



International Conference
November 6-9 2024, Marchin, Belgium

New Circus | New Architectures?

Contrary to the common understanding of circus as a nomadic artform, the development of the institutionalized modern circus is fundamentally connected to a process of settling down. From 1850 to 1950, a multitude of static circus buildings were constructed across Europe and beyond (c.f. Ward 2023). Permanent venues began emerging that offered the traveling artists of the fairgrounds a stable place to perform and work, such as Astley's Amphitheatre and the Royal Circus in London, Cirque d'Hiver in Paris, and Circus Gymnasticus in Vienna.

One might even be tempted to speak once again about another international "construction boom." The solidification of contemporary circus as an artform that is "now firmly established as one of the most popular forms of live performances" (Lavers 2020, 1) has led to an increasing number of permanent circus buildings, which serve as circus schools, residency spaces, centers for leisure activities, and performance venues. New circus buildings are being constructed, e.g., Le Cirque de Latitude 50 in Belgium; historic circus buildings are being renovated and redesigned, e.g., Riga Cirks in Latvia; and other older buildings are being repurposed, e.g., La compagnie des Autres in Quebec repurposed a church, Up - Circus and Performing Arts in Belgium repurposed a supermarket, and Cirqu'Aarau repurposed an old riding hall. Impressively, the selected examples only include buildings that have been inaugurated in the last three years – the actual number of new and repurposed circus buildings is much larger.

The designs of these buildings are as heterogenous as the artform itself. All of them, however, refer simultaneously to their traditional heritage and the future of circus. The historical context of the venue, as well as its contemporary cultural milieu, shape each construction: La Tohu in Montréal, created in the late 1990s, represents the Canadian vision of circus at that time with its elaborate shows and big audiences, whereas the architectural decisions of Le Cirque de Latitude 50 promote a vision of contemporary circus in Europe, which can be described as collaborative, interconnected, and sustainable; the building offers individual artists or small companies (and their families) the space necessary for creation and contemplation.

The objective of this conference is to use analyses of historical and contemporary circus buildings, their forms and typologies, discourses, and epistemes as a starting point for discussions of broader questions concerning artistic, social, cultural, and historical interrelations:

Knowledge

- What are the epistemes and discourses of circus building?
- To which extent are orders of perception manifested in circus buildings?

Politics

- What social missions do circus buildings fulfil? In which cultural-historical context?
- How can the use of public funds for circus buildings be justified?

Space

- Rural areas, urban areas, city centers, peripheries – Where are circus buildings located and why?

Practice

- In what way do permanent buildings meet the demands of traditional, new, and contemporary circus – with regard to equipment, training, creation, performing, audience development, etc.?
- How did/do circus buildings contribute to the technical and aesthetic transformation of the circus?
- How do fire and safety regulations, stage technology, and the comfort of audience members influence the architecture?

Professionalization

- How did/do these buildings promote the professionalization of circus professionals, be they artists, directors, dramaturges, equipment designers, technicians, riggers, or administrators?
- Which ideas of “work,” “art,” “entertainment,” “leisure,” etc., were/are promoted by means of circus architecture?

Relations

- How is the construction of circus buildings related to the construction of other cultural venues?
- How does circus architecture differ from theatre architecture? How did/do they inspire each other?

Vision

- Which buildings are suitable for which kinds of circus?
- How are visions of the future of circus represented in the architecture?

The conference will take place at the recently inaugurated Cirque de Latitude 50 on the Belgium countryside. This venue not only gives us the possibility to directly link the

research questions to practice, but also to explore alternative forms of academic discussions such as walking debates, lecture performances, and artistic research presentations.

We therefore invite proposals for research talks (20 min) and also make explicit invitations for presentations in a diverse range of formats from artists and practitioners who address questions on circus architecture in their work, practice, and/or research-creation.

Please send your proposals (ca. 300 words) and a short biography to Franziska.Trapp@ulb.be by April 1, 2024.

The event is open to public. Please register via mail.
For additional information please visit www.circusstudies.com.

Organisation: Prof. Dr. Jan Lazardzig and Dr. Franziska Trapp
Photo: Arnaud Pamalio. Le Cirque. Latitude 50. Belgium 2023

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