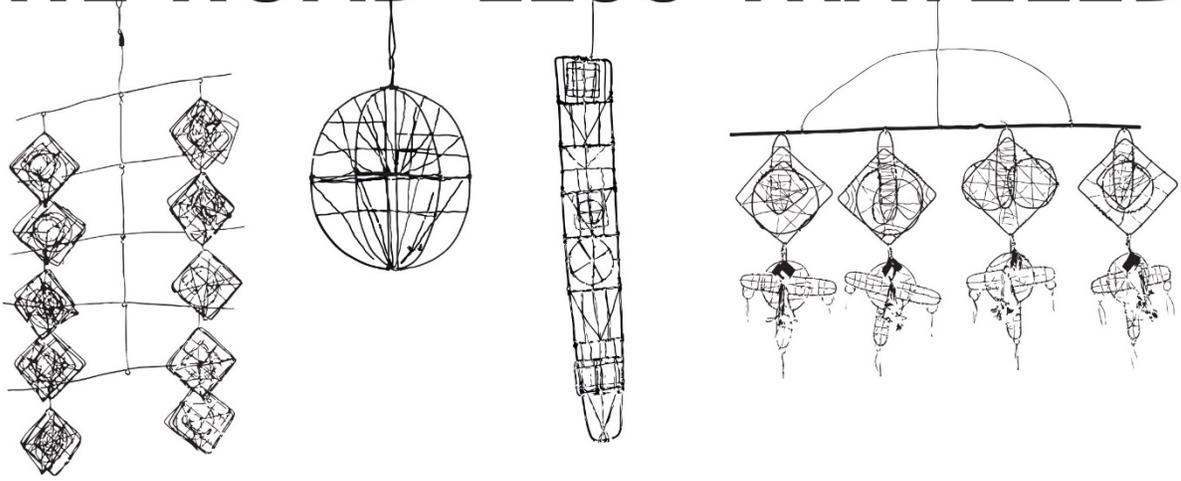


THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED



Sheboygan, WI September 27–29, 2017

The Roundabout Research Session

Karen: Today we're going to be talking about alternative choices in current research methods to do with art environments. And I've had the pleasure to work with all the panelists, on this panel, in various capacities.

I first met Dr. Jackson in Liverpool, actually, and he was our responder for the Nek Chand Exhibition that ran from January to June this year.

Analise, I met through Lisa Stone, and she was a brilliant research assistant for my essay on the Eugene Von Bruenchenhein Catalog.

And Jennifer Joy Jameson worked very closely with on the Loy Bowlin Installation here at the Art Center.

And Laura Bickford and I went to grad school together.

So, I'm so pleased to share the table with these brilliant people. And we're just going to get right to it.

Iain: Okay. Thanks Karen. Thanks for coming down to the session everybody. It's great to be back here in Sheboygan again.

So, I'm here to talk about Nek Chand's Rock Garden in Punjab, in Chandigarh, northern India. Ideally, we'd all go, now, to the Rock Garden and we'd go on a big tour. Like we were talking about earlier, in the first session; it would be great to go there. But we can't

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do that because the session's too busy, so I brought along a few photographs to show you. I thought we could have a virtual first.

Try to imagine the wonderful light, the intense heat, fragrant smells, the bird's song. There are three distinct phases in the rock garden.

The first one, phase one, is concerned with natural rock collections, small huts. Some of them are anthropomorphic, rock shapes, some are animal forms, some are lingans, kind of a Hindu religious symbol; and they're generally arranged around a series of small ponds and walkways. Gradually, they became more organized and contained, outside garden rooms. Podiums that wrap around trees.

Phase two is all about sculptures; initially humanoid, anthropomorphic, small scale. They began to be produced in multiples and displayed in multitudes across the Rock Garden. Eventually becoming what we now think of as the Rock Garden's sculptures today; what we imagine when we think about Nek Chand, these wonderful, beautiful, human sculptures. Some have become animal forms.

You're very much on display when you're walking through the garden; you're the one who's being exhibited, surrounded by these creatures that gaze upon you. You feel slightly too big, you feel ... it's not quite human scale; you feel almost like a giant.

And then, phase three, it changes. It's about topography and architecture. It goes beyond a human scale. You're squeezed down these tight ravines, the endpoint's never revealed. You have to walk down. You don't what's going to come next. The rocks are now not artifacts, they form part of the infrastructure, if you like. And then it opens up into grand axis and vistas, large waterworks, outside amphitheaters, waterfalls, temples, [chateries 00:03:16], vast civil engineering works. Very picturesque, beautiful. A lot of it's cast into found objects, so those little pyramid forms on the left-hand side, they're cast into a row of traffic cones, for example.

Some of it's meandering and doesn't seem to make sense, almost barren and sterile, always tactile, always flowing always organic. Often picturesque and beautiful, seductive. Harsh qualities of concrete are softened by being cast into cloth sacks.

Sometimes it becomes ugly, bloated, peculiar. What is it I'm looking at? What is this building? Why does it have no function? Why did Nek Chand make it on this vast scale? Epic, waterfall structures. You can see the humans at the bottom there, tiny people walking past. It's on a huge scale that we can't really comprehend. How is this built? Why does it look like this?

And then, finally, phase three opens up into a large vestibule or party space, with large amphitheaters, terrace seating, a stage, and the perimeter is formed by a series of pavilions. And you eventually wind your way to this giant arcade, cast in concrete, with large family-sized swings topped with horses. And Nek Chand intended you to walk along this arcade and it would take you out of the garden. It's not been completed in that way, so you now retrace your steps.

So that's what I had to work with. Where to start? When I first started looking at the Rock Garden, we didn't really know how big it was, in terms of its area. We certainly didn't know how many sculptures Nek Chand had produced. I took a strong empirical approach. I wanted to catalog, record, and survey. I couldn't look at one sculpture or one set of sculptures without looking at the overall body of work. I was interested in the physical objects, the artifacts, the spaces in the buildings; but that wasn't the full picture.

The Rock Garden's also about storytelling. It's a narrative, both in terms of what it depicts, and equally, it's got its own sense of myth, its own story. And linked to this, of course, are people, biography, Nek Chand himself. So, these three strands formed my methodological approach. And it all sounds like it was worked out and deliberate. It wasn't.

So, I started off by looking at cataloging. I began with the rocks, the first things that were produced. Photographed every single sculpture on permanent display; each one had a kind of passport photograph. I recorded some basic biographical information, like the height, width, depth, materials used, any other anecdote connected with the sculptures and where they were located within the Rock Garden. So, each sculpture's got a reference and you can find out exactly where that sculpture is by using the catalog that I produced. And there's a copy in this collection here.

Then I began to survey the Rock Garden. I used a sketch plan that had been produced by Tony [Rager 00:06:12], and I found another plan of the Rock Garden in the Chandigarh City Museum. So that formed my base plan.

For me, the architectural side is more fun. So I began using chains, ropes, plumb bobs, tape measures, and began a very hands-on way of surveying the Rock Garden, one section at a time. But I found that the conventional architectural plan failed; it didn't convey any of the spatial qualities of the site. So I began to work in axonometric projection, which is still a scale drawing, but produced in three dimensions, like the one you've seen here.

Here, I can show movement, space, flow, materiality. Most normal architecture is concerned with form and enclosure; the Rock Garden is more of a process. It's more of a performance or series of cinematic spaces. And I found I could show that through a series of drawings.

