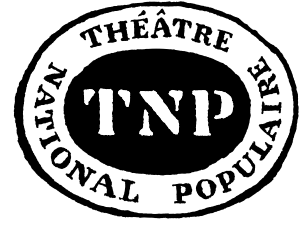


PREMIERE AUTUMN 2021

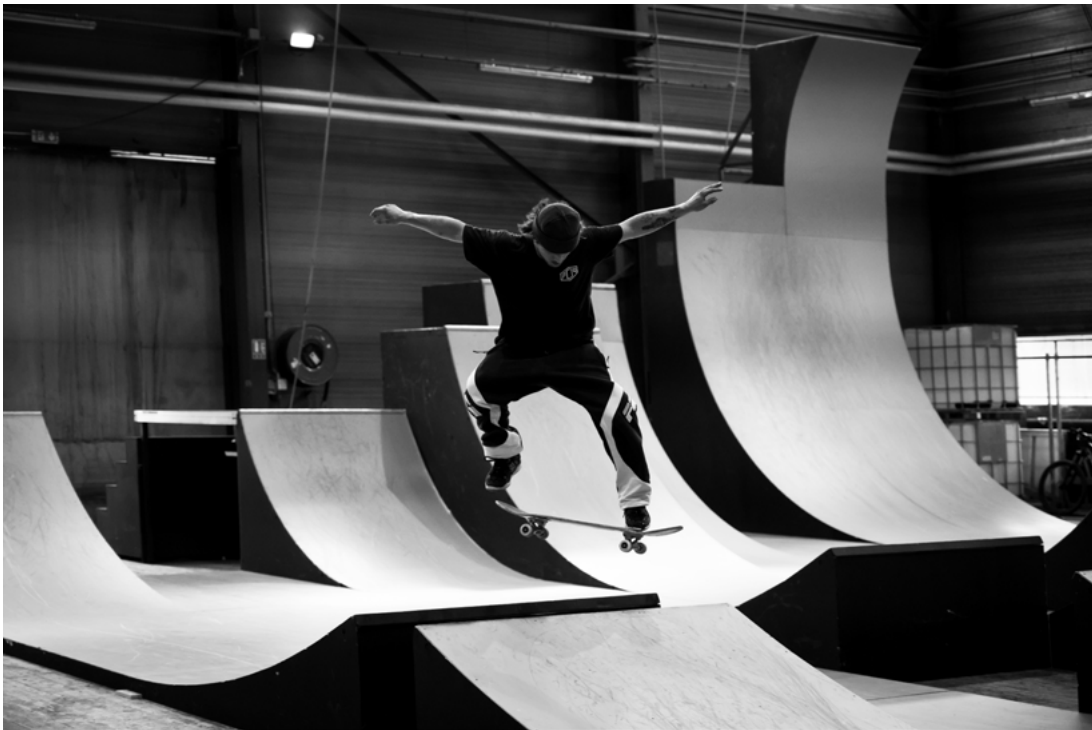
Archipelago



a new work by **Nicolas Musin**
with excerpts from *Invisible Cities*
by **Italo Calvino**

A dramatic dance work performed by 3 actors, 9 riders,
and 3 freerunners. Mixing professionals and amateurs.

from November 6 to 14, 2021, TNP



©Jeanne Laurent

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Archipelago

a new work by
Nicolas Musin

with excerpts from
Invisible Cities
by **Italo Calvino**

running time: approx. 1 h 30

with
9 riders
skate **Florian Maillet,**
Théo Dabadie,
Camilo Payares Gonzalez,
Baptiste Bordier, Romane Panossian
scooters **Guillaume Trucchi,**
Arnaud Andres, Antonin Mollard,
Ugo Léonce
3 freerunners **Caryl Cordt-Moller,**
Maxime Renaud, Kevin Bringolf
actors
Damoh Ikheteah,
Liza Alegria Ndikita,
Ulrich Verdoni

