

CHINA SERIES

Fragile but eternal.
Turning, rolling and falling.

CHINA SERIES is an assemblage of performances, sculptures and publications around the diabolo, made from ceramic and porcelain.

Author & Performer Julian Vogel
Light & Stage Design Savino Caruso
Artistic Advice Roman Müller
Graphic Design Laurence Felber
Production Ute Classen

Co-Producers Festival Cirqu'Aarau, Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde, Festival Circolo, Südpol Luzern

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In short

CHINA SERIES explores and shows various forms of diabolos, which is quite a simple apparatus: Two bowls connected with an axis. It is an interdisciplinary art project between contemporary circus, dance, performance and sculpture. The diabolos bowls – usually made from rubber – are replaced by ceramic and porcelain objects. They roll, turn, fly and break. The starting point is the perpetual motion, the constant transition and transformation of objects. The fragility of objects – but also of the human body – reminds us of the temporality of our being.

With CHINA SERIES the Swiss artist Julian Vogel presents a modular project, which currently consists of 14 variations (#1 - #14). These variations are performances, installations, videos, sculptures and publications, which can be exposed in various combinations. The different formats interact with the surrounding and the visitors and create surprising and new frames for experience.

The project

It all began with the shape of the diabolos: Two bowls connected with an axis. This led to using two soup bowls instead. With ceramic, fragility came in. But also, different shapes, sounds, weight, colours and histories of objects.

CHINA SERIES consists of several parts, which are called variations (#) alike in a musical oeuvre. These are different approaches to the turning – and sometimes breaking – diabolos made from ceramic or porcelain.

The variations have diverse forms of presentation, such as performances (frontal, interactive, durational), installations, videos or publications. The variations have no chronological build-up. It's rather a structure of material that can also grow over time. For the moment there are 14 variations. They are all in different moments of creation. In addition, a publication (the catalogue of objects) has been created, which represents an archive and documentation of the objects made or collected for CHINA SERIES. In the appendix you find a more detailed description of the variations.

Finally, this project aims to be a collaboration between the material and its context, and therefore, between the artist and the venue. The different variations can be combined in multiple ways, that it fits to a special environment or theme. For a period of a few days up to 4 weeks CHINA SERIES will be present in a venue. Next to installations, that are fixed for the whole time, different forms of live performances will intertwine. Artist and organizer will decide together which variations will take place where and when.

These collaborations can be very different. Some partners, that know the project already are helping in co-creating possible ways of how such a collaboration could look like.

Cirqu'Aarau involves CHINA SERIES in the program 2021 during 10 days. Their program is decentralized throughout the city. Together we will search one place, which will be a «centre» for CHINA SERIES, showing installations and performances. Other variations will happen in the city centre and in a theatre. It will be possible for the people to «follow» several variations of the project within one day.

Centre Culturel Suisse Paris has been accompanying the project since a while. As an interdisciplinary house, that supports Swiss artists from all kinds of arts they have a very wide view. Their location has a small theatre with foyer as well as an exhibition space. In order to present multiple variations of CHINA SERIES they try to link with other venues, such as Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde and Théâtre Châtillon.

The project derives from the performing circus arts. I grew as an artist into this field and so this is the frame CHINA SERIES is created in. Whilst the inspirational object (the diabolos) is a circus discipline, I reframe the purpose of object and technique. Therefore, art and its various techniques and forms are serving as the base. Moreover, this project proposes a different logic of watching as well as presenting a circus work, hence, including artists, spectators and organizers. Starting from the performing arts, this project helps to create connections between different art forms.

Concept

Research

CHINA SERIES has its roots more than two years ago. Starting to work with ceramic diabolos led to various approaches and ideas. A lot of material emerged quite intuitively, one led to the other, which led to something new and so on. Thereby, I was not thinking about making it into one project at all. Clearly, the concept grew through unravelling what the objects are expressing. In other words: Creating objects led to generating material, which led to experiments with different settings. And only this led to understanding, what the single variations are about and how they are connected. This is the reason, why it became clear only now that the main focus is the collaboration between the material and the context, thus, between the artist and the organizer. Therefore, a wide collection of material exists already.