So, it's almost an architecture in reverse. Nek Chand built the Rock Garden without any drawings or preconceived plans. I was trying to [depict 00:07:12], I was trying to produce an archeology of the Rock Garden through these series of drawings. And they're all drawn by hand and, hopefully, convey what the Rock Garden's about. And we use them as a tool to understand the place. So, through these drawings, we could begin to figure out which parts of the Rock Garden were produced first, how the original journey through the Rock Garden was conceived, unlike Howard Finster's work, which was more of a ... You can explore Howard Finster's garden. The Rock Garden in Chandigarh has a preconceived and predefined route, a [circuited 00:07:43] that Nek Chand takes you along, especially in the early phases.

And through the drawings, we're able to figure out how Nek Chand would apply a different façade treatment to the same structure. So the building on the far left has very smooth stone applied to it. And then when you walk round into the next part of the Rock Garden, you see the center image. It's actually the same building, but viewed from two different vantage points; it looks like two separate structures. So, Nek Chand's able to create a sense that the Rock Garden's much bigger and more varied than it is. He was a master at making you feel lost within a vast kingdom. It was actually quite tight and compact. Brilliant piece of stage scenery; brilliant bit of storytelling. And we're able to figure out how Nek Chand built these works through measuring them and drawing them.

I say "we" because I was helped by a lot of students. So, if you walk a small passageway where those people have stood, that leads you up to that secret door. And if you go through that secret door, you're led to a series of rooms. And it was in these rooms where we set up a drawing studio and my students came out to help me. And also John Maisels and the wonderful Raw Vision crew enabled me to go out there on three occasions to live in this space and spend a lot of time producing the survey drawings. It was quite wild.

So, history and myths. The Rock Garden's got a wonderful history, a kind of creation story, to it. And like all good stories, it begins with "Once upon a time."

And there was a peaceful farmer named Nek Chand. After his people had overcome centuries of political and cultural oppression, they celebrated freedom. But then, tragically, the people turned on each other and the country was torn apart. Nek Chand was forced to flee the village where him and his family had lived and farmed for generations. The pain and trauma of moving, coupled with the equally dramatic wonder of Chandigarh, prompted Nek Chand to start work on this project. He gathered the remains of destroyed villages and created the wonder that we see today.

So, that's kind of the creation myth that I was dealing with, and I love that story, and I wanted to explore it in more detail. So Nek Chand gave me permission to investigate his Rock Garden, spend time with him. I wanted to know more and know it was possible, how much had Nek Chand produced by himself before it was discovered? I started to produce some basic calculations. If Nek Chand was working on the Rock Garden for 15 years alone for a set amount of time, would it be possible for him to have produced phase one by himself? And yes, it is.

So I just started to unpack the story and validate it and make sense of it, out of my own curiosity. I started to look at what was there before the Rock Garden. So I found some adjacent land, just beyond where the Rock Garden is today, and it looks like this. Kind of a swamp land. That opened up a good conversation with Nek Chand to talk about how he built the phase three and how he worked with the natural topography, he worked with the water that was already there. If he found a pool of water, he would excavate it out further. He would turn that into a pond. He would always work with what was already there.

If there was a mound, he would build upon it; he would add a castle on top of that wall to accentuate the overall height. So, he was always working with the existing topography.

And from these discussions, from these kind of walks and talks, we were able to look at how the Rock Garden was created, how it was pieced together, which bits came from different parts and how it was extended. And you can see the quick sketches on the left-hand side there. The top one was what Nek Chand would have come across. He would have then worked with the small bit at the bottom to excavate a pond. He would have enveloped the tree. He would have built a wall upon it and he would gradually create these enclosures.

On the top-right there is Nek Chand's son, Anuj. And he took me up to the riverbeds where Nek Chand gathered the rocks. So, during the monsoon, fresh rocks are brought down from the Himalayas every year. And during the wintertime, it becomes a dry riverbed. So, we were able to go up to this landscape and see the kind of rocks Nek Chand would find, and Anuj would pick the rocks up and say, "Oh look. This one looks like a [inaudible 00:12:10]. Look at this one, it's kind of a snake's face." So, we were able to look at that. And it was kind of how Nek Chand began his first work.

And there were many other stories that we haven't really begun to look at. I'm quite interested in the creation of the city of Chandigarh, and the European architects that worked there. Nek Chand was part of the construction team. So, there's a Swiss-French architect called, Pierre [Jonerea 00:12:37] who was Le Corbusier's cousin. He was interested in found rocks, he was interested in found objects. And you can see some of these rocks outside the City Museum today, still. And Nek Chand became friends with him. They spent time with each other, and they would sail together on the lake in Chandigarh.

The City, Chief Architect, Aman Charma [00:12:55], who's in the bottom right there, next to the chap with the garland around his neck, he's still alive, and he knew Nek Chand from the '60s and '70s. So, I've been trying to find out more of their stories. This is not to undermine the creation story that we all know and love, but to add to it. To further add to the wonder and beauty of the garden.

And, of course, Nek Chand himself, who've I got the utmost respect for. Composer, creator, artist, performer, architect, project manager, foreman. And formal interviewing didn't really work. I had to spend a lot of time with him, walking through the garden, and the more I understood about his work, and the more I spoke to him about it, the more he began to open up. So, I think when you're working with outsider artists or people who work in this domain, you have to be in it for the long haul. You can't just go in and get an interview and run off again. You have to be prepared to put the time in.

And I was also interested in the people that work with Nek Chand, his workforce. This atelier, his studio that he's built up. Wonderful people, like, [Lakramna 00:13:56], Nek Chand's right-hand man, guardian of his office space, superb chai maker, an artist in his own right.

And here's the construction gang, the crew. Wonderful artisans who I began to know and observe and document their working practices. Highly organized workforce, producing time sheets, bills of quantities, wonderful artists in their own right.

And I also just want to finish on the studio spaces that still exist today. For me, this is the heart of the Rock Garden. There's very much public and private spaces, and these private spaces still exist; these ateliers, these workshops. And I think it's about remaking, renewing, and reinvention. And I think that's as far as I can go.

Thank you.

Laura: So, I just want to start by saying thank you to Karen and Peter and Valerie and Amy and Sam and everybody else who worked on this conference. I'm so honored to be here at such an incredible learning opportunity, and I'm also really looking forward to the rave that Lisa mentioned earlier. She'll be hosting, so ...

This project, "Something in the Water: The Seed, the Slabs, and Winter Knight's Salvation Mountain," began with my personal belief in the mountain as miraculous. As the product of one man's faith and drive and obsession with the singular, but powerful, notion of universal love.

Upon actually experiencing the site, and not just the site of Salvation Mountain, but the place as a whole, the landscape, the nearby towns and the people, what I found was much more substantial than the exploration of one man's work in isolation.

As an outsider in awe of this work, it was easy for me to make attributions to intangibles. To believe there was something in Leonard's water. But visiting the site outside of Niland, California, brought me closer to the substance of Salvation Mountain and the complex histories and personalities that are integral to an understanding of how the mountain came to be and continues to be. I believe a deep engagement with Salvation Mountain reveals how our actions, our successes, and our failures, are deeply rooted to a historical trajectory, resulting from our personal histories and the histories built by our predecessors, and requires a thoughtful, ethnographic investigation into the place and the people that surround it.