choreography and stage
Nicolas Musin
artistic collaboration
Jean Bellorini, Michel Jusforgues,
Mélodie-Amy Wallet
light designer
Jean-Marc Skatchko
original music by
Sébastien Trouvé
freerunning assistant
and instructor
Caryl Cordt-Moller

production
Théâtre National Populaire
co-production
Association Urbanity

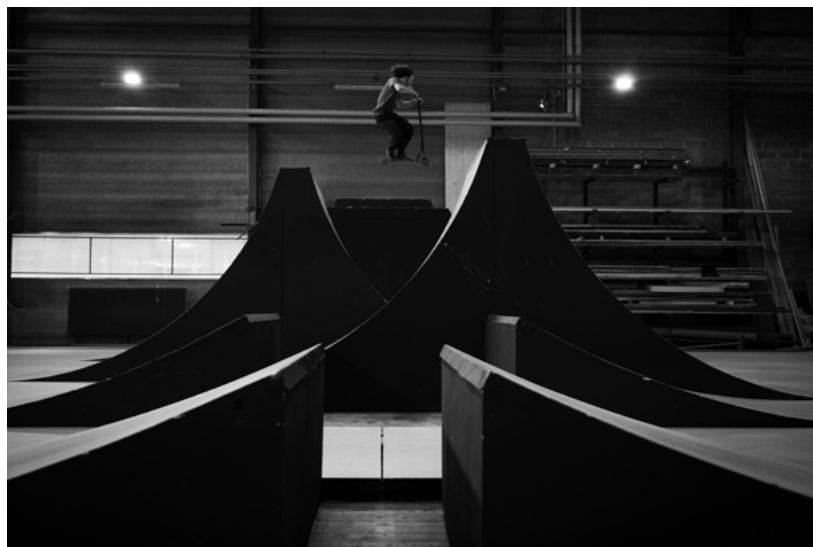
More than a sport, skateboarding is a culture, a way of life, and a way of inhabiting the world. Tolerated yet irreverent, with a series of ritualized movements that make up their teenage sociability, skateboarders reinvent and rewrite the city. Free and clear, they move through the urban environment in accordance with their push-and-pull dynamics, and with the fight against gravity. In their own way, they dance.

Belgian choreographer Nicolas Musin captures this social imaginary to create a performance between public space and the arts of movement. His cross-genre approach to space is explored through the unique scenography of the skateboard ramp. Musin's artistic collaborator, Jean Bellorini, for whom education and youth are at the core of his work, breathes poetic language into this piece, with excerpts from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, an atlas of cities that could only exist in dreams.

Archipelago is the urban narrative of 15 young actors, riders*, freerunners** and dancers. Told through words, moves and light projections, it is a story at the crossroads of many languages. It is a long urban sentence, a score, with its own rhythms, scansion, stumbles, and dissonance... It is a resolutely contemporary, yet timeless, call to the imagination.

* Skateboard and scooter.

** Freerunner: a practitioner of freerunning (an offshoot of parkour, the acrobatic sporting discipline of overcoming obstacles without equipment).



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The Project

Skateboarders see the world in a constant reverse image. What the average pedestrian sees as an obstacle, the skateboarder sees as an invitation. The fragmented spaces of the former contrast with the connectable spaces of the latter. Every urban object, useful or decorative, is turned away from its primary function. The Ollie, the skater's classic trick, lets them leap over the rough edges of the city, symbolizing their pursuit of the endless. There are no limits, barriers, obstacles, or walls to stop the body's movement. More than a sport, skateboarding has always been a culture, a way of life, and a way of being in the world. Tolerated yet irreverent, with a series of ritualized movements that make up their teenage sociability, skateboarders reinvent and rewrite the city. Free and clear, they move through the urban environment in accordance with their push-and-pull dynamics, and with the fight against gravity. In their own way, they dance.