The idea to design a series of works, that have different formats and ask for different settings is very much based on two approaches. On the one hand, the research with the objects itself. Through collecting and manufacturing different ceramic and porcelain, various «new» objects emerged. They all refer to the diabolo (which basically means two half-bowls are connected with an axis) but are transformed in shape and purpose. Approaching these objects, the question is: What is the core quality of the object? And further: In which setting is this quality transmitted best? By answering these questions, I set no limits. It could be a performance, a sculpture, a film, a publication, an interactive performance, a phone call or a dish.

On the other hand, it was the urge to propose different ways of how to look at a circus project. Evidently, the spectators form a valid part of a project and therefore it is crucial for me to question the placement, perspective and approach of the audience.

While searching answers on the question how to present the various circus works, I started at a very early stage to develop partnerships with potential promoters and curators. I needed their specific expertise on the audience and how they could be approached. I already knew that my works are not made to fit into the usual framework. These partners – like Berlin Circus Festival, Cirqu’Aarau and festival Circolo or institutions like Centre Culturel Suisse Paris – had confidence in my work and provided me the possibility to experiment with material and context without labelling scenes and extracts as «finished» but also not as «work-in-progress».

CHINA SERIES is a wide project, consisting of several variations, without having the goal to celebrate a premiere of the «whole». However, it’s also not the goal to have premieres of single parts. It’s rather the idea that the project is each time fitted together in collaboration with the partners, therefore being a unique combination each time.

Ceramic and fragility

Jugglers constantly drop objects. What if the objects break? The materiality changes the relation between performer and object. The movements are more sensitive and careful not only because of the fragility of the material but also because each object reacts differently due to its variety in weight and crafting methods. The authenticity of this situation is also communicated through the performer’s body and is transmitted to the visitors. This results in two types of risks. First, the risk of breaking the central object and second, the risk of breaking something that is aesthetic, valuable and hand-crafted.

The concept of fragility applies not only to objects but rather to myself as a performer and circus artist as well as to the audience. Fragility is also connected to perishability. Things come and things go. Ceramic embodies the ephemeral nature of things as well as of the performance. Thereby, the break itself is an ambivalent thing. It is something people wish but also fear to see, they may expect it but it will still surprise them. In addition, the break is an aesthetic event. As an explosion it combines crash and creation in one.

Creating space

To establish space, in which people come together for a certain period of time to share an experience, is a beautiful concept and a deep human need. Nowadays, this experience is often a moment of consumption, which is reduced to entertainment and keeps distance between performer and audience, especially in circus. CHINA SERIES questions and reframes the defined spaces and boundaries. Visitors might be free to walk in and out a durational performance, that is accompanied by sculptures and a video. In another variation the performance itself consists of the build-up of a mobile, that is afterward hanging as an installation in space.

To rethink space is especially now, in (and after) the times of a pandemic an urgent topic. How can we as performing artists create spaces in the near future to share experiences? But rather than defining spaces, CHINA SERIES aims to create space. Literally, most of the variations leave the freedom to move in space freely – in installations but also in performances. Moreover, creating space includes also freedom of letting one's thoughts go different places, leaving the time one needs to dive into an experience.

Time, temporality and transformation

With performances, artists have the chance to guide the audience through a certain period, to pinpoint some things and go over others. Installations are totally different. Parts of this project give agency to spectators in terms of time and perspective. From where and how long you want to look at a ceramic object rolling on an electric treadmill in an installation or a performer rolling objects around him during a two-hour-performance is up to the visitor to decide.

According to the Italian physicist and philosopher Carlo Rovelli, time consists of very tiny granulates and, in fact, it is not directional. The time «flowing» towards the future is only a social idea and the emotional connection we have to past events makes us recognizing time. A performance can loosen this emotional connection. It can bring us to a situation of losing awareness of past and future for a certain period. The variations of CHINA SERIES make one questioning the very personal perception of time. Ceramic spheres, formed by two diabolo half bowls, that hang from the ceiling and move in space, create a repetitive structure of visual rhythm. This changes the perception of time immensely.