I still can't explain how a man who said his hand was moved by God and who started with nothing, ended up creating this extraordinary place, but I can say without a doubt, that it was no coincidence that such a remarkable utilization of resourcefulness, ambition, and community happened in Imperial Country, California.

After an itinerant lifestyle that took him across the United States from coast to coast and back again, Leonard Knight, born in 1931 in Vermont, finally planted himself on a barren patch of dirt (quote), "A real good place for not knowing what I was doing," explained Knight about his haphazard landing on the outskirts of Slab City, California, a village of snowbirds, retirees, and career wanderers.

Armed with a single tool, half a bag of cement, and even less direction, Knight began building what would become a technicolor dreamscape, rising triumphantly out of the desert dust: Salvation Mountain.

Knight initiated his project by dumping cement, sand, and junk yard detritus on his patch of land for several years until it was more than 50 feet high. Once his slapdash mixture dried, he coated the manmade mountain with the thick impasto of whatever paint he could find at the dump was donated to him by passersby.

The highlight of this painting project was Knight's personal motto, "God is Love," prominently displayed at the center of his mountain. However, three years after Knight began building up, everything fell down.

"Well, everybody thought I'd be discouraged and people said, 'God must not want you to put that mountain up.' But my thought was, thank you God for taking mountain down. Nobody got hurt and, boy, I'd been telling everybody it was safe. And I just looked up, and I said, 'God, I'm going to have to do it again, but I'm going to have to do it with more smarts.'"

Over the next 25 years, Knight did rebuild his mountain, this time, by working with the natural landscape and using the vernacular material, adobe mixed with straw. He estimated that he used more than 100,000 gallons of paint to adorn his rising monument with imagery reminiscent of a desert oasis, replete with flowers, trees and undulating rivers and streams flowing down the steps of his mountain.

Throughout this endeavor, Knight lived on the site of his work, in a truck with no electricity or running water. With the exception of his excursions into the nearby town of Niland for coffee and a bite, Knight was present at the site 24 hours a day, from 1984 to 2012, when he was placed in a convalescent hospital in eastern San Diego County. He passed away in February 2014.

In order to understand Leonard and his work, I believe we must first attempt to understand his faith. Knight told his conversion story as happening miraculously after a run-in with his evangelizing sister, Irene, in San Diego when he was 36. He found her efforts irritating, but on private reflection, was struck with the urge to pray (quote), "Jesus, I'm a sinner. Please come into my heart."

Knight's conversion to Christianity redirected his wandering path, and he spent the remainder of his life teaching others about the pursuit of an inclusive Christ-like love. His mission statement can be summed up with this explanation of the motivation behind his work (quote), "I had something you couldn't pay a million dollars to receive, and it didn't cost a thing. So, I really wanted everyone in the world to say, 'Jesus, I'm a sinner. Please come into my heart.'"

Rather than thinking of the mountain as merely a monument to God, Knight's intention was to make a billboard with a powerful call to action. However, his first project to

spread his message wasn't Salvation Mountain, but rather something a little less stationary; a homemade hot air balloon.

The inspiration behind this endeavor first appeared to him when a hot air balloon flew over Burlington, Vermont in 1970, and he noticed everyone on the street redirecting all of their attention to the object floating overhead.

For the next 10 years, Knight traveled back and forth between Vermont and California, performing migrant labor and speaking to churches in an attempt to garner support for his dream of a hot air balloon that would (quote), "Advertise the Lord Jesus."

(Quote): "I prayed for a hot air balloon so many hours you wouldn't believe it. It must have got God sick of it. I talked to churches that love the Lord and said, 'Boy, let's build a balloon.' To me, that was the most beautiful idea in the whole world," said Knight of his ambitions.

During his travels, Knight ended up in Nebraska, living on a property of a couple that joined in on his balloon building venture and allowed him to borrow a sewing machine. Working with scrap material from a nearby hot air balloon manufacturing plant, struggled with the construction of the balloon for more than 10 years before heading down to Slab City, California, to attempt flight without fear of inclement weather.

Every time they tried to inflate the balloon, it would rip, and Knight knew (quote), "Right then that the balloon was just plain rotting out on me." Knight blamed himself for the failure of his balloon saying, (quote), "I remember saying, 'Lord, for 16 years, I've tried to work for Jesus and God and all I've got to show for it is a rotted out balloon.' I felt like a failure because Leonard didn't listen properly. Leonard was too far ahead of God. Leonard wanted to do it his way."

I would argue that this failure and Knight's perception of his personal failures ahead of it, for example, his disinterest in traditional schooling and finding stable employment, dramatically shaped his life and his ambitions, and out of those failures, we arrive at Salvation Mountain. When Knight realized his dream to travel cross country with a 200-foot tall, hot air balloon, with the message "God is Love" was no longer an option. He knelt down in the desert dust to create a monument in honor of his efforts. That small token of remembrance became Salvation Mountain.

Through an engagement with Knight's work, we can explore the significance and multiple interpretations of personal and societal failure and success, and how those seemingly opposite events are equally contributive to the building of our cumulative, ongoing histories.

As Lisa Lefevbre writes in her essay, "Strive to Fail," "If perfection and idealism are satisfying, failure and doubt are engaging, driving us into the unknown. Rather than producing a space of mediocrity, failure becomes intrinsic to creating open systems, and raising searching questions. Without the doubt that failure invites, any situation becomes closed and in danger of becoming dogmatic."

I believe Salvation Mountain begins and ends with more than just Leonard Knight and his beliefs, but rather, as a culmination of actions, including many other failed endeavors that occur through time and space. These myriad trials and errors shaped the community that Leonard joined in the California desert, the same community continuing the never ending care that maintaining the mountain requires.

Through an examination of Slab City, the painted mountain that makes up its front door and the damaged landscape of Imperial Country in the Salton Sea that provides the perfection condition to invite so-called dropouts and runaways, the story of Salvation Mountain reveals what compounded failures can do.

Chronicling the account of how Imperial County arrived in its current state, dusty and dried up with the second highest unemployment rate in the country, is a somewhat tragic and, frankly, weird story with many players.

The tale begins in prehistory with land that was once part of the Gulf of California. In the years since, what we now know as Imperial Valley has faced rapacious land development, environmental engineering failures, the testing of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, and seemingly biblical plagues of death and decay, including, but not limited to, devastating floods, barnacle infestation, and massive cyclical die-offs of fish and bird species.

Known as one of the largest man-made ecological disasters in the United States, the Salton Sea has been, for the most part, altogether ignored or forgotten. Development of the Salton Sea began in the late 1800s when the Colorado River was diverted to the area in order to take advantage of the mineral-rich soil for agricultural efforts.

The first of many disasters occurred when the channels leading from the river were blocked by sediment. An unprotected cut was then made into the river, which unexpectedly led to massive flooding after the arrival of an El Nino in 1905. The Colorado River flooded, which then turned into a sea 35 miles long and 15 miles wide. The birth of the Salton Sea resulted in the decimation of crops and communities alike.

Agricultural effort continued to thrive, despite the prior disastrous conditions and salty irrigation runoff from nearby farmland became the Salton Sea's main source of replenishment, driving the salinities near ocean level, which I believe the sea is actually now saltier than the ocean.

Local residents introduced fish in 1951, and by 1960 there were eight boat landings that launched 5200 boats every day. Developers moved into the space to draw the new monied crowds to the area, and the Salton City, otherwise known as the Salton Riviera, opened in 1958, and nearly 32,000 residential units sold between 1958 and 1964.

