemporary circus.

This evaluation report is based on:

- Tools for collecting data on the activities and actions implemented by the co-organizers and partners,
- Questionnaires (candidates, pre-selected, selected artists),
- Informal exchanges with all concerned (artists, co-organizers, partners, JTCE team) in the field,
- Formal interviews with selected jury members and partners, selected artists, co-organizers,
- Observations during major events and specific meetings.

The CircusNext operation is a unique and an experimental project that opens a reflection for the circus field in Europe. During the whole project, many issues were discussed and co-organizers, partners and artists were encouraged to mobilize experts on their territories. The 2017 European conference Think Circus! was an opportunity to share knowledge and know-how and an opening on different scientific disciplines (sociology, philosophy, performing arts...) and on other arts (dance, street arts, etc.). Moreover, the different events of the 2013-2017 program lead to an important and necessary work on professional identities as circus artists or cultural operators working in the circus field, in order to build the future of the creation of a European circus.

One of the strengths of the project has been to mobilize the circus sector in all its diversity: artists, audiences, experts, researchers, cultural operators. The identity CircusNext has made it possible to gather them around unifying themes and major events in the European circus landscape, whether during the presentation of the laureate artists at the Théâtre de la Cité internationale in Paris or in different European cities during the European Season of Circus Arts.

Methodology of the final evaluation

This evaluation report focuses on two support schemes that took place in 2013-2014 and in 2015-2016 and on one European season that took place in 2016-2017. During these five years, the activities were numerous. The evaluation was therefore conceived in the long term in relation to the JTCE team and the co-organizers. Project monitoring was regular and punctuated by a number of "highlights" related to the project schedule. These events allowed for more accurate assessments:

- Jury meetings (pre-selection)
- Selection weeks in Theater Op de Markt, Neerpelt (Belgium)
- Presentations at the Théâtre de la Cité internationale in Paris (France)
- European Conference in Paris (France)

In addition to these major events, the evaluation also focused on various meetings with the co-organizers and / or associated partners.

For the two support schemes in 2013-2014 and 2015-2016, the evaluation covers the different phases of the CircusNext operation: call for projects, selection process, support phase and public presentations. In addition, the evaluation also focuses on 5 of the Labs that took place between 2014 and 2016 in different European countries (Portugal, France, Czech Republic) and third countries (Brazil and Madagascar). For the European Season of Circus Arts, the evaluation focuses on different public presentations (European season and "Les inédits de CircusNext") and on the organization of the European conference Think Circus! in March and May 2017.

→ Quantitative evaluation

Questionnaires - Quantitative methods in the field of the humanities were used to account for both the evaluation of the perception and of the project by its actors. Questionnaires include quantitative questions (quantification and/or evaluation of a specific item) and qualitative open questions (associate words, explain, identify with statements).

Data through questionnaires addressed to all short-listed artists in 2013-2014 and in 2015-2016; the evaluation is based on the answers of 23 questionnaires.

A survey was also released to collect data on the audience attending some public presentations during the support phase or during the final opening in Paris. 178 questionnaires were filled in during the 3-day presentations. The results focus on the 147 questionnaires filled by people identified as "not professionals".

Other documents - The evaluation also relies on data collected by the JTCE team: profile of the participants, number of people involved in the projects, budgets and co-productions, descriptions of the projects, places and lengths of the residencies, phases of the projects and on data provided by the co-organizers.

→ Qualitative evaluation

Interviews - Questionnaires were associated to in-depth qualitative interviews with different key actors of the project. Semi-directive interviews have been made with all laureate artists during the public presentations in Paris, and some of them were also interviewed during the support phase (residencies). A precise evaluation of the whole process was strictly explored with each artist. More interviews were made with cultural operators accompanying the artists, jury members, mentors and associated partners during the major events or by skype. In total 32 qualitative interviews were conducted for the whole evaluation.

Observations - Quantitative and qualitative data were associated to observation and immersion in the project. All of the events mentioned above have been the subject of field notes supported by an observation grid. These observations made it possible to establish the interview grids and to provide recommendations on the different moments of exchange and reflection. Overall, spending time with the JTCE team, the artists and the people involved in CircusNext facilitated the observation process by being involved in a lot of collective discussions and being able to observe interesting interactions within the groups.

This methodology places more emphasis on interviews and reduces the place of questionnaires and quantitative data analysis. Qualitative interviews have allowed more precision on the evaluation and the perception of the project. Quantitative data is therefore more focused on very technical / logistical points, etc. Our approach is anchored in the field of humanities and more specifically sociology and performance studies.

The purpose of these evaluation reports will be to:

- Report the activity of CircusNext 2013-2017,
- Analyze the actions carried out in relation to the general and specific objectives,
- Identify the main themes of reflection emerging from the program and their main challenges.



Galktic Ensemble © Mylan Szyspura/Haytham for JTCE

PART I:

General presentation

In order to build bridges between artists, audiences, institutions and European cultural operators, 9 organizations have gathered together to offer an innovative scheme of identification, support, and promotion for emerging circus creators at European level. They represent about 15 countries and 40 associated partners. After a few years of cooperation, CircusNext platform members are targeting a common goal: the emergence and promotion of a lasting and striking European contemporary circus. Networking is at the heart of CircusNext. The European members of CircusNext platform implement the activity program by hosting part of the activities (residencies, selection week, public presentations, labs, etc.) and finance together the creation grants offered to laureates. The network is essential to develop the creation projects and ensure their viability.

As a general overview for 2013-2017, CircusNext is:

- 253 applicants from across Europe;
- 144 weeks of residency in Europe;
- 175 000 euros of funding for 14 emergent artists;
- 1850 spectators for public presentations at Théâtre de la Cité internationale and more than 170 cultural operators.

1. Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe

The JTCE team coordinates the whole CircusNext operation in collaboration with the co-organizers. It provides the link between artists and professionals and monitors the projects, administers and organizes the main steps of the operation: selection week, public presentations in Paris, etc. The JTCE team regularly communicates on the CircusNext project and on the artists involved.

JTCE team

Direction: Cécile Provôt

Administration: Elisabeth Baudin, Elena Korshunova, Léa Collombet

Production & Communication: Thomas Renaud, Chloé Bensimon-Liatard, Maud Thomas, Davi Jucá Donizeth

Interns : Delphine Maugars, Chloé Bodin

Associated staff for special activities

Agathe Dumont, evaluation

Delphine Maugars, video

Pierre Staigre, technical director

Milan Szypura, photography

Charles Vairet, mentoring

2. Co-organizers and associated partners

Cultural structures involved in CircusNext (festivals, organizations, places, various cultural operators) are run by people committed in the promotion of circus, and particularly contemporary circus, since a very long time. Their knowledge of the field is essential to build a network between professionals and artists, to host companies and to discuss on the projects. The aesthetics of contemporary circus are very different from one country to another and this type of cooperation is sometimes difficult. CircusNext platform partners host information sessions, residencies or public presentations and work in close relationship with the artists and with the JTCE team in order to offer the best working conditions to everyone. The CircusNext platform tries to establish privileged relationships with the artists and to follow them even after the support phase.

2.1 Co-organizers

Co-organizers are the heart of the project. They support financially CircusNext, contribute to the main discussions and decisions and follow the artists on long-term goals.

Members:

La Cascade, Pôle National Cirque, France

La Central del Circ, Spain

Centro Cultural Vila Flor, Portugal

Circus Futures, United Kingdom

Cirqueon, Czech Republic

Associazione culturale IdeAgorà/Festival Mirabilia, Italy

Les Migrateurs, France

Associazione culturale Sarabanda/Festival Circumnavigando, Italy

Meetings:

- Paris, France, September 2013 (hosted by Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe, La Villette), kickoff meeting
- Bourg-Saint-Andéol, France, December 2013 (hosted by La Cascade)
- Dublin, Ireland, March 2014 (hosted by Circus Future)
- Guimarães, Portugal, July 2014 (hosted by Centro Cultural Vila Flor)
- Genoa, Italy, November 2014 (hosted by Sarabanda)
- Barcelona, Spain, May 2015 (hosted by La Central del Circ)
- Prague, Czech Republic, September 2015 (hosted by Cirqueon)
- Bourg-Saint-Andéol, France, January 2016 (hosted by La Cascade)
- Paris, France April 2016 (hosted by Jeunes Talent Cirque Europe, La Villette)
- Paris, France, Septembre 2016 (hosted by Jeunes Talent Cirque Europe, La Villette)
- Ghent, Belgium, January 2017, Vooruit (hosted by associated partner Circuscentrum)
- Cherbourg, France March 2017, SPRING Festival (hosted by associated partner La Brèche – Pôle National Cirque)
- Paris, France, November 2017 (hosted by ONDA-Office national de diffusion artistique), conclusive meeting.

These meetings contribute to a **better understanding of contemporary circus in Europe** (festivals, workshops, residencies, productions and tours) and **encourage the creation of new models of cooperation**, using CircusNext as a starting point. Collective work being one of the pillars of the circus, renewing with **collective ways of acting and thinking**, on a European scale, opens up very interesting perspectives.

The role of the co-organizers is also fundamental to **accompany and support the artists** on the long-term. According to Roberto Magro (former director of La Central del Circ, Barcelona, Spain) the co-organizers follow the shortlisted and the laureate artists on long-term goals. The co-organizers also **promote artistic research** in the field of circus; they strive to achieve a **better understanding of contemporary aesthetics**, for the audience and for the professionals in the area of performing arts.

Their role should therefore be the mainspring of the project, they articulate the local and international levels and are key institutional actors in several places. In this sense, they participate fully in the process of legitimizing and institutionalizing contemporary circus in several countries. However, this double-dimension remains complex. Local (especially economic) issues often prevail over transnational issues. Thus, it seems that the stronger the network and the more effective cooperation are, the more the articulation of these two levels can be achieved.

2.2 Associated partners

Associated partners accompany CircusNext., they host the artists and follow the projects. Their actions are important to build and promote a circus network across Europe and to ensure the presence of CircusNext in many countries.

101 - Outdoor arts creation space, United Kingdom	La Brèche, Pôle national cirque de Basse-Normandie, France
Académie Fratellini, France	La Ferme du Buisson, scène nationale de Marne-la-Vallée, France
Centre national des arts du cirque, France	La Grainerie, Fabrique des arts du cirque et de l'itinérance, France
Cicus Cirkör, Sweden	Ladislav Sutnar's Faculty of Design and Art – University of West Bohemia, Czech Republic
CIRCa- Pôle national cirque, Auch, France	Latitude 50, Belgium
Circomedia, United Kingdom	Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde, France
Circuscentrum, Belgium	Le Prato - Théâtre international de quartier, France
Cirko Vertigo - Casa del circo contemporaneo, Italy	Les Halles de Schaerbeek, Belgium
Cirko, Center for new circus, Finland	Les Subsistances, France
Comune di Fossano, Italy	Numédiart - UMONS Institute for Creative Technologies, Belgium
Comune di Racconigi, Italy	SeaChange Arts, United Kingdom
Comune di Savigliano, Italy	Subtopia, Sweden
Dublin Fringe, Ireland	Theater op de Markt / Dommelhof, Belgium
Espace Athic - Festival Pisteurs d'Étoiles, France	Théâtre d'Arles, France
Espace Catastrophe, Belgium	Théâtre de l'Agora, scène nationale d'Evry et d'Essone, France
Espace Périphérique, France	Théâtre de la Cité internationale, France
Établissement Public du Parc de la Grande Halle de la Villette, France	Théâtre de la Roseraie, Belgium
FEDEC - Fédération européenne des écoles de cirque professionnelles, Belgium	Tralee, National Circus Festival, Ireland
Festival de Circo do Brasil, Brazil	Video Porto Genova, Italy
Festival Trapezi, Spain	Zerogrammi - Luft Casa Creativa, Italy
Humorologie/PERPLX, Belgium	
L'Aléa des Possibles, Madagascar	
L'Hippodrome de Douai, France	

Major events of the circus field are appropriate for gathering most of the CircusNext platform members (co-organizers and partners) and to discuss important issues. During these highlights, many European artists and cultural operators have the opportunity to discuss. CircusNext is one of the few programs in Europe to enable such gatherings. Therefore, a European network is formed and its participants are learning how to work together. Seeing how the others work, identifying what the partners share, understanding how they deal with different cultural, economical and artistic contexts is very important to improve the circus professional network. For Julie Descamps, jury members and representing Circuscentrum in Belgium (associated partners and co-organizer with JTCE and Theater op de markt of the selection week in Neerpelt), being an associated partner in the CircusNext platform is very fruitful. Seeing how the others work, identifying what the partners share, understanding how they deal with different cultural, economical and artistic contexts is very important to improve the circus professional network.

Most of the associated partners host residencies and/or public presentations. They can take over the co-organizers and they play a very significant role in the artists' careers, as many shortlisted or laureate companies of CircusNext premiere in one of those structures. A wide and active network is the foundation of CircusNext to promote multiculturalism and interdisciplinarity. By moving to different countries, professionals and artists are invited to take a fresh look on contemporary circus. Associated partners are essential in this process.

Important events taking place in the circus sector are often an opportunity to offer to the platform's partners moments of reflection on the issues that CircusNext developed during the 5-year project 2013-2017 and to open contributions for the future:

- April 13, 2016, Paris, France.
Collective reflection workshop of the CircusNext platform on the next application to the European Commission's Creative Europe program, bringing together 48 participants from 9 countries, including: 10 co-organizers and 21 European associate partners, 6 people from the JTCE team, 3 board members and 6 representatives of JTCE funders, 2 members of the CircusNext jury.
- June 4, 2016, Paris, France.
During the public presentations of the CircusNext laureates, Théâtre de la Cité internationale hosted a meeting of the platform (including the co-organizers and 7 associated partners).
- October 24, 2017, CIRCa festival, Auch, France.
Presentation of the new European project CircusNext PLaTfORM to cultural operators, artists and the French network "Territoires de cirque".

The notion of network is central to understanding how the platform works. When analyzing the sociological aspects of a professional network, it is observed that what founded it as a network will be the importance of not only decisions and shared values, but also the ways in which the actors themselves conceive and discuss those choices.

Thus, all the times when these discussions are made possible are valuable even if it is the more invisible part of the project. The sessions that we have observed show that the actors are eager to share the reflection. It is a two-way exchange of know-how where everyone can distance themselves from their experience and try to think of it in a collective adventure. The discussion spaces of the platform also make it possible to configure the centers and the peripheries differently. This dimension is not only geographical but also symbolic as some countries have more support for artistic creation than others and have allowed the emergence of stronger poles in the circus sector. The platform is a horizontal workspace that allows for the sharing of experiences. As we know, informal and personal networks play a large role in the professionalization of the artistic sector (social relations, occupational relations and indirect relations). The CircusNext platform is therefore an attempt to formalize while keeping the dynamics of live discussion active.

3. The Jury

The jury is composed of artistic personalities: experts from the circus field, festival and venues directors and experienced artists. They participate in all the steps of the selection process and they try to give feedbacks to the artists on their work.

The 15-jury members come from 10 different countries.

The jury is formed of:

- Representatives of the co-organizers of CircusNext 2013-2017,
- Representatives from the CircusNext associated partners,
- Artists and/or experts from the circus field.

3.1. Cultural operators

Co-organizers

Boris Vecchio, Festival Circumnavigando/Sarabanda, Italy (co-organizer) member in 2013-2014 and 2015-2016

Claire Peysson, La Cascade, France (co-organizer) member in 2013-2014 and 2015-2016

Fabrizio Gavosto, Festival Mirabilia/IdeAgorà, Italy (co-organizer) member in 2013-2014 and 2015-2016

Jean-Charles Herrmann, Les Migrateurs, France (co-organizer) member in 2013-2014 and 2015-2016

Roberto Magro, La Central del Circ, Spain (co-organizer) member in 2013-2014 and co-president 2015-2016

Rui Torrinha, Centro Cultural Vila Flor, Portugal (co-organizer) member in 2013-2014 and 2015-2016

Sarkà Marcikova, Cirqueon, Czech Republic (co-organizer) member in 2013-2014 and 2015-2016

Verena Cornwall, Circus Futures, United Kingdom (co-organizer) member in 2013-2014 and 2015-2016

Associated partners

Emma Hannon, Dublin Fringe, Ireland (associated partner) member in 2013-2014

Julie Descamps, Circuscentrum, Belgium (associated partner) member in 2013-2014 and 2015-2016

Kiki Muukkonen, Subtopia, Sweden (associated partner) member in 2013-2014 and co-president in 2015-2016



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3.2. Artists and experts

Antonia Kuzmanic, Cie Room#100, Croatia (artist), co-president 2013-2014 and former laureate

Claudio Stellato, Italy (artist) member in 2015-2016

Jani Nuutinen, Circo Aero / Cirko, Finland (artist), member in 2013-2014

Jean-Michel Guy, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, France (expert), member in 2013-2014 and 2015-2016

Kitt Johnson, X-act company, Denmark (artist) member in 2015-2016

Lindsey Butcher, Gravity and Levity company, United Kingdom (artist) member in 2015-2016

The jury members of the two editions were very diverse and have allowed the association of cultural operators and contemporary circus artists. This double perspective brings much richness to the debates and allows to rethink the place of circus in the various European countries, from the point of view of artistic creation and regarding economic and cultural policies issues. "CircusNext is about giving the opportunity to an artist to write a performance based on a research that we feel is interesting and strong enough for a full length show", explains Claudio Stellato, artist and jury member.

The jury members are looking for innovation, a difficult but very interesting concept. "We are looking for something creative and innovative, new kinds of using a circus skill, good technical skills and, of course, the reliability of the project" explains the co-president of the jury. For others, the jury can also take artistic risks and foster the emergence of some demanding projects that can sometimes scare professionals. Giving them the CircusNext label help them face those difficulties.