The fragility of the objects forms a counterpoint that seems to underlie this awareness. Objects have a temporality for us. The suddenness of the rupture makes one aware of that. Paradoxically, most humans don't apply this on themselves. In an Indian epic a spirit named Yaksa asks a wise man what the greatest of all mysteries are. His answer is: «Every day countless people die, and yet those who remain, live as if they were immortals». Materials transform, things are in constant transition, and so are humans, and so is a breaking object. As Rovelli puts it: «Fearing transition, being afraid of death, is like being afraid of reality itself; like being afraid of the sun». Exposing transitions and the transformation of materials and objects set the bass line for CHINA SERIES.



Team

Julian Vogel – author, performer (CH)

Julian Vogel holds a BA degree from the Academy for Circus and Performance Art (ACaPA), with specialization diabolo. Before, he studied Psychology and Art History at University of Bern. He is co-founder of Cie. Trottoir and KLUB GIRKO and has created several artistic works with and next to those companies. He is participating in other artistic projects (e.g. PANAMA PICTURES, CIE. SH) as a performer and artistic coach and is composing/producing electronic music for international circus and dance companies.

Julian is interested in various things, which makes him an autodidact in several practices and he will probably never be tired of learning new things. This also shaped his approach to CHINA SERIES, the fact that he is involved also in construction, sound design, technique and production. His academic background and strong interest in philosophy and the physics of objects opens up a wide field in his artistic approach and gives him knowledge that he then connects to something original.

He has been taught and influenced amongst others by Roman Müller, Alexander Van Turnhout, Breno Caetano, Nicanor DeElia, Darragh McLaughlin, Jonas Althaus.

2019 BA Academy for Circus and Performance Art Tilburg (NL)

2019 nomination BNG circusprijs (NL) with his solo work «Transition Nr. 1»

2019 short-listed CircusNext 2020/2021, co-funded by Creative Europe

2018 awarded Swiss circus authors price Pro Cirque / SSA for the concept and authorship of «122×244 - and a lot of little pieces»

2017 co-founder, creator and performer of KLUB GIRKO

2014 BA University of Bern

2012 co-founder, creator and performer of Compagnie Trottoir

Roman Müller – artistic advice (CH)

20 years ago, Roman Müller surprised the circus community when reinventing the diabolo in aesthetic, dramatic, and technical terms. With his company Tr'espace (CH), he created ground-breaking pieces such as the trilogy Le Cercle or Arbeit, touring internationally with huge success. He does not use the diabolo as a circus object but amplifies the constraints inherent in the object and thus pursues his own vision of circus and object manipulation. Since Julian Vogel met Roman after a performance of Arbeit, they have stayed in contact. Later, during Julian's studies, Roman became an important mentor for him and these early encounters form the cornerstone for a fruitful collaboration. Roman Müller is founder and artistic director of festival Cirqu' in Aarau (CH). It's especially this experience from the two «sides» – artist and organizer – that makes him an excellent advisor for CHINA SERIES.

2015 founder and artistic director of Cirqu'Aarau

2002 founder, creator and performer of Cie Tr'espace

1999 graduation Accademia Teatro Dimitri Verscio

Savino Caruso – light & stage design (CH)

Savino Caruso studied film and photography at Zürcher Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK), F+F Zurich and CEPV Vevey. He works as a freelance stage designer, technician, camera man and performer. Savino Caruso and Julian Vogel started to work together through Cie. Trottvoir. Deep trust has developed in these 10 years of collaboration and Julian is more than happy to have a friend at his side who contributes to the project with a wide technical knowledge, a good eye for scenic details on stage and screen, understanding each other even without words and being able driving together in a car hour by hour. His skills in both, video and photography, make him recognize and capture the best situations and moments of CHINA SERIES in image.

2018 BA in camera, Zürcher Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK)

2011 - 2013 study photography at CEPV Vevey and F+F Zürich

2012 co-founder, creator and performer of Cie. Trottvoir

Laurence Felber – graphic design (CH)

Laurence Felber studied graphic design as well as circus. As a circus artist she is familiar with the performing arts and combines it well with visual design, working as a freelance graphic designer. After hours, if not nights, of discussions and discourses on CHINA SERIES and its materials, Laurence knows and understands how to convert Julian's thoughts into visual keynotes. Thanks to this collaboration and her talent in graphic design, the idea of the «Catalogue of objects» is realized and enriches CHINA SERIES with a valuable documentation. She also accompanies Julian in designing exhibitions and costumes and became an indispensable reflector on most processes.