The crown jewel of this development was the \$500,000 Salton Bay Yacht Club, designed by renown modernist architect, Albert Fray, accompanied by the Salton City Golf Course. These attractions drew visitors like Frank Sinatra, Dwight Eisenhower, and the Beach Boys.

The Golden Age of the Salton Sea did not last, and the engineering projects of the past caught up. Rainfall and agricultural runoff caused the sea to flood the local communities, the increased salinity of the water created a lack of oxygenation, causing massive fish die-offs. The decay of the fish brought flies, which brought botulism. The birds ate the dead fish, which caused avian botulism, and these plague-like conditions, in addition to the myriad other troubles facing the sea, drove away most of the vacationers by the early 1980s.

In addition to the physical history of Imperial county and the Salton Sea, I believe the position of the American West as final frontier and the pursuit of the American Dream within the cultural imaginary Leonard experienced during his lifetime, to be crucial contextual elements that inform the creation of Salvation Mountain.

The genesis of the Salton Sea and Imperial Valley is exactly the stuff that the American Dream is made of; a humanity's conqueror of a wild and unruly nature to provide financial gain and opportunity of eventual wealth and prosperity. For both the place and the person, we see struggle against the limited, though widely accepted definition of success. It's no wonder then that those existing on the fringes of society or those wishing to leave it behind altogether, would find community with one another on a patch of dust and cement foundations, left when the military operations moved out of Camp Dunlap.

Slab City, otherwise known as the Last Free Place, is a haphazard desert village made up of recreational vehicles, mobile homes, shanties, and tents. The resident vary between full-time, seasonal, and just passing through. They are wanderers, drifters, escapists, and retirees. Some sought out the slabs as a last resort, like builder, Bill Ammon who, due to his inability to find lucrative work in construction, ended up living out of his van in San Diego. He'd received so many vagrancy citations that he was told that he would be sent to jail if he was picked up again. So he headed to the slabs; what he heard was a safe and welcoming place. He needed a little work to stay alive and he was told that if he showed up at the mountain at 6:00 a.m., that Leonard would let him help, and that he would pay him for his construction help.

So, I don't believe it was coincidental that Leonard found the slabs, that Bill found Leonard, and a 28 year spiritual and aesthetic project ensued, but rather, a product of the mishaps and the misfortunes, the odd circumstances that created this weird and wonderful place in Southern California.

This is part of a much larger ethnographic study, so, I'm going to stop here. I could go on all day. But thank you.

Jennifer: Hi. My name is Jen Jameson. Can you all hear me? All right.

I work as a public folklorist in California, though from 2014 to early 2017, I lived in Jackson, Mississippi where I directed a folk arts program at the State Arts Council. Through a few very serendipitous happenings, including stumbling upon the Collier Art Center's 2007 exhibition book, "Sublime Spaces," I had known about Loy Bowlin, who

called himself the original Rhinestone Cowboy and his beautiful Holy Jewel home, for some time, and when I moved to Mississippi, of course I wanted to know what remained.

So, around 2015, I began to do a little off-the-clock local research. Over 20 years have come and gone since Loy Bowlin passed away in '95 in Macomb, Mississippi. As many of you know, most of Bowlin's works, including the House, found a permanent home here in the collections of the John Micheal Collier Art Center.

As I began to build relationship with Bowlin's remaining family and friends in Macomb, the research developed into an oral history and community-sourced archive in response to the second full installation of the Home at the Collier Art Center, which opened here in early 2017, an exhibition that is now on view called "The Making of a Dream," a title pulled from a series of lyrics penned by the artist/entertainer.

Today I'll be walking you through the dazzling creative works of Rhinestone, as local people call him, and the people who gleaned from, and collaborated, in his vision. Welcome to the world of the world's most famous entertainer, the original Rhinestone Cowboy. This is his calling card, and he also would paint his copyright on his suits.

Picture downtown Macomb, Mississippi, mid-1970s. This is where Rhinestone's story begins. Macomb is a small railroad town, between the capital city of Jackson, Mississippi and New Orleans, population about 12,000, which basically remains the same. It straddles the Mississippi/Louisiana state line. I would say it's where you begin to sort of see palm trees in Mississippi; it gets a little swampy.

And you can see Macomb here, again, right sort of above the state line.

Through this research, Bowlin's life and work is explored through what I call a "collaborative ethno-history," aiming to put the sum of his work, story, and memory in the hands of local people. Part of the culmination of this project are a series of audio stories, built from oral histories of local people and woven into a series of found recordings that Rhinestone made or directed. I'll be excerpting bits of this, but of course, you can hear each of those episodes in full at the exhibition.

In this clip, you'll hear the voices of Loy's great-nephew, Neal Randle, who is here today with other members of the Bowlin family; Neal, Jean, Mary and Mike, who I just had the pleasure of meeting, so I wanted to honor y'all. As well as a local artist named, Deb Rock, who also has a cult following of his own as a musician performing under the name "Bobby Lounge." Oh, and note his button, his rhinestone button.

Video: "Oh, but the man could play a mouth harp; he could really play that harp. And he was ... I guess I could likened it to the Pied Piper. He'd play that harmonica just, you know, a versatile [inaudible 00:31:35].

[Harmonica music]

"Well, I first saw the Rhinestone Cowboy standing on the street corner in downtown Macomb. Like I said, the summertime is my big inspiration, where we have this blazing, intense presence of the heat and then this cool, cool, lush, lush jungle foliage. And there he was, just sparkling out in the heat. And I thought that it was just fabulous, you know? Just thought what an addition to this environment.

"And for years, you know, he would be there every day, and especially in the summer, in these double knit, had to be hot suits that were encrusted with rhinestone and his own embroidery and painted on the back, and a big cowboy hat and boots."

Jennifer: So, some might say Macomb has something in the water. It's a small town, but there's a surprisingly dynamic history in music and arts. Natives include Bo Diddley, Brandy and Ray J, Britney Spears, who's born in Macomb, lived across the border in Kentwood, but would go to high school in Macomb and ...

Video: "[inaudible 00:33:17]. Well, grandma had all the best pictures of us right here. Look at this. This is straight in the '70s.

Now, who would have had that shit back there, and damn, what, about 30 years ago.

That shit about 39 years ago. I was about four or five in this picture."

Jennifer: [crosstalk 00:33:32] Steven [inaudible 00:33:32] obviously comes from Long Beach, California. But [inaudible 00:33:37].

And I'd be remiss to not mention Rhinestone's contemporary, Mary T. Smith, who lived and made her own art environment on the same Highway 51, just about 40 minutes north in Hazelhurst, Mississippi.

This brings us back to Rhinestone. Loy Bowlin was born on a cattle ranch in Franklin County, Mississippi, in 1909. He worked as a used car salesman and a [inaudible 00:34:02] mechanic for many years, and was known for his ability to piece together a one-of-a-kind car from disparate pieces, known as the "Bowlin Custom."

Rhinestone married young and raised a small family with his wife in New Orleans during the War. The marriage fell apart, he fell into a deep depression. He moved back to Pike County, Mississippi to be near his family and eventually got a two-bedroom house along Highway 51, near his nephew Arvis.

Bowlin often talked about struggling with feelings of isolation and loneliness and then in 1975 ...

Video: [Glen Campbell's Rhinestone Cowboy]

Karen: It's hard to compete with.

Jennifer: Yeah, anyway.

