take care
circus life in a swing

Take Care Conference # 3

Relationally Curious: Awareness, Behaviour and Well-being

7 November 2026 | ON THE EDGE Festival, Vienna (AUT)

Theater am Werk im Kabelwerk - Oswaldgasse 35A, 1120 Vienna, Austria

Take Care Final Conference

09:30 | Accreditation & coffee

10.00 | Welcome words
ON THE EDGE, CircusDanceFestival and FEDEC

10:15 | Keynote - Relationally Curious: Creating an Ecosystem of Care
by Anna Mendelssohn - actress, performance artist and systemic psychotherapist
What does it mean to take care of ourselves and of each other? The opening keynote by Vienna-based actress, performance artist, and systemic psychotherapist Anna Mendelssohn explores how we navigate the relational ecospheres that shape our mental health every day. She invites us to consider relational empowerment as social activism. By using curiosity as a way of becoming more aware of what happens within and between us, we can reach for our best possible selves, thereby creating healthier relationships and a more caring relational ecosystem.

Anna Mendelssohn (she/her) is an actress, performance artist, and systemic psychotherapist based in Vienna.
As an actress, she has worked in ensembles with theatre directors, dance choreographers and filmmakers. Her own artistic creations have won several prizes and travelled to a wide range of international festivals and theatre stages.
As a psychotherapist, she works with individuals and families, and has a particular focus on couple therapy. In both art and therapy, she is interested in language, in emotional and somatic work, and in how we communicate — with ourselves and others, personally and politically.

10:40 | Keynote - Circus, Science & Care: CODARTS Take Care Survey Results
by Rogier van Rijn - PhD human movement scientist, CODARTS associate professor
As a partner in the Take Care project, CODARTS conducted a survey over the past year among European professional circus schools to explore the impact on mental health during the students' training years. Delivered by Associate Professor at CODARTS and member of the PEARL research lab, Rogier van Rijn, the findings reveal important connections between injuries, stress, and broader health concerns among circus students. These results are a valuable outcome of the Take Care trajectory, providing the sector with evidence to understand and address current mental health challenges.

Rogier van Rijn (he/him) holds a PhD and is a Human Movement Scientist and Associate Professor at Codarts Rotterdam, University of the Arts, the Netherlands, within the Professorship Arts & Wellbeing. He serves as a board member of the Performing Artist and Athlete Research Lab (PEARL). His research focuses on enhancing the physical and mental health of performing artists – including dancers, circus performers, and musicians –as well as athletes. His work aims to prevent health issues, optimise overall health and maximise performance.

11.15 - 13:00 | Three Workshops in parallel

1. **Let there Be Pie! Playing between personal needs, collective interdependencies and performative practices**
   - **With Verena Schneider – interdisciplinary circus artist & Christina Rauchbauer – choreographer, performer and theatre facilitator**

Facilitated by Christina Rauchbauer and Verena Schneider, whose artistic practices span contemporary circus, choreography, performance, and participatory formats, this workshop invites participants into a shared space of movement, play and exchange. Through a combination of somatic practices, physical exploration, improvisation, and conversation, care is approached as something continuously negotiated, with ourselves, with others, and within artistic processes. As a playful laboratory for exploring care as an embodied, relational, and creative practice, expect movement, conversation, unexpected encounters, and, of course, a shared piece of pie.

Verena Schneider (they/them) is an Austrian acrobat, performer, circus maker, and interdisciplinary artist working at the intersection of circus, choreography, and performance. Co-founder of the circus company Kumquat and the Vienna-based association Freifall, and with a background in circus arts and biology, their work weaves together hand balancing, acro-dance, object manipulation, and choreographic research to cultivate a personal circus and movement language.

Christina Rauchbauer (she/her) is a choreographer, performer, theatre facilitator, and founder of FUORI – Association for Performative Arts. She creates transdisciplinary, participatory, and intergenerational projects that bring together artistic practice with social engagement. Christina works at Musisches Zentrum Wien and teaches at institutions such as Accademia Teatro Dimitri (Switzerland), Nest, Dschungel, ylab and Tanzwerkstatt Vienna. She is currently researching Care as a Performative Practice through a grant from the City of Vienna, supported by Culture Moves Europe.

2. **Relationally Curious: Curiosity as a tool to navigate an Ecosystem of Care**
   - **With Anna Mendelssohn - actress, performance artist and systemic psychotherapist**

In this workshop, Anna Mendelssohn draws on her experience as a systemic psychotherapist to explore how we navigate the systems and relationships we are part of, and the roles we take within them. Mental health can be understood as the felt sense of being empowered and able to act, rather than helpless. How can we speak up about our needs and concerns, with wisdom and love, making it possible to hear each other? Through practical exploration, we will explore curiosity as a simple, yet not always easy, tool to respond with greater awareness and care for the relational ecosystems we are part of.