In 2017, Belgian choreographer Nicolas Musin took hold of this social imaginary to create *Urbanity*, in Geneva. The Geneva Skatepark bowls became the stage set of a vast show that brought movement, dance, and digital images into the public space. In this "urban vertigo" performed by 40 young free-runners, riders and dancers, Nicolas Musin transformed their spontaneous moves into artistic gestures, and the architecture of the Skatepark into a musical score. The performers, most of them amateurs, observe each other, share skills, and, blending genres, bring about mutations in the contemporary arts. The show brought together a diverse audience and created a happening.

Now, Nicolas Musin, Artistic Director of the Association Urbanity, is collaborating with the TNP (Théâtre National Populaire) in Villeurbanne (France) and its Director, Jean Bellorini, to renew this project, created at the crossroads of art forms and audiences. Musin defends a multidisciplinary approach to training and creation, and he sees the Association Urbanity as a laboratory for young people to create and to express themselves. It is therefore significant that the choreographer is collaborating with the director of the TNP, for whom youth and education are core to his work.

Jean Bellorini has joined the project to inject it with poetic language. He has chosen young actors from the theatre company that he founded at the Théâtre Gérard-Philipe in Saint-Denis near Paris. Under his direction, three of them perform excerpts from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. The novel stages the meeting between Kublai Khan, Emperor of China (1215-1294), and the legendary explorer Marco Polo. As the monarch could not visit all the cities he had conquered, he asked the Venetian traveller to visit the places for him, and to bring back descriptions. The two men conversed light-heartedly about these imaginary cities, which are so many endless journeys in the empire of language.

These cities are not on any atlas, nor do we know whether they belong to the past, the present or the future. We hear an imaginary atlas unfolding, strewn with cities that only exist in dreams. Through the smoke of their pipes, we discern distant cities, for "the form of things can be discerned better at a distance". From this marvellous novel, Jean Bellorini and Nicolas Musin are not using the exotic figures of the great traveller Marco Polo, or the wise old figure of Kublai Khan. Instead, they focus on numerous images of spectacular cities, fleeting and impressive suggestions of a multitude of other worlds.

From this meeting of languages, from these ways of speaking about and dreaming about cities, the project *Archipelago* will be born. An artistic creation scattered across different forms and disciplines, just like a scattering of small islands: portraits of cities, utopias, obstacle courses, ramps, and dance moves... The city will emerge as a story told by 16 young actors, riders, freerunners and dancers: a story told with words, gestures, tricks, and projected images. And conceivably, beyond this set of texts, movements, and images, a new poetics of the city will emerge.

Excerpts from *Invisible Cities*

"With cities, it is as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear. Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else."

Zaira

"A description of Zaira as it is today should contain all Zaira's past. The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls."

Tamara

"Your gaze scans the streets as if they were written pages: the city says everything you must think, makes you repeat her discourse, and while you believe you are visiting Tamara you are only recording the names with which she defines herself and all her parts. However the city may really be, beneath this thick coating of signs, whatever it may contain or conceal, you leave Tamara without having discovered it."

Raissa

"Also in Raissa, city of sadness, there runs an invisible thread that binds one living being to another for a moment, then unravels, then is stretched again between moving points as it draws new and rapid patterns so that at every second the unhappy city contains a happy city unaware of its own existence."

Zenobia

"This said, it is pointless trying to decide whether Zenobia is to be classified among happy cities or among the unhappy. It makes no sense to divide cities into these two species, but rather into another two: those that through the years and the changes continue to give their form to desires, and those in which desires either erase the city or are erased by it."

***Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino**

Translated by William Weaver

English translation copyright © 1974 by Harcourt, Inc. [1972]

Interview with Nicolas Musin

What was the origin of this production?

I discovered street sports and Skateparks – with which I was completely unfamiliar – and became fascinated. I felt this intense desire to weave a dialogue between the public space they inhabit and theatrical space, which I know well. I became captivated by the culture of skateboarding – its teenage conviviality, its location and its timing, its way of rejecting the spatial boundaries of traditional sports. To take a deeper dive into this sociable solo activity, I reached out to a true Californian skateboarding legend, and one of today's most influential skaters, Chris Haslam. This unexpected meeting between the institutional and the underground led to a great friendship developing between Chris and me.