But there are different versions of how Rhinestone came to be Rhinestone. Some account to divine intervention, some say that the tune was based on Loy and Michael Williamson, who's the former editor at the Macomb Enterprise Journal, he told me a story he heard direct from Bowlin. He said, "Glen Campbell rode up on a greyhound bus to Sunshine Square, a pedestrian mall in downtown Macomb, where Rhinestone often stationed himself to entertain. He then stepped off the bus, pointed at Loy and said, 'You are the original Rhinestone Cowboy.'"

Anyway, and then here we are at the suits. Rhinestone famously had a suit for everyday of the week. Certainly in the nudie suit tradition of Hollywood and Nashville, these suits really served to cement his persona and embolden him to continue to take his act to the street. He became a fixture around town. He was Macomb's buck-dancing, joke-telling, harmonica-toting Rhinestone Man, who would occasionally sell you an autograph picture of himself on a palomino for a buck fifty apiece; and a brave strategy to combat his depression and isolation. I think as Rhinestone, he was able to make new friends, bring people closer to him.

In this clip, you'll hear New Orleans photojournalist, Sandy Maio, who was the former chief staff photographer at the Enterprise Journal, who often found himself documenting Rhinestone.

Video: [Music]

"He was just so photogenic.

"The Time Picayune did a story. Angela Carl, who subsequently, I worked with at the Times Picayune, and she was my neighbor, did this story and it was so interesting. There's a part on it where he says, I believe, "He was just a-layin' on my bedside, so lonesome all by myself. I prayed, 'Lord, give me something to make me happy.' Now, you won't believe this but the Lord said, 'Make you an outfit.'"

"And it came to pass that 'make you an outfit' became a catch-phrase that me and my roommate, who was a reporter at the Enterprise Journal, it was like 'Get a life.' So, we would be bitching and groaning about why are we working at this, you know, piddly-squat newspaper for \$150 a week. And Ross would say, 'Make you an outfit.'

"So, I made me an outfit."

Jennifer: And she did. Standing in his 1.0; he has a 2.0 version as well, version of his rhinestone outfit.

But, this brings us to the tapes. It's a little skewed here, but you get the idea. I very strangely found these tapes uncataloged in the Folk Life Archives at the Mississippi Arts Commission where I worked. To my knowledge, there're really only a few copies around, including ones that are here at the museum. But they're really interesting, sort of combination of what some might say is sort of experimental, homemade recordings of Rhinestone playing the harmonica, telling jokes. There's sort of an extended track of

him laughing, which is really interesting. Wish we had time for that. And then also these professionally recorded, likely song poems, these sort of theme songs, with lyrics very, very likely written by Rhinestone himself, and then sort of sent off to a professional recording studio to be turned into a song in Nashville or Hollywood. So, you're hearing bits of those.

You know, Rhinestone, he saw himself as an entertainer, he really had a fascination with Johnny Carson. So my sense is that these tapes were some sort of like a variety show demo that he was shopping around, maybe; he was known to have a few agents. And actually, here at the Art Center, there's a wonderful paper trail of that, and there's a kindly-worded rejection letter from the Johnny Carson Show, from the Tonight Show. He didn't quite make the cut.

When I first started developing a list of potential interviewees, I wanted to figure out who was responsible for Rhinestone's dentures; it had never been written up, to my knowledge, in any article or clipping. And no one in Macomb seemed to know the story, which actually surprised me a little bit.

Of course, near the end of my field work I worked with some local folks to hold a community oral history day, where we collected shorter interviews from folks kind of just encountered Rhinestone. After one interview, a man named Greg Harvison, thought to reach out to his retired dentist uncle, a man named Jimmy McDonald. And, of course, of course, just a few days later I was down in his kitchen hearing this story.

Video: "Well, I came back to ... out of the army in about 1963, and started a practice here in Macomb on Delaware Avenue. And so happened, two stores down from me, Delaware Avenue was the K&B, Katz and [Bestoff 00:40:19] Drugstore. And there was a guy that was standing up there, and dance around, and play a harmonica. I found out it was Rhinestone Cowboy."

[Music and lyrics]

"I had a call from the Salvation Army. They would bring patients to me and I'd give them a cut, half price for extracting teeth and making teeth, filling teeth, whatever. He called me from the Salvation Army, said, 'Dr. McDonald, there's a Mr. Bowlin here.' I had no idea it was Rhinestone Cowboy.

"So, I said, 'Well, bring him on in.' He had two teeth left and I took those out. And then, he needed to have some teeth, so they said, 'Yeah, we're going to get him some teeth,' so, I made him some teeth. Well, the day before ... the day that I made the impressions, I told him, I said, 'Mr. Bowlin, would you like to have some rhinestones in your teeth?' And he said, 'God bless you, doc. Can you do that?' I said, 'I sure can.' I said, 'You just bring me some Rhinestones and I'll put them in those teeth for you.' He said, 'Well, God bless you. I'd love to have that done.'"

[Music and lyrics]

Jennifer: All right, there's some more [inaudible 00:41:58]. So, after the suits and the teeth came the car, which is familiar territory for Rhinestone. Here, his blue 1967 Cadillac, with script on the dash by his friend Saul Mar.

A visual artist name Paul Mar, who ran a sign painting shop in downtown Macomb, and his adult children, Saul and Christina, would become regular collaborators with Rhinestone. They were responsible for the paintings on his suit, the script on his car, the sign on the home and on the shed. And there's also a really great story about how Paul Mar would invite Rhinestone to come in and sit in his life drawing classes that he would have in town. So, there are a number of locally made portraits of Rhinestone; he was fully clothed doing all this. And a few of which are here.

But there became this really symbiotic dynamic where the Mars, among a handful of other local artist, took creative inspiration from Rhinestone, while in turn, providing aesthetic feedback to him, and support for his developing vision.

And a few more images of the car and, of course, make sure to see the footage of Rhinestone and Wild Wheels, it's on display at the exhibition.

Around 1980, Rhinestone's health started to decline, so he spent most of his time at home. Over time, this developed into cathedral-esque adornment of the interior and exterior of his small home, which he title "The Beautiful Holy Jewel Home." Another way to combat isolation and depression, make your home into a collage-glittering palace and bring people to you.

These are some great snapshots from some of his artist friends. Saul and Christina is pictured in his embrace there. And [Karen Lowe 00:43:42] at the bottom, who, by the way, made this wonderful blue Cadillac kick for Rhinestone's birthday.

Rhinestone did ... you know, he saw himself as an entertainer first, I think, and so he did have some sort of wider achievements during his lifetime. Most notably, he was featured in an NBC news magazine, nationally syndicated magazine called "Real People." This is a snapshot from that filming day.

He also received an artist fellowship from the Southern Arts Federation in 1992. And, of course, after the home was made, he would host folkart collectors and other visitors throughout New Orleans and Texas, and so forth. And he would sell bits of his work along the way, and a little bit of that work was exhibited before his death.

What was also really interesting to discover was that there was actually a really interesting local effort to turn, you know, in his twilight years, while he was still alive, there was a woman named Sandy McGill who was leading an effort to turn his home into the Rhinestone Cowboy Folkart Museum, there in Macomb. Sandy McGill has since passed away, so there's a little bit of missing information on why that didn't pan out, but it makes us all the more thankful to Huston collector, Katie [M.D. 00:44:53] who bought the house and work just before the proverbial wrecking ball hit, not long after

Rhinestone's passing in '95. And then, later the Collier Foundation acquired it, and then the Collier Art Center, where conservation/exhibition began.