3. **Workshop - Fit Your Brain: Physical Preparation and Stretching for Neurons**
   - **with Chiara Marchese - multidisciplinary artist**

How to do circus arts when you are neurodivergent? How can neuroscience and psychotherapy help alleviate the morale of circus artists in training and in the profession? How to self-help in situations of psychological distress?
Through the experience of Chiara Marchese, diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2016, and creator of the autobiographical show The Weight of the Soul (circusnext laureate 2021), we will explore themes that dissect the difficulties of living with mental health disorders, not only on stage. Taking care of one's mental health allows for better expression through the body, breath, voice, movement, visual arts, and circus. She will share her experience and work based on the concepts of authenticity and resilience.

Chiara Marchese (she/her) is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice bridges circus, puppetry, and visual arts. Through her show The Weight of the Soul, she has developed a unique scenic language in which thread, objects, and materials become powerful metaphors exploring mental health, vulnerability, resilience, and the delicate balance of the human being.

13.15 - 14:30 | Lunch break by registration **@Genuss am Werk**

14:30-15:10 | Mental Health, Circus & Cinema: Take Care Films Screening by filmmakers and Take Care partners Filip Jacobson and Miikkael Kukkula

In the two sensitive documentaries by Filip Jacobson, the artists Alice Rende and Alice Davies reflect on their mental health in their professional practice. Miikkael Kukkula's fictional short films, together with Ron Beeri and Marina Cherry, are based on the artists' collaborative residency work, in which they have explored the relationship between mental health challenges and artistic practice, reflecting on these themes through their own experiences.

The four short films are screening for the first time at the Take Care final conference and are ready to travel internationally.

Miikkael Kukkula (he/him) is a cinematography & screenplay-oriented filmmaker and media artist who graduated from Turku Arts Academy in Finland. His practice focuses on working across film and performing arts: integrating cinematic language into live performances & creating films that engage in an active dialogue with the performing arts.

Filip Jacobson (he/him) is a Polish documentary film director based in Cologne, Germany. He graduated from the Film Studies program at the Lodz University in Poland, from Gdynia Film School in Poland as a director, and from the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne. Involved in social documentary projects, he specialises in working with art venues, festivals and artists, especially in the circus sector.

15:10-16:40 | Panel - Conscious Creatures: An Artistic Exploration of Mental Health
with Chiara Marchese, Miikkael Kukkula, Filip Jacobson and Isabel Joly, moderated by Valentina Barone. Live drawing by Birgit Kellner.
A final roundtable is dedicated to sharing reflections on the experience of mental health. Together, we will discuss how personal and collective mental health can shape artistic creations; the personal stories behind the scenes of producing the short films; what lessons we can learn from different artists' career experiences; and the current challenges in the professional sector on the topic.

Isabel Joly (she/her) earned her degree in communications from the University of Lille. She then spent five years within the EU institutions before taking the helm at RESEO, a network dedicated to opera and dance education for 14 years. From there, she moved to Zonzo Compagnie in Belgium, where she coordinated the Big Bang festival for young audiences, bringing the event to ten cities across Europe. Isabel joined FEDEC in January 2018, where she continues to champion arts education across a global membership of 90 circus schools and circus-arts organisations. Deeply committed to contemporary circus, she also serves on the Circostrada Steering Committee and the circusnext Managing Board.

Valentina Barone (she/her) is a cultural manager, curator, and editor. Her work spans international project development, communication, and curatorial practice. Since 2022, she has been developing International Relations at the Cologne-based CircusDanceFestival. In 2023, she founded Around About Circus, a digital media platform dedicated to circus and its intersections with contemporary performance and culture.

16:40-17:00 | Snacks & drinks

ON THE EDGE Artistic Programme

17:00 & 18:30 | **Running Gag** by Sööt/Zeyringer (AT/EE)
19:30 | **Cracks in the Wood** by Maria Madeira (PT/BE)
21:00 | **Dark Glowing** by Laurence Felber, Silvan Strübel, Caroline Schenk (CH)

This conference is part of a series of conferences organised as part of Take care, the first-ever EU project dedicated to supporting mental health and well-being in the circus arts sector.

- Take Care Conference #1 | CircusDanceFestival, 7 June 2025, Cologne (DEU)
- Take Care Conference #2 | Circusstad festival, 2 May 2026, Rotterdam (NLD)
- Take Care Conference #3 | On the Edge Festival, 7 Nov 2026, Vienna (AUT)

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