As a JTCE laureate artist (2010), jury member and co-president for the 2013-2014 edition, Antonia Kuzmanic knows CircusNext very well. Coming from Croatia, a country where contemporary circus is not developed at all, she learned a lot from CircusNext. "To be part of the jury is a great experience", she explains, "reading the dossiers and discussing with the other jury members is a way to receive a kind of education. It is interesting to see how professionals talk about the performances, what they are looking for..." Being in the middle of CircusNext is being in the place where the circus of tomorrow is being built. "We do not seek performances that are bound to sell immediately. It's important to look for authors, creators that can change the circus, now and in ten years!" adds a jury member.

The jury members have a quite common view of the definition of contemporary circus even though a lot of discussions come across their different meetings. Their role, when examining the applications and judging the projects on stage, is to identify a potential, a profound research in terms of topics, disciplines and practices, carried out by the artist. Even though the process may appear fairly subjective, especially since the expertise of the jury members are very diverse based on what circus is like in their country, some consensus exists in the choice of projects. "There is no other place where your artistic dossier is read with so much attention. When you are part of the jury, it's interesting to see the different cultural backgrounds of each artist and to understand what they are trying to do: is it innovative, avant-garde? These notions are quite subjective depending on the different contexts in Europe.", says Roman Müller, artist and jury member.

What forces interest in the guidelines of the jury is undoubtedly the concept of innovation, frequently invoked by the actors. In a way, CircusNext could be seen as a place for innovation, as it has been defined in the creative industry in the 1990s : "This concept emerged from a curious nexus of spatial and cultural economists, regional geographers, cultural and media studies academics, along with consultants and politicians, who all came to realize the same thing more or less at once: namely, that creativity is not just good for the soul or the cultural milieu, but also good for regional economic development and interesting jobs."¹ As it gathers artists and experts, the responsibility of the jury might not only be artistic but also, on a broader scale, social, economic and political. As a network, CircusNext not only influences the European stages but also the whole cultural sector around circus and its economic and political implications. Therefore, regarding innovation, it might be necessary in the future to define it both artistically and socio-economically.

¹Jason Potts, "Art and innovation: An evolutionary view of the creative industries", UNESCO Observatory e-journal – *Multi-disciplinary research in the arts* : 2007

3.3. The Reading Committee

As the selection is based on a written application, the application file is the first connecting point between artists and professionals.

The reading committee helps the jury and gives its own evaluation of the projects during the first phase of the selection process. During the pre-selection and selection phases, Jury and Reading Committee members discuss and comment on the applications online. The Reading Committee members' input is a supporting element for the Jury debates and might be used to give some summarized feedbacks to applicants. Some members of the Reading Committee are former jury members and were involved at some point in the construction of CircusNext. Its members are also important to help the identification of artists and the dissemination of information on CircusNext in countries where contemporary circus is less developed.

Members of the Reading Committee are artists, former laureates, cultural operators, circus teachers and experts and come from 12 European and third countries. Several members of the jury are former members of the jury, conversely some members of the committee have subsequently become a member of the jury which gives them a very good knowledge of the project.

Members are invited to give their feedbacks on 5 different projects, they participate actively on the online forum. Opinions from the Reading Committee fuels the debates but its members cannot vote.

Alain Taillard, France	Juliette Beaume, Spain
Alessandro Serena, Italy	Laure Houben, Belgium
Alexandre Fray, France	Maaïke Van Langen, The Netherlands
Ana Sanchez, United-Kingdom	Marie-Laurence Sakaël, France
Antonia Kuzmanic, Croatia	Marta Morico, Italy
Bernard Fleury, France	Martine Linaer, Belgium
Camille Englebert, Belgium	Michel Cerda, France
Catherine Magis, Belgium	Olle Strandberg, Sweden
Claude Véron, France	Orit Nevo, Israel
Claudio Stellato, Belgium	P. Dahlmann & S. Frasca, France
Claudius Bensch, Germany	Paolo Stratta, Italy
Constantina Georgiou, Cyprus	Raffaella Benanti, France
Cyril Thomas, France	Raquel Nicoletti, Portugal
Daniel Gulko, France	Roger Le Roux, France
Fatou Traoré, Belgium	Roman Müller, Switzerland
Frederico Corona, Italy	Sami Ylisaari, Finland
Gérard Fasoli, France	Sébastien Roux, France
Gert Nulens, Belgium	Serge Borrás, France
Giacomo Scalisi, Portugal	Sophie Morrin, France
Gilles Defacque, France	Spiros Paterakis, Greece
Hélène Langlois, France	Stefan Sing, Germany
Isak Lindberg, Sweden	Stéphane Bou, France
Javier Jimenez, Spain	Sverre Waage, Norway
Jean Pierre Marcos, France	Sylvie Cadenat, France
Jenny Patchovsky, Germany	Thierry Dutoit, Belgium
João Paulo dos Santos, Portugal	Thomas Renaud, France
Joe Mackintosh, UK	Tim Roberts, UK
John Ellingsworth, UK	Ute Classen, Germany
Jordi Gaspar, Spain	Valérie Fratellini, France
Joseph Seelig, Germany	Virginie Lavenant, Madagascar
Julien Vittecoq, France	Wendy Moonen, The Netherlands

4. The artists

- 134 companies from 21 different nationalities applied to CircusNext in 2013-2014
- 155 companies from 17 different European countries applied to CircusNext in 2015-2016
- 15 projects were shortlisted and 7 projects were laureates each year

4.1. Professional identities

All artists heard about CircusNext or Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe before having this creation project due to the development of an important network. However most of them heard about the project from other artists rather than from schools or venues. 44% of them participated in an information session about CircusNext before applying.

The reasons for applying to CircusNext are varied:

- Having more visibility on the European stage
- Being identified as an emergent artist
- Benefit from the support scheme and mentoring program
- Having time and space to create in good conditions

If we look at the companies, we notice, in 2013-2014, 134 applications coming from 21 European countries. When interviewing the artists, we understand that the circus context is very different from a country to another, reliant on the access to schools, the possibility to meet producers and managers, the opportunity to find residencies in dedicated places, etc. However, a lot of artists wish to travel around Europe, to discover new places and to learn new ways to make circus in different cultural contexts. Indeed, local contexts are very important to understand how European artists travel and why they apply to CircusNext.

They are generally also happy to meet artists from other countries during the selection week in Neerpelt or the public presentations in Paris. Although they occasionally meet at festivals, this opportunity is one of the strengths of CircusNext and should develop in the future.

From one country to the other, the access to schools, the possibility to meet producers and managers and/or to find residencies are very different. This might explain the fact that circus artists usually live and create their companies in countries where circus is more developed. However, a lot of artists wish to travel around Europe, to discover new places and to create in different cultural contexts. Moreover, for some artists, CircusNext is also the opportunity to start a new project for circus in their country of origin as for example Roman Müller (former laureate JTC 2003-2004) who created the festival Cirqu' in Aarau, Switzerland, or Antonia Kuzmanić (Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe laureate in 2009-2010), director of the company ROOM 100 (Croatia) and creator of HALA 100, the first residency place for contemporary circus in Croatia.

As CircusNext offers a strong visibility to artists, they arrive at the end of the project with a strong European professional network. Most of the applicants come from major European or international graduate circus schools. Higher Education in circus is more and more developed in Europe and less than one third of the artists did not attend a circus school.

² In 2013-2014 the two artists of a laureate company put an end to their collaboration and decided to abandon the project.

- The most represented schools are: ESAC in Brussels (Belgium), DOCH in Stockholm (Sweden), CNAC in Châlons-en-Champagne (France), Académie Fratellini in Saint-Denis (France), École nationale du cirque in Montréal (Canada)....
- Among schools, France, The Netherlands and Belgium and the most represented countries. Italy, Germany, Sweden and the United-Kingdom also offer undergraduate and postgraduate curriculums and are also represented among the applicants.

Among the laureates, 50% of the artists have studied in one (or more) of these schools and 50% have studied in another vocational school (Le Lido in France, the National Center for Circus Arts in the United-Kingdom, ACAPA in The Netherlands). However, as there are only a few circus schools in Europe, self-taught artists (less than 10% of the applicants) also attend a program like CircusNext. The international network of schools is therefore the first pool of identification of emergent artists and more should be made to allow self-taught artists to access the project. Indeed, European cooperation programs could also lead to reducing territorial inequalities in the development of cultural policies.

In its "Survey and dialogue between employers and young circus arts professionals on key competences that are necessary for circus artists today" FEDEC (European federation for professional circus schools), Zita Hermann observes: "We are well aware that the abilities that employers look for differ depending on the type of performance and the economic context in which it will be performed. There is not one reality, but several European and global realities, at the heart of which the need for profit and immediate efficiency directly influences the skills needed by employers. While taking into account these realities, we also have the obligation to accompany each individual throughout their education so that he/she can make free and informed choices for his/her career, the kind of artist he/she would like to be and the context in which he/she would prefer to express his/her art: as a member of an ensemble, as an independent artist, as a freelancer or as a member of a much larger production. This multiple reality reassures us and shows us that we contribute to the education of individuals that are free to surpass conventional forms of expression, capable of seeing, understanding and seizing opportunities that present themselves and able to make choices."

Interestingly, many artists choose to apply to CircusNext because the program is a step towards professionalization and provides help to become an author and a project leader, an aspect of professional careers that is not necessarily present in the educational programs of circus schools. Moreover, a lot of artists have met during their training and CircusNext allows them to continue a collective adventure, either right after school or after several years, due to the fact that many young artists choose to work and tour as performers for a few years before they start writing a show and creating their own company.

4.2 Artistic identities

CircusNext is fairly representative of the interdisciplinary nature of the contemporary stage as artists mix not only the circus disciplines but also different artistic expressions. In these contemporary shows, the acrobatic language is as a privileged vector to convey a discourse, a vision of the scene. Circus techniques tend to disappear to open to a multitude of languages: this is where CircusNext defends authors, they invent their own ways of expressing themselves.

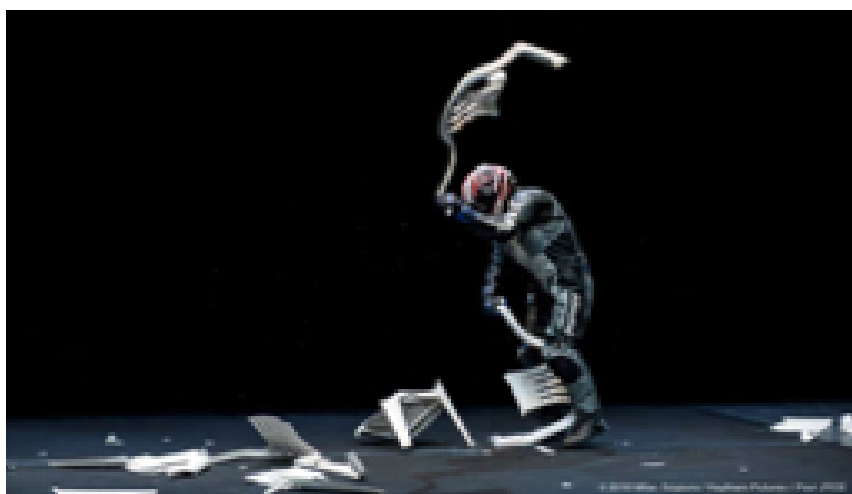
Among the laureates, some artists had already applied in a previous edition and some of them even participated in a Lab after applying and not being selected. This shows that CircusNext can follow the artists and try to help them improve their dossier for a new application. It also shows that applying to CircusNext represents the key to success for a lot of young European artists and could be a very important stage in their professional lives. Therefore, the motivations for applying to CircusNext are varied but are frequently expressed: the visibility offered by the program, the professional network, the opportunity to work (to be programmed) in France and having time and space to create in good conditions.

³ Zita Hermann, Analysis of key skills of young professional circus Artists, MIROIR project, Parts II, FEDEC : 2009.

In general, the applicants come from very different circus disciplines (acrobatics, juggling and aerial techniques representing the most important part of the projects). However, a large range of circus disciplines are represented (trapeze, rope, silk, handstands, clown, magic, contortion, tight-wire, Chinese pole, horses...), and, above all, a lot of contemporary artistic techniques are also explored in the shows (video mapping, music, acting, light design...) showing that the European circus is not standardized and that CircusNext welcomes all forms of contemporary circus and is opened to innovative authors. The size of the projects also varies but only 17% of the projects involve 4 to 7 artists *versus* 62% of solos and duos. Even if few artists are on stage, shortlisted and laureate companies have implemented collaborations with many artists (video artists, musicians, writers, light designers) showing the artistic dynamism of contemporary circus.

Artistic excellence is not so much defined on the contemporary stage as excellence in only one art form but rather as the ability of artists to move between the arts. Interdisciplinarity being a strong characteristic nowadays, while defending circus writing and its specificities, more porosity between the arts could be promoted in order to avoid a disciplinary model that is largely outdated in the current artistic dynamics. This issue (and the tensions it provokes) are often at the heart of the discussions, whether during the jury or during more informal meetings. The "interdisciplinary" *versus* "disciplinary" debate is indeed quite characteristic of art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, struggling with sometimes radical transformations. This is recounted for example by the art historian and philosopher Patrice Loubier who analyzes the passage from modern art to contemporary art favoring the emergence of forms not yet determined. The circus currently seems to be at this point of passage because of the different evolutions of the art form already mentioned. The virtuosity and technical excellence of the circus are therefore often defined by a discipline, but they are also deployed in interdisciplinarity. In this sense, they also participate in the synthesis of practices to bring out a singular gesture.

For shortlisted and laureate artists evaluated and supported as "authors", their technical backgrounds or heritage is "capital of experience" constantly put in play. It is this capital (in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu) that will define the artistic identity of the performer. If their propensity to affirm this capital is fundamental to build virtuosity, in the perspective of authorship, it is no longer responding to normative excellence but favoring experience in interdisciplinary projects. This game on multiple identities is often claimed by the artists and presented as intrinsic to their approach as authors, emancipating (or attempting to emancipate themselves) from the norms imposed by the institutions, in the forefront of which is the school. CircusNext could therefore be considered as the place of this emancipation. The point of view is that it must be moderated immediately to the extent that the production scheme of the project, its calendar and the public presentations lead to reintroducing others standards.



Dymitry Szypura © Mylan Szypura/Haytham for JTCE

⁴ Patrice Loubier, < Du moderne au contemporain. Deux versions de l'interdisciplinarité >, in Lynn Hugues et Marie-Josée Lafortune (dir), *Penser l'indiscipline. Recherches interdisciplinaires en art contemporain*. Montréal, Optica : 2001, pp. 22-29.

PART II

Identification and Support of Circus Artists

For all artists applying to CircusNext and more specifically for the shortlisted and laureate artists, CircusNext is a key moment in a starting career as authors and project leaders. The artists are given the chance to experience a situation where they have to talk about their project and they can present in front of numerous professionals, in good conditions (a lot of them have been, before their selection, dealing with very basic technical conditions). All seem very anxious but excited to be there, and aware of the opportunity. For a lot of them, applying to CircusNext corresponds to a turning point in their career, as they move from being a performer to become an author and stage director. They acknowledge the whole process and particularly the two events in Neerpelt and in Paris that are big steps for them, whatever the results are in the end, whatever follows: to step up as an author is a key moment in their careers as artists, no matter how old they are.

During the whole selection process, the jury will base their evaluation of the projects on 4 criteria:

- Singularity of the proposition
- Coherence and relevance
- Performing quality
- Ability to bring the project to fruition

1. The application process: starting an artistic and professional project *Pre-selection*

"In the beginning when filling up the application form I felt that the questions where a real intellectual challenge for me. Instead of going directly to physical work I had to really think over my project."
(Julia Christ, laureate, 2013-2014)

The "call for projects" is published throughout Europe. Applicants are required to have completed their education and to be involved in a creation project, which must be either their first or second professional show. In the meantime, information sessions are organized in many different places, festivals or circus schools, led by the JTCE team or by the CircusNext co-organizers.

1.1 For the artists

For most artists applying to CircusNext, the role of the application file is to develop and precise one's artistic project.

Most of the feedbacks are quite good on the application file, even though the language is sometimes a difficulty for non English speaking artists. Most artists had enough time to complete their application and working on this written assignment would eventually help them to clarify their project. Depending on their academic and artistic backgrounds some artists are more used to complete dossiers. As the criteria for applying to CircusNext seems fairly clear, the application is also an important step in the process of building a show and/or starting a new company.

However, we must keep in mind the strong social and territorial inequalities between the artists potentially interested in the project throughout Europe. The standard of the written dossier, the English language, the need to present an already thought-out project and financial commitments is not without problem. For example, having studied in a professional school or not can become an exclusion factor. Accompaniment could thus start as soon as the drafting of the dossier as evoked by some members of the platform during a global reflection meeting, to try to reduce these inequalities.

We can notice that 70% of the shortlisted artists consider that working on the application file helped them in one way or another to develop their artistic project. Most applicants have already a pretty clear idea of the organization of their creation process but the questions asked on the application file often help them to precise their artistic goals. We can therefore say that the application file has mostly an impact on developing an artistic project rather than on developing a company, even though this ability of bringing the project to fruition is a criteria for the jury, artists must also try to build an economically viable project. However only 44% of the participants to the survey after the application process declared that writing the application file helped them to develop the administrative part of their project (company, production, etc.). At this point of the process of CircusNext, we can tell that the artists are more into artistic questions. The most important fact when applying to CircusNext seems to assert a strong artistic purpose and a very clear aesthetic proposal in order to distinguish themselves from other projects and innovation is therefore the key-word of the application process. If the artists are overall satisfied of the selection process and the criteria fairly clear, adjustments could be made to the notion of emergence. This term is indeed subject to discussion since its definition may vary according to the country and the contexts. Difficulties in touring / producing shows in certain countries may for example lead some artists to produce several short works or acts before engaging in a full-length show. In the same way, the concept of "author" is still quite new for the circus sector, uncertainties remain around the ownership of the work and the division of roles between an author, a co-author or an outside eye.