Here's the same view of the site here today and, really, the only physical remnant is this shed, with script by his friend Paul.

I did want to also kind of show some images of the family and friends who were really generous with their time and memory, and participating in this project. And really kind of dug through their own personal archive to share it. Another rhinestone button, which I'm wearing here today.

And then, of course, that brings us to the Making of a Dream, the exhibition here at the Collier Art Center. Alex Gardelman, Cricket Harback and the conservation team did an incredible job on the installation. Curator Karen Patterson and collections manager, Peter Rosen, did extraordinary work in finding compelling ways to showcase the voices and contributions of local people.

And here, I'll just page through a few images. And this brings us back to the beginning. Here's me at Rhinestone's grave in late 2015, which took about three different excursions to find, by the way. But I finally made it and here you can see he did decorate his gravestone. A little bit of the glitter has fallen off, but still looking good.

But this project has been such a wonderful opportunity, it's been such a pleasure to sort of add new dimension to the ways that we see his work with the contributions of local people who knew him in context, who knew Rhinestone best. I really continue to be compelled by Loy's creative spirit and in awe of the beauty and joy that he shared with so many folks, at times in the face of some ridicule by his neighbors. Thankfully, it's very clear that any of those setbacks just made his work bigger and brighter.

So, thanks. If you want to get a Rhinestone of your own with contributed photos, we're using that to raise money for arts organizations in Macomb, so just let me know.

Laura: HI. I just want to thank the Collier for introducing me to what you call these sites, around 2007, I'd been interested, but was like, "Oh, this is so unusual." And knowing there was entire field of people that were also interested really solidified the path that I'm on now. And then Karen for asking me to revisit this work that I did for my Master's thesis. And then, I didn't realize that it was still working on me in my work today. And so, that's been a really fruitful and fulfilling thought exercise.

This is a photo of the artist that we'll be talking about. So, you'll have his smiling face in your mind as I'm talking; Wallace Simpson.

Towering above Wallace Simpson's former farm fields in Lucama, North Carolina, the whirligig shown here, affectionately known as "Satellite Tub," cast shadows that resemble spiders and space ships that move across the land. Comprised of various salvaged parts from sources as distinct as vintage muscle cars, obsolete washing machines, road signs, metal milkshake cups, bicycle wheels and tobacco farming

equipment, Simpson built Satellite Tub and environment of 35 other equally monumental whirligigs, over the course of 15 years, after his repair shop partners retired.

Seeming to grow out of the ground, taking roots in the soil leached from tobacco, and sprouting branches of the remnants of the rapidly industrialized regions, the whirligigs, like Simpson himself, are an undeniable product of the economic, political, and social structures of Wilson, North Carolina.

This talk is a small portion of a much larger body of work, but aims to contextualize the whirligigs into, and of, the eastern North Carolina landscape, instead of suggesting that they materialize from nowhere, out of the mind of a visionary loner. It positions them as an instance, a material representation of a confluence of systems that are constantly moving and shifting, like whirligigs, in the wind.

By starting with the whirligigs themselves, looking at their component parts and trying to understand where these parts came from and how they go to Simpson's workshop, the ecosystem in which they spin comes alive. This integrated way of researching, combining oral histories, material culture, and social geography, has created a roadmap, which has helped me to approach a variety of sites that I now work on, like Joe Minter's African Village in America in Birmingham, and Lonnie Hollie's home and studio in Atlanta, Georgia.

This presentation will offer just a really brief history of the whirligig's materials, a little bit about Wallace, and then, what is happening with them today, to suggest an object-based way of approaching the research and preservation of found object environmental sites.

So, [inaudible 00:49:49] my pointer.

So, although the tobacco plant is quite versatile and can adapt its growing habits to most climates, the specific variety of tobacco that is utilized in cigarettes really flourished in the coastal plains of North Carolina and Virginia. An extremely labor-intensive crop, each arce of flue cured tobacco requires approximately 450 hours of labor. And so, because of this, most families in this region operated really small farms of five to seven acres, which created really dense populations for a rural region that was farming, and they had a tenant labor system that used unmechanized methods well into the 1960s.

And Lynchburg, Tennessee inaugurated the first tobacco market, where they would invite local farmers to bring their crops to one big warehouse where buyers would then come, and they would auction off the different crops. The market in Wilson, North Carolina opened in 1895, and pretty soon it was the largest in the country. And during these week-long markets, which would happen in late July or early August, the host towns became like a big party and farmers would come, and they would drink and dance. They'd hear music, they'd show off their crops, and their daughters, usually, to find them suitable husbands. And this all sort of started to fail in the 1920s, when

tobacco prices began to fall, which was a combination of a lot of different things, including a really saturated market. There were a lot of different warehouses, so, as a farmer and then as a buyer, you had to pick which one you wanted to go to, which kind of diffused the market. And then, of course, the Depression, as we know. It's like prices plummeted for every crop, everywhere.

So, R.J. Reynolds was founded in 1875 by the son of a merchant who left Patrick County, Virginia and arrived in Winston, North Carolina, which at the time, was the closets town with a railroad depot. And he saw this town as a really interesting place at the middle of all these other markets, and so, he bought a former church building from the Moravians and opened a factory that was called "The Little Red Factory."

So, in the company's first year they produced 150,000 pounds of processed tobacco, and by the 1890s, that number was in the millions of pounds. This ... when Winston became Winston-Salem, as two towns merged, the RJ Reynolds' factory buildings were the largest structures in the town, and they were the first to bring in electricity, and also steam-powered machines in industrial production.

By the early 1900s, Reynolds had bought all of the competition in eastern North Carolina, and they were producing 25% of the nation's chewing tobacco. And today, RJR, which is still partially located in Winston-Salem, is the third largest cigarette producing company in the world still; and all of their United States cigarette production happens in a small town called Tobaccolville, which is outside of Winston-Salem.

So, with this increasing influence of large tobacco corporations, farmers, in the 1960s, started to look to industrialized methods to increase their efficiency. And during this ... years of the transition, aided by North Carolina State University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, there's this huge influx of experimental farm technologies, and they saw these farmers as this really good test market. So, oftentimes, these machines would come in, the farmers would try to figure out how to use them, just as soon as another one was sent to them to try.

And so, because of the use of these machines, a lot of farmers with smaller plots of land, found that it was inefficient; like, they didn't have enough land for these machines to be working. And so, because that wasn't making them as productive as they could have been, they didn't get contracts from tobacco companies. And so, this public auction system vanished, and a lot of these independent farmers that didn't have a contract with tobacco companies started losing the ability to sell their crop. So, they had to sell their land to other big farmers, which is now, when you drive through North Carolina, there's tons of huge super farms, and not sort of small farms.

And so, because of this, by 2000 agriculture, which was once the largest employment sector in North Carolina, in 1950 only provided 4% of adults with employment.

And so, although industry had really been a part of the state's economy, World War II and the Cold War brought unprecedented numbers of businesses and manufacturers to the region. There was one governor named Luther Hartwell Hodges, who is still the

state's only businessman that became the governor, called ... did a series of what he called "smokestack chasing." So, he is today credited as almost single-handedly putting the state of North Carolina on the radar of national/international manufacturing companies. And he went all around the country meeting with heads of industry and companies, and created massive tax incentives to lure all these industries. And although, credited with opening a thousand plants during his seven-year term as governor, he initiated a system that relies on, and perpetuates, a steady supply of unskilled workers who are willing to work for low wages. And as these jobs are now being outsourced to foreign countries who have a supply of workers willing to work for even lower wages, the state is, once again, saddled with one of the countries largest uneducated, and now unemployed, populations.