What did he teach you about the world of skateboarding?

That skateboarding is at the heart of a dialectic between pleasure and suffering. It is one of those games “which are based on the pursuit of an adrenalin rush and which consist of an attempt to destroy for a moment the stability of perception and to inflict on the lucid consciousness a kind of voluptuous panic...”. These words by Roger Caillois wonderfully define the world of skateboarding, which is a combination of game and sport, free improvisation, the pursuit of immediate pleasure and carefree fulfilment. And in fact, when skateboarding was taken up by the Olympic Games, not everyone was happy about it. Most skateboarders – especially the younger generation – are against this appropriation by the world of professional sport, the media, and major brands. For them, skateboarding should not stray from its libertarian and unruly roots

As a choreographer, how did you fit in with skateboarding culture?

For days on end, Chris and I dragged our wheels around Geneva to meet skateboarders – all looking like characters from a Gus Van Sant or Larry Clark movie – and looked out for the unexpected. These urban adventures gave me credibility and enabled me to scout for performers for the work I was going to create. And I discovered the skatepark, a hybrid place of life, of meeting and sharing, but also a new kind of stage where spontaneous performances happen every day. And then I had the revelation that, because of codes of identity and technique, skaters, rollerbladers and BMXers never mix...

But beyond this ceaseless movement in the public space, and all these urban objects that become challenges – real and imaginary – I was mesmerised by the artistry with which skateboarders stage their bodies. Their clothes, accessories, rituals, linguistic idiosyncrasies, all contribute to a form of theatricalization of the street

These urban customs allow for a lot of freedom, but they also follow precise codes. When we talk about “tricks”, we are not far from choreography. How do you see your work with young people? Do you talk about “dance”?

Skating is an invitation to explore the countless possibilities of the body in movement: mobility, both improvised and organised; codified movements, quasi-choreographic lines; and the thirst for speed, verticality, and the escape from gravity. Dance is close to this.

My work with urban sportsmen and women has been that of transforming spontaneous acts into artistic gestures. To enable them to become their own choreographers, creating and developing combinations, open to improvisation, within fixed structures and a poetic space – the digital image.

Another urban discipline has inspired me a lot: freerunning. Like skateboarding, it gives the city an extreme openness, a poetry, and even danger. My meeting with Caryl, a young freerunner who is performing in the show *Archipelago*, was miraculous. A body full of vitality, an aesthetic sense, a unique ability to read urban geometry and transpose it into vertical mobility.

Let's talk about Italo Calvino... What new angles are opened up by introducing words and language into this choreographic, visual project?

For these young people who have mastered the skatepark “with their eyes closed”, we must add a new challenge, a new danger. In Geneva, the use of video mapping was a third dimension. Here, the introduction of text will be like a fourth dimension. Leading Calvino's poetic language to move in a choreography of words, and to become a verbal dance, is a remarkable challenge.

And this show is a call to the imagination, the very background of *Invisible Cities*.

Every urban rider carries an invisible city within them. As they are always pursuing an elsewhere, I believe they will know how to take hold of the sublime material of *Invisible Cities* and create unique images that belong to them.

