

Circus is Dead in Singapore!

The Landscape of circus in Singapore: From traditional circus in post war era to contemporary circus in present day.

Author
Xyn Foo Shin Ling

Supervisor
Audrey Wong Wai Yan

Affiliation:
LASALLE College of the Arts, MA Arts and Cultural Leadership

01 Introduction

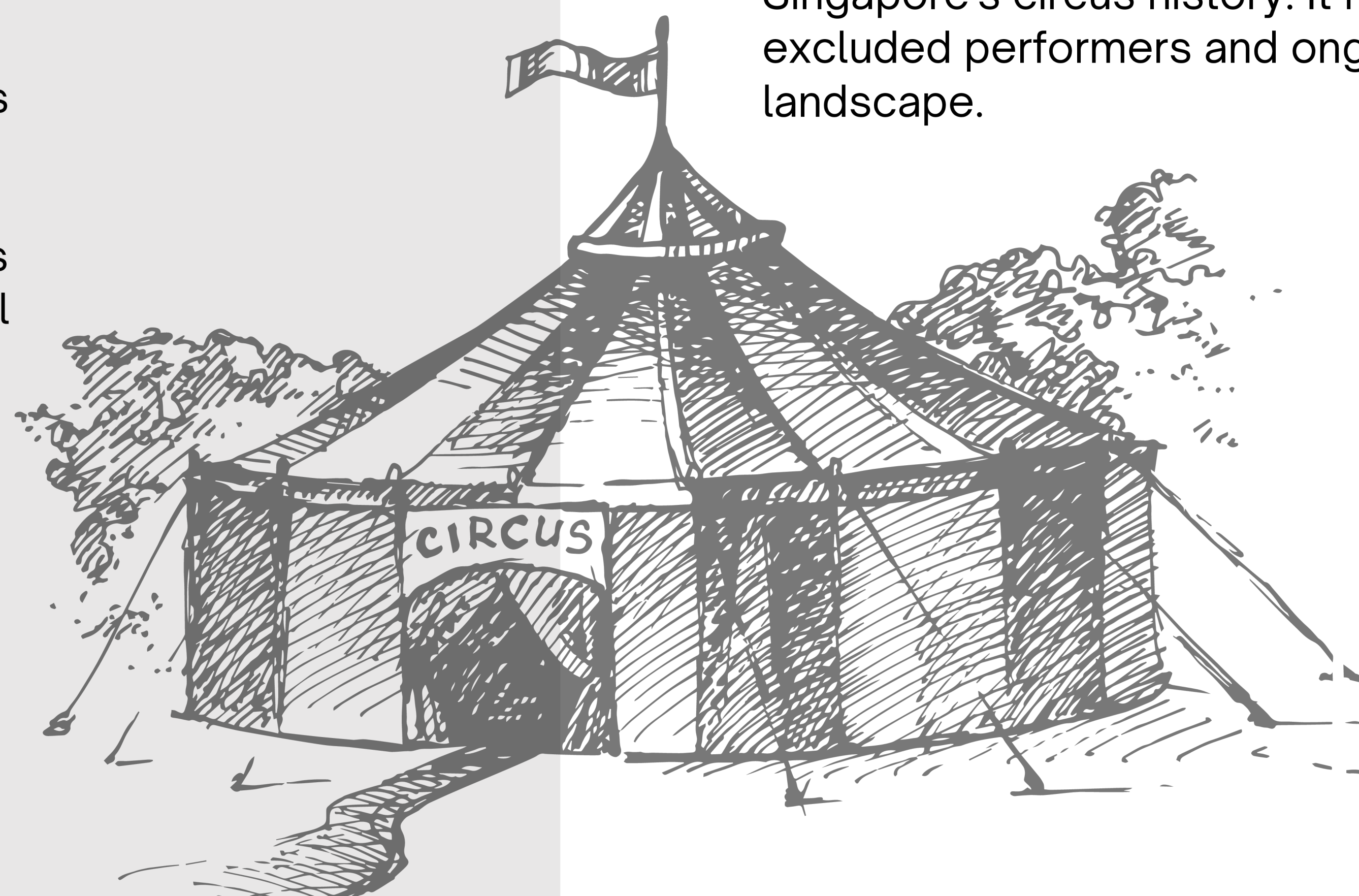
The study contests the prevailing belief that circus is dead in Singapore by examining the contemporary circus as a renewed art form, tracing its historical roots, and analysing its current practices, challenges, and accessibility—filling a critical gap in Singapore's cultural historiography.

02 Research Questions

- What happened to the circus in Singapore between the 1980s to 2000s?
 - What happened to the acrobatic and cycling troupes?
 - How did the juggling community emerge in the 1990s?
- What is the landscape of contemporary circus in Singapore?
 - What is contemporary circus to Singapore circus artists and practitioners?
 - When and how did contemporary circus emerge in Singapore?
 - What are the factors that contribute to circus mobilities in present-day Singapore?
 - Are contemporary circus performances accessible to the general public?
- What is the outlook for the future of contemporary circus in Singapore?

03 Methodology

- Interviews with local circus practitioners, artists, and producers.
- Archival resources such as historical newspapers, oral history interviews, and photographs.
- References to global circus literature and Singapore's social and cultural history.



04 Results/Findings

Singapore circus from 1980s to the 2000s

- Circus presence in Singapore since 1900s, practiced in isolated groups.
- Decline of traditional circus troupes, including acrobatic cycling and stilt-walking.
- The internet facilitated the growth and development of the juggling community.
- Kong Chow Clan Acrobatic Cycling troupe declined due to aversion to acrobatic skill dissemination.
- Socio-economic changes led to decline of stilt-walking community.



Word count on the definition of traditional circus

Singapore's Contemporary Circus Landscape

- Socio-cultural changes since 1970s have shaped Singapore's circus art.
- Contemporary circus artists enter the field through various means, including incidental introduction, formal training, and online resources.
- Community challenges the definition of circus as an artistic medium.
- "Internet" and "Community" significantly contributed to early 2000s growth.
- Local circus practitioners strive to legitimise circus as an art form.



Word count on the definition of contemporary circus

05 Conclusion

The study suggests that the artification of circus is occurring in Singapore and is thriving due to knowledge transmission changes. To gain legitimacy, the circus community must acknowledge its positive interdependence and develop a deeper understanding of Singapore's circus history. It recommends further investigation and documentation of excluded performers and ongoing discourse to enable growth in the contemporary circus landscape.

Suggested readings

Fu, Qifeng. 1985. *Chinese Acrobatics through the Ages*. 1st ed. Traditional Chinese Arts and Culture. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press.

Lievens, Bauke. 2017. "First Open Letter to the Circus. 'The Need to Redefine' | Etcetera." *Etcetera*. <https://e-tcetera.be/first-open-letter-to-the-circus-the-need-to-redefine/>.

Shapiro, Roberta. 2019. "Artification as Process." *Cultural Sociology* 13 (3): 265–275. doi:10.1177/1749975519854955.