And one of the companies that was attracted North Carolina during this boom was Firestone Tire Manufacturing. It opened in 1975, and in 2007, its campus covered 500 acres and employed 2000 workers; even as highly mechanized as it is. And this presence of Firestone in Wilson is part of a much larger globalized economy, that we now understand characterizes much of 21st century manufacturing, but even in the '70s it had a huge role to play in the southeast, particularly.

And by the mid-70s, a lot of automobile companies were manufacturing cars in the South. You had Nissan and Saturn in Tennessee, and General Motors was in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi. And as part of this production, United States companies followed a Japanese production system called "lean production," because they were finding with all this new mechanization, they were producing a lot of parts and then these parts would sit in factories, and they would discover there was a problem, but they had no way of knowing which parts in the piles had the problem. So they were wasting a lot of what were perceived as faulty parts. So they decided ... they implemented a "just in time" mode of production, which meant, basically, that parts were delivered and then, almost instantaneously, put onto the production lines.

So, factories that produced parts of cars needed to be close to factories that made cars. So Wilson, for example, got a tire manufacturing plant, so they could provide these Firestone tires to the factories surrounding them.

So, in June of 2012, which is the time that I was spending in Wilson as part of this research and project, the tobacco market didn't open for the first time. It had not really, for a while, been a place where they were actually selling tobacco, but it was still the suggestion of the fair, like, and there were some farmers selling other wares, and some people would sell independent ... independent farmers were selling tobacco for, like, home use, but not as sort of massive capital ... like this massive system that it once was.

And this sort of really, for a lot of people there, was the final death toll for the bright leaf tobacco golden era. And a lot of the warehouses around the square were empty and there were unused tobacco barns, empty automobile parts manufactures, and idle farm equipment. Reduced to the status of ruins, these ghostly structures served as daily reminders of the end result of the promised progress.

The industry brought to the industry through smokestack chasing's promise of cheap labor, ample resources, was lured away by promises of greater profits elsewhere. And lying in waste, these remains have been reduced to garbage. And technically speaking, garbage is leftover matter, it what remains when the good, fruitful, valuable, and nourishing, and useful has been taken away.

But more philosophically, garbage is a culturally and socially constructed category of matter that allows us to engage in the myth of modernity and this quest for progress.

So, the various methods designed to eliminate its presence are intended to keep it from encroaching on our everyday lives. But in Wilson, where the garbage is not banana peels or toasters, but literally, three-acre factories or rotting barns, it doesn't really disappear from consciousness quite as easily.

Which brings Wallace Simpson, was born in 1919 in Lucama, North Carolina. In growing up his father had a small farm, but mainly made his living as a building mover and town handyman. And Wallace told me, "Growing up with my daddy, you learn to do everything real quick. Fixing things, planting food, tending animals, I learned to use a wench, and drive a mule before I could read."

Like many men his age, Simpson was drafted in 1940 at 21, and set to serve a one-year term when World War II broke out. So he ended up staying for five years in Saipan. Raised with an appreciation and intuitive knowledge of machinery, Simpson had never seen the likes of the militarized equipment he was exposed to in the Mariana Islands. While stationed there, he built a wind-powered washing machine to wash his fellow soldiers' clothes, and he built a motorcycle out of parts that he salvaged from around the base. But he told me they made him dismantle it really quickly.

So, upon his return to Lucama he opened a repair shop with several friends around 1950, and he repaired farm tools, broken factory equipment, cars, and trucks and sometimes he would move buildings, like his dad. But often, he would make both the replacement parts and the vehicles he would use to move the buildings. And there's a lot of local legends that he had a tow truck made out of a tank that he would use to tow the tow truck. So, when the tow truck would get stuck, they would call him, and he would bring the tank to get the tow truck out.

So, he constantly kept on finding usable parts. As early as 1952 he was saving odds and ends, which sometimes were entire cars or decommissioned airplanes. In the late '70s and '80s, when most of the repair shop work shifted from repairing machines to emptying out these closing factories, his collecting sort of mirrored that.

He created a network of scrappers, junkers, repairmen, and observant locals. A majority of the obsolete farm tools, outdated factory equipment, fiberglass oddities, abandoned cars, and unclaimed bicycles of eastern North Carolina likely passed through Simpson's hands at one point.

So, when his business partners retired in the early 1990s, Simpson couldn't adjust to this idle life. So, he built these monumental whirligigs, some as tall as 60 feet, and weighing five tons. He installed them throughout his property over a period of seven years, constantly adding components, decorating the surfaces, and greasing the bearings, so they would blow and rotate in the wind.

Ranging in motifs from a mule-powered plow to a World War II air bomber plane, the whirligigs are comprised entirely of salvaged materials, collected by Simpson from eastern North Carolina.

In both their subject matter and their materiality, they document the history of the region. Composed of parts from tobacco farming equipment, tobacco processing machinery, cotton mills, auto part factories, vintage for automobiles and bicycles, they physically map the region. And his knowledge of these materials really enabled him to do this. He didn't look at a washing machine tub and see that it was a washing machine tub. He could see it as the gear that he would need to attach a Firebird side mirror to a washing machine to a bike that could spin a giant rod. And this ability was because of his innate knowledge of the machines, and the technology that had surrounded him.

And so, for years, people saw these whirligigs ... here's just a little bit of scale. This is them on his property before they started to be moved. But people started seeing that they were the number one tourist attraction in Wilson County, even though they were behind a fence. And there was a lot of local legends that he would shoot you with a shotgun or chase you on, like, a four-wheeler or send his dogs at you if you went ... People would still go and oftentimes just peer into the fence and park outside. And a lot of people tried to get him to either open the property or have other people come and run it for him. And he was really hesitant, until 2011 when I think he sort of sensed his impending mortality. He died in 2013. And also I think wanted a legacy for his kids because the farm was not a farm anymore. It was whirligig farm. He sold them to a consortium of private and public entities in Wilson, who were going to move them downtown to revitalize this depressed tobacco district.

This is a photo I took following one of the whirligigs down the highway.

And so, they get taken down from the field. They've been up there for so long and as he got older he just couldn't grease the bearings, and they got rusted. So they really ... they stopped spinning. A lot of the paint had faded. So, part of the efforts of this is to revitalize the town economically, but also provide jobs. So, they hired a team of what the town has called "chronically unemployed or unemployable" citizens who are trained in the conservation. And Wallace would come by.

And a lot of the people that worked here, the leaders of this team were a group of mechanics who had all been pushed out of their jobs at Bridgestone/Firestone. So they offered a lot of support and engineering. And each whirligig had to be taken down, basically taken apart, cataloged. Replacement parts had to be made or bought from Wallace, which he really enjoyed, and then repainted. All the bearings had to be replaced with stainless steel, and reflectors had to be cut. And this really revealed, as you took them apart, the actual components of them and Wallace would come in and

say, "Oh, you see" ... I want to make sure I get this right. Like, the big rod that supports one of the pieces, he said, "It once held up the entire interior of the Ford headlight assembly line." Or he would point to a tobacco bin, "Oh, I got that from Harry when his farm closed." And so, each of these pieces began to be part of this larger system.