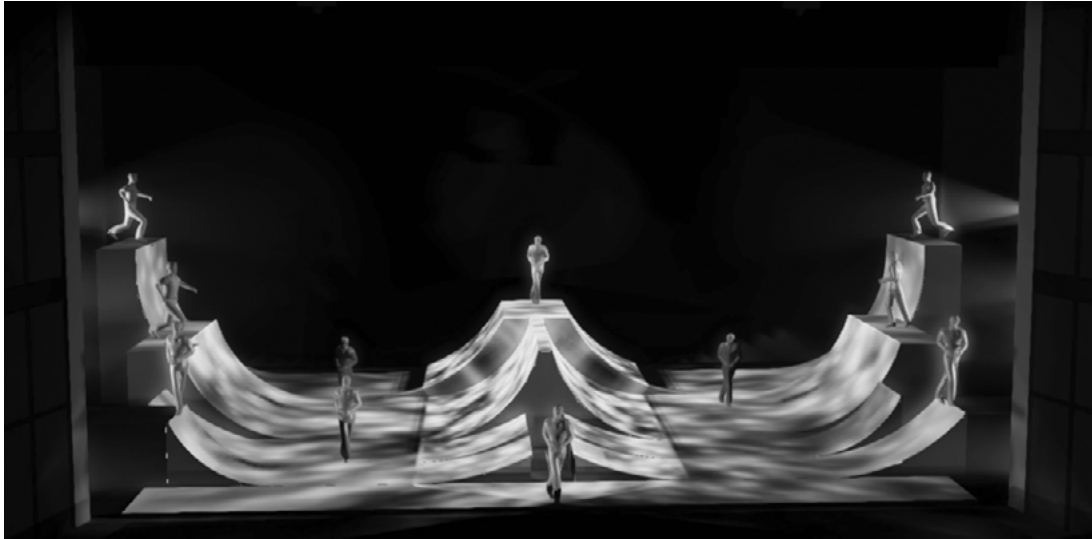
As with Jean Bellorini, education and youth are at the core of your artistic approach.

I hope that this show is not the fruit only of my imagination but that of a group of young people, reflecting their dreams and inner resources. The amateurs and professionals who come together in Urbanity form, in their own way, a transitory ensemble.

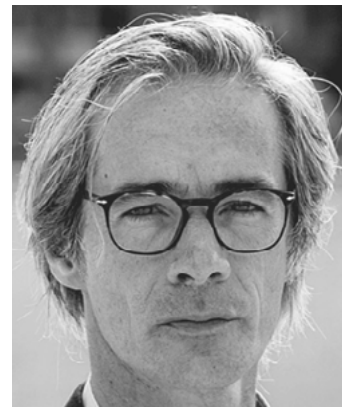
Interview by Sidonie Fauquenois, documentalist at the TNP, October 2020.

The Scenography

Actors, riders and freerunners move around on that unusual and fragmented environment: a skateboard ramp.



Nicolas Musin



Although the product of a perfectly classical choreographic education, Nicolas Musin never ceases looking for new means of expression, because, for him, the choreographic field goes beyond that of dance. The interaction between image, scenography, costumes, lighting, and the body is an essential element in the construction of his choreographic works.

Born in Belgium, he spent his childhood in Africa, Japan, and India. After training at the Paris Opera Ballet School (1980 to 1986) and studying Art History at the École du Louvre (1986 to 1989), he turned to a career as a dancer and joined, in succession, the Paris Opera Ballet, the Ballets de Monte-Carlo and the Hamburg Ballett. As a soloist, he danced in works by Vaslav Nijinsky, George Balanchine, Martha Graham, Jérôme Robbins, Maurice Béjart, Pina Bausch, John Neumeier, Jiri Kilian, William Forsythe, Ohad Naharin and Mats Ek.

Parallel to his career as a dancer, he has created choreographic works for the Ballets de Monte-Carlo, the Bavarian State Ballet, the Stuttgart Ballett, Introdans, the Ballet Gulbenkian.

In 2002, Nicolas Musin created his own company in Vienna, Austria. This enabled him to welcome choreographers such as Angelin Preljocaj, Wayne McGregor, William Forsythe, Karole Armitage; and to develop multidisciplinary projects with, among others, the Venice Biennale, the Aoyama Round Theatre, the Bregenz Festspiele, the Volkstheater, the Suzanne Dellal Center for Dance and Theater in Tel Aviv, the Vienna Art Orchestra, the Tonkünstler Orchester, the Venice Baroque Orchestra, or else with the fashion designer Helmut Lang and the novelist Elfriede Jelinek.

In 2010, he moved to Geneva, where he has collaborated with the Flux Laboratory, the Grand Théâtre de Genève, the Athens Festival, the Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers, the Andy Warhol Foundation, the City of Geneva, and Central Saint Martins in London. At the same time, he teaches at the HEAD, Geneva School of Art and Design (Department of Fashion) and is a member of the committees of the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève and the MAMCO.