For most shortlisted and laureate artists, the feedbacks they received from the jury on their application file were useful to carry on their project. The discussion during the selection process showed that the organization, administration and production of the project could be more developed for a lot of applicants in order to show their capacity to finalize a whole creation process. It is to be reminded that the capacity of the artists to bring the project to fruition is one of the criteria during the selection (criteria Nb 4) and it highlights the importance of a mentoring program to help the artists cope with the challenges of a professional life and the responsibilities of a project manager.

1.2 For the jury

The CircusNext jury evaluates the projects and discuss in order to help authors (not performers) and more specifically artists who would not find support and visibility without CircusNext. The jury also tries to identify long-term projects and therefore gives a lot of importance to both the originality and the high artistic quality of the projects and to the ability of the project leader to bring it to fruition.

The selection is made in two stages:

- Pre-selection on the application files
- Selection Week in Neerpelt

In 2015-2016, an eligibility committee was added before the first pre-selection. The need of an eligibility committee appeared after the 2013-2014 edition, the jury having spent a lot of time examining the eligibility criteria leaving less time for more specific discussions on each project. 6 members the jury accepted to join the committee with Jean-Michel Guy, former jury president, as an external observer and witness of the previous selections.

Therefore, the 7 members' role was to establish a precise and objective list of the eligible projects, based on the rules of CircusNext. Cécile Provôt, director of JTCE reminded the eligibility rules to all members and invited them to judge the projects only with those criteria: the artists should be living in Europe, the project is only their first or second show, they are not at school anymore and their project has not been funded yet. 4 to 5 members read each application and were invited to pre-vote online. As Verena Cornwall reminds, the meeting is not a selection meeting but should only decide upon the eligibility criteria.

Projects considered as non-eligible projects correspond to at least one of the following cases:

- Shows that are already/almost created
- Non-European country
- Non-full-length shows
- Availability during the support phase
- Projects that are already significantly funded
- Schools and training: candidate must be professional artists

After this eligibility committee, the jury meets in Paris for the selection:

- January 15, 16 and 17, 2014, La Villette, Paris, France
- June 3 and 4, 2015, Théâtre de la Cité internationale, Paris, France

Number of projects evaluated:

- 134 applications coming from 21 European countries in 2013-2014
- 119 applications coming from 17 European countries in 2015-2016

The dialogue between jury members is very important and time is kept for these exchanges either upstream of the process (reading the online dossiers with the reading committee), or during the meetings and the selection week.

Each year, the protocol of the pre-selection meeting was well prepared by the JTCE team in close relationship with the jury co-presidents. Together, they settled the program of each day and the role of each jury member. A document summarizing the online votes and the tendencies (yes/no/maybe) and a document with the explanation of each selection criteria is given to each jury member.

Each jury member is in charge of 5 to 6 applications and pitches the project to the others in order to start the discussion. The pitch is supposed to give basic information: the name of the company, the name of the author, the country and a brief description of the projects and of the content of the application form.

The co-presidents lead the debates and read a few comments of jury members or of members of the reading committee on the online forum. Those comments help to precise some points and are a chance to hear the points of view of other specialists.

Each project is objectively presented and discussed. If needed, the videos (not compulsory) are seen in order to make a decision. All these elements show the will of the jury to induce objectivity in a selection process that is structurally subjective.

Many important questions are raised during the debates.

For example, Fabrizio Gavosto (Mirabilia Festival) asks many times: **"Do the artists need CircusNext?"** He also encourages the jury to give special attention to "projects that would not exist without CircusNext". The role of the reading committee is also very important. Their comments and evaluations are accessible on the online forum. For example, Antonia Kuzmanic, former laureate and co-president of the jury, has a very sharp analyse of the projects and, as an artist and as a jury, really insists on projects that are "for CircusNext". We understand that "for CircusNext" means projects responding to its philosophy and to its principles. As Jean-Michel Guy reminds: **"we help people who really need it, not talented artists who would find support and visibility without CircusNext."**

Even a project with a majority of "no" is discussed. Besides the eligibility criteria (which are fairly objective), it is important to clarify why a project is not chosen. The fact that some application forms are not well completed is an important factor. As many jury members underline, some projects are "not ready for CircusNext". This doesn't mean that the project is artistically uninteresting, but that the artist still needs time before engaging him or herself in a long creation process. These artists are generally recommended for Labs, the best place to help them improve their project, open to other artists and other artistic cultures. Many artists who participated in Labs applied to CircusNext the year following the Lab showing that CircusNext succeeds in creating a dynamic network. A dialogue is engaged on ways to help those promising artists to be challenged and supported. In the future, other ways of helping artistic personalities to emerge could be discussed among the jury. This idea of long term projects to accompany some artists in parallel to the core of the CircusNext program seemed to be more and more considered during those two meetings and is very promising for the future.

As previously mentioned, during the selection process, an important question is raised: What would be the common definition of an "emerging" artist on a European level, when the situation of circus is so different from one country to another regarding training, production, cultural policies, etc.? Cultural operators associated to CircusNext are eager to know what is happening elsewhere when they join the project, either as co-organizers, associated partners or even jury members. The observation of these differences reveals that it is difficult to apply the same definition of emergence to all countries and all artists. For now, its definition might be too pragmatic, too simplistic and does not take into account the complexity of the concept in the different European countries. It is misunderstood by both artists and jury and can lead to inconsistencies. The notion therefore needs to be discussed for the future.

What is an emerging author today, how to define the circus language, how to evaluate the capacity of an artist to build a show, what is an aesthetic judgment, how to identify a strong and original artistic identity? As Jean-Michel Guy underlines in his comments, **"CircusNext is seeking for authors asking themselves important artistic questions"**.

For the jury, it is important to choose projects that represent the circus of today but will also represent it tomorrow; they are therefore looking for artists with long-term goals and a promising artistic vision, innovation is therefore supposed to be central in their discussions and decisions. But it remains complicated to build a European vision of the circus, the aesthetic criteria being still very dependent on cultural areas, revealing tensions especially around the question of innovation.

The dramaturgy of the future shows as well as the other artistic components (including technique, sets, etc.) are frequently discussed and we can observe that the consensus is difficult on artistic questions. However, the jury also pays attention to the capacity of artists to really build the project, looking at budgets, technical needs, etc. For example, projects requiring specifically a tent are closely studied in order to see if the company has means to implement such a project.

Another interesting question is raised when discussing the risk of choosing and following one project or another. A young and innovative company has its place in CircusNext and the jury plays a role in supporting projects that would not exist without CircusNext. As some artists take risks (artistically and sometimes physically), the jury should also take the responsibility to support those projects. We then understand that it is a complex set of parameters that makes it possible to explain the selection. Indeed, the singularity and diversity of the proposals cannot under any circumstances be reduced to a binary evaluation.

Finally, Roberto Magro (co-president of the jury in 2015-2016) insists on the necessity for the jury to evaluate the artists' capacity to move from a short-length project to a real performance. This is related to the ability of really writing a show and being able to hold it. As an echo, a very interesting comment is written by Thomas Renaud, former production manager at JTCE and now director of la Maison des Jonglages in France, he insists on the fact that CircusNext is "**an opportunity to take this time for research**", a question that should also guide the jury when examining the applications: do we focus on production issues or do we allow ourselves to support projects that need more time for artistic research and would never evolve without CircusNext? Unfortunately, this aspect is not always understood by artists and more space for discussion and pedagogy should be encouraged around the jury's choices.

2. The selection week: an opportunity for "being in the light" *Selection*

"CircusNext creates possibilities and generates interest"
(Alexander Vantournhout, laureate 2013-2014)

In April 2014 and in November 2015, the shortlisted artists presented their work in Dommelhof/Theater op de Markt (Neerpelt). They came from Ireland, Finland, Croatia, Czech Republic, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Israel, Norway, Sweden, and The Netherlands.

The positive image and the notoriety of CircusNext appear clearly through the interviews with the artists. As pointed out, the Selection week and the Paris presentations are the best places to discover new talents for the festivals and venues directors. The artists are aware of it and, as the laureate Darragh McLoughlin stated it: "**CircusNext can put you in the light.**" The issue of being in the light is pointed out by all the artists who are conscious of the high difficulty of getting noticed in a very competitive field. How do you make a difference? Most directors are overwhelmed with emails and artistic dossiers sent by hundreds of artists and companies. For Nacho Flores, laureate in 2013-2014, CircusNext gives time and the opportunity to reinforce the project: "**At the beginning of the project, I was alone, then the project grew, with other people, it is CircusNext that allowed me to find and be able to pay collaborators.**"

CircusNext, since it benefits from such a positive image, is definitely a trusted and valued program in terms of selection. This is partly the consequence of the previous laureates' profiles who went through the CircusNext program and who are not only successful but also greatly recognized by the artistic community. The candidates attending CircusNext have great expectations regarding the outcomes of their selection because they have the feeling that they are walking in the steps of companies such as Race Horse Company, Ivan Mosjoukine or Un Loup pour l'homme; companies with strong artistic standards that went through CircusNext themselves.

The selection unfolds in two stages:

- The artists present a 20-minute work-in-progress on stage
- They have a 30-minute interview with the jury members taking place right after their on-stage presentation

2.1 Presentations on stage: a variety of aesthetics representing the European contemporary circus

Before coming to Neerpelt, all the shortlisted artists benefited from at least one pre-selection residency organized by CircusNext with the co-organizers or associated partners.

In Neerpelt, the technical conditions and the general conditions are evaluated very positively by all artists. They have the opportunity to prepare their presentation on stage with the technical team and had time to rehearse. During the interviews, they often mentioned that the selection week as a very stressful and important event but that the help of the technical team and of the JTCE team as well as the good general conditions really helped them to face this challenge. Pierre Staigre, technical director for CircusNext welcomes them with the technical staff and Theater Opt de Markt. For him, this first step in the selection process is fundamental to learn how to organize your work, adapt to the conditions of representation and interact with the technical teams. He then plays the role of a mentor to alert them on the feasibility of certain projects and help them solve scenic problems. One understands then that mentoring begins well before the final selection and that it is an ongoing process of which shortlisted as laureates benefit from.

Many different disciplines are explored on stage and most of the artistic projects mix circus disciplines with different arts as dance, physical theatre, music or digital arts, reflecting one of the major evolutions of the contemporary stage for the past 15 years. Interdisciplinary work is therefore very present in contemporary circus even though artists still develop the specificity of their circus disciplines and try to invent new artistic languages in relationship to specific stage designs, objects or new apparatuses. The variety of disciplines represented among the 15 shortlisted companies shows that CircusNext attracts artists with very different profiles. No aesthetic dominates and even if acrobatics make up 30% of the disciplines, practices such as contortion, magic or dressage are also present. The artists also seek for new ways of writing circus, from notation systems or drawings, to finding methods to develop artistic research during the studio work.

- The four major disciplines of circus - acrobatics, object manipulation, dressage and burlesque - are all present in the 2013-2014 edition.
- In 2015-2016, a lot of projects focus on the creation of new body languages through the invention of objects and machines. These inventions are interesting to question the relationship between authorship and the renewal of aesthetics and techniques in contemporary circus.

It is interesting to see that many artists seek for a collaboration with a stage director or choreographer. During the interviews with the jury we can notice that most of them are in a research process in the long run, claiming their authorship. CircusNext is therefore particularly suitable to help these emerging young authors who will benefit from the CircusNext platform to build their company and take time to invent their singular way of writing circus. Excellence is at the heart of CircusNext and one of the selection criteria. Therefore, most of the shortlisted artists followed advanced training in circus arts in many schools, including the major European ones. Some have already substantial experience as performers in international companies and the technical quality on stage is quite high in many presentations.

2.2 Networking

The selection week in Neerpelt is also an intense week of work, exchanges and discovery of original artistic processes, an opportunity to show one's work and to meet a lot of professionals, other artists and circus experts from all over Europe and have feedbacks on a creation process, an important turn in a beginning career, a way to learn how to present and defend a project. **"The Selection Week is a rare opportunity in an artist's life, where you can take time to talk about your project and to have so many people interested in it, looking at you and listening to you."**, explains Sandrine Juglair, laureate in 2015-2016.

During breaks and in the evenings, there are opportunities for informal talks, as well as more formal discussions. There are a lot of interactions among the CircusNext community gathered during these five days and it was obviously a great opportunity for the young artists to meet festivals and venues directors. Several of them, who were not jury members, explain that, despite the fact that it is quite a strong commitment to be five days away from the office to come to the Selection week, it is, for them, a great opportunity to scout for new talents, to get an overview of the future of circus and of the tendencies in terms of creation and innovation.

As there is strong needs for mentoring and feedbacks among artists, it is important that the Selection Week in Neerpelt stays a place promoting the possibilities to meet and discuss. **"CircusNext is a label but also provides access to a network of professionals who, during the selection week, are really there to watch artistic projects and meet with the artists. This type of event does not exist anywhere else."**, relate Galactick Ensemble, laureate in 2015-2016.

In addition to informal meetings, in 2015-2016, one of the evenings is devoted to a meeting between artists moderated by Agathe Dumont. This informal encounter enables artistic teams to meet and discuss common themes: how to define one's circus language, how to work in a creative process, what is artistic research and what are the needs of the artists? The artists rarely have the opportunity to share their practices, which can only be beneficial. Another evening is devoted to a set of questions and answers. Artists could, during the week, write all the questions they wanted to ask to the professionals and drag them anonymously into a box. Cécile Provôt (director of JTCE) and Jean-Charles Herrmann (former director of Les Migrateurs, FR) managed the discussion that addressed some difficult issues: producing and touring shows, economic matters in the sector, or programming choices. Talking helps to understand each other's ways of working and builds bridges. It also highlights the differences between European countries and offers the opportunity to learn more about each other's practices.

The notion of network can also be considered differently. In this articulation between territories, the localization of Neerpelt, decentralized in relation to the large European capitals, plays a role. If the place is identified in Europe as a support for creation in circus arts, some artists reside there for the first time which allows them to discover another reality and also induce other territorial logics.



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3. Residencies and Mentoring: developing and accompanying one's artistic vision

Support Phase

The support phase of the 7 laureate companies⁵ takes place between the selection week in Neerpelt and the public presentations in Paris and includes:

- A grant of about 10 000 euros
- Residencies in partnership with co-organizers and associated partners
- A personalized support (mentoring)

The laureates are from different backgrounds but they all have an original artistic approach. For them, CircusNext is an opportunity for artistic and professional development and all were able to work on their project, to develop it, to constitute a permanent team and to benefit from outside eyes during the support phase.

3.1 An opportunity to travel through Europe

The European dimension is seen as an opportunity to tour their work in other countries and to learn about the European circus geography (several artists had residencies in several different countries). The artists appreciate the time and space offered by CircusNext. It allows them to be in a research process and enhances progress of writing a show, it helps thinking the central idea of authorship; these are the values CircusNext stands up for.

During the support phase it is offered to the artists to invite a "mentor" for a few days, with the support of CircusNext partners. CircusNext gives time and space to young artists for their artistic path to emerge or to develop in quite good conditions. Therefore, the mentoring program plays a role in the professionalization process of these young artists and the development of a project both artistically and professionally.

According to the availability and technical constraints of each artistic team, CircusNext tries to ensure at least one month of residency by company.

The aims of these residencies are:

- Foster mobility
- Meet other cultural contexts, new audiences
- Expand the co-producers /touring network

"CircusNext was a unique opportunity to go elsewhere in Europe, see other residencies and meet other people. During my residency in Prague, I was so energised. It's good to be in contact with other professionals. After the selection week in Neerpelt, I could discuss with many cultural operators in Belgium. It's so easy and I was so lucky!", says Sandrine Juglair, laureate in 2015-2016, who had the opportunity to travel to Belgium and Czech Republic during the support phase.

In 2013-2014 and 2015-2016, the laureate artists travelled to more than **10 different European countries**. If we look widely at the supports that the artists benefited from in Europe, we can notice a very large range of countries, showing that contemporary circus is a nomadic art, travelling easily from one place to another and able to reach different audiences through Europe. CircusNext highlights this challenge of circus today and enables a dynamic at a European level. The circus sector and its actors can only benefit from this international network. Indeed, the processes of legitimization (and visibility) of the arts often go through this geographical dimension. This was the case for contemporary art which, as Alain Quemin⁶ recalls, the definition itself includes international characteristics.

⁵ NB. In 2013-2014, on company decided to split and stopped the CircusNext program.

⁶ Alain Quemin, *L'art contemporain international : entre les institutions et le marché (le rapport disparu)*, Jacqueline Chambon/Artprice : Nîmes, 2002.

3.2 A place for artistic research

This period of time is not only focused on the climax of the CircusNext program and the public presentations but also provides a framework of work and time for artists to go further in their artistic research.

For a lot of artists, CircusNext is the opportunity to invite an outside eye during the creation process. The “mentor” will therefore help for the dramaturgy, the choreography or the stage direction. As an outside eye is not the author, his or her role is to help structuring an artistic purpose, as a dramaturg for example. Julia Christ, Marion Collé, Darragh McLoughlin, Netty Radvanyi & Johan Bichot, Alexander Vantournhout, Sandrine Juglair, Compagnie Two or Dymitry Szytura benefited from the mentoring program by inviting one or many artistic collaborators on the long term of their creation process.

On another hand, “mentors” can also occasionally help the artists on specific problems. This was, for example, the role of Kitt Johnson with Circus Katoen. After the selection week, the choreographer and jury member offered to help some companies to work on the choreographic part of their shows or more generally on body and movement. As the two artists from Circus Katoen suffered from injuries and physical problem, the choreographer acted as a mentor to help them think about their bodies, organize their physical work in order to work longer, with efficiency and more care.