So, this is as they are now. They're going to be installed in a park in downtown Wilson. The Collier Foundation has agreed to step in and assist in the completion of this, which is real exciting. They have a big opening planned November 2nd. Businesses have moved into all these abandoned warehouses. There's a brewery, there's a café, there're some artists' lofts and resident spaces. And it really will be interesting to see what they become, now that they are here.

So, I guess what I've learned from this, and what I'm taking into the sites I work on now, is that it's best not ever see these projects as complete. Like the makers often say that they are. And perhaps that the best way forward for Wilson, its residents, the state of North Carolina, the whirligigs, everyone here interested in this study and preservation, may be just to look closely and listen openly.

Karen: As you can tell, these are just little snippets of larger research projects for each of our panelists. So, please, please ask them about their projects. They are deeply passionate about these sites, and know a lot more than what you have seen today, even though it was such a compelling panel. Thank you.

I wanted to talk a little bit about your backgrounds and how that played into the research that you did. So, on this panel we have architecture, art history, folklore, and material culture studies. Trained professionals, but then they pushed against ... you're professional. But in many ways, the study of these art environments pushed against your field. And so, I wanted ... each of you talk a little bit about what skills you used from your field that helped in your research, and then how you impacted your field with the research that you did, if that makes sense. How you impacted the field, and how the field impacts you. That's what I'm asking.

Jennifer: I can chime in there. I ... yeah, I was trained as a public folklorist, both in undergraduate and graduate school. And studying self-taught art, art environments, is not always the most welcome subject in the field of public folklore, because public folklore is about studying community and collective creation and cultural groups. But, I think that I've always been drawn to the ways in which individual folks, and their creative expressions are drawn from culture and community. And we see that in each of these presentations here.

I have to honor, like, folks that I have learned from, including Joe [Farbre 01:06:10] Hernandez, who's a folklorist, who has been a leader in this field, both within the field of folklore and beyond, in the area of art environment study. And, of course, Karen Patterson, who also served as a model of someone who has used ethnographic, community-based methods of interpretation, but also kind of let's have that conversation, let's look at folklore and oral history and ethnographic methods, and let's look at studio art, let's look at modes of presentation and performance, and so forth, among other folks who are influential.

So, yeah, this was a little ... I think I really kind was able to kind of rely on some of those experiences before. And I think I also was just far enough out of graduate school, where I was a little more comfortable to take some more risks and kind of just find my own path, and not worry about offending my professors.

Karen: Laura and Analise, you want to talk about art history? You both went to the school ... the Art Institute of Chicago and did the dual degree in Art History ... You did the dual degree, Laura. You did the Art History degree, Analise, I wondered if you could talk a little bit about how your Master's thesis on Art Environments impacted the Department. And then also, how art history helped inform your practice and research methods.

Analise: Sure, I can start. Well, I think for me, I was really fortunate. I had taken a class with Lisa Stone, and then I was able to have her be my thesis advisor, and she definitely, having so much experience in this field, was like, "Go for it." So, I didn't really feel held back.

I think the other really important thing was making sure that I let the experience at the site lead my investigation. I think when I started the project, I was really focused on Leonard. Like, this is going to be "The" project on Leonard. I'm going to dive into him and then, getting to the site and experiencing, you know, the people that were still left and caring for the place, really affected my direction. And I sort of learned about how connected these things are. That they don't ... One doesn't really exist without the other. And that Leonard arrived in this place, I think because of this history that started in the late 1800s, that led to this place, attracting people like Leonard. He wasn't the first one to arrive, and he's certainly not the last. So, that was definitely a really important part of that exploration.

And I took my family with me to the site, and we ended up at a party in Slab City. And just sort of being opened to that experience and not worrying about being on a narrow, art historical, academic path, and letting those things inform my process was really important.

Laura: Yeah, [inaudible 01:09:08] I've sort of been running from art history forever, but knowing that's what I wanted to do.

I got my undergrad at UNC in Chapel Hill, with Art History and Folklore, and I loved folklore because I loved talking to people and living life and getting out and it was a college class where your assignment was to leave, basically; leave campus and go talk to people. It was amazing.

I had a hard time sort of finding people that wanted to also really look at objects closely in the way that I wanted to. And then I found art history was sort of limiting to the library, and saying that you wanted to write about a living artist was really scandalous and no one ... said, "Well, that's not history," like, "How can you research this? How can you contextualize this?"

And so, I applied SAC, sort of on a whim, as the only grad school, thinking I didn't want to go to grad school. And I got in and my interview was really inspiring. And I started

doing research, and read about Lisa, and was like, "Oh, this is maybe actually what I'm looking for."

And so, I found the environment of SAC really thrilling, but again, it was art history and there're so many smart art historians there who I respect immensely but that's, again, like, not what I was necessarily looking at. And so, you know, saying that I wanted to write and do work on the whirligigs, I met a little bit of resistance, I think for myself, just because they're really impressive, and they're ... I have the utmost respect for Wallace, but I'm not sure I like them. And I've struggled with that a lot. And I, you know ... professors of history would say, "But are they art?" And I would say, "I don't know, like, I'm not sure." But I think that's interesting too. And maybe they're just engineering marvels that are really beautiful to look at. But I'm just not sure what I'm doing.

And I just kept kind of going and not really taking no. And in the end, I was trying to be responsible to what I saw happening in Wilson and what Wallace said and did, and what I thought the whirligigs were doing. And I think, like I said, this work is now ... I work in Atlanta for the [inaudible 01:11:01] Foundation, with a lot of living artists or artists who are recently deceased. And we meet a lot of similar resistance too, I think, in what we're trying to do. And taking just this, as everyone has said, like, going to the site and kind of shutting out everything, but your voice, as Karen spoke about earlier. Trusting your intuition and following what you see. Because we all are sentient beings and see and feel the same things and hear the same things.

And so, if Wallace saw it, I can't see it the same way, but I can see something that he saw too.

Karen: And Iain, Nek Chand's Rock Garden Chandigarh was your Ph.D. dissertation. Can you talk a little bit about the impact of your architecture studies on your Ph.D. and how that subject matter impacted your department and your field?

Iain: Okay. So, yeah, I studied architecture and became an architect. And I'm grateful to it because it gave me a discipline to measure and draw and to think spatial, but I never really fitted into it.

I was more interested in people and cities and how we live together. And I just enjoyed subcultures, the weird, the peculiar, so I kind of tried to seek that out.

And I got interested in vernacular architecture. So there's a brilliant book by Bernard Rudofsky, called "Architecture without Architects," and that really got me into thinking about buildings that were made other people besides architects. So, I decided to go down that kind of route.

And then there's kind of a childish dream about being an explorer or and adventurer, and India gave me that space to do that, and to rethink about what it meant to be British or English, that relationship with India and the people there. So, that was really good, reflective thing.

And then I had a problem with architectural history, and the way we teach architectural history. That it's all geared around Rome and Greece. And there's nothing wrong with the Eurocentric approach and then tagging on the last hundred years of America. But I think there's more to architectural history than that. So, I'm interested in how we teach that as well, and I think there's more to it. And our students really engage with this kind of work.

So, I'm starting to rethink the way we try to teach architectural history. I know in the States, the professional accreditation is changing, so that ... you now have to include a more global architectural history in your architectural education here. And hopefully, we'll do that in the U.K. and Europe too.

But that only gets us so far. I think this idea of the vernacular in Architecture without Architects really got to push in architecture schools.