

# 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  
**Artistic Advice** Roman Müller  
**Light & Stage Design** Savino Caruso  
**Graphic Design** Laurence Felber  
**Production** Ute Classen

**Co-Producers** Festival cirqu'aaarau, Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde, Festival Circolo, Südpol Luzern

**Supported by** Aargauer Kuratorium, Arts Printing House Vilnius, Albert Koechlin Stiftung, Berlin Circus Festival, Centre Culturel Suisse Paris, Ernst Göhner Stiftung, FUKA-Fonds Stadt Luzern, GG Stadt Luzern, ICC Santa Maria da Feira, La Maison des Jonglages, La Plateforme 2 Pôles Cirque en Normandie Elbeuf & Chèrbourg, Panama Pictures, Pro Helvetia, Riga Circus, RKK Luzern, Station Circus Basel, Sundaymorning@ekwc

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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 consists of several variations. 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

## A series of variations

It all begins with the shape of the diablo: Two bowls connected with an axis. The bowls, usually made from rubber, are replaced by re-used or self-made ceramic bowls. Like this, I create “diabolos” with different shapes, weights, colours, sounds and stories. And with ceramic comes fragility.

The project CHINA SERIES consists of several parts, which I call variations (#) alike in a musical oeuvre. These are different approaches to the turning – and sometimes breaking – diablo made from ceramic or porcelain. They have diverse forms of presentation, such as performances (frontal, interactive, durational), installations, videos or publications and have no chronological build-up. It's rather a structure of material that can also grow over time. At the moment (January 2021) there are 15 variations. A publication (the “catalogue of objects”) represents an archive and documentation of the objects made or collected for CHINA SERIES.

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, I research with the object itself. Through collecting and manufacturing different ceramic and porcelain, various «new» objects emerged, which can be seen as diabolos 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 of presentation 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. Through different and sometimes unusual settings I want to question placement, perspective and processes of the spectators. This includes the artist, the audience and the organizer.

The project derives from the performing circus arts. This is, where my artistic roots are. Whilst the inspirational object (the diablo) is a circus discipline, I reframe the purpose of object and technique. Therefore, art and its various techniques and forms are serving as methods. Starting from the performing arts, this project aims to search for new spaces between the different genres.

## Individual collaborations

The variations can be combined in various ways to make them fit to the space or a specific topic. During a period between a few days up to a few weeks CHINA SERIES will be present at one venue or festival. Durational installations are accompanied by live performances. The different formats should interact with the surrounding. To make these interactions possible and to create a suitable combination, an active collaboration between artist and organizer is the base.

In comparison to other projects these collaborations play a key role. This concept emerged through the necessity of creating the right frame for the material as the different formats of CHINA SERIES need the right contextualization. This process starts very early, grows over time and the project presentation will be adapted until the last performance. Thereby, each collaboration but also the artistic result will be unique and made specifically for one venue or festival.

Two examples from the planning of CHINA SERIES show how such a collaboration could look like:

The festival cirqu'arau presents CHINA SERIES during the whole period of cirqu'8. This edition will take place decentralized through the city of Arau. Very early, the artistic director Roman Müller got in contact with the Forum Schlossplatz, a museum in the middle of the city. Together with the curator of Forum Schlossplatz, we design the good combination of the material from CHINA SERIES for the museum space. More variations will be presented in the nearby theatre and outside in the city. Like this, CHINA SERIES draws a “red line” through the festival program and it will be possible for spectators to see several variations of the project within one day.

Centre Culturel Suisse Paris follows the development of CHINA SERIES since the first ideas. Their venue has a small theatre with a foyer, an exhibition space and a library. As an interdisciplinary house, which presents Swiss artists from all genres, they have a very wide program and an unconventionally open view to new formats. This collaboration was crucial to design the «catalogue of objects». To present different formats of CHINA SERIES, they are collaboration with partners like Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde and the Théâtre de Châtillon. At the moment, we are planning to present CHINA SERIES through the whole house before its construction phase in 2022.

### From an idea to the project

The first ideas for CHINA SERIES - at that time still completely open where the thoughts would lead - were born in 2018. Replacing the diabolo bowls with ceramics and porcelain led to many different approaches. Without already thinking of a concrete project or product, I intuitively developed material, which led to the next, which in turn produced something new and so on. From this, the concept crystallized after a while. In other words, the developed objects led to possibilities, which led me to experiment with different formats and settings. And only through this I began to understand the content of each variation and how they relate to each other.

This aimless research gave me the opportunity and time to explore the objects and materiality in multiple ways. The diversity of this material has led to designing a series of variations. These individual pieces initially stood on their own and it was not yet the intention to create a larger project out of it. Only with time these connections became clear to me and the idea of formulating a large project that consists of different variations and formats took shape. This somewhat unusual process helped me to explore the full potential of CHINA SERIES.

# Concept

### Breaking ceramic

Jugglers constantly drop objects. But what if the objects break? Ceramic 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 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, and to the performance itself. Fragility is also connected to perishability. Things come and things go. Ceramic embodies the ephemeral nature of things. Thereby, the break itself is an ambivalent moment. It is something people wish but also fear to see, they may expect it but it will still surprise them. This short moment is very aesthetic and shows decay, whereby always something is new emerges.