When accompanying emergent artists, a “mentor” is also accompanying human beings, helping them to create a space for their artistic questions to emerge and setting long term goals beyond a specific project. Questioning both artistic and professional issues, this type of mentoring is of course essential for young artists in order to help them to think differently on their project and to prepare their careers.

For some of the artists this mentoring was essential to develop their project. Nacho Flores, for example, explains how working with a video designer improved the technical aspects of his show and led to a true artistic collaboration. Marion Collé sees the creation process as a collaborative space and the mentoring program allowed her to establish specific working times with her collaborators. For Netty Radvanyi and Johan Bichot, the presence of two well-known artists and circus authors alongside them, led them to have a more accurate idea of what writing a circus show meant and to assert their artistic identity.

In general, the artists have a **good overall satisfaction** of the logistics, technical and accommodation conditions provided by the hosting structures. Some of them were able to meet with some professionals and/or to present their work at the end of their residencies.

The residencies helped them to prepare the final public presentations in Paris as well as to develop new parts of their projects in order to prepare the future. **“During CircusNext, a residency is an active support without imposing things. The principle of an artistic residency is to find a balance between the structure, and the artists’ demands, it is a dialogue. It is important that the artists present their work-in-progress; it creates a link with the audience. A public presentation allows the audience to witness a moment of a creation process, to engage in a dialogue with the artist about his or her work.”**, explains Jean-Charles Hermann, former co-organizer. Therefore, significant professional relationships are forged during these residencies and the artists hope that those collaborations will continue over the long term and will accompany the creation of their project.

From a sociological point of view, we could then develop the idea of artistic companionship as another set of working relations, as we sometimes find them in certain places or artistic factories in the design sector, for example, but which still have to develop in the circus and performing arts sector in general. This evolution may seem paradoxical with regard to the history of this art that has long valued an economic model based on mutual aid and sharing tasks. Economic developments in the sector and initial training have modified these practices. However, the reflection is strong among some artists and some partners around cooperative models as we cross in the theater sector for example.

3.3. Administrative and production mentoring

In 2013-2014, it was noticed that companies had difficulties in thinking about their professional and organizational plans. Although many artists note that the CircusNext framework and the different stages help in the structuration of a project, it remains that building a project in the long term is an issue and a necessity to ensure the future of an artist and his/her team. This is why, in 2015-2016, it was decided to strengthen the administrative and production mentoring program with the aim of professionalizing companies and helping project leaders. **"CircusNext is offering so much support! You learn faster and you have more opportunities to show your work in progress. The process can really influence a lot on how you want to make circus. You meet with a lot of people and young circus companies, there is a need of meeting other artists"**, explain Circus Katoen, laureates in 2015-2016.

In 2015-2016, Dymitry Szytura, Circus Katoen and Compagnie Two were offered to work with a mentor in order to help them for structuring their company and building their professional project. The mentoring session were driven by Charles Vairet, expert in the circus field. **"It is not possible to think on the accompaniment of emergent artist without considering the accompaniment of human beings. Creating a space for reflection is important. The idea is to stop at one point in the artistic process and to discuss, change, evolve"**, explains Charles Vairet. Most artists lack skills for structuring administratively a long-term project and for considering their creation project as a part of a larger professional career. Creating an art form is one part of the process but knowing what are one's issues and how he or she will manage them is another part. Being an artistic director also requires specific skills which the mentoring program of CircusNext can help to acquire. Emergent artists applying as authors to CircusNext are also in the process of becoming company directors and accompanying them also involve helping them to play this role. This type of mentoring is fundamental in a program like CircusNext. From his point of view, all artists that worked with Charles were very satisfied even if this type of work wasn't clear for them in the first place. Once again, the role of the mentor is not to work directly on the administration and the production of the show, but to understand the issues faced by the artists and to help them find the right tools to build their company and be more aware of the difficulties and challenges of a professional life: how to earn one's living, how to develop a project and ensure touring etc. The artistic process is therefore as important as the company project. Discussions with artists on their project and their future allows them to transform something in their process and continue their professional pathway on their own.

It can be observed that the structuring of vocational training for circus performers on a European and even worldwide scale, as well as the development of European or international programs of cultural cooperation, favor the circulation of circus actors and their professionalization. CircusNext may then be considered as a milestone in a process of professionalization with complex temporalities. As the sociologist Jérémy Sinigaglia⁷ notes, if we look at the artist's' status nowadays, asserting his rights and developing his activity requires a certain amount of specific knowledge and skills to be mastered:

- To be able to understand institutions and processes
- To be able to identify financial support
- To be able to write an artistic project, including financial, legal aspects
- To be able to present an artistic project and convince potential partners

In a way, CircusNext allows the development of these skills over a very short time. **"CircusNext acts an accelerator for a lot of artists who are not always ready to become project leader or director of company. It's important to associate people to the project who can help the artists with the administration, the production or with touring. On one hand, the ideas of authorship, circus writings are important, but on the other hand, working on becoming a project leader is as important for the professionalism of young artists."**, explains Géraldine Werner, from AY-ROOP Productions, accompanying several laureates.

⁷ Sabrina Sinigaglia-Amadio & Jérémy Sinigaglia, *Les temporalités du travail artistique. Le cas des musicien-ne-s et des plasticien-ne-s*, La documentation française, coll. Questions de culture, 2017.

We could say that there is a strong professionalization issue that underlies the CircusNext project but which is probably not sufficiently emphasized in the communication and which, to play its full role, should extend beyond the selection and presentations in Paris. Some co-organizers and/or associated partners of CircusNext become co-producers of the shows and accompany the artists beyond the support phase. However, artists often evoke the difficulty to manage the transition between the end of the CircusNext support scheme and the development of the project when seeking for producers and touring. It would therefore be necessary to reflect on the way of thinking this professionalization within CircusNext for the artists, for the cultural operators, and for every agent involved in the sector and to invent innovative methods and situations to enable this process to be fully realized.

4. The public presentations in Paris: visibility and networking

Public presentations

*"CircusNext helps, gives credibility and motivation."
(Netty Radvanyi, laureate 2013-2014)*

Public presentations of "works-in-progress" can be organized during the support phase. Either they take place at the end of a residency, or the CircusNext partners host them (especially during festivals). The idea is to show an excerpt of the work and to present the artist. The audience is sometimes asked to complete a questionnaire in order to help understand how contemporary circus is perceived.

The audience generally doesn't know CircusNext; those public presentations are also a way to promote the project. All the laureates had public presentations during the support phase (in Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Sweden, Czech Republic...). As they explain, those presentations help them to improve their technique, precise things, to meet different people. However, it is also a difficult experience because the artist are still creating and present a show that is not yet finished. It highlights the difficulty to confront works-in-progress to audience and the need to finish the development of new presentation formats. Indeed, attending a work-in-progress requires abandoning certain categories of aesthetic judgment to try to see the work of the artist beyond what is presented. A public presentation does not go without pedagogy.

The most important public presentations of the program takes place in Paris, at Théâtre de la Cité internationale. The program is precisely established and strictly followed by everyone. The three days are very intense and are a climax for both the artists and the JTCE team that is very invested during this period.

The final presentation has many goals:

- Helping encounters between artists and co-producers
- Giving the opportunity to meet, within a few days, with a lot of European circus artists and European circus professionals and/or experts
- Promoting new circus writings in front of a diverse audience
- Giving the opportunity to see the diversity of contemporary circus writings
- Enabling the link between all the artistic teams

In 2013-2014, CircusNext organized a pitch session between the laureates and the European cultural operators and artists. The authors briefly presented their projects in English and in French and explained their needs. The purpose of this operation was to facilitate the dialogue between artists and potential co-producers in a dedicated space.

Presentations show a wide range of aesthetics and each company has the chance to play twice approximately 30 minutes of his/her work. Some artists present the beginning of their show, others some various excerpts. All of them have a good overall satisfaction of the public presentations in Paris. For them, this event is a completion but also a challenge.

The 3-day public presentations in Paris play a role quite similar to a festival in the building of a professional network and the valorization of a sector. In a festival economic, social and cultural dimensions interact. As analyzed by Luc Benito (2001)⁸ a limited event in space and time is conducive to new public awareness and its recurring nature is essential for the market to build relationships between producers/programmers/cultural operators and artists in the same way as a fair. Indeed, the public presentations in Paris are an expected event and despite its temporality, it remains an important marker of the sector in terms of the legitimization of a certain number of artists on the French and European stage. These 3 days act as an indicator of contemporary circus trends. Nevertheless, we could question this process of legitimacy that can induce strong inequalities between artists and eventually tend towards a homogenization of aesthetics due to the very important stakes of this event. Other formats of public presentations where artistic diversity and risk-taking can be envisaged are therefore to be further explored and developed.



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⁸ Luc Benito, *Les festivals en France. Marchés, enjeux et alchimie*, Paris : L'Harmattan, coll. "Gestion de la culture", 2001.

PART III:

Supporting Contemporary Writings and Artistic Research

What is circus today? This is obviously quite a wide question but the strength of CircusNext is to reveal the state of contemporary circus in Europe. The selection reflects the diversity of aesthetics, practices, and disciplines. A close attention is paid to risky and challenging works, but also to projects that are more accessible. The jury members are aware of their responsibility since the circus community considers the laureates of CircusNext as indicators of the artistic evolution and state of circus production today in Europe.

CircusNext is a unique place dedicated to thorough discussions about what contemporary circus is, its own dramaturgy, the dialogue between the circus disciplines and the themes the artists want to tackle, the creative process the artists are going through, how they write and develop their artistic vision, etc. All these discussions have a pedagogical quality since they shape strong foundations for the European circus sector, to support its development and its sustainability in the future.

1. A European contemporary circus?

1.1 A shared definition of circus?

By giving time for research, discussions and presentations, the program gradually builds a common definition of contemporary circus at European level. The question of circus is one of the main themes during the debates of the jury due to the variety of the aesthetics present in CircusNext. Even if "nouveau cirque" or "contemporary" circus can be defined historically, it seems more difficult to have a common definition of what it could mean on stage for artists and professionals coming from different countries and different cultural backgrounds. When debating, it is therefore important to keep in mind that, in the European circus today, some aesthetics are dominant and that one of the roles of CircusNext would be to widen the definition of circus.

- **What could be the essence of circus and how is it questioned on the contemporary stage?**
- **How to define "fundamentals": what is the acrobatic body as a language, as a technique?**
- **What makes the circus body in itself and not necessarily default compared to other artistic mediums?**

Far from being a codified and rigid artistic and cultural form, circus has always been open to influences (aesthetic, social) of its time. Since its inception, the circus show was enriched with varied backgrounds. The circus arts have been able to draw their renewal in other disciplines, so that the "miscegenation" would be one of the characteristics of contemporary circus. Moreover, the idea of "dramaturgy" in circus was raised in the 1980s and is more than ever relevant in works that question the circus medium itself and what "to represent"/"to perform" means. As Louis Patrick Leroux, professor at Concordia University (Canada), reminds us: "Attempting to give sense —political and aesthetic—to the circus act beyond its own spectacle. Once you start using circus to tell stories to make a point, other than just entertain, the issue of dramaturgy does come up"⁹.

⁹ Carlos Alexis Cruz, "Contemporary Circus Dramaturgy", interview with Louis-Patrick Leroux, *Theater Topics*, vol. 24, n°3, 2014.

During the discussions with the jury and with the artists, different points are raised to define contemporary circus. First of all, it can be defined through the artists' relationship to their bodies and to the apparatus. In the discourses, it appears that circus is defined as:

- A world of "body in motion" and a world of actions
- The art of risk-taking (concretely related to the body and metaphorically related to the self)

Inside the "circus system", we can therefore identify specific disciplines specialties such as floor acrobatics, aerial acrobatics, clowning and juggling. Each discipline has its own characteristics that appeal to very specific technical skills. However, the relationship to the body might be shared by almost all circus artists, as a craft with a specific expertise, know-how, and a set of shared rules and values which also form the foundations of contemporary circus.

When talking about their bodies and disciplines, circus artists often claim a specific identity, due to the embodiment of a demanding technique in their daily work. Therefore, technique is the heart of the creative process of the circus performer. In this process, the relationship to the object is fundamental. How does the writing of a circus act reinvent the relationship to the object? **"CircusNext is a very important platform for the new circus languages. Innovation is very present during the debates. Some projects bring new questions on circus, open new ways, invent new techniques. It's always very interesting to see how artistic research is carried out through circus techniques"**, observes Roman Müller, artist, former laureate, and jury member.

The term "writing" is not considered here in its only intelligible form but also in its sensible form. "Representation of speech and thought by conventional graphic signs" (Larousse Dictionary). "The art of permanently representing speech through an agreed system of signs that can be perceived by sight". (Lexis Larousse of the French language). The notion of writing here includes a number of elements: scores, drawings, sketches, graphs, signs, doodles, paper searches, storyboards, scenarios, readings, notations, motion captures, but also signs / senses / symbols / sensations.

Therefore, it seems important for artists not to be referred to as "authors" in a unique vision of authorship associated to theater, drama or literature. To enrich the reflection on circus writings we could also look at other authorship modalities as the one developed on the contemporary interdisciplinary stage, and more specifically the idea of "stage author/writer" (*écrivain de plateau*) performing: "The stage writer thwarts and disturbs the laws of genres and categories. Taking leave of the hierarchy of genres (which precisely translates the hegemony of the text), the theater written from the stage no longer cares for the defence of a pure territory. On the contrary, it is constantly open to the contributions of other artistic, visual, musical, choreographic and technological forms"¹⁰. This notion opens to a wide definition of "stage" and "writings" and not only in a more restrictive vision of the writing related to a specific technique or language.

The strong relationship that ties the artist to his/her discipline and to his/her apparatus acts as an identity mark: socially, artistically and physically. A creation process is a way to define this relationship more precisely. Therefore, in this reflection on circus languages arises the question of virtuosity that could be defined less as excellence within a framework but as the capacity to produce one's own frame. **Innovation** and **excellence** are two key words for CircusNext. We can also notice that as "excellence" on stage is one of the criteria for the CircusNext selection, high performance and risk remain the two words the more quoted to define the acrobatic body among artists, jury members and co-organizers. **"Circus is associated with risk, body, limits, equilibrium, manipulation, specific techniques and is about becoming very specific into something. What is "next" in CircusNext, regarding the given criteria, is a project which brings something never seen, innovation in circus techniques, dramaturgy"**, explains Claudio Stellato, circus artist and jury member.

¹⁰ Bruno Tackels, *Les Castellucci, Écrivains de plateau I*, Paris: Les Solitaires intempestifs, 2005.

In the discourses of the actors, a rather shared vision of circus languages dominates. Circus is clearly an art of risk-taking (physical, artistic) and the circus artist deals with both an athletic body and an artistic body. The question of risk is also based on shared values and in particular the concept of mutual help; as circus refers to imbalance, impermanence and instability.

Beyond the techniques, circus can also be defined through shared values that are clearly expressed by the artists, the cultural operators (co-organizers and associated partners) and by the jury members:

- **Mutual assistance, support to each other, especially when safety is involved**
- **The exchange between disciplines but also the openness to the outside world**
- **The concept of companionship as much in transmission as in a creation process**
- **The need to do, to act, here and now**

1.2 The diversity of contemporary circus on stage

2013-2014

Julia Christ, presented with *Coin de l'âme-Soul Corner* a solo mixing handstands, object manipulation and contemporary dance. As variation on "boxing", she conveys a very poetic universe with a lot of physical commitment.

Marion Collé, started a research on poetry on her apparatus, the tight wire. Her show *Autour du domaine*, was written exploring visual arts (specifically stage lightings) and video art. Two performers are on stage to explore the feeling of balance to reinvent the space of the tight wire and change the audience perceives it.

Nacho Flores, has created a new handstand technique, balancing on wooden cubes to create ephemeral sculptures. In *Tesseract*, fighting gravity and Newton's theory, a surreal universe is created where the most ordinary actions can turn into a real challenge. The artist also worked on video mapping allowing the encounter of circus techniques with digital arts.

Darragh McLoughlin is a juggler and offered with *Fragments of a Mind* one of the most contemporary shows of the 2013-2014 selection. His solo on stage explores the essence of juggling, working on different scenic devices and giving way to many inventions. His work was accompanied by many outside eyes: dance, music, light design, machineries, etc.

Netty Radvanyi & Johan Bichot, created a piece with three performers on stage, mixing dance acrobatics, Chinese pole, music, roller-skates and the dressage of horses, rather rare in the contemporary circus. Exploring different techniques and medias, their show offers a very singular universe where all these expressions can meet.

With the solo, co-written with Bauke Lievens, *ANECKXANDER*, **Alexander Vantournhout**, has managed one of the most programmed shows of the 2013-2014 laureates. His work is at the crossroads of handstands, dance and contortion, playing on the limits of the body and its representations. His show explores a strange, sometimes deformed body, reactivating the images of freaks of the traditional circus.

Circus Katoen, presented part of their artistic research due to an injury and specific physical conditions the week prior to the presentation. Wanting to show **"the strength and the vulnerability of the body"**, the two artists adapted their original form and have chosen to work on small objects, showing the possibility to link circus and object manipulation regarding physical limits.

Compagnie du Chaos showed an excerpt from the piece *Nebula*, working on a very complex light design with a lot of video effects and mixing floor acrobatics and Chinese pole, **"a sensorial piece between circus and digital arts."**

Dymitry Szypura presented his research on how **"safety, protection and risk bring you to the human contradiction of a little kid, laughing about a dramatic accident, out of innocence and joy of seeing an attraction."** His work directly questions the nature of circus regarding risk and definitely resonates with political and social contemporary considerations.

