

## “Museum of Circus Art: Heritage Preservation and Creative Laboratory”

**The museum was established on August 8, 1928**, directly in the building of the *Leningrad Circus* (now St. Petersburg Circus). The museum’s original name was *Museum of Circus and Estrada*. Its founder, Vasiliy Andreev, was a collector, scientific colleague of *the Hermitage and the Theater Museum*, an expert in fencing, who taught in theatrical educational institutions and later taught in theaters as well.

**The basis of the museum's** funds is private collections of the founder Vasiliy Andreev and of former, 1920s artistic director of the Leningrad Circus, Yevgeniy Gershuni. Circus performers took an active part in collecting the funds, bringing a variety of materials reflecting their work. To this day, this source is the most valuable one, especially if it provides archives of dynasties, collections, research works. Other important sources are amateurs of circus art, collectors, scientific figures who donate their collections or individual items to the Museum.

Currently, the collection of the Museum counts more than 135 thousand items and consists of fifteen funds containing domestic and foreign materials:

- library
- photo library
- video library
- collections of paintings and graphics
- sculpture and small plastics
- costumes and props
- posters
- programs and promotional products
- souvenirs
- manuscript and archive departments

**The library** has one of the largest collections of the Museum. It represents circus subjects by historical and research works, textbooks, reference books, memoirs of artists, fiction.

The first book registered in the library inventory was presented by its author, clown Vitaliy Lazarenko, on the fourth day of the museum’s foundation - August 12, 1928. Lazarenko published his short book *Makeup Stains* in 1922, dedicated to the memory of the famous clown and trainer Anatoliy Durov.

The oldest edition in the library dates to 1680. It is a folio containing programs and librettos of theatrical street acts in medieval Europe. The book was published in Nuremberg in German language and printed in Gothic script.

The Museum has a separate card index on circus genres, which includes both educational literature and memoirs of artists talking about their work and life. Regarding the fundamental genre of circus – equestrian – the library contains about two hundred books in Russian and in foreign languages. Among such books are the works of the expert in equestrian dressage

François Bouchet *Guide to the Art of Riding*, published in Paris in 1844, as well as the 1856 edition of the book *Carousel and Horse Cadrille*.

The Museum's library is replenished with publications based on the materials of its collections. For example, in 2023, memoirs of museum founder Vasilii Andreev were published entitled *The house of living circus history (sic!)*. In addition, the museum staff publishes articles on circus art in various periodicals.

Currently, the library of the museum has about five thousand books in different languages, including booklets about famous artists.

In addition to books, the library inventory includes magazines and newspapers, which have also been collected since the foundation. The range of topics covered in these publications is vast: creative and production issues, historical materials, biographies of artists, interviews, reviews of individual programs and much more. In the lifespan of the museum, titles of more than 150 magazines have been included in the catalog, covering activities of circuses, variety shows and other entertainment organizations. Materials in the section are classified using geographical and chronological signs. Information on different topics touched upon in the articles is entered into the card index. This way, the printed material becomes available to researchers. This type of source can often help to clarify and date an event or reveal the views of contemporaries on it.

**The collection of photo documents** is one of the museum's significant collections. Currently, the museum has about thirty-thousand photo documents on paper, reflecting the history of domestic and foreign circuses. Photos of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought us the image of the founder of the circus in St. Petersburg, rider, and horse trainer Gaetano Ciniselli. For years, professional photojournalists and photographers gave their works to the museum. The main collection of photographic documents was formed from the gifts of circus artists and their families. Thanks to contacts with foreign circus artists, the museum has created a fund of photographic materials on foreign circus. Thus, the general fund of photographs consists of domestic and foreign sections. The systematization of photographic materials is based on genre. In addition, the catalog has a personal card for each artist with a list of his photos, description of images on them and inventory data.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the museum began to form a new department – **the department of video materials**. It contains more than eight hundred cassettes and 850 DVDs, which, in total, adds up to more than twenty-five thousand numbers. Taking the requirements of modernity into account, digitization of materials is currently underway. The video library also consists of a collection of domestic and foreign circus art. Each part has sections – festivals, programs, television programs, individual numbers, video recordings related indirectly to the circus, but related to the spectacular arts (e.g., silent cinema, water, ice, music, and dance shows and the like).

All videos are cataloged both by the performer's name and genre, allowing quick searching. Also, the museum can offer artists a selection of multi-genre numbers united by one theme: marine, chef, oriental style, boxing scenes, and so on.

Circus art, as one of the most expressive, bright, and eccentric of all, has always attracted artists. The funds of the Museum reflect the theme "the artist and the circus" in **the collection**

**of paintings and graphic works.** Currently, in the museum's exhibition, there is a painting entitled *Behind the Circus* (1925) by artist Alexander Semyonov. Its dimensions are 197x255 cm, as well as the image of the rider Lucia Ciniselli (wife to Cipione Ciniselli) by an unknown artist, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Among the graphic works** contained in the collection, the museum holds a collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century engravings. There are thirty items of this kind. A lithograph of the early 1820s, which was in the possession of the museum's founder Vasily Andreev, depicts episodes of the equestrian mimic-transformation, and is entitled *Soldiers' Life*. The painted lithograph depicts an acrobat on horseback performing a leap through hoops wrapped with roses. The figure represents Annato Palmira. She shone in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in various genres (school rider, horse dancer, equestrian acrobat). In 1852, she performed in St. Petersburg in the building of the Imperial Theater Circus.

**In the section of graphics**, sketches of circus costumes, scenery, props found their place. Among other authors, there are Rimma Yunosheva, Roman Levitskiy, Herta Nemenov, Ivan Tarasyuk. The fund of paintings and graphics is replenished both by gifts of the artists themselves or their relatives, and by the acquisition of works by the museum. For example, in the 1960s, the museum purchased a rare facsimile edition of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's drawings.