In 2016, Nicolas Musin founded the Urbanity Association to develop projects in the public space with young urban performers, to transform spontaneous movement into artistic gestures, and to open the way for a dialogue between public space and theatrical space. The first major project, produced in 2017 in the Plainpalais skate park, was a great public and critical success. Since then, Musin has regularly collaborated with the cities of Geneva, Lausanne, Zurich, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte and Athens.

The Creative Team

Jean Bellorini

artistic collaboration

Stage director Jean Bellorini is committed to great dramatic and literary texts. In his productions, he tightly knits together theatre and music and breathes into them a generous company spirit.

He champions a theatre that is both popular and poetic. Selected stage works include: *Tempête sous un crâne* adapted from *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo; *Paroles gelées* inspired by Rabelais; *The Good Person of Szechwan* by Bertolt Brecht; *Liliom* by Ferenc Molnár; and *Karamazov* adapted from the novel by Fyodor Dostoevsky and premiered at the 2016 Avignon Festival. In 2014, Jean Bellorini won two Molière awards, for *Paroles gelées* and *The Good Person of Szechwan*, in the categories: Best Director and Best Public Sector Show.

Appointed in 2014 as director of the Théâtre Gérard Philipe, the national dramatic centre (CDN) in Saint-Denis, he founded the Troupe éphémère (the Ephemeral Ensemble), made up of teenagers from Saint-Denis, with whom he puts on a show every year. He has developed his work in opera and also abroad, collaborating in particular with the Berliner Ensemble, the Opéra de Lille and the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg. Recently, he created the works *Un Instant* adapted from Marcel Proust, and *Onegin* adapted from *Eugene Onegin* by Alexander Pushkin. In 2020, Jean Bellorini was appointed Director of the TNP in Villeurbanne. In October 2020, he opened the “Semaine d’art en Avignon” with Valère Novarina’s *Le Jeu des Ombres*.



Sébastien Trouvé

original music

Sébastien Trouvé is a sound designer, sound engineer and musician. After his studies, he created his own audio-visual production and artistic development company, Sumo LP. At the same time, he collaborated with several directors, including Jean Bellorini. In 2013, he established a new recording studio in the 20th arrondissement of Paris, Studio 237, and worked as a sound designer and engineer at the Gaîté Lyrique in Paris. Sébastien Trouvé conceived the soundscape for the exhibition *Habiter le campement* based on the text *Walk About the Villages* by Peter Handke, displayed at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe. In 2016–2017, he directed a sound and visual creation project based on software he designed himself with a class of school students in Saint Denis, leading to an interactive sound and visual exhibition in 2017 at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe.

In 2017–2018, Sébastien Trouvé designed the sound for the show *Flight!* directed by Macha Makeïeff. He composed for: *The Sonnets*, a project with young amateur performers from Saint Denis directed by Thierry Thieû Niang and Jean Bellorini in 2018; for *Un Instant* adapted from Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, created in 2018 at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe; and *Onegin* adapted from *Eugene Onegin* by Alexander Pushkin, in 2019; both directed by Jean Bellorini. In 2019, he designed the sound and composed the music for *Retours* and *Le Père de l’enfant de la mère* by Frederik Brattberg, directed by Frédéric Béliet-Garcia. The same year, he collaborated again with Macha Makeïeff by designing the soundscape for the show *Lewis versus Alice*, adapted from Lewis Carroll, which premiered at the Avignon Festival. In 2020, he worked again with Jean Bellorini on the new work *Le Jeu des Ombres* by Valère Novarina, as musical director – a show initially planned for the Cour d’Honneur as part of the 2020 edition of the Festival d’Avignon, and which was then programmed during the “Semaine d’art”.



Caryl Coordt-Moller

freerunner, assistant

Caryl is one of the most talented parkour athletes in the world. When he is not competing, he regularly works with Nicolas Musin.