La Migration, initially scheduled to play outdoor but showcased indoors because of the weather conditions, works on a very innovative apparatus created by Quentin Claude. The company presented an excerpt from their final show. The two acrobats, accompanied on stage by a composer and musician, dance and play with a double rotating tight wire, described as a **"metallic and kinetic structure"**. Their work interrogates circus languages by working with the landscape and revisiting the tight wire technique in this new structure.

Galactik Ensemble is a collective. The five acrobats describe their work as **"situational acrobatics, the precise relationship between a rugged environment and a man's ability to adjust to it."** They showed different parts of their research, building a dramaturgy and creating a complex stage design to work on falls and surprise. The research is therefore very interesting as it interrogates both body languages and the place of objects on stage. Moreover, Galactik was the only collective work of this edition.

Compagnie Two also presented different scenes from their ongoing research. Their very theatrical performance plays with absurdity and the two acrobats have developed two very different characters, evolving in various musical environments: **"an unusual encounter, an extravagant duo."** As they work a lot on improvisation, each scene is more like a "painting" with a very specific atmosphere. The aerial rope is present but floor acrobatics, between dance and circus, are the main parts of the research.

Finally, **Sandrine Juglair** showed the first part of her final show where she plays with stereotypes. As a Chinese pole acrobat, she tries to deconstruct the technique by introducing a theatrical work on a character, **"fixated on an obsession to please (...) locked in this life of representation, she is condemned to play, to fail, to start again."** This solo work is really built on a precise dramaturgy with different sequences, in order to start telling an absurd story.

Both in discourses and in practices, the question of the circus performer as an artist and as an athlete is present and rooted in contemporary representations of the body in our society. This network of influences - modeling an athletic body, performance, social injunctions to succeed cannot be totally separated from how the circus artist works. To think about artistic research in the field of circus and to accompany circus artists for the best, it might be necessary to build a reflection on how circus artists will empower these representations to build their own professional path. As laureate artist in 2015-2016, Dymitry Szypura finds it easy to embody those multiple identities: **"CircusNext is a platform open to tryouts, original projects. I have an acrobatic body, I see myself as a dancer and I do theater pieces! For what I had in mind, to explore, to research, CircusNext was the right place. It was the best bay to start an artistic research."**

The discussions within the CircusNext project provoke a strong interrogation on its languages and in particular on the "fundamentals" of circus: what is the acrobatic body (what gestures, what techniques...), what are the circus writings, how to define the boundaries of performance, risk, terms which are frequently verbalized by the artists and cultural operators involved in the project?

Circus Katoen, also laureate in 2015-2016 is a good example to illustrate the possibilities offered by CircusNext: **"CircusNext is supporting really new things, it was a motivation to make something different from what we normally do, to think outside of the box. It would have been more difficult in our normal network. Now, with CircusNext, something different can become a performance. It's a good motivation, even for the selection week, you know you have to make something new or special."**

All these questions come to nourish a reflection on the circus language and its multiculturalism. How to engage your body physically and creatively on a daily basis? What is the dramaturgy inherent in the acrobatic act? What are the relations to bodies and identities involved in the work of the circus arts? The circus writings developed in the frame of CircusNext could be more or less related to what Barbara Métais-Chastagner calls "Dramaturgy of the facts and the materials", also defined as "the arrangement that imposes the sequence of certain movements but also the way the technique and the conditions of the body, interfere, thwart or confront the possibilities offered by an apparatus or an object"¹¹. The example of artists, shortlisted or laureates of CircusNext, comes to question something essential in what would make circus writing (as opposed / compared to other dramaturgies and scenic writings). A form of radicality, perhaps, that only a large project like this one can support. Indeed, CircusNext places the issue of artistic work as central in its concerns and gives it importance in its residency program.

1.3. Being an author

For all artists, but more specifically for artists from European countries where circus is not developed and who have no real experience as circus artists abroad, CircusNext can be "a lifetime change". The program gives huge opportunities, financial help, and above all, the opportunity to present one's work and ensure the future of a show.

One of the questions raised by CircusNext is how to define an emerging author in a European perspective. As the word "author" is understood by everyone in the literature or the theatre world –the author being different from the stage director, even though it is sometimes the same person– the use of the word "author" in the circus sector remains complicated. The jury members seem to have a common view of the definition when trying to identify a potential, a profound research in terms of topics, disciplines, practice carried out by the artist. The process appears fairly subjective, especially since the expertise of the jury members are very diverse, based on what circus is like in their country. Something can look very innovative to someone and not at all to someone else. This leads to very interesting and challenging discussions between jury members regarding what innovation is. For the artists, having time for artistic research is rare and precious. Julia Christ, the eldest laureate of CircusNext 2013-2014, explains that: **"Having been laureate and having followed the more than one-year path of CircusNext I have experienced a deep and intense form of artistic advancement through a long physically and mentally challenging phase of creative research."**

The artists, the jury members and all the partners defend and enhance a specific circus language and help the artists to become authors, as Darragh McLoughlin wishes: **"How can my name be associated to a creator rather than just a good juggler?"** If circus artists can rely on the models developed by dance and theater in Europe, they must also invent their own schemes; CircusNext is also there to help them achieve this goal. In the artists' discourses, we understand that the affirmation of the identity of the author is not sociological (claiming a social status, a profession) but rather artistic, as a process of "becoming an author".

¹¹ Barbara Métais-Chastanier, «Écriture(s) du cirque : une dramaturgie ?», *Agôn* [En ligne], Cirque et dramaturgie, Dramaturgie des arts de la scène, Enquêtes, mis à jour le : 08/05/2014, URL : <http://agon.ens-lyon.fr/index.php?id=2308>.

CircusNext puts in debate the status and definition of the "author". To be recognized as an author was one of the fights of the generation of artists of the Nouveau Cirque/New circus in France in the 1980s-1990s. Currently, this symbolic "status" is for example recognized in France at the SACD (Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers) and circus writers can not only declare their works but also benefit from financial support. However, the impact remains symbolic as from a sociological point of view, most artists do not declare themselves as "authors" but as "performers" or "artists". This observation is essentially valid for France, which frames and categorizes artistic activities. In Belgium, for example, the status of "artist" is more global. Nevertheless, beyond the sociological question, the recognition as an author seems to be part of a process of legitimization but is little claimed collectively. Indeed, being a "circus author" does not constitute a professional group identified locally or in Europe, which does not allow the setting of a clear identity and of collective demands. On one hand, there is therefore a gap between what CircusNext asserts as a framework and the reality of professional practices. On the other hand, the project could then help to build this professional group. From a more symbolic point of view, historically, the legitimization of circus as an art has gone through the claim of the status of author, as a guarantee for the autonomy of an art compared to the other so-called "major" arts. This is in any case what the circus historian Martine Maléval¹² notes as central in the revolution of Nouveau Cirque/New French circus. One could then wonder about the European challenge of the circus authors today being comparable to the local issue of the circus author in France in the 1980s. Going further, we could imagine that CircusNext could be the place for the construction, by the artists, of a specific identity of the author in the circus arts which would then modify the professional practices and why not lead to the evolution of the status of the circus artist-author in countries where they benefit from less recognition.

2. New languages, new inventions: innovative frameworks to support artists

2.1. Building creativity: The Labs

These past ten years, there have been very fast changes within the context of European circus. Even though circus is developing, there is still some misunderstandings of what is artistic research in circus among cultural operators. Therefore, some professionals lack tools to properly support circus artists. There might be a real need on the European level to share more knowledge and to build a cooperative network on supporting circus authors. Identifying the strengths of the different places that form the circus network would help to orientate the artists and to give them a suitable framework for different phases of a project.

Labs gather for ten days 10 to 15 artists from various countries, all involved in an artistic creation project. Artists are not invited as representatives of a company but as individuals. Half of them come from the hosting country, the other half are artists picked out of the CircusNext selection process: they are not laureates, but all of them participated either in the selection on application files or the selection week. Participants are chosen on artistic criteria (originality of their project, coherence, relevance). The whole group has to be well balanced in terms of represented disciplines, global experience, origins, and personalities. Labs are supervised by artistic personalities who play the role of mentors or facilitators: directors, choreographers, experienced artists, academics... Those facilitators play a mentoring role without imposing any direction to the artists' works. They might also enlighten the artists with their own experience – careers, specialties – through open talks or occasional workshops.

¹² Martine Maléval, *L'émergence du Nouveau Cirque*. 1968-1998, Paris : L'Harmattan, 2010.

The working method during the lab is based on a free and collective work on each artistic project. The artists successively present their project to the group, which then explores a number of approaches every day. These proposals enable each artist to refine his/her project and to experiment new directions. Labs are a free artistic exploration time: no specific results are required. This dimension is important insofar as this kind of space is quite rare in the European cultural landscape. Thinking of the artistic work outside the productivity schemes is not usual and forces to shift one's habits, to look at artistic work in a new light, and to take into account other issues: the experience, the possibility of being wrong, the possibility of presenting more fragile materials in a safe environment, etc. Even though labs are not central to the project, the framework they offer is valuable. Linking artistic work to a non-productive goal is quite revolutionary and is part of a reflection on artistic work that is found in the political philosophy. The Italian philosopher Paolo Virno analyzes the artist as a virtuoso who "works without product" and "requires the presence of others"¹³. In a way, the labs make this utopia possible.

When not getting in the way of the artistic research, public presentations and debates might be held on an occasional basis. Some of the labs can be an opportunity to establish links with a country from another continent, willing to contribute to the development of circus arts on its territory. Within the European cooperation process started by JTCE, the Labs play an important role in making the voices of emerging artists heard by cultural partners in order to develop new models of cooperation.

During the 2013-2017 CircusNext operation, six labs took place in three European countries and two Third countries.

3 INTERNATIONAL LABS

- La Seyne-Sur-Mer, France, Mediterranean Lab, September 1-13, 2014, co-organized by JTCE and hosted by Théâtre Europe – Pôle National des Arts du Cirque Méditerranée.
- Recife – PE, Brazil October 29 – November 11, 2015, co-organized by JTCE, associated partner La Grainerie, and hosted by Festival de Circe do Brazil
- Tananarive - Madagascar, Indian Ocean Lab, October 10-23, 2016, co-organized by JTCE and PPCM (Le plus petit cirque du monde, Bagneux, France, associated partner), and hosted by L'Aléa des Possibles.

3 EUROPEAN LABS

- Guimarães, Portugal, September 29 – October 10, 2014, organized hosted by Centro Cultural Vila Flor
- Ladislav Sutnar Art and design Academy, Plzeň Czech Republic, 25-30 August, 2015, organized by Cirqueon
- Prague, Czech Republic, September 20 - Octobre 2, 2016, organized hosted by Cirqueon

The mentors were renowned dance, theater or circus artists, stage directors and dramaturges, coming from 5 different countries.

Jean-Michel Guy, Albin Warette, Maria Paula Costa Rêgo, Roberto Magro, Claudio Stellato, Ben Fury, João Paulo dos Santos, Gaëtan Lévêque and Cyrille Musy.

¹³ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, New-York: Semiotex, 2004.

An important part of the Labs is dedicated to discussions between the artists in order to debate on circus arts development in each region. Therefore, a Lab is both a place to learn and a place to discuss.

"Labs are a free artistic exploration time: no specific results are required"; "I would have never gone that far if not helped by eight other people"; "Everybody is pushing you"; "I didn't expect to go there during the Lab, so it's very good", explain different participants of the Labs. Overall, more than 50 artists have been helped through the Lab program of CircusNext, in Europe and in third countries. This innovative frame seems to be very fruitful and a larger development of labs or even a network of labs could be considered to enhance the support of artistic research. CircusNext provides a support for the Labs, but it is then the responsibility of the partners to carry on and to strive towards new goals.

2.2 Enhancing artistic innovation

The residencies during the support scheme as well as the Labs show that artists are very concerned by the questions of innovation, artistic research and creativity. Moreover, during the selection, the jury also asks the artists their approach of their creative work. These questions are therefore shared both by the artists and by the professionals who accompany them.

- What is an experimental approach of circus?
- How to build a methodology when setting an artistic research?
- What are the tools to use when we go into artistic research and how do these "tools" also reveal the inventiveness of the artist?
- How to bring in a new person in the research process, as an outside eye?
- How to present / show an ongoing research, through which mediums?

In artistic research, research methodologies are part of a complex approach, which implies experience, imagination or intuition. This hybrid character of artistic research is what makes it different from scientific or academic research and involves specific contexts. However, to promote fully artistic research, there is a need to move from standardized production goals, that CircusNext tries to answer by offering residencies and opportunities to show a work-in-progress. **"CircusNext has the potential to be a place for risk and experimental art. Some companies get a chance to try something else. This does not really exist in any other processes and it is very valuable. CircusNext is a place where you learn a lot about the art form"**, asserts Kiki Muukkonen from Subtopia (associated partner), jury member, and co-president of the jury in 2015-2016.

Therefore, the singularity of each specific artistic project is essential to understand along with the specificities and constraints related to circus companies (in terms of security, working environment work, alternating rest and work, etc.). Defining "support" should be based on the goals, the choices, the country of an artist, and on the phase of the project. Therefore, any support means that both the artists and the "supporters" are involved in the same process.

For CircusNext artists, a multi-modal support is offered by JTCE at different stages of the selection process in order to enhance artistic innovation and singularity:

- A support before the application: helping to identify the artistic project and to help it to be mature enough for CircusNext
- A support during the selection process
- A support after the final presentations to help producing and touring

These different steps in fact allow an adaptation to the context of each project to understand the singularity. Only a framework like this one can make it possible to value new, sometimes strange, artistic approaches. We could then hope that all co-organizers / partners would be more involved in this support for singularity by taking the risk of supporting projects over the long-term and enabling artists to meet new audiences. Creativity, indeed, is more readily deployed in secure environments. CircusNext is one of them, but as the effective time-support of the project is quite short, before / after CircusNext should be better considered so that artists can be moved elsewhere besides this very privileged working environment.

Moreover, if the jury values and attempts to support artistic risk-taking, there is a gap between this vision of the jury and the reality of the field in terms of production and touring. When artists defend more radical works or propose complex scenic / technical devices, it is the responsibility of the jury to allow their existence by offering them the right framework. In 2013-2014 Netty Radvanyi and Johan Bichot (Z Machine) had a horse on stage and encountered difficulties to find residencies. It appeared that this very specific aspect had not been sufficiently estimated by the jury before selecting the show. The same year, Darragh McLoughlin (Squarehead Productions) with *Fragments of a Mind*, which explored a very experimental juggling, had difficulty meeting its audience. This work, for example, could have been accompanied differently by professionals by allowing the artist to enter other artistic production and touring networks such as those of performance art and contemporary art. On the other hand, the performance by Alexander Vantournhout, ANECKXANDER (in collaboration with Bauke Lievens), although quite radical in its approach and far from the popular imaginary of circus, toured a lot, especially in the contemporary dance network. If we understand that the jury is committed to promoting the circus sector, the need to open up to other artistic networks seems inevitable to allow artists to express themselves fully. The difficulty for the jury is to continue to support original initiatives while accompanying the artists on the feasibility of the projects. The commitment must not be symbolic but also financial.

However, we must also beware of the notion of "innovation" which is complex to define. What is innovative is only innovative in a given context and in relation (in art) to more singular than cultural (or collective) perceptions even if it is interesting to study the experimental processes that make it possible to affirm a singularity of the artist-author (both his language and the formalization of this language). The art sociologist Nathalie Heinich recalls how the notion of innovation is linked to a context of reception and therefore of "art market" (crucial point in legitimization processes when innovation differs from what disturbs)¹⁴. Nathalie Heinich is interested in the symbolic aspects (in discourses and in representations) of the aesthetic and social homologation of artists. In a way, CircusNext fully participates to this double process. The question of innovation should therefore be further analyzed, perhaps by considering an evolution/transformation process (within a system which rules are set by the



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¹⁴ Nathalie Heinich, *L'élite artiste. Excellence et singularité en régime démocratique*, Paris : Gallimard, 2006.

3. Artistic & Intellectual Encounters

Through the various events that mark the program, CircusNext really gives shape to the European contemporary network by creating innovative spaces for sharing ideas, knowledge and practices. In addition to public and non-public meetings and presentations, different events were held in the European Season of Circus Arts and allowed numerous exchanges, both artistically and intellectually.

Two major events proposed new ways of working and exchanging for the contemporary circus sector in Europe:

- The "Inédits de CircusNext", which prompted encounters of artists from different generations and styles, creating a new space to stimulate creativity and innovation;
- The *Think Circus!* meetings, which fostered the emergence of debates on different topics between artists, researchers and cultural operators, creating a new space for reflection on contemporary circus.

3.1 Inventing new artistic forms

Les inédits de CircusNext

In the framework of the European Season of Circus Arts, Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe coordinates "Les Inédits de CircusNext", a series of original short-length shows created by former laureates and hosted by partners from the Parisian region.

The events aim at different objectives:

- Reaffirming the European dimension of the project in gathering artists from different European countries
- Promoting the CircusNext program
- Building bridges between former laureates
- Building bridges between laureates and cultural operators
- Strengthening our relationship with local partners
- Reaching local, non-professional audiences to promote contemporary circus

"Les inédits" de CircusNext can be translated as **"the unreleased or the unprecedented"** of CircusNext.

Each venue was offered to welcome 3 or 4 authors who had been supported by Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe or CircusNext for a 2-to-4-day residency in order to create in situ short proposals that were then presented to a local audience. The performances took place either outdoors or indoors with light technical conditions. The objective of "Les inédits de CircusNext" was to focus on the pleasure of collective and improvised creation, far from the usual pressure of production objectives and aesthetics standards, to reach local and diverse audiences, and to encourage the artistic encounter of artists from different countries, practices and generations.

21 artists from **11 different nationalities** and from **7 CircusNext / JTCE promotions**,
10 partners, **5 departments ("districts")**,
Between **2500-3000 spectators** for **9 events**.