2020 BA from Academy of Circus and Performance Art Tilburg (NL)

2020 co-founder, creator and performer of Cie. FelberWey

2016 creator and performer of Cie. Trottvoir

2015 BA from Hochschule der Künste Bern

Ute Classen – production (DE)

Ute Classen is an experienced theatre manager specialized in contemporary circus, the development of which she has closely followed over the past 25 years. She acts as an interface between artists and organizers, since she knows both sides: as a production manager and program scout for theatres and festivals and as a strategic support for artists and companies in questions of administration, production and tour planning. Communication is one of her main topics and so it is no surprise to anyone that she is well connected worldwide. Having been accompanying Tr'espace and Cirque Aarau, she's directly been enthusiastic when Roman told her about an interesting artist, Julian Vogel, he had recently met. The new format of CHINA SERIES between performance and installation, with much more appearance options than just the stage, tent or black box, is an exciting task and Ute is happy to be in the team around Julian Vogel.

Calendar

Residencies

18. November - 6. December 2020

Riga Circus, Riga (residency plus showing)

4. January - 15. January 2020

Arts Printing House, Vilnius (residency plus showing)

25. January - 6. February 2021

Studio Panama Pictures, Den Bosch (residency)

22. Feb. - 6. Mar. 2021

Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde, Bagneux (residency plus showing)

16. May - 29. May 2021

La Brèche, Cherbourg (residency plus showing)

15. Jul. - 26. Aug. 2021

Ceramic Centrum Oisterwijk / EKWC sundaymorning@ekwc (residency Part 1)

11. Nov. - 23. Dec. 2021

Ceramic Centrum Oisterwijk / EKWC sundaymorning@ekwc (residency Part 1)

Extracts

14. November - 15. November 2020

Festival ON THE EDGE, Vienna (extract of CHINA SERIES)

12. December - 19. December 2020

Centre Culturel Suisse Paris, Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde, Théâtre Châtillon (extracts of CHINA SERIES)

10. March - 11. March 2020

Theater ROXY, Birsfelden
(extracts of CHINA SERIES)

Performances

11. June - 20. June 2021

CHINA SERIES at Festival Cirqu'8 Aarau (first place, where the project will be involved in the whole festival program)

30. August - 12. September 2021

CHINA SERIES at exposition hall of Centre Culturel Suisse Paris (tbc)

13. September - 19. September 2021

CHINA SERIES at Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde (tbc)

20. September - 26. September 2021

CHINA SERIES at ATOLL Festival Karlsruhe (tbc)

October 2021

CHINA SERIES at Festival Circolo Tilburg (tbc)

October 2021

CHINA SERIES at Neubad Luzern (tbc)

2022

CHINASERIES at Theater ROXY, Birsfelden

2022

CHINA SERIES at Südpol Luzern (tbc)

More materials

Videos

Trailer CHINA SERIES, 2020

<https://vimeo.com/424495836>

Transition Nr. 1, 2019

<https://vimeo.com/432208448>

Sheep, video-installation, china series, 2018

<https://vimeo.com/432191462/396e4c3953>

CHINA SERIES #1 (full performance), 2019

<https://vimeo.com/320470832/612a865d9c>

CHINA SERIES #3 (extracts), 2019

<https://vimeo.com/399650143>

Articles

Cyrille Roussial, « Éléments pour une éco-conception des objets de jonglage: le cas du diabolo dans la collection China Series (2019) de Julian Vogel », communication présentée dans le cadre du colloque « Agrès, scénographie et éco-conception », organisé par le Centre national des arts du cirque (Cnac), dans le cadre de la chaire d'innovation Cirque et Marionnette et la Circus Arts Research Platform, Cnac, Châlons-en-Champagne (15 - 17 novembre 2019, à paraître)

Cyrille Roussial, « Se positionner face aux éléments. Pour une lecture matérielle des modes d'incarnation du jonglage », revue Âgon [En ligne], dossier « Matières », dir. Julie Sermon, Emma Merabet et Anne-Sophie Noel, décembre 2019, consulté le 13 janvier 2020, URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/agon/6245>

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