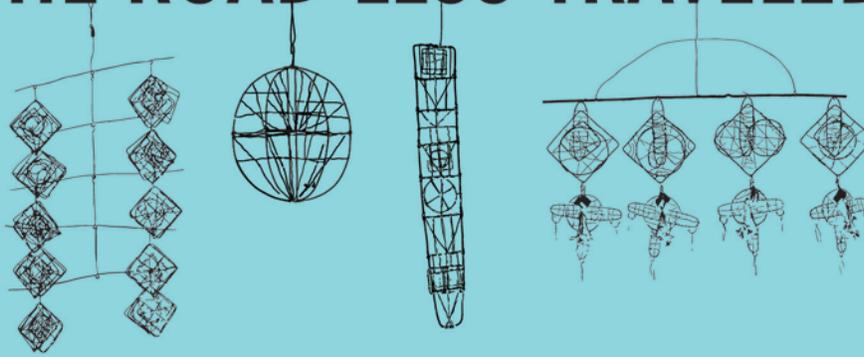


# THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED



Sheboygan, WI September 27-29, 2017

## THE ROUNDABOUT (I)

Alternatives & Choices in Current Research Methods

**Dr. Iain Jackson**

*Exploring and Surveying Nek Chand's Rock Garden of Chandigarh*

Nek Chand's Rock Garden of Chandigarh in northern India is an extraordinary creation that continues to ask questions and provoke our attention. Despite its worldwide fame, we knew very little about the Rock Garden—even its overall area, and the number of sculptures produced within this atelier remained a quixotic mystery. Using empirically driven methods, I've set out to record and catalogue this work based around these three themes:

**History and Myths:** How and when was the Rock Garden made? What were the processes involved and what influenced Nek Chand's decisions? Most previous research has focused on these stories and woven in external events such as the Partition of India in 1948 and the creation of Chandigarh in 1951.

**People:** Nek Chand is in many ways the 'sole author' and he is certainly the creative driving force—but what about the other people involved in this epic construction? Who worked with Chand and helped in the construction of this vast landscaped garden?

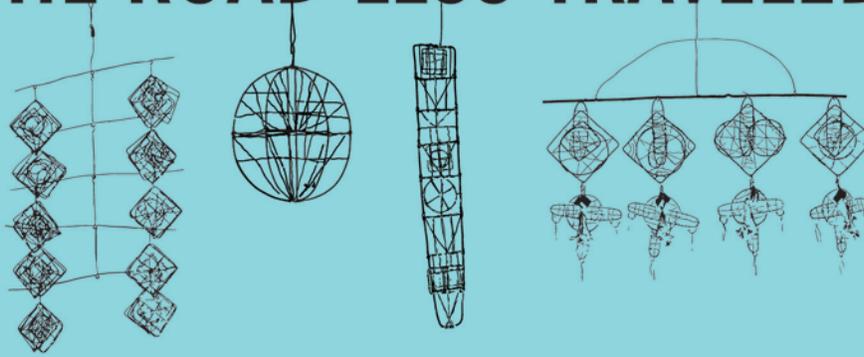
**Objects, sensations, and experiences:** The sculptures are, of course, incredibly important; they are in many ways the content of the Rock Garden and a major component of Nek Chand's creative output. In addition to this, we must also think about the Rock Garden in spatial terms. The Garden was built and is experienced sequentially as a series of episodes or 'garden rooms'—how are we to interpret and understand these spaces, and how best to record and document them?

**Annalise Taylor**

*Something in the Water: The Sea, the Slabs, and Leonard Knight's Salvation Mountain*

Leonard Knight (1931–2014) worked tirelessly over the course of twenty-eight years building, painting and maintaining a lush, elaborate scene replete with trees, flowers, and undulating rivers to frame the message central to his practice: "Say Jesus I'm a sinner please come upon my body and into my heart." Though Salvation Mountain (near Niland, California) was the result of constant, dedicated labor and intensely directed focus, the context surrounding the

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artist and the place is fraught with failure. What made Salvation Mountain a compelling and significant vernacular art environment was not the ambition of one man working in isolation, but rather the tangle of a complex accumulation of personal and social histories—most involving intermingling coincidence and catastrophe. This ethnographic study explores the specificities of the environmental failings of the Salton Sea and the social enterprise of the community at Slab City as backdrops and context for Knight's work in order to reconsider the role of failure as not existing in opposition to success, but rather as an essential ingredient for the freedom of unselfconscious experience and unfettered experimentation.