These events took place in May, June, and July 2017:

- **Sandrine Juglair / Johan Bichot**, May 6, ATLAST #2 défloraison - ATLAST label de création vivante - La Marbrerie, Montreuil.
- **Roman Muller, Gaël Manipoud / Cécile Mont-Reynaud, Quentin Claude and Sika Gblondoumé**, May 13 & 14, La Ferme du Buisson, Scène nationale, Marne-la-Vallée.
- **Nacho Flores, Valia Beauvieux, Maël Tebib, Jordi Querol**, May 20, Théâtre de l'Agora, Scène nationale, Evry.
- **Luis Sartori do Vale, Darragh McLoughlin, Ania Buraczynska**, May 20, Houdremont – Maison des Jonglages, scène conventionnée, La Courneuve.
- **Cécile Mont-Reynaud / Satchie Noro**, May 31, Fête du Chapiteau bleu / Théâtre Louis Aragon, Tremblay-en-France.
- **Sandrine Juglair / Pablo Rada Moniz**, June 4, festival Parade(s) in Nanterre, in partnership with Les Noctambules.
- **Marion Collé, Julia Christ, Sandrine Juglair & Jur Domingo**, June 17, L'Espace Périphérique / Parc de la Villette, Paris.
- **Johan Bichot, Satchie Noro, Darragh McLoughlin**, June 25, Festival Solstices - Pôle national des arts du cirque, Antony.
- **Valia Beauvieux, Mikkel Hobitz Filtenborg, Sade Kaampila, Julia Christ**, July 1 & July 2, L'Avant-Seine, Colombes.

Audiences:

The shows presented for each of these "Inédits" are unique and the audiences did not have a lot of information prior to the shows. We could organize the different events in **2 categories**:

1. Local events

The audience was often composed of inhabitants of the neighborhood, families, anchored in the territorial issues of the venues hosting the artists. As most of the presentations are free (or with a very low price) and take place during festive events or festivals, people attending the shows are numerous and sometimes attend a contemporary circus show for the first time. The fact that the shows were performed in public spaces (plaza, parks) is a way to allow a large audience to access cultural events ("Festival Solstices" in Antony, "Festival Parade(s)" in Nanterre, "Week-end Cirque" at La Ferme du Buisson, Marne-la-Vallée, "Fête du Chapiteau bleu" / Théâtre Louis Aragon, Tremblay-en-France, festive picnic in Centre culturel Houdremont, La Courneuve).

For example, in the **Parc Bourdeau in Antony**, the spectators were not less than 500, composed of families from the neighborhood and regular spectators of the venue. The festival chartered a bus in order to conduct the spectators from one presentation to the other.

Sometimes, inhabitants are even included in the performance itself as in **Théâtre de l'Agora, Scène nationale d'Evry** (May 2017). The venue being located in a very frequented shopping mall, the four artists quickly decided to work outside the venue, and, on the first day, talked to the inhabitants walking through this very frequented plaza and recorded their words. They pushed their exploration gathering their different skills, roller acrobatics, improvisation with the audience, Chinese pole, cube equilibrium and acrobatics. Combined with the texts from the inhabitants of the city, it was a very touching performance, especially for the local audience.

There were approximately one hundred spectators, composed of regular spectators of the venue, inhabitants crossing the square and attracted by the performance and a group of students from a school of Evry, in partnership with the venue.

This programming "outside the theater" is therefore clearly part of cultural democratization and promotes access to an innovative and demanding circus, but nevertheless accessible.

Another interesting example could be **L'Avant-Seine, théâtre de Colombes** as the venue is not dedicated to circus arts and does not organize a specific festival. However, the four artists hosted for "Les Inédits" were able to perform twice and invested the whole theater. L'Avant Seine offers a wide range of artistic propositions in order to reach the extreme diversity of population of Colombes. The theater provided the artists with their big venue, a 990 seats modulable room, a light technician and a sound technician during the 3-day creation work in order to help them. Moreover, during the 5 days at the theater the artists also seized the opportunity to meet the director and the general secretary of the theater to introduce their current projects.

At the end of the show, the artists took the time to explain that they all had been involved in the CircusNext program and that it quite influenced their careers as circus artists. The team of JTCE, present during the performance, also took the time to answer questions of the public on the program.

In this case we could say that "Les Inédits" de CircusNext helps to promote contemporary circus to new audiences in more interdisciplinary cultural venues and valorize the professional network of circus arts.

2. Specific events

At the **ATLAST** event (May 2017), the audience was composed of middle class and upper class spectators, who are used to attend cultural events and not specifically circus, as the events created by ATLAST gather artists from different fields (musicians, plastic artists, photographers, circus artists). This case is interesting as it includes contemporary circus in the contemporary art world. Approximately 350 spectators attended this event and a lot of them discovered CircusNext thanks to "Les Inédits".

In **Espace Périphérique** (June 2017), a place dedicated to artistic residencies in the field of circus, the audience was mostly used to go to circus shows. However, considering that Périphérique is not a known and established venue hosting public, a special attention was given to the audience and it was a real challenge to organize this event. Finally, more than 250 spectators attended the event during the evening, a lot of families, regular spectators of La Villette and inhabitants of the surroundings, but also circus professionals and artists. This diversity and the festive aspect of these performances is undoubtedly one of the strong points of these "Inédits" and shows that the invention and singularity has its place and finds its audience when we shift a little from conventional touring networks.

Aesthetics:

On the artists' side, the proposal is always welcomed with great enthusiasm and the experience is very positive for all of them. Indeed, CircusNext offers to these performers and authors, who sometimes knew each other little or not, a space to invent something free, original, effective only in a few days. What the artists retain from this experience is the challenge of a creation in such a short time, which stimulates the creativity and the freedom of invention offered. The shows are created on-site (gardens, tents, square, hall...) and use all the resources of a place to create these small ephemeral forms. They often mix different circus techniques with music, acting or dance and offer a very complete approach of contemporary circus.

The artists really understood the constraints and explored all the possibilities of the venues. They led the spectators to different spots and through all different kinds of atmosphere. **There is therefore a real artistic emulation in the spirit of the values defended by CircusNext.** Moreover, many different circus techniques are explored during these presentations (Chinese pole ■ Acrobatics ■ Aerial ■ Voice ■ Juggling ■ Cyr Wheel ■ Wooden cubes ■ Roller ■ Dance ■ Salto Pastoral ■ Hand-stand ■ Music ■ Tight wire ■ Acting ■ Double-Chinese pole ■ Hand to hand ■ Hair hanging) showing all the richness of circus writings.

"Les Inédits" de CircusNext are therefore offering the artists a space for experimentation with very specific constraints of space and time, in order to create an unprecedented and unexpected creation, a small window on contemporary creation.

3.2. Creating spaces for discussion

Think Circus!

In the framework of the European Season of Circus Arts, Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe organized events for circus and performing arts professionals, with the aim of producing a reflection on different issues of the field.

Two encounters took place:

- Professional encounter *Think Circus!#1* and artistic program on March 23 and 24, 2017 in the framework of SPRING festival, in partnership with Plateforme 2 Pôles Cirque en Normandie
- European Conference *Think Circus!#2* in Paris on May 17-19, 2017 in partnership with La Villette

These professional encounters were an opportunity to present the CircusNext 2013-2017 project results, to offer a space for reflection and debates, and to disseminate tools mapping good practices developed in the framework of support activities to emerging creation and have gathered European cultural operators, institutions, artists, journalists, and thinkers (scholars, journalists, etc..) in order to take a step back from our practices.

The major areas of discussion were:

- The professionalization of circus artists
- Accompanying and supporting emerging artists
- Artistic research, innovation and new circus writings
- Circulations and cooperation
- Utopias and future of circus in Europe

During the *Think Circus!* events, the discussions took place around

- 10 conferences by scholars and artists
- 6 round-tables gathering artists, scholars and cultural operators
- Open forums for discussion with the audience
- Testimonies and video documents on contemporary circus and on CircusNext

All presentations and round-tables were both in French and in English and translated by professional interpreters.

More than **250 people** attended both professional encounters.

Professional encounter *Think Circus!#1* and artistic program on March 23 and 24, 2017 in the framework of SPRING festival, in partnership with Plateforme 2 Pôles Cirque en Normandie

In Cherbourg and Rouen, the SPRING festival allows the association of a day of reflection with the programming of shows. In partnership with La Brèche, the issue of "accompanying circus" is considered in different ways: to accompany artistically (dramaturge, outside eye) a project, to accompany the structuration of a company project or cultural entrepreneurship, to accompany the professionals of the sector.

The topic of this first encounter was: How to accompany circus artists today? Inventing new approaches.

Two main issues were discussed:

- How to accompany artistic projects of today while taking into account their singularity and/or their complexity?
- How can the diversity of artistic projects bring us to question our practices and to invent new approaches?

Yveline Rapeau (director of Plateforme 2 Pôles Cirque en Normandie) and **Cécile Provôt** (director of JTCE) opened the encounter by giving their visions of "accompanying" and "supporting" circus artists in the framework of their projects. This first insight in the issues of accompaniment was followed by an introduction by **Agathe Dumont** (associated researcher) on **"To accompany / To be accompanied: artists at work! What issues in artistic paths nowadays"**.

This introduction was followed by a presentation by **Sophie Majibé** (manager for the incubator of the **104 Factory**, Paris, France): **"Supporting Models / Reflections on Support: artistic incubators for emergent projects."** 104 Factory acts as an opportunity accelerator for innovative project holders in the fields of artistic, cultural and creative industries. The CENTQUATRE-PARIS is a space of collaboration between the artistic, economic and social spheres. The incubation offers to each entrepreneur the possibility of accompanying the development of his/her start-up, carrying out on-site experimentations in interaction with the public and the CENTQUATRE-PARIS ecosystem.

The presentation was followed by a discussion with the participants on how to develop **innovative models** in the creative and artistic industry to support artists and raising questions on the **specificities of contemporary circus**.

The afternoon opened with the presentation of circus dramaturge and scholar **Bauke Lievens** (from Belgium) on **"The circus and its representations / myths"**. Questions were raised on **artistic accompaniment** (dramaturgy, stage direction, outside eyes ...) and on **communication** between artists and cultural operators accompanying them.

The end of the day was an **open forum discussion** with all participants on the issues discussed in the morning and the afternoon in order to build and invent together the **"Toolkit of accompaniment for tomorrow"**. The debates were moderated by Jean-Paul Perez (advisor at ONDA, Office national de diffusion artistique, FR).

This professional encounter was also an opportunity for the cultural operators to attend **4 shows** and **1 exhibition** by former laureates, including two works-in-progress and two "premieres":

- **Diktat** by **Sandrine Juglair** (CircusNext laureate 2015-2016) and **Rare Birds** (premiere) by company **Un loup pour l'homme** (JTC laureate 2005-2006) in Cherbourg;
- Encounter with **Adrien Mondot** (JTC laureate 2004) and visit of a work-in-progress of **Mirages & miracles** exhibition, premiering in Autumn 2017 in Rouen.
- **La Calaca** (Extravaganza) by **Jordi Kerol** (laureate JTCE 2009-2010) and the performance **Inverted Tree** by Hisachi Watanabe (Japan), and **Raphaël** (French premiere) by **Alexander Vantournhout & Bauke Lievens** (laureates 2013-2014) in Cléon and Cirque-Théâtre d'Elbeuf.

The debates were intense showing the need to think about these issues in the circus sector. **The participants were generally satisfied with this two-day journey through intellectual and artistic encounters**, and most of them insisted on the need to refocus for the future on the concrete realization of projects emerging from those discussions. The diversity of the public (cultural operators, artists, intermediaries in charge of production, touring...) made it possible to confront the points of view and to broadly enrich the debates

European Conference *Think Circus!#2* Paris on May 17-19, 2017 in partnership with La Villette.

This CircusNext final conference aimed to offer an overview of the five years of an innovative project and design the future of contemporary circus and European cooperation.

CircusNext has been an experimental laboratory for contemporary circus, for new writings, for emerging authors and audiences, but also for cultural operators who accompany circus artists across Europe. What would be the issues of a collective discussion prompted by this project? And tomorrow, what will circus look like? What kind of challenges will it have to tackle? The European conference gave the floor to those who participated in, accompanied, reflected on or observed CircusNext, to think together the circus of today and of tomorrow. Far from giving answers, the conference aimed at offering a complex vision of what circus arts and cooperation networks are, accepting uncertainty and contradictions. Numerous issues were raised, but all were fertile and nurtured future projects.

The hosting of La Villette in the Boris Vian venue made it possible to embellish the presentations of numerous video documents and illustrations. The different sessions included equal representation of men and women and gave as much as possible the floor to all professions: artists as well as cultural operators, directors as well as production or touring managers, researchers and teachers.

Co-organizers and a lot of associated partners of CircusNext participated in those two events and enriched the debate by their perception and experience of the project. Various laureate artists were also invited to debate or came as audience, showing that this type of event creates a strong interest. Major representatives of circus studies attended the conference coming from universities from across Europe. Their contributions to debates and plenary presentations are fundamental, as contemporary circus still needs to be analyzed and documented. Starting from the case of CircusNext, the researchers and experts were able to support the reflection and enlighten the project with their own questions. Starting from the singular to go to the general allows to go beyond binary debates, to move towards a more global reflection and take a step aside from our habits and practices.

Conferences / Debates

4 main areas of discussion:

TRAJECTORIES

Relying on the diversity of the paths of the authors supported by CircusNext in their artistic project, this first theme was an opportunity to question artistic professionalization and the modalities of artistic work: how, as an author, to be both committed into an aesthetic purpose and stand as a project leader? Which dialogue can be invented between artists, technical directors, production or diffusion managers, institutions, cultural operators, and how can we have a different look on our work processes?

RESEARCH AND INVENTIONS

Innovation, experimentation, uncertainty and risk are at the heart of the approach of CircusNext, but spaces available to take the time to mature a project remain rather rare in the field of performing arts. How to define the notion of artistic research in circus and in other performing arts? Panels and plenary sessions tried to rethink time and spaces of artistic research and question its position in a creation process. Beyond delineated territories, could we invent new ways to work, to invest the space, to create?

CIRCUS WRITINGS

Circus constantly raises the question of the body, of its writings and of its engagements: what is the acrobatic body, the juggled body, the acted body? How to define the boundaries of performance and risk? To work one's body, to write it, to say it ... All these questions came to nourish a reflection on the circus languages and their intermixing. How to envisage the notion of technique? How to engage one's body physically and creatively on a daily basis? What is the dramaturgy that is inherent in the acrobatic act? What are the relations to bodies and identities involved in the work of the circus arts work?

CIRCULATIONS

There are currently many European circus cooperation projects which undoubtedly reflect a strong will to share knowledge and know-how, despite very different economic, political and cultural contexts. Could a project like CircusNext break the lines and build the bases for the promotion and the legitimacy of contemporary circus in Europe? This third theme invited us to question real, possible and imagined artistic and cultural circulations. Isn't it necessary today to reflect on the issues of borders, space, and distance? What are the effects of mobility on artistic work and cultural operators' practices, and how to accompany these circulations?

Each area of discussion was run in several formats to allow different topics, methodologies, points of view to be heard:

- Plenary lectures by scholars and researchers (sociology, aesthetics, political sciences, performance studies...)
- Round-tables with artists, scholars, cultural operators led by a moderator (expert of the field)
- Focus on a specific issue, lecture by a researcher or an artist

Participants

The conference was the opportunity for a lot of people to meet for the first time as only few circus events gathering so many different people are organized in Europe. The European Conference was therefore a unique place to discuss with colleagues and to have a better understanding of contemporary circus in Europe at different scales: venues, companies, universities, schools, etc.

- **28 speakers** from different **9 European countries** (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Switzerland): 10 artists – 9 researcher/scholars – 9 cultural operators working in the field with artists, festival or venues.

Agathe Dumont - Emilie Salaméro - Marine Cordier - Zita Hermann - Charles Vairet - Pierre Staigre - Géraldine Werner - Danijela Jovic - Philippe Goudard - Marie Le Sourd - Elena Lydia Kreusch - Roman Müller - Antonia Kuzmanič - Veronika Štefanová - Stéphane Segreto-Aguilar - Julie Descamps - Franziska Trapp - Sebastian Kann - Kitt Johnson - Satchie Noro - Alexander Vantournhout - Magali Sizorn - Alexandre Fray - Jean-Michel Guy - Valentine Losseau - Quintijn Ketels - Olivier Hespel - Alix de Morant - Thomas Riffaud

- **115 participants** from across Europe including: head of circus schools, teachers, scholars, artists, production managers, touring managers, communication managers, public relation managers, directors of cultural venues, technical directors, cultural policies managers.

From the point of view of those who accompany artistic creation - venue directors, administrators, production and touring managers - and from the artists' point of view, there seems to be a strong desire to share knowledge and know-how in spite of economic, political and cultural differences. This event thus shows that other places and spaces of discussion are needed in order to continue this work in the future.

Indeed, *Think Circus!* provided a better understanding of the realities of representatives of the sector, whether among jobs, roles or countries. What is it like to be a circus artist, a circus cultural operator or a circus scholar in Zagreb, Rome, Copenhagen, Porto, Cork or Athens? In countries where there is almost no academic training and therefore little visibility, CircusNext allows for a double legitimization process: in terms of local cultural policies but also for the European partners of the Performing Arts sector, which can help break a certain isolation. Thus, the program is perceived as a possible space to "educate" artists, cultural operators and audiences. One of the richest aspects of this project is that it puts contemporary circus into question: **"There is something that we need to think about in our practices in the performing arts about our societies, our world. There is a vitality in circus that can help fighting"**, explains an artist.

