

What obligations do we carry—to one another, to elders and ancestors, to young people? The question threads through our work in many ways.

Kurt Jung grew up listening to laundrymen who gathered every Sunday on the second floor of his grandfather's Chinatown store to play the music they loved. Ngô Than Nhân was captivated by the music of itinerant troupes who visited Vietnamese villages and towns to perform for local people. Wu Peter Tang's first lessons in erhu came from his father and included the "modernized" folk music taught in state-directed music conservatories. Against considerable odds and in different ways, all three men pursued folk arts. They now teach in free programs at public schools, including the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School founded by Asian Americans United (AAU) and PFP in 2005. And every year these artists and their students perform at the beloved Mid-Autumn Festival in Chinatown, created more than 15 years ago by the inspired and fearless organizers of AAU.

Recognizing the loneliness and sacrifices of generations who came before and who made our way possible, young people (led by AAU staff) imagined an alternative. They reclaimed a significant cultural tradition and began Mid-Autumn Festival as a small gathering. Now more than 5,000 people come together to enjoy the celebration every year. Ellen Somekawa, AAU Director, writes: "When we create a street festival, we strengthen connections among people, honor the knowledge of the elders in our communities, activate people, and value our own cultures. This is fundamental to social justice work because if people don't care deeply about their neighbors, their fellow workers, or themselves, what will motivate them to stand up for each other? And if people are not up for caring about themselves or their

neighbors, what happens when it comes time to stand up for those who are defined as 'other'?" What Mid-Autumn Festival has come to mean to people is described in the exhibition now in PFP's galleries, *Under Autumn Moon: Reclaiming Time and Space in Chinatown*.

In Parallel Destinies, an artist residency project supported by PFP this year, Germaine Ingram, Bobby Zankel, and John Dowell created choreography, music, and images to address the experiences of nine enslaved Africans who labored in George Washington's President's House in Philadelphia in the 1790s. Using new research (some literally unearthed during recent excavations of the "slave quarters"), they are developing a multimedia performance piece imagining the lives of Oney Judge, Hercules, and others. They are aided by what scholars have to say about the persistence of ring shouts, African traditions of movement, and self-fashioning: folk arts that sustained people and that endure in ever-new forms. Their work, too, pushes us to move past obstacles of injustice, obscured histories, fragmented evidence. It pushes us to ask: How do we enact our responsibilities in relation to painful pasts? How do we remember and imagine those who came before us?

Read between the lines: the conversations with artists and activists excerpted in these pages hint at some of the enormous forces that people have witnessed and endured. It is a hard list: the insidious evils of enslavement and entrenched racism, war and violence destroying homelands, anti-immigrant policies separating families, state-based erasures marginalizing people, draconian development policies crushing communities. In the face of any of these forces, forgetting and compliance would seem to be tempting alternatives. Yet the folk arts work described here reminds us (again and again) how critical change can begin by imagining what freedom,

and justice look, feel, and sound like. In this issue of *Works in Progress*, people share the model of their own lives: examples of active art-making that values the hopes and the collective imagination of ancestors (known and unknown), elders, immigrants, and youth. In creating movement and music and gatherings grounded in particular folk arts, artists and activists cultivate our best hopes for the world in which we want to live.

These glimpses of PFP's folk arts education efforts, our artist residency programs, and our community folklife documentation projects hint at the alternatives offered up by courage, compassion, and persistence. Introducing just a sampling of what we've been up to at PFP this year, this issue of our magazine reminds us again what we can learn from folk arts and from one another.

In a year of massive assaults on our communities and dwindling resources, we are privileged to join in imagining and cultivating such alternatives—what critical race scholar Mari Matsuda calls "radical pluralism and radical anti-subordination" and Robin D. G. Kelley describes as "freedom dreams." In small ways, these are efforts to live out our obligations to one another.

We invite your participation as well. For more news about these efforts, samples of what these artists and cultural workers are accomplishing, and information about becoming a PFP member, check out our website: www.folkloreproject.org or join us on Facebook.

—Debra Kodish

