

Culture Works 2016
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Folkvine.org:
GLOCAL Action Scholarship & Changing How We Do Scholarship

The editors of *Culture Works* invited my folkvine collaborators and me to contribute something to an early issue of this your journal; we were still working on the website, and had not had time to think through many of the implications of our project. Happily the editors have asked me to return to folkvine many years later to offer a reflection. The folkvine project (<http://folkvine.org>) did not merely make folk art accessible, but also used folk art and practices to influence how we did public scholarship. For example, the term vine described a new *rhizomatic* organization of our site (vines versus tree-like outlines); it also alluded to hearing "it on the grapevine" as another way of presenting materials. With those allusions, our project used a popular danceable song, and the folk artist's sensibility, to impact our way of working and presenting the folk art as a lens not merely an object of study.

Near the start of the project, animator-artist-scholar Lynn Tomlinson and I interviewed former circus clown Diamond Jim Parker, who made miniature model circuses and had an important archive of clown, sideshow, and freak show history, paraphernalia, and photographic records. Sadly, Diamond Jim passed away during the work on this project only a few weeks after we interviewed him. Museums and private collectors divided up his circuses and archives. He knew he was not well; so, he wanted to make sure we protected and cultivated his legacy. In his interview, he specifically asked us and the entire Folkvine team to portray his circus-y sensibility. He was particularly concerned that we not decontextualize his life and work for hanging on four white walls of a museum's gallery. This resistance to the dry museum-like exhibition resonated with me as it was part of a larger movement in my scholarship away from what art theorists called the "white cube," fixed and decontextualized findings. We would not sacrifice these *folks' sensibility*. The site instead uses that sensibility in all aspects of design and approach to the materials. It is a folk vine not a sterilized catalogue of materials.

Since we built the website and completed the project, our group's members and directors started ChinaVine (<http://chinavine.org>) and PeruVine/PeruDigital (<http://digitaletnography.dm.ucf.edu/pv/index.html>) and probably influenced others. We also have suffered enormous setbacks and traumas both personal and in relation to the sustainability of our project and website. Yes, tragically our lead web-guru and the "heart of folkvine" suicided and prevented us from changing the website without extensive recoding of the website. We did not, and will not, get over that loss of our friend, and folkvine is marked with a butterfly on the front porch of the old-timey tourist center in her honor. Yes, we built the project using Flash, and, as corporate software constraints have favored new proprietary systems, our website remains insecure unless we recode the entire site. Yes, other members of our team moved, passed away, or retired. The funding of the URL and server space remains tenuous in the future even as we have funded it for a few more years. Yes, multi-year, large, and collectively built projects will have challenges. With the very concepts of knowledge-based education now under threat, we must respond with glocal action to make knowledge danceable and accessible.