The European conference was a place to:

- Enhance networking between people often working in separated fields
- Strengthen future cooperation in Europe and abroad
- Build new strands of reflection
- Take time for discussions and debates
- Hear all actors of the circus sector
- Share ideas and experiences

Resources

Full resources on *Think Circus!* are available online in order to build further discussions and give access to the intense debates to a wide audience. The conference resources are available on the dedicated website [CircusNext Odyssey](#), together with other audiovisual resources and accessible in French and English:

- **Full texts** in open access form the conference, **transcriptions** of round-tables and **audio recordings** of the debates
- **Audio-visual documentary videos**, released along the project, that illustrate the creation path of certain laureates of the promotions 2013-2014 and 2015-2016.

The **CircusNext Odyssey** website aims at raising awareness of diverse audiences about creation processes and contemporary circus emerging authors' paths and to valorize a strong reflection on contemporary circus led by CircusNext. All resources help following up on the objective of CircusNext of developing a common expertise in echoing the existing local dynamics with European challenges. Questions or themes which can touch individually or collectively the project members and all people associated or interested in the project are discussed in these different resources and documents issued from the project and its cross-cutting reflection strands.

The resources are also related to all reflections produced by CircusNext at the end of the project and addressed to the professionals of the circus European sector:

- **Creation conditions in Europe**
- **Good practices on artistic residency hosting**
- **What new and innovating models in terms of support to emergence?**



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PART IV:

New Professionalization / New Territories: Strengthening Cooperation

At the heart of peer-to-peer discussions is the question of "how to support and accompany artists, projects, but also audiences (often unfamiliar with innovative aesthetics in the circus sector), cultural operators and policy makers. Because the professionalization of the circus sector in recent years in Europe has been exponential, artists, producers, touring managers, venue directors, technical directors, supervisors have also learned to promote and welcome circus, which paved the way for new career paths. Interesting phenomenon in Europe, we come cross artists who, although they were trained and spent a large part of their career in France or Belgium, returned in the second part of their professional lives to their countries of origin to develop festivals, schools, artistic residencies, and to try to influence and shape cultural policies. In other words, they try to offer today's artists what they have not benefited from at the edge of their careers. For a lot of them Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe and CircusNext act as a trigger and allow to acquire fundamental skills for these new professional projects.

There are currently many European circus cooperation projects which undoubtedly reflect a strong will to share knowledge and know-how, despite very different economic, political and cultural contexts. A project like CircusNext breaks the lines and builds the bases for the promotion and the legitimacy of contemporary circus in Europe as a place for artistic and cultural circulations.

1. Identities

1.1 Questioning cultural dominations

The concept of identification involves taking into account all the realities of professional circus artists and how authorship could be defined on a European level. In contemporary circus, some countries are quite dominant due to the history of their cultural policies and to the development of professional circus schools. During the 5-year process, CircusNext offered a better access to artistic diversity and tried to counter cultural dominations by opening up to more innovative aesthetics.

To enhance the identification of emerging artists in all European countries, CircusNext relies on a lot of different partners: cities, structures, professionals, companies, independent artists, who are able to be the ambassadors of the values of CircusNext in Europe and to identify the artists who would need the help of CircusNext. Supported by the platform, people involved in the circus world disseminate the information (for example during information sessions, festivals, informal meetings) and play a major role in identifying and accompanying artists. During 4 years, the CircusNext network has grown bigger and relies now not only on the energy and the skills of cultural operators but also on artists: former laureates and shortlisted artists, thanks to their strong commitment, both in circus and at a local scale. Only this type of network could really play a role in spotting emerging artists who really need the help of a network such as CircusNext. Rafael de Paula, laureate in 2015-2016, describes this process quite well: **"CircusNext is a real opportunity for contemporary circus. For emerging artists, young graduate artists from schools or other young artists from countries where there are no schools, known or unknown, CircusNext can be an open window on the circus world. There are no other projects like CircusNext."**

Indeed, we can notice important differences in the professional careers, starting from the possibility or not to attend a circus school, training and creation possibilities, the cultural policies, the support available and the status of the artist in the different European countries. Getting to know the country of residence of artists but also their country of origin and the countries crossed along their professional careers can help to take into account the multi-culturality of circus and the complexity of the possible routes within a European framework. In addition, we could say that CircusNext started a debate that must be continued in the future on how this type of project could prompt public policies in favor of circus in European countries. How could the networks affect national and regional policies and could help strengthen the professionalization and emergence of circus artists?

Considering that many different aesthetics constitute the CircusNext artistic sources, we could say that the project embodies the diversity of European writings. However, we might express reservations on the fact that the major touring network of past and present CircusNext shows remains France. Thus, this trend related to issues of production and broadcasting could tend towards homogenization, even if the 2013-2014 edition clearly shows that the jury wished to favor the taking of artistic risk and the diversity, giving chance to less mainstream projects.

Therefore, it seems fundamental to pay attention to the complexity of the artists' professional paths across Europe. During debates, the idea to establish the need for a monitoring network of these artists on a European scale is frequently raised. Taking this complexity into account would undo the accepted idea that artistic choices are partly determined by the school. In the artists' discourses, we can see that their travels and encounters (professional or others) have also played a role, especially for the older ones. A mapping of their circulation indicates that while some of them favor a local anchorage and a specific territory, most of them favor the possibilities of moving physically and culturally.

Through the formal and informal network of CircusNext, it can be noted that circus authors have now gained legitimacy and recognition, even if their visibility sometimes remains discreet alongside with dance and theater in some countries. It must be stressed here that festivals play a fundamental role, as financial risk taking is less important for partners. This phenomenon is known in the process of institutionalization of an art form and was, for example, important in the legitimization of the new circus in France in the 1980s.

1.2 Artist / entrepreneur: the poly-activity of contemporary circus artists

A lot of artists claim that CircusNext helped them to develop several skills and participated in their professionalization. First of all, the artists have a better understanding of European issues and a more acute knowledge of the circus network in Europe (festival and performance venues, schools, etc.).

Furthermore, CircusNext is also an opportunity to learn how to pursue a creation process, to write and present a project, to schedule residencies and rehearsals and to budget a show. A shortlisted company, Zero Gravity, explains that CircusNext helps **"to be able to communicate internationally with residency partners, for example"** and Bekkrell, another shortlisted group, underlines that CircusNext helped them **"to point that it was really important to formulate regularly what we are looking for throughout our creation in order to outline what we want to work and stress for the show."**

The deadlines imposed by CircusNext (presentation of a 20-minute work-in-progress during the selection week in Neerpelt, a presentation of a 20-30-minute work-in-progress in Paris 8 months later, and several public presentations) shape a step-by-step creation process that is very helpful for these young artists. The role of JTCE and of all the partners is therefore to support them during this process, to answer their questions so that CircusNext not only helps them to develop an innovative artistic project, but also means a chance to lead a company towards professionalization.

Finally, professionalization not only applies to the artists but more generally to all the technical and administrative staffs working on a project, as the producer of Squarehead Productions explains: **"We learned so much by doing and got a better understanding of the (French) sector, enlarged our network and gained a lot of security when it comes to administration."** Therefore, we could say that CircusNext accompanies artistic emergence - from the integration into the world of work to the achievement of a project.

However, the discussions during the process revealed the need to distinguish two levels of emergence:

- **The emergence of an artist:** his/her artistic vision, his/her culture, his/her influences, his/her sensibility, etc.
- **The emergence of a project:** the artist's ability to build a long-term project and the possibility to have strong professional objectives, his/her ability to manage a team, to manage working with others, etc.

Indeed, the distinction seems to be very important. On the one hand (the artist), we take into account the aesthetic point of view, on the other (the project), we take a more sociological point of view. Of course, one and the other are linked but they do not cross the same realities. The emergence of an artist might refer more to innovation and brings back to questions of visibility. On the side of the emergence of the project, the vision is more complex and opens to a different way of accompanying a project. Of course accompaniment can occur on both levels: artistic (a dramaturge, for example) and the ability to undertake a project.

When asked about the time spent working on a project and the modalities of a creative process, the answers are interesting. Discourses reflect many different definitions of what would be artistic work. Formal, informal, the time and space for artistic work is varied: discussing at the café on a project, training, going elsewhere, observing, meditating, drawing, being in the studio, at the table... These different statements show that there is currently no common definition of the profession. This is explained in particular by the fact that, in the field of circus, we cannot consider the artist-author (and therefore project leader) as a professional group, from a sociological point of view. In this regard, we must note the difficulty of artists to identify themselves as "entrepreneurs" during the interviews. Often, while they have created their company, manage teams, budgets, sometimes with little human and financial means, this role remains unfamiliar to them.

Moreover, this process of complex identification is also found at the artistic level. Several sociological studies, particularly in France, show for example the difficulty of defining oneself as "artist" among circus practitioners. A self-identification that is variable according to the generations of artist, the apprenticeship modes, the degree of integration in so-called "legitimate" circuits, etc. The desire to develop a personal project will often occur, after or along with a career as a performer. The causes of this professional change are numerous:

- Intra and extra artistic multi-activity that have become too prevalent
- A discontinuity of artistic work having consequences on the regularity of bodily practices
- The feeling of having to adapt constantly to new artistic proposals
- The will to defend one's point of view

Nevertheless, it should be noted that, compared to contemporary dance, contemporary circus allows more easily a transition from performer to author. On these questions, the future seems to be the establishment of a more stable sector with life-cycles developing and specializations playing a more important role. The main question in this context would be to understand how the realities of artists meet the realities of the market, especially beyond France and how this could influence the trajectory of an author.

Understanding this population of artists who are the driving force of CircusNext is complex. In fact, depending on the country, they belong to the first or second generation of contemporary circus artists that are characterized by:

- An earlier vocational practice of circus
- A multi-modal but high-level training in professional schools
- A diversification of professional commitments in a logic of multi-activity¹⁵

In these paths of emerging artists, CircusNext is often the mean to stand out while focusing one's artistic project on a personal project. That's why, the "project leader" dimension is fundamental to avoid unfortunate professional experiences. This new generation has, in fact, been less used than its elders to carry out projects in all its dimensions and to develop skills to perform different tasks (technical, administrative, strategic, artistic). The need to learn and incorporate these two roles - artist and project leader - is then strongly expressed by the laureates. For example, the selection week could become a place for learning: dealing with partners, developing one's ability to speak about a project in different contexts, etc. For all artists, the impact of CircusNext remains very important as they assert an artistic project and feel legitimate as authors and project leaders. CircusNext accompanies this professionalization process.

The question of the entrepreneur is an interesting debate. Indeed, very few artists recognize themselves in this identity while a lot of them carry out entrepreneurial duties at different levels. In her analysis of the different relationships to work of various freelance artists in the field of performing arts in France, the sociologist Chloé Langeard identifies that the figure of the "entrepreneur" is operative in the artistic milieu as a valorization of autonomy and responsibility. Circus being still a young and relatively unstructured professional sector, it is normal that the identification process is not natural. Moreover, the values of collective work, that a lot of circus artists stand up for, would go against this entrepreneurial vision. If autonomy is named, any form of hierarchy is rather rejected by the artists. Just as the function of author is rarely completely embodied, the "entrepreneur" seems difficult to assert. In this professionalizing art, the identities of artists are therefore complex and the accompaniment of projects should take into account this complexity and implement a collective reflection on these issues¹⁶.



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¹⁵ For a detailed sociological analysis of the profile of circus artists: Émilie Salaméro & Marine Cordier, *Être artiste de cirque*, Lieux Dits, 2012.

¹⁶ Chloé Langeard, *Les intermittents en scène. Travail, action collective et engagement individuel*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012.

2. Mobilities

2.1. Hosting and accompanying artistic teams in the area of circus

A European project involves many challenges in terms of artist mobility, but also the exchange of knowledge and know-how between cultural operators in different countries. As a 5-year project, CircusNext offers a long-term prospective on what could be learned about the reception of circus artists or cultural policies in different countries. Residencies and festivals create the conditions for the meeting between artists and cultural operators from different geographical areas. Historically, modern circus has moved from a sedentary to a nomad art form during the 19th century. With the development of new aesthetics in the late 20th century, the question of nomadism is still central. Promoting the circulation of artists across Europe within its program through residencies and thanks to the European Season of Circus Arts, CircusNext clearly asks the question: will the European circus of tomorrow be itinerant? As Elena Kreusch, scholar in Circus studies and Performance studies and member of Squarehead Productions - laureate 2013-2014, observes: **“While studying at a circus school abroad is a first extended mobility experience for many artists, the majority of graduates don't seem entirely prepared for the challenges that come with the mobility lifestyle of the profession.”** One may wonder about the cultural identities of artists and the influence of mobility on their professional and artistic choices, their aesthetics, their ways of working. In a way, CircusNext could also be a place to learn about “moving”, inventing new ways of moving borders: geographically, politically, culturally, aesthetically.

Even if cultural contexts are different, the strength of the various places that make up the CircusNext network is that all partners try to share the same values. While the definitions of support may differ from one country to another, know-hows and professional practices are often quite close. When hosting circus artists during residencies, different skills are exchanged between the local “resource” people (who can practice different jobs) and the artistic teams. This could be improved to examine accompaniment and support from every angle. For example, Pierre Staigre, the technical director of CircusNext, reminds us that his role can be central in the elaboration of an emergent project. His discussions with the artists help them refine their project, to measure its feasibility and to be able to prepare at best to tour. It is therefore important not to forget that a technical accompaniment is also very important: “The essential is in the link that I have with them and the rest of the interlocutors. I feel like an interface between the artist, the production of CircusNext and the venues. The artists need to acquire knowledge but for this, they need time and they don't often have time. My role is also to make them less stressed with the technical constraints so that the artistic side can stand out”, explains the technical director.

In a hosting place for circus artists, many staff members can intervene at different levels with the artists:

- The technical staff, to try, build or specify technical requests
- The production managers, to build the co-production, to look at the budgets
- The administrators, to help the structuring of a company project
- If necessary, on-site resource centers staff (if there is any) to direct to researches
- Other artists present: dramaturge, choreographer, stage-director, musician, etc. who can eventually play the role of “outside eyes”

We could summarize their contributions in the relationship between artists and venues as followed:

- Guiding, alerting (on the feasibility of a project)
- Asking the right questions to go further with a project
- Helping the formalization of ideas on stage or outside the stage
- Linking people (networks)
- Giving time and space

Someone who hosts and accompanies a project, is someone who knows and analyzes the context of the artist. In a way, "hosting" an artistic project could be a "disinterested" commitment, outside from production and financial issues. From the discussion during *Think Circus!* and interviews with artists and cultural operators, we could list the following questions as a framework to develop the reflection on these topics:

- Which actors are involved, with which skills, which expertise?
- What do we seek by formalizing a project?
- How to accompany the implementation of a project?
- How to define the stages of an accompaniment?
- How to develop a long-term vision, develop a project in time?
- How to create the conditions for the emergence of innovative projects?
- How to accompany, towards autonomy?

The accompaniment of the laureate and shortlisted artists is multiple: visibility, money, network, residencies, and we can observe a huge gap between accompanied artists within the framework of CircusNext and other circus artists. The project allows more specific support and gives companies access to places that they could not necessarily approach alone. In order for artists to fully seize the opportunities of the program, perhaps it would be better to share resources and identify the strengths of one cultural structure or another in terms of support: rather artistic, rather on the structuring, allowing to meet with audiences or with other local actors, giving the possibility part of a local touring network or not, etc.

From the point of view of cultural operators and more specifically venue directors, a network of residency places with their specificities clearly identified could promote something interesting about "continuing education", sharing of knowledge outside the usual patterns of production and dissemination of information, considering the diversity of practices on a European scale. Of course, hosting a company, is taking the responsibility to be part of a process, to help making shows and bringing projects to fruition. Therefore, the commitment when housing companies is obviously not only financial but also intellectual and human. This is why, accompanying the people doing accompaniment seems also very important, specifically if we look at touring and production managers: "People working to accompany artists are particularly precarious economically speaking and are still relatively undervalued. There are not many people who have been touring, producing and coaching companies for fifteen or twenty years. It's a shame because there is no transmission of skills, no transmission of experiences, or too little." In the last 10 years, the evolution of the European landscape of contemporary circus has been rapid and sometimes radical. However, a lot of cultural operators still notice a lack of knowledge of the network. To host artistic teams for the best would therefore require to share more tools, knowledge, know-hows. During the discussions between members of the platform, two ideas were mentioned as "food for thought" for the future:

- The idea of a tool that would provide a live mapping of circus in Europe - places, people, skills - but also a tool to "monitor" projects and build long-term and European-wide partnerships.
- The idea of a "charter" that would define the deontology of hosting and touring circus artists, but that could also be a guide for the accompaniment of artists, a way to put in play and formalize practices. This second idea is part of the CircusNext reflection stands and is the base of a publication on "good practices" as part of the project.

All those ideas reinforce the values of cooperation that is to promote synergies between actors of the field. Therefore, it is important not to neglect the support of not only artists but also of professionals as a mission of CircusNext.

2.2 Touring and producing Circus: how to implement a support at European level?

During the discussions between members of the CircusNext platform (co-organizers and associated partners) and when observing and interviewing the artists, the inequality of touring possibilities among countries is often mentioned. In order to imagine a touring network in all European countries members of CircusNext, it would be necessary to further pool the means of production and thus share responsibility for costs. Indeed, some small structures that receive only a few public subsidies at a local level are struggling to accommodate some shows which costs are high.

On the same level of discussion, on the one hand, CircusNext raises the question of the possibilities for some artists from countries where circus is less developed to tour in other countries. The producers and touring managers in those countries will need the help of their colleagues to promote their work with the directors of cultural institutions (often inter-disciplinary). On the other hand, when contemporary circus is quite developed like in France, Belgium or in some northern European countries, it is also the responsibility of the cultural operators to open to new aesthetics. In order to avoid the aesthetic hegemony of some countries on others, it would be necessary to prepare audiences as well as professionals of the different countries to take into account this dimension and to know that all the countries are not at the same stage of development of the circus. One of the answers offered by CircusNext to this problem is the public presentations held in many countries and venues at the end of a residency. Meeting audiences by involving them in the creative process allows to:

- In countries where the very contemporary aesthetics of circus are not very present, to engage the dialogue with the audience;
- In countries where contemporary circus is frequently on display, to introduce other artists and other aesthetics to more familiar audiences of this genre.

