



## FIFTH DUTCH STATE OF THE CIRCUS

by Júlia Campistany

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at This is not a circus

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Hallo, mijn naam is Júlia Campistany, en allereerst wil ik Rosa en TENT bedanken voor deze uitnodiging, en jullie allemaal voor jullie aanwezigheid vandaag.

Let me introduce myself. I am Júlia Campistany and I am a Dutch based artist. In the Netherlands, I created La Campistany and before starting I would like to introduce you to the team that makes the work of the company possible:

Artistic director: Júlia Campistany

Head of marketing: Júlia Campistany

Technical director: Júlia Campistany

Administrative director: Júlia Campistany

Graphic designer: Júlia Campistany

Community manager: Júlia Campistany

Administrator: Júlia Campistany

Circus artist: Júlia Campistany

Production and distribution: Júlia Campistany - Sandra Smits

Before attacking my State of the Circus I wanted to attempt one more time to answer another question. What is Circus for me? I used to say that circus is possibility, freedom. Circus as an art form found me, but later, I consciously chose to dedicate my life to it because I did not want to find myself working to live; I wanted to make a living out of my life. I wanted a life that allowed me to relate to my profession and my colleagues in a way the corporate world seemed to disagree with.

I found in circus, or at least in a part of it, a life where I did not need to question my plurality, my curiosity or my character but rather explore it and encourage it. A place



where I can be and I can change and where the most severe judgement comes from this one inside my head.

However, the more the years pass and the more I freely choose to be a circus artist, the more I realise how this freedom comes hand in hand with many compromises.

Not seeing my family regularly, not enjoying a sunny Sunday with my childhood friends, the mystery of what my monthly income will be, the durability of my body, thinking of maternity as a possible change in my career, having a relationship that grows often in the distance and out of stubbornness rather than from real hugs, and so many more we all here know, are compromises that I, we make and that are part of the nature of our job.

The very incredible part in all of this, is that I, we, am and all are still making the same choice of being a circus artist and for this and for many other endless reasons I believe that what circus is, is definitely not just a job but rather a choice, a life choice.

And of course, there are many ways of being a circus artist and relating to this profession and lifestyle but the more I belong to it, the more I believe we all share something deeper than our artistic choices, the knowledge and the passion for this life choice. The certainty that the relevance of what we do transcends our artistic practice, extending into the way we understand our surroundings and how we relate with one another.

The circus life choice has been good to me. It has brought me great friendships, love, travel, hard work, fun, trust, fear and pleasure. It has also offered a whole new perspective in my life. This is the reason why I keep on choosing to remain a circus artist despite the unavoidable decadence of my body and the flaws of the field.

And yet, in trying to define what circus is, I find myself failing. Perhaps if I were to write a recipe for the definition of circus, failure would be one of its main ingredients. Failing might even be the spine of circus, at least for me.

Failing in training is the step between any improvement. Failing on stage is the diamond of clowning. Failing in creation is the door to new possibilities. Failing in composition challenges traditional dramaturgy and opens the door to continuation.



And following up on failure, for a long time I was haunted by the idea of innovation: discovering the next step, creating something never seen before. But what can that possibly mean in 2026? Striving for “the new” or “the next” is almost always doomed to failure. What we are often doing instead is re-thinking and reframing what already exists. Not even this is new, Stravinsky already said that.

For me, creativity is no longer about attempting to produce something radically new - whatever that means - but about surprising myself as an artist and as a performer in each artistic challenge. I see these moments as opportunities to learn, to challenge myself, and to let curiosity remain the engine.

We search for innovation in a field that can rarely assure stability or prosperity. Personally, I would find it truly innovative if our field allowed us to envision a sustainable circus career: to imagine longevity, continuity, and a future that includes things as simple - and as radical - as affording a home.

Another step I am actively trying to take is to change the names on the chart behind me. My current major goal is delegating. I have tried to do this while working as a zzp, and I can tell you: it is extremely challenging. It is true that delegating might not our biggest quality as circus artists, we struggle with letting go but in this case I believe that it is not only a matter of personality, but it is structurally constrained.

It is true that, and it makes me happy to see that within the last years, there has been a great growth in initiatives dedicated to support creation. Circunstruction, focused on emerging artists, Tent and their makers, Panama Pictures, with their residency space, the evolution of the Great Catch, Circolo accompanying makers, Buro Piket and their support, and to many others: thanks for all your work. But the truth is that their support capacity is not enough to meet the needs of the field, and especially not nowadays with the budget cuts. Besides this, there is no bigger system like the *travailleuse des arts* in Belgium or the Intermittance in France that allows us to focus on creation.