**Jennifer Joy Jameson**

*Recalling Rhinestone: The Making of 'The Making of a Dream'*

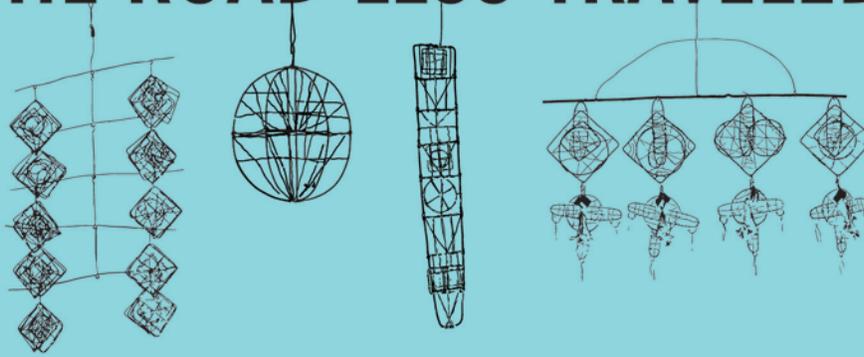
Over twenty years have come and gone since the passing of Loy Bowlin and the subsequent removal of his bedazzled magnum opus, the *Beautiful Holy Jewel Home*, from its location just beyond city limits of McComb, Mississippi. It's in this small railroad town that he first embodied the persona and aesthetic of the "Original Rhinestone Cowboy."

Since that time, Bowlin's creative legacy has largely been explored beyond Mississippi's borders, with the *Home* ultimately arriving nearly 1,000 miles away from McComb at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Wisconsin.

Bowlin's body of work extends from material manifestations like the *Home*, his highly-adorned Western wear, and even rhinestone-studded dentures, to his performance as "The World's Most Famous Entertainer," McComb's buck-dancing, joke-telling, harmonica-toting Rhinestone Man—a fixture in the public square. In the absence of the artist, we are left with a narrative that probes both the autobiographical and the aspirational.

Beginning in late 2015 and in anticipation of the reinstallation of the *Beautiful Holy Jewel Home* for the 2017 THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED exhibition series, THE MAKING OF A DREAM, Bowlin's life and work is explored through a collaborative ethnohistory, aiming to put the sum of his work, story, and memory in the hands of local people. Through new documentary fieldwork, based around oral histories and a community-sourced archive, Bowlin's family and friends in Mississippi, as well as those who knew him only by name, reveal what has lasted, how the artist's story has shifted with time, and what outsiders may have missed upon first glance. This research examines the ways in which Bowlin has—and has not—been locally

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memorialized, alluding to one man's personal history, as well as the collective memory of a time, place, and community.

**Laura Bickford**

*"Well, Time Goes By": Obsolescence in Vollis Simpson's Whirligigs*

Vollis Simpson's environment of twenty-nine monumental whirligigs, built on his former farm in Lucama, North Carolina, over the course of fifteen years, provides a tangible snapshot of the object landscape that populated this region of the country during his lifetime. Comprised of salvaged materials collected by Simpson over decades, the transformer-like kinetic sculptures constantly oscillate between being monuments to the past, markers of the present, and suggestions of what is to come. Obviously formed with some aesthetic intentions in mind but more closely aligned with machines, a fixed description of them seems almost impossible and one that would necessarily come at the expense of a more nuanced analysis of the whirligigs. Frozen in motion, the pieces of the whirligigs and the whirligigs themselves are confounding in their state of permanent transition. By providing a material read of the whirligigs, this paper seeks to follow their modularity and kineticism and suggest that the problem lies in our very understanding of categories of division that come up when querying this subject, such as trash, waste, insider, outsider, useful, obsolete, artist, laborer, object, and subject.