L'Association Urbanity

The vision of this Geneva-based arts organisation is to develop innovative projects related to street arts, and to build a broad audience of both initiates and newcomers to these genres. The Association Urbanity encourages dialogue between innovative forms of expression in one place, in a single scenic space, and is in this way emblematic of the practices of current generations. It seeks to offer a frame of reference that highlights new modes of collaboration, expression, relationships with the public and of participation; to encourage the emergence of new movements; to identify differences in culture and expression as sources of conversation and mutual recognition.

The city has increasingly become a space for contemporary, pluralist, popular and constantly evolving creativity. The street arts that have been developing over recent decades are characterised by a wide diversity of forms and approaches. They borrow and renew, from urban sports as much as from dance, music, visual and digital arts, video, light sculpture, opera, and theatre.

These new forms of expression animate the street, question public images, transform relationships between residents, provoke reactions and leave room for experiments, as much for younger generations as for older ones. By taking over the public space, the arts that take place there contribute to reinventing the relationship with the population, they invite themselves out of dedicated arts venues and create a space for artistic experiences.

Skateparks are embedded in the urban world. Architectural and enduring, they answer a need and result from the pooling of multiple skills and public and private partnerships. Some cities in Switzerland, including Geneva and Zurich, have such facilities, and are the result of a combined sporting, artistic, aesthetic and architectural approach. A skatepark is also a hybrid living space, for meeting, sharing and civic utility. For Nicolas Musin, artistic director of the Association Urbanity, a skatepark is “a spontaneous scenic space; a true territory for sensory and emotional expression, for personal construction, creation, representation and the pleasure of movement”.

Le Théâtre National Populaire (TNP)

The Théâtre National Populaire was founded on 11 November 1920 by Firmin Gémier, and its first home was the Palais du Trocadéro in Paris. In its early days, it was focused mainly on presenting shows in association with national and musical theatres for a mainstream audience. After Firmin Gémier's death, and the war and the occupation of Paris, the institution then experienced a long period in the shadows.

In 1951, Jeanne Laurent appointed Jean Vilar as head of the TNP. Jean Vilar considered his theatre to be a public service, just like gas and electricity. He developed strong relationships with audiences, and from season to season, in the huge auditorium, he presented numerous productions of European classics, (Corneille, Kleist, Brecht...), which he staged in a pared-down aesthetic.

Jean Vilar implemented an innovative cultural policy and turned the TNP into a genuine theatrical enterprise that took the risk of bringing a mainstream audience to Chaillot, at least 2,500 people each evening, at low prices. To attract the audience, he deemed it necessary first of all to go and meet them, and so developed a network of community groups, employee representative committees, student groups and clubs. They founded a group called the Friends of the Popular Theatre. They relaunched Firmin Gémier's magazine *Bref*. From November 1951 to July 1963, the TNP travelled throughout France and twenty-nine other countries. Jean Vilar successfully associated a sense of celebration, ceremony, and public service with the theatre.

In 1963, Jean Vilar retired, and was succeeded by Director Georges Wilson, who had a second auditorium built, better adapted to producing new plays of contemporary authors.

In 1972, the TNP logo was given to the Théâtre de la Cité in Villeurbanne. Roger Planchon was appointed Director of the theatre and decided to share it with Patrice Chéreau and Robert Gilbert. The dazzling success of shows produced and presented there made it one of the liveliest venues in the decentralised French arts landscape. In 1986, Georges Lavaudant succeeded Patrice Chéreau, and he codirected with Roger Planchon until 1996.

In 2002, Christian Schiaretti succeeded Roger Planchon as Director. Through his work, he preserved the fundamentals of the TNP: promoting the continued exploration of the classics, developing new writing, the work of the ensemble, the work on language, educational and community outreach. On 11 November 2011, after three years of substantial construction works, Christian Schiaretti inaugurated the new Grand Theatre.

In January 2020, Jean Bellorini became Director of the Théâtre National Populaire. He champions a theatre where new works are created, a theatre devoted to education and youth, a poetic theatre, deeply rooted in its local community – a house open to all.