

# Artcirq

## LE CIRQUE POLAIRE CANADIEN CANADA'S ARCTIC CIRCUS



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Depuis une douzaine d'années, une surprenante troupe canadienne mène une carrière internationale, tout en honorant une mission sociale : se préoccuper du sort des jeunes Inuits. En piste!

PAR GARY LAWRENCE

**En** mai dernier, on a pu voir ce cirque canadien à Toulouse, en France. Auparavant, c'est lors des cérémonies des Jeux olympiques de Vancouver que l'on a admiré ses prouesses. Et le mois dernier, le Groenland requérait sa présence, après le Mexique, la Grèce, le Danemark, le Mali...

Détrompez-vous, nous ne parlons pas du Cirque du Soleil, mais d'une autre troupe bien plus modeste, qui est néanmoins originaire d'ici : Artcirq. Fondée en 1998 à Igloolik, une petite communauté insulaire du Nunavut, Artcirq est sans conteste la plus marginale des entreprises circassiennes canadiennes.

For more than a decade, an unlikely Canadian circus troupe has been gaining worldwide acclaim, while remaining focused on a noble mission: investing in the future of young Inuit.

BY GARY LAWRENCE

**Last** May, they performed in Toulouse, France. Before that, they participated in the Olympic opening ceremony in Vancouver. Just last month, they got an invitation to Greenland, to go with similar requests from Mexico, Greece, Denmark, and Mali.

No, we're not talking about Cirque du Soleil. This Canadian troupe operates on a much smaller scale. In 1998, Artcirq was founded in Igloolik, a small, remote community in Nunavut—without a doubt the farthest-flung circus company in Canada.

Created with the support of Isuma, the production company best known for its Oscar-winning film *Atanarjuat*,

Créée grâce au soutien d'ISUMA, la maison de production du film *Atanarjuat, la légende de l'homme rapide*, ainsi qu'avec l'appui du cirque québécois Éloize, Artcirq n'a pas comme seule vocation de produire des spectacles de qualité, où s'entremêlent arts modernes du cirque et coutumes inuites. La troupe aspire aussi à redonner espoir aux désillusionnés du Nunavut, l'une des régions du monde où l'on enregistre l'un des plus hauts taux de suicide chez les jeunes.

« Artcirq, c'est un véhicule pour leur donner la chance de mieux conduire dans la vie, et les aider à faire grandir leurs rêves », dit Guillaume Ittukssarjuat Saladin, son cofondateur et actuel dirigeant. Pour y arriver, Artcirq propose notam-

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ment des ateliers de cirque aux Inuits. Ceux-ci peuvent dès lors s'impliquer comme bon leur semble, jusqu'à prendre une place de plus en plus importante dans l'organisation.

Mais pourquoi faire appel aux arts du cirque pour stimuler la jeunesse du Nunavut? D'abord, parce que les racines de la culture traditionnelle inuite comprennent l'acrobatie, la jonglerie et les prestations de clown. Ensuite, parce que les arts du cirque donnent aux jeunes l'accès à des modes de communication qui transcendent les générations et les

*the Fast Runner*, as well as assistance from Quebec's Cirque Éloize, Artcirq's goal is to entertain audiences with quality performances that blend modern circus arts with Inuit tradition. The troupe aims to boost morale among Nunavut's disaffected youth—the region suffers one of the world's highest teen suicide rates.

"Artcirq is a vehicle that can help them find a better path in life, and help them live up to their dreams," says Guillaume Ittukssarjuat Saladin, the circus's co-founder and current director. As a starting point, Artcirq offers circus workshops for Inuit youth. Participants are invited to get as deeply involved as they wish, and those who stick with it can end up taking on more important roles within the organization.

Why choose circus arts to motivate Nunavut's youth? First, they're well suited: traditional Inuit performance culture has long featured acrobats, jugglers, and clowns. Additionally, circus arts provide youth with a way to communicate that transcends all generations and cultures. Lastly, "training in physical forms of expression and spirituality boosts a person's self esteem," says Saladin. "And," adds circus administrator Cara Di Staulo, "this troupe is focused on its members' needs. It's based on collaboration, human interaction, and sharing Inuit culture."

Onstage, the performers offer an intriguing blend of classic circus arts and traditional Inuit games, such as the high kick, in which an acrobat makes an astound-

ing one-footed leap into the air, using his jumping foot to kick a target (often a toy stuffed seal) suspended high above the ground. Other performances include traditional hand-to-hand games, and human pyramids in the shape of inukshuk, the Inuit stone structures that take a human form.

Unlike other circuses, Artcirq has no full-time performers. That said, budget constraints keep Artcirq from performing (let alone touring) as much as they'd like. Culture shock can be another factor: "The fact is that it is disorienting for an Inuk to leave home for more than two weeks at a

time—they're very attached to their country," explains Cara Di Staulo. Fortunately, several Artcirq shows have been filmed, and have been shown all over the world.

In October, Artcirq will be performing in Montréal, in a show co-produced with Kalabanté. Otherwise, you'll have to drop by their home base in Igloodik, just north of the Arctic Circle, rather than wait for their next cross-Canada tour.

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Pour d'autres informations sur Artcirq, et pour voir des vidéos de leurs performances :  
For information, or to view videos of performances: [www.artcirq.org](http://www.artcirq.org)