### Recycling material

In daily life we associate objects, and materials in general, with a certain lifespan. A piece of furniture has to be replaced at some point, the computer becomes too slow, the mattress uncomfortable. Things get old, break and become unusable. But what does „unusable“ actually mean? CHINA SERIES is interested – through ceramics – in the before and after of an object. Bowls, which are given away by people, are used again and transformed until a vessel possibly breaks to pieces. From this, in turn, sculptures or sound objects are created. Through the repurposing, the usefulness is put into a new perspective.

It is time that we as a society rethink usability and unusability. Of material, people and resources. CHINA SERIES wants to give impulses for and participate in this discussion.

## Transforming time

During a performance, the artist has the chance to guide the audience with specific intentions through a certain period. In contrast, installations can be observed differently regarding time and perspective. Parts of this project give agency to spectators.

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 a social idea and only 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. Materia has a certain 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”. (from: Carlo Rovelli, *The Order of Rime*, Penguin Books Ltd. 2018, p. 163). All materials are in transformation, things are in constant transition, and so are humans, and so is a breaking object. CHINA SERIES makes one aware of the constant process of change.

## Creating space

Experiencing togetherness is a deep human need. With this project I create spaces where people come together for a certain time. In today's world, however, the focus is often on consumption, entertainment, and – especially in circus – maintaining a safe distance between performer and spectator. CHINA SERIES questions the defined boundaries and tries to redesign them. Rethinking space and its use is necessary. How can we as performing artists design spaces for people to come together in the near future? Thereby, CHINA

SERIES is not meant to define spaces, but rather to create space. Some variations literally leave space in which spectators can move freely and at their own pace – in installations but also during performances. Creating space also means creating room for personal thoughts and interpretations, giving visitors the – individual – time they need to look at something or to move from one to another at their own tempo. An example: a two-hour performance in which visitors can go in and out, which is framed by installations and a video work.



# 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. Trottvoir 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.

Milestones are:

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

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

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

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 Trottvoir

### **Roman Müller – artistic advice (CH)**

Roman Müller is the founder and artistic director of the festival cirqu'aaarau, which became one of the most important festivals in the circus-world within a short period of seven editions. 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. His experience from the two „sides“ – artist and organizer – makes him an excellent advisor for CHINA SERIES.

2015 founder and artistic director of Cirqu'aaarau

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. Trottoir. 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. Trottoir

### **Laurence Felber – graphic design (CH)**

Laurence Felber holds a BA degree from the Academy for Circus and Performance Art (ACaPA). Before, she studies graphic design at the Berner Fachhochschule. 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 co-founder, creator and performer of Cie. FelberWey

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

2016 creator and performer of Cie. Trottoir

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 and influenced 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 that she is well connected worldwide. Through Roman Müller she gets to know Julian's work. 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 (cancelled/postponed)**  
Riga Circus, Riga (residency and try-out)

**16. - 27. November 2020**  
Bühne Aarau, Aarau (residency)

**4. - 15. January 2021 (cancelled/postponed)**  
Arts Printing House, Vilnius (residency and try-out)

**4. - 15. January 2021**  
Bühne Aarau, Aarau (residency)

**25. January - 12. February 2021**  
Studio Panama Pictures, Den Bosch (residency and try-out)

**22. February - 6. March 2021**  
Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde, Bagnaux (residency and try-out)

**16. - 29. May 2021**  
La Brèche, Chèrbourg (residency and try-out)

**15. July - 26. August 2021**  
European Ceramic Work Centrum Oisterwijk / sundaymorning@ekwc (residency part 1)

**11. November - 23. Dezember 2021**  
European Ceramic Work Centrum Oisterwijk / sundaymorning@ekwc (residency part 2)

## Performances / planning 2021

**11. - 12. March 2021**  
Theater ROXY, Birsfelden (extract)

**10. - 20. June 2021**  
CHINA SERIES at Festival cirqu'8, Aarau – PREMIERE

**8. - 12. September 2021**  
CHINA SERIES at Peculiar Families Festival, Split (tbc)

**16. - 26. September 2021**  
CHINA SERIES at ATOLL Festival, Karlsruhe (tbc)

**22. - 31. October 2021**  
CHINA SERIES at Festival Circolo, Tilburg

**October 2021**  
CHINA SERIES at Neubad, Luzern (tbc)

**1. - 9. November 2021**  
CHINA SERIES at Festival ON THE EDGE Vienna

## Performances / planning 2022

**January 2022**  
CHINA SERIES at Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde Bagnaux (tbc)

**1. - 13. February 2022**  
CHINA SERIES at Centre Culturel Suisse Paris (tbc)

**February/March 2022**  
CHINA SERIES at Petithéâtre de Sion (tbc)



## Past events

### December 2020

Centre Culturel Suisse Paris, Théâtre Chatillon, Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde (extract)

### March 2020

Festival Spring, Cirque Théâtre d'Elbeuf (extract)

### March 2020

Südpol Luzern (residency and try-out)

### December 2019

Südpol Luzern (residency and try-out)

### November 2019

La Maison des Jonglages (residency and try-out)

### February 2019

Centre Culturel Suisse Paris (extract)

### January 2019

Festival ON THE EDGE Wien (extract)

# 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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