I don't know if the solution is to look at our neighbors and compare systems, but I do know how powerful it would be to have financially healthy mechanisms whose main purpose is to accompany, support, and promote creation.



All of this to say, going back to my point, that with festivals, venues, creation spaces and production houses, struggling to survive, self-employed artists also struggle to find enough resources and we end up carrying everything ourselves - creation, production, administration, fundraising. This makes delegation almost impossible which results in less hours dedicated to training and creation.

It is only once a foundation or a solid collaboration with a bigger entity is built that delegating becomes imaginable, but by then the artist has already absorbed years of structural work alone.

One positive consequence of all this is that Dutch artists have become extremely skilled at building international connections. I wish for a future where we can also create from home, and for home. Perhaps in the near future. Fingers crossed.

Thinking of the future is something I do often, as both an artist and a producer: dreaming, drafting, planning projects. And the more I do this, the more I believe the future lies in collectivity.

Collectivity might feel like part of the spine of circus, and as circus artists, we strongly identify as a collective but I realised in the Netherlands, institutional circus collectives are uncommon.

Where are the Malunés, the Pardi's, the Femmes d'Acrobacie, PDFs, of the Netherlands? (all my love to all the mentioned ones) Where are our Dutch circus collectives? Maybe some of the future ones are now sitting in this very same room or training in our schools. But what is it that has stopped us from working that way? Is this neoliberal system that pushes towards individualism and productivity? Or maybe it comes from the times we are in school where the creation of an act becomes the ultimate goal as the culmination of the studies? Maybe it is too much of a risk that an artist without financial stability cannot take? In my case, this was always my dream but after finishing school I could only afford creating a little solo and later on the dimension of a collective still seemed unrealistic for my production capacities. After years of working in the field, learning from others and seeing how it is developing, I start to feel a little bit more confident about taking such a step in The Netherlands. It might not be the first step in one's career but I strongly believe



collectivity is key to the wellbeing of the State of the circus and the wellbeing of the state of our society in general.

And before finishing, I really wish I could skip this part but we are not yet there. I will keep it short but I will keep it. As a female artist, creator and director I keep getting told: it is very hard to find shows created by women! Why?

And I ask back - I ask the field, I ask you and myself: are we truly given equal support, opportunities, and credibility? Because this is not only about receiving funding - it is about how easy or difficult it is to access that support: the credibility as power granted, the thresholds to be crossed, and the spaces where decisions are made. The question is old, but it persists - and therefore we must keep asking until the situation is reversed.

Yes, changes are happening, and we should acknowledge that. But while many of us may feel that, individually, we are doing fine, the numbers tell a different story. We can and should celebrate every step forward, but we cannot stop there - and we cannot do this alone. If we struggle to “find” work by women, it is not because women are less talented or less present; a look at the schools is enough to prove that. Perhaps we should ask ourselves whether it is because women are questioned twice as much and supported far less within a system that was largely built without women in mind.

When we think of artistic and directorial references, the vast majority are still men. We cannot stop until this default disappears from our subconscious. From here, I thank each and every one of you who does whatever is within your power to narrow this gap, and who genuinely believes in a future of equity and diverse identities.

Thank you very much for listening and I hope these words will lead us to many talks later today or later in the future.

They say, whenever you write a text like this, you should end with a conclusion, a paragraph that wraps up your ideas. I chose to write this for all of you:



## KEEP CALM, YOU ARE A CIRCUS ARTIST

So long at Dommelhof and Circus Kapel,  
that my partner forgot my smell. My  
lower back hurts from all the driving  
Keep calm, you are a circus artist.

Hours of swings, balance and spinning around,  
but how many euros sit in our bank accounts?  
Became crazy good at the packing practice,  
Keep calm, you are a circus artist

Hey, don't worry, we offer visibility! then  
why don't bills pay with flexibility?  
my mother had a point, engineering might have been the smartest,  
Keep calm, you are a circus artist.

I know your job, I saw Cirque du Soleil,  
Ahà, that's exactly what we do, who cares anyway?  
pitches, Belastingdienst, budgeting and fundings,  
Keep calm, you are a circus artist.

Being a Dutch maker, I got used to the flat land,  
but why the hell can I not be intermittent?  
Fondspodiumkunsten you are the one we are trusting,  
keep calm, you are a circus artist.

they ask: Where are all the female artists and directors,  
you certainly need us rocking the sector!  
of exceptional ones, I can give you a vast list,  
keep calm, you are a circus artist.



To all my fellow colleagues, experts in multitasking,  
Busy with family, performances and marketing,  
you are not alone, we are all together in this,  
keep calm, you are a circus artist.

I want to say, using this opportunity that I strongly believe we are the  
best community, looking forward to training together, a field full of  
equality and nice gigs,  
keep calm, you are a circus artist!