Another problem was raised within the network and is quite interesting: how to encourage national and regional public policies in favor of circus, and related to this, how could the network "compensate" the deficits of these policies to help strengthen both the higher education possibilities and the producing/touring possibilities that underlie professionalization and emergence? However, an emergent artist in the field of performing arts does not necessarily go to a school and could exist "outside" way-marked paths. It would therefore be necessary to keep an open model without reproducing what already exists in countries where circus is stronger, not to conform to a unique vision of contemporary circus that would be very normative.

We also understand that some issues are related to the "market" and the possibility, or not, of the circulation of artworks. A conflict thus exists between the "aesthetic value" of the shows of circus authors, recognized for their innovation, and the "market value" of these works in touring circuits that are still relatively conventional. The sociologist Raymonde Moulin¹⁷ shows that these two fields are in a relationship of circularity and interaction. In CircusNext, one can observe the interdependence and almost confusion between the aesthetic and the market values, both of which participate in the process of legitimation of circus authors in Europe. However, the reality of the "market" and the possibility of making an "aesthetic" choice rather than a "market" choice (riskier) remain rare and the economic conditions of certain European countries regarding circus do not make it possible.

¹⁷ Raymonde Moulin, *L'artiste, l'institution et le marché*, Paris : Flammarion, 1992.

Regarding those issues, we can say that there is a huge challenge about the different moments of visibility during the process. A lot of artists - and it is also the point of view of some cultural operators - feel that they could be more "accompanied" during these events. La Migration, laureate in 2016-2017, insists on the fact that: **"CircusNext is an opportunity to have new contacts and meet people. Even though some contacts might not materialize immediately in professional partnerships, CircusNext helps to build a network"**. For example, why not consider for each partner to sponsor a company before, during and after the CircusNext process in order to prepare artists at best to be confronted to audiences and other cultural operators. His/her role would be to link together artists and directors of cultural venues, producers, touring managers. This idea of a reinforced touring and producing network relies on the possibility to build long-term projects: time for creation and for preparation before a premiere, for tryouts, for meeting the right people. Therefore, the question of the artists' visibility and of contemporary circus in Europe is necessarily linked to a reflection on the phasing of the production, creation and touring stages and on the duration of the projects.

The European Season of Circus Arts

Following the two CircusNext editions, co-organizers launched from Summer 2016 till Autumn 2017 a European Season of Circus Arts. This season was the opportunity for partners and cultural operators of the European territory to promote and disseminate the shows of former laureates from **8 promotions** of Jeunes Talents Cirque, Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe and CircusNext from 2001 to 2016 and therefore encourage the artistic mobility through Europe.

This project was coordinated by JTCE and carried out by **9 co-organizers** from **6 different countries** and **44 associated partners**. Together, they have programmed **49 shows** of circus companies **based in 9 different European countries** for a total of **306 representations**.

The variety of the presentations values both emerging artists and companies that are further in their processes and have contributed to the rise of contemporary circus in Europe. Partnerships have been built with major artistic venues and international festivals like the SPRING festival hosted by 2 Pôles cirque en Normandie (Elbeuf & Cherbourg, France, March 2017), Setouchi Circus Factory in Takamatsu (Japan, December 2016), Festival Perspectives in Saarbrücken (Germany, June 2017) or "L'Occitanie fait son cirque" at Festival d'Avignon (France, July 2017).

In the various places the season unfolds in shows but also workshops or debates. The presence of these authors in festivals, seasonal programming, or in specially organized events has been an opportunity for the audience to (re)discover European contemporary creation, to be in dialogue with these artists, to have an insight in their creative processes, and to discover a strong European cooperation. Artists, festivals and venues directors can therefore build a stronger network to prepare the public presentations and value the visibility of the projects released by CircusNext.

For example, Verena Cornwall, from Circus Futures in the UK has taken the opportunity of the European Season of Circus Arts to program shows during the Circus City festival in Bristol but also to organize a national conference on UK circus. Rui Torrinha from Centro Cultural Vila Flor in Portugal also managed to organize a debate with artists and cultural operators to discuss funding and support for circus, and offered a workshop with Rafael de Paula, CircusNext laureate in 2015-2016. This way of approaching circus in different ways - through body and practice, through reflection, through the performances - shows all its diversity but also asserts that the sector is changing and that all its potential actors are welcome to participate in this evolution.

In a more general perspective, this European Season of Circus Arts is a way to reflect on the issues of borders, space, and distance in contemporary circus. What are the effects of mobility on artistic work and cultural operators' practices, and how to accompany these circulations? While CircusNext has allowed some territories to make local cultural policies evolve (for example, the Mirabilia festival in Italy), there is also a gap between the good reputation of the project, its means and the difficulties faced by some operators on their territories, facing major economic and political changes that sometimes weaken the sector. The project of Sarka Marsikova with Cirqueon for the European Season of Circus Arts is therefore very interesting. The venue organized an innovative tour of 5 laureate shows around Czech Republic building cooperation with local partners, allowing new circulations and meeting new audiences. This example shows how global and local dynamics can come together and how different levels interact. On a more political point of view, this type of event also helps to promote contemporary circus among cultural operators from theater and dance and to encourage them to showcase more circus in their programming. Fabrizio Gavosto from Mirabilia Festival explains for example that company Ieto (Jeunes Talents Cirque 2007-2008 laureate) did the opening of Teatro Astra, second theater in Torino for theater and dance. This can be considered as a major step in the legitimization of contemporary circus both symbolically and politically.

Indeed, a project like the European Season of Circus Arts - that we could analyze as a European-wide festival - is fundamental in the process of institutionalization of circus. Regarding local cultural policies, the "label" can also be a tool for local touristic and cultural promotion. In the different formats built by co-organizers and associated partners for this European Season of Circus Arts we can see that the CircusNext "label" is an accelerator of the artification process of circus already under way in many countries. Artification is a sociological concept designed by Nathalie Heinich and Roberta Shapiro, regarding the transformation process of "non-art" to "art" in a given socio-cultural context.

This transformation is due to very specific practical, technical, semantic, legal, institutional, organizational conditions that allow the possibility of a "world of art" to emerge. The artification process of circus is not homogeneous in the different European countries because of very different socio-cultural and institutional contexts. For a long time assimilated only to "entertainment", circus has now invested the other contemporary performing arts while remaining a very popular art form. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account this dimension of an ongoing process of artification when discussing the evolutions of circus on a European scale.

Places of visibility, artistic exchanges, self-reflective dimensions, continuous education (through conferences, workshops) are different aspects that convey towards the legitimization of circus. In this process, CircusNext becomes an institutional agent for companies and favors actions toward audiences and the artistic community. A broad event can therefore also induce local cultural policies (for example the recognition and professionalization of artists) and opens questions on the circulations of artistic works. Therefore, the CircusNext "label" creates new territorial dynamics and could modify the perceptions of circus to engage further the process of professionalization and artification.

2.3 Audiences: essential partners for promoting contemporary circus in Europe

To promote the access of a wide audience to artistic diversity, CircusNext asserts the plurality of this European circus, as an art open to other artistic disciplines, looking towards Europe and beyond, asking for creativity and innovative creations.

- The artistic excellence of CircusNext is designed to appeal a wide but demanding audience
- One of the goals of CircusNext is to educate new audiences and to invite them to understand what a creation process in contemporary circus is

"When you are selected for CircusNext, it means that you are already working on something different. A personal project, not necessarily a manifest, but something peculiar. The presentations are a place where you can show and defend your singularity" explains Compagnie Two, laureate in 2015-2016. This "singularity" of the artistic proposal and the will to share it with varied audiences is a strength for CircusNext. For the two young artists of Compagnie Two, for example, meeting people during their creation process was an opportunity that helped them to go further with their project.

Regarding the cultural habits of the audiences coming to the different events of CircusNext, we notice that the major part of the people is used to see circus performances. This corresponds to other studies made on the cultural habits of circus audiences: a generally loyal audience, but who attend performances less frequently than regular theater and dance audiences. While circus is one of the most deeply rooted cultural practices in the French population, there are few surveys that provide a better understanding of its audiences. The one conducted by Jean-Michel Guy in 1992 highlighted the existence of two distinct logics, related to the aesthetic evolutions that the discipline had known since the end of the 1970s. Where the "traditional" circus attracts a family audience and rather popular, the spectators of the "new circus" come more from the middle and higher categories and are characterized by specific expectations. The first seemed to value above all the work of artists and their courage, where others emphasize aesthetics and creativity. We know that by affirming a creative approach, contemporary circus companies have benefited from a growing support from the public policies, which has resulted in a rapid increase in the number of companies and the supply of shows in this area¹⁸. This is why the circus audiences have also evolved. For CircusNext, the analysis may be a little different during the "highlights" of moments of visibility at Théâtre de la Cité internationale, where the professional public cross local audiences, creating an interesting double dynamic, found in some festivals.

If we look at the precise case of the public presentations in Théâtre de la Cité internationale, even though this audience seems used to watching circus performances, most of them (75,2%) came for the first time to see CircusNext (or Jeunes Talent Cirque Europe) presentations at Théâtre de la Cité internationale. CircusNext values the importance of new audiences for contemporary circus. Moreover, as CircusNext presentations are works-in-progress, this audience seems eager to take the risk to come and see shows on which they only have little information. This might be due to the fact that CircusNext communication insists on innovation and diversity of the artistic propositions. Presenting short formats (30 minutes) as well as the possibility of seeing 3 or 4 shows in the same event might also be a reason to come to Théâtre de la Cité internationale for CircusNext. This quantitative data informs us on the profiles and the cultural habits of the targeted audience but qualitative data was also recorded through questionnaires. People were asked questions on their perception of circus, their expectations and their impressions after the performances. Some key words regularly appeared and are very important to understand the perception of CircusNext by audiences, it shows why the project is important in the current cultural offer in Europe and that audiences are keen to defend it. In the collected data, circus is generally associated with performance, high risk-taking, poetry, humor, dream, surprise or wonder, but also to inter-disciplinarity as circus is often considered as a total art. When interviewing audiences, we noticed that they often mention creativity and innovation, which corresponds, among other things, to the excellence criteria targeted by CircusNext and expectations of audiences from new and contemporary circus in general.

¹⁸ Jean-Michel Guy, « La fréquentation et l'image du cirque », *Développement Culturel*, n° 100, 1993. Wallon Emmanuel., « La chose publique en piste », in Guy J.-M. (dir.), *Avant-garde, cirque!, Les arts du cirque en révolution*, Autrement : Paris, 2001, p.116-125

Moreover, the people coming to public presentations during the support scheme or for "Les Inédits de CircusNext", or the European Season of Circus Arts, seem very interested in understanding the creation processes and show a strong will to meet the artists. As a motivation to come to CircusNext presentations, a lot of people mention the opportunity to have a chance to discover emerging artists and see what they often call "the future of circus". Audiences also frequently mentioned that contemporary circus can be both a popular art form with a very demanding level – a finding noticeable in most studies on contemporary circus. CircusNext is very representative of this issue: developing original forms and claiming authorship, while remaining an accessible form of art for all audiences. Finally, the European dimension is presented as a major asset of the project. The presence of artists from across Europe reinforces the impression of originality, creativity and diversity associated with the project.

Thus, the various formats of presentation (work-in-progress, exit of residence, extracts, finished shows) tend to maintain a regular audience. Once the contact is established between artists and spectators, this type of mediation seems to favor risk-taking, which will then be reflected in the cultural habits of the audiences. Then, they become the supporters and promoters of these new forms of circus and of the "CircusNext" label with other spectators, or even with institutions. It is therefore advisable not to neglect the work on and with a wide variety of audiences in order to build a solid network of production, touring and valorization of circus authors.



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Conclusions for the future of CircusNext

CircusNext is a long-term project whose stakes are set to grow and strengthen in the future. During these five years many questions have been raised, ideas have been launched and experiments have been carried out.

The strength of cooperation

First of all, this project tells us the importance of the cooperation and values sharing, a strong feeling to be part of a group, claimed by all the participants, as what binds them and allows them to work together. In particular, among these values, the tension between the art form and the necessity to remain popular is a large part of the reflection. In this perspective, we could ask the question of "places" in Europe that would support while being involved in this process. Should we invent places where to engage or carry on with a dialogue between artists and their professional environment, involving also public policy makers and other professional fields? This process can only happen at a European level by relying on a strong network of actors committed to the same objectives. Jeunes Talents Cirque and Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe paved the way for CircusNext, which, during four years, has imagined spaces for artistic, intellectual and professional encounters. But the work is not finished; it must continue and spread out in other local, regional, and transnational projects. Finally, to fulfil this project, cultural operators, artists, technicians, producers, touring managers, policies makers should be aware that thinking collectively is unavoidable. Therefore, CircusNext is also an opportunity not only to share values but also tools and a common language, taking the risk, for the best, of "formalizing" the informal.

Working together, making choices together, discussing. CircusNext has built a relevant group to exchange about local practices and local cultural policies, lobbying about contemporary circus and local artistic communities. For the co-organizers of the project, CircusNext brings some financial inputs to program international and contemporary circus shows and opens the possibility to experiment. For them, compared with other European cooperation projects, CircusNext is the one which pushes circus towards more emancipation, due to the strength of cooperation. Even more interestingly, on an artistic level, the cooperation helped challenge the ways of doing shows, dramaturgy, writings. Finally, a project like CircusNext contributes positively to audience development for most venues. Both for artists and for cultural operators, CircusNext increases recognition of contemporary circus; and participating in a European project is a valuable experience which brings more trust and can lead to an increase of political and financial local support. The concrete impact of the project on the structures involved is therefore measurable. Finally, for all co-organizers, participating in a European project is also important on human and individual levels.

However, if the importance of European cooperation is fully seized by cultural operators (co-organizers and associated partners), issues and concerns might be different for artists. The interviews and observations revealed that some of the artists did not fully grasp this European dimension. This might be due to the fact that, on a European level, circus artists can't be yet considered as a professional and homogenous group. A project like CircusNext contributes to a better circulation of ideas, demands, questions that are necessary to reinforce the feeling of belonging to a professional group (circus artists / cultural operators in the circus sector) and to allow the emergence of a more global cultural identity. There is, indeed, as expressed by Rui Torrinha, a real need to "translate" CircusNext in one's own reality. An issue that everyone has shared during the different work meetings of the project, essential to build the circulation and cooperation.

Opening the definition of circus: an experimental art open to other arts and other cultures

Thinking about circus as a language interrogates the systems of domination, inevitably at work in artistic fields and depending on sociological, political, economic standards. The reference to other arts in the circus field (theater, dance) sometimes imposes a dominant view of how to organize a creative process, a kind of pattern that might not fit to an artistic research in circus. This form of domination on what “should be” a creative process weakens an art whose creation means are still to invent and must look over its characteristics and not only in comparison to the other arts. These aesthetic dominations have economic reasons, but they also tend to standardize languages, to redefine what is (or is not) a circus show, at the risk of forgetting that the cultural richness of European circus is based on its diversity. Establishing specific ways to accompany circus artists partially allows the deconstruction of these dominations. A major issue would be to have a closer follow-up of shortlisted and laureate artists after the CircusNext support scheme. There is therefore a major role for the partners to continue their efforts, to preserve the links, the follow-up of the artists and the dialogue with the other structures that will accompany or program the artists, especially in sometimes less familiar local territories.

Their role would also be to accompany the process of identification of artists as “authors” and “entrepreneurs” and, for the future, to better communicate on the project so that its perception is not limited to issues of touring and visibility but so that all issues on professionalization are also valued. The difficulty of certain artists to seize the project indicates that the stakes are not always clear, specifically because to think and consider artistic paths on a European scale remains complex with regard to the diversity of local situations and variable working experiences. A project like CircusNext could eventually help define more precisely what is the artistic work: its modalities, its temporalities, as well as the means available to the companies. CircusNext can also be seen as a laboratory for new artistic and professional exchanges. At the moment new cooperation models are being developed in the performing arts sector which re-engineer professional relationships and structural organizations. If one cannot ignore the possibility of tensions or disagreements, a project like CircusNext tends to show that this kind of scheme can improve artistic and geographic circulations as well as emphasize the importance of intermediary places and intermediate actors. Finally, the CircusNext companionship model allows other possibilities and other forms of professional socialization, mobilizing the artistic teams and cultural operators in the same project to achieve the same goals.

Finally, we could conclude with aesthetic considerations. After the historical and aesthetic evolutions from “new circus” to contemporary circus that was first predominantly disciplinary, now arises the question of the inter-artistic. CircusNext can also be the place for original creative processes to emerge and experimental approaches to be possible. Each year, some artists present more radical shows that frequently mix the circus disciplines with other arts: video, performance, music, etc. Within the framework offered by CircusNext, working conditions are quite good for the artists who could be invited to take more risks. The scope of CircusNext could also go beyond circus: how could touring in Europe be organized with the help of partners from the circus field but also from other arts like dance or contemporary art? CircusNext could be both a place to defend the autonomy of circus languages and a place for the renewal of contemporary stage aesthetics, opened widely to artistic experimental and inter-disciplinary approaches. The strength of CircusNext is the capacity of the partners to think collectively these issues. Not only could they share their artistic differences but overall, they would need to invent together what can be “next” in circus.

December, 2017

*A support scheme
for emerging creators of contemporary circus in Europe*

CircusNext

2013-2017

A project conceived and piloted by

Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe

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