**The museum's collection of sculpture and fine plastics** gives a three-dimensional insight into the image of a particular artist and offers the author's embodied fantasy. In one of the expositions there are marble busts of the married couple Ciniselli - Wilhelmina and Gaetano by master Enrico Butti, as well as a bronze bust of Vasilii Kenel, the architect of the St. Petersburg Circus, by sculptor Nikolai Lavretsky. There is an interesting marble portrait of the clown Oleg Popov, presented by the artist to the museum. The right side of the face is the clown image of the artist, the left side is without the clown mask.

**The Museum of Circus Arts keeps costumes of artists** of different genres who performed at various times. Besides, the museum carefully preserves details of costumes, such as the cap of clown "Pencil" (Mikhail Rumyantsev), and the first cap of clown Oleg Popov. The slide shows a unique exhibit – the costume of clone Vitaly Lazarenko, made according to the sketch of theater artist Boris Erdman. Next to it is a dress of an equestrian Kayana Kantemirova from the North Ossetian dzhigit troupe "Ali-Bek" but created according to the sketch of the artist herself, it preserves the style of the national dress of the peoples of the Caucasus.

**Props**, unlike a costume, do not always look attractive at the museum exposition. But their history helps us to better understand the individual tricks. For example, the roller-copfstein for rappelling on the head on an inclined cable of equilibrist Vladimir Arzumanov, was donated to the museum in 1950. The annotation to the item contains the words of the artist: "I rehearsed with this roller for four years and worked with it for twenty years". The device is simple at first glance, but the trick, born so difficult, had a deep impression on the audience.

In the neighboring exposition are the rings of Albert Petrovsky. In 1963 he managed to throw up and catch eleven such rings, and, before him, such a trick had never been recorded. Nearby are the sticks of the virtuoso juggler Alexander Kiss. Their shape conveys the style and aesthetics of circus art in the 1930s.

**Circus posters** are of undoubted value for the museum collection, as one can easily recognize the time, place, and character of a circus performance by a poster. The best samples always reflect the aesthetics and artistic style of a certain period.

The museum started its collection of domestic and foreign posters on the third day of its foundation. Like other funds, the fund of posters has two sections – domestic and foreign. Within each of them posters are systematized by genre, and within genre selections are collected by artists' names.

One of the most important circus documents is the **program** of a performance. The fund of circus programs and advertising products of the museum lists over five thousand items of this kind. It is represented by separate collections, such as:

- Domestic programs
- Foreign programs
- Programs of domestic circus tours abroad and foreign circuses in the CIS countries.
- Programs of circus festivals
- Circus advertising production

The main source of replenishment of this fund is the gifts of visitors. One of the first additions were gifts from the founders of the museum, Vasily Andreev and Evgeniy Gershuni.

In addition to their informational value, the programs are a rich source of iconographic material. The photographs on them are recorded in the card index of illustrations. In some cases, the image of the artist in the program is the only one in the museum's holdings.

**Small advertising products** in the museum's collections are represented by brochures, leaflets, postcards, and others. This type of material is also of interest as an informational and iconographic source.

**The fund of souvenirs**, in addition to souvenirs produced by circuses, also contains products of other organizations, but dedicated to circus art, for example: labels on matchboxes, postage signs (envelopes, stamps), pocket calendars, badges.

**The archive department** collects documentary materials related to the economic and organizational work of the St. Petersburg Circus, as well as those related to the work of the Museum. In addition, books of record and feedback of visitors are kept here. The everyday life of artists and creative figures of circus art is reflected in family archives and separate documents. They were handed over to the Museum by the artists themselves or their relatives. This material gives the possibility of a wider study of history and personal biographies.

There are more than three hundred cards in the card catalog of the archive, each of which is devoted to a separate theme or person, these archives are kept in personal folders. The archive of the museum is a rich source of information for historians, writers, researchers of circus art, journalists, and cinematographers.

**The manuscript department** contains more than four hundred folders with such material as:

- Scripts of productions (from the 1920s onward)
- Artists' repertoires
- Props drawings
- Schedules of artistic councils, conferences
- Diplomas and dissertations
- Manuscripts of articles on circus art
- Memoirs of artists and their creative biographies

Already in the first years of its work, the museum began to organize **exhibitions** devoted to circus programs, individual genres, and personalities. For example, there are photos of the exhibition entitled *Clownade*, held in 1929-1930, the exhibition entitled *Horse Circus* in 1930, the exhibition dedicated to trainer Ivan Lerry in 1956, as well as the exhibition *Circus Poster* in 1961 – the photo shows the artist Mikhail Gordon.

Currently, there are three exhibition areas **on the circus's territory**.

On the first floor of the circus, an exposition is dedicated to the family of the founder of the St. Petersburg Circus Ciniselli. In the foyer of the second floor, a thematic exhibition was created for each new program of the circus. On the third floor there is an extensive exposition called *Colors of the arena*, dedicated to the history of the national circus costume, and has thematic sections by genres of circus art. In total, there are more than fifty costumes and more than 150 sketches by famous artists of 1930-1970, as well as props of artists, paintings, and sculptures.

The tradition of introducing the museum's expositions to a wide audience was established by its founder and chief curator Vasily Andreev. Since then, the **excursion activity** has acquired a regular character. Nowadays the visitors have an opportunity not only to get information on the proposed topic (now the museum has seven different excursion programs), but also to participate in the process. A game is offered, during which, those who wish can try themselves in the genre of juggling, equilibrium, and illusion.

For 95 years, the museum's funds have served as a base for scientific research, information center and source of creative ideas.