

Circus Republic- The Great Gathering



CIRCUS REPUBLIC- THE GREAT GATHERING

Kerala International Open Tent Festival

Thrissur, Kerala | January 15-19, 2027

Call for Expression of Interest

Kerala is often remembered as the cradle of Indian Circus, but perhaps the circus began much earlier, the moment human beings first gathered to watch another body attempt the impossible. Circus is not simply entertainment; it is one of humanity's oldest pedagogies of risk, trust, failure, survival, wonder, labour, and collective imagination.

The five-day Festival, developed in collaboration with the **International Festival of Theatre Schools (IFTS 2027)** and [Circus and its Others V \(CaiO 2027\)](#), imagines circus not as a closed tent but as an open cultural ecology. The festival proposes Thrissur itself as a living circus ground, where indigenous cultures, physical traditions, rituals, and urban circus arts co-exist. Intermingling across gender, caste, religion, and race, they echo the characteristic feature of the street, shaping a deeply inclusive and cosmopolitan form. Under the larger vision of *Carnival of Pedagogy*, the festival will be a space where institutions encounter informal knowledge systems and where performers, scholars, students, communities, and audiences collectively rethink what performance, education, and public life can become. Co-curated with Circus and its Others, the festival will run in parallel with its fifth conference, bringing together over a hundred circus scholars and artists from more than 35 countries.

Historically, the Indian circus emerged through the cultural encounters situated in the intersections of global mobility, and local invention. Yet these histories have often remained at the margins of formal arts education and public discourse. This festival seeks to reposition circus as a site of serious artistic inquiry and embodied knowledge while recognising its relationship to labour, caste, migration, ecology, survival, and everyday life.

Across five days, the festival will showcase ten major performances, with two featured productions each day extending beyond thirty minutes, alongside the CaiO conference, IFTS

2027, and a smaller range of interventions, demonstrations, installations, conversations, workshops, and research-creation encounters. Alongside invited Indian and international productions, there will be local circuses, family circus traditions, subaltern performance communities, street performers, magicians, puppeteers, acrobats, jugglers, folk entertainers, itinerant artists, and emerging youth collectives whose bodies continue to carry living archives of performance knowledge.

The city itself becomes scenography. Streets, maidans, school grounds, tea shops, temple surroundings, markets, bus stands, and public spaces become temporary stages. Small circus acts and spontaneous encounters appear across Thrissur, transforming ordinary movement into collective attention.

This festival asks simple but urgent questions:

Can circus tents be open ecologies—moments of un-closure in public spaces?

Can performance restore dignity to invisible forms of labour?

Can the circus become a method of education?

Can the street become a space for learning?

Perhaps the future of circus, theatre, and the humanities will not be defined by larger stages or newer technologies alone, but by our capacity to create deeper forms of encounter. As contemporary performance increasingly moves across circus, visual arts, music, digital media, public space, ecology, and embodied knowledge, the question is no longer what art represents, but how art allows us to live together differently. Contemporary circus scholarship increasingly understands performance not as spectacle alone but as a relational and transformative space where bodies, objects, technologies, memories, and communities continuously reshape one another. In this sense, this festival imagines the future not as acceleration, but as attention, where the street becomes a classroom, the city becomes a stage, technology becomes imagination, and performance becomes a way of rehearsing more generous, inclusive, and possible worlds. But what space do the streets of the future hold for the past, for the legacy, for the tradition that still carries on in the living repertoire of the many communities.

Rather than presenting circus as spectacle alone, *Circus Republic-The Great Gathering* - imagines performance as a republic of labouring bodies - where knowledge circulates through risk, generosity, humour, discipline, and wonder; and where audiences do not merely watch, but rediscover what it means to gather, imagine, and belong together. This is intentionally designed as a **festival-first model**, in which the city becomes the venue, and the street becomes part of the pedagogy.

The tent is open.

The city becomes the stage.

Everyone arrives as an audience member and leaves as a performer.

We invite expressions of interest by **August 31st, 2026** via this [Google Form](https://shorturl.at/KSKCt)
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We welcome artists who could offer participation through:

- 1) Performances extending beyond 30 minutes
- 2) Workshops
- 3) Visual artists who would be interested in showcasing exhibitions and installations

The organizers are currently pursuing financial sponsorship to support the festival. At present, however, the travel subsidies cannot be assured at this stage. While we remain committed to delivering a standalone circus festival, in the event that necessary funding is not secured, the festival will take place under the auspices of our collaborative partner, the International Festival of Theatre Schools.

We welcome inquiries via circusfestindia@gmail.com.

Leadership:

India Team

Abhilash Pillai, University of Calicut, Thrissur

Aastha Gandhi, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University, Delhi

Prodosh Bhattacharya, Kolkata

In Collaboration with Festival Committee (Circus and its Others)

Veronika Štefanová, CIRQUEON, Czech Republic

Olga Lucia Sorzano, Colombia

Ante Ursic, University of California Davis, USA

Festival Coordinators

Suresh Chandra Das

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