

Audience

SUNDAY
 MAY 2, 2004

Artist's run of the mill is anything but

A youthful symbol of Maine's creative economy, Buckfield artist and teacher Jonathan Mess 'reinvents' found objects — like the artifacts inside the Bates Mill complex in Lewiston — for a massive project that elicits fresh new stories from the remnants of the past.

By **BOB KEYES**
 Staff Writer

LEWISTON — Jonathan Mess is all about rebirth.

The Buckfield artist enjoys taking found objects and giving them new life, new context and an entirely new frame of reference.

As such, he's the perfect choice to serve as the de facto artist-in-residence for this week's Blaine House Conference on Maine's Creative Economy, which will attract more than 600 people to the Bates Mill complex in Lewiston.

Armed with data and brimming with ideas, policymakers, economic strategists, downtown developers, arts advocates, creative entrepreneurs and others will gather over two days to talk about Maine's cultural resources and brainstorm ways the state can encourage growth in its creative economic sectors.

In style and substance, Mess is symbolic of their efforts. He's a young art-entrepreneur who came to Maine because of the state's creative spirit. In his work, he takes what is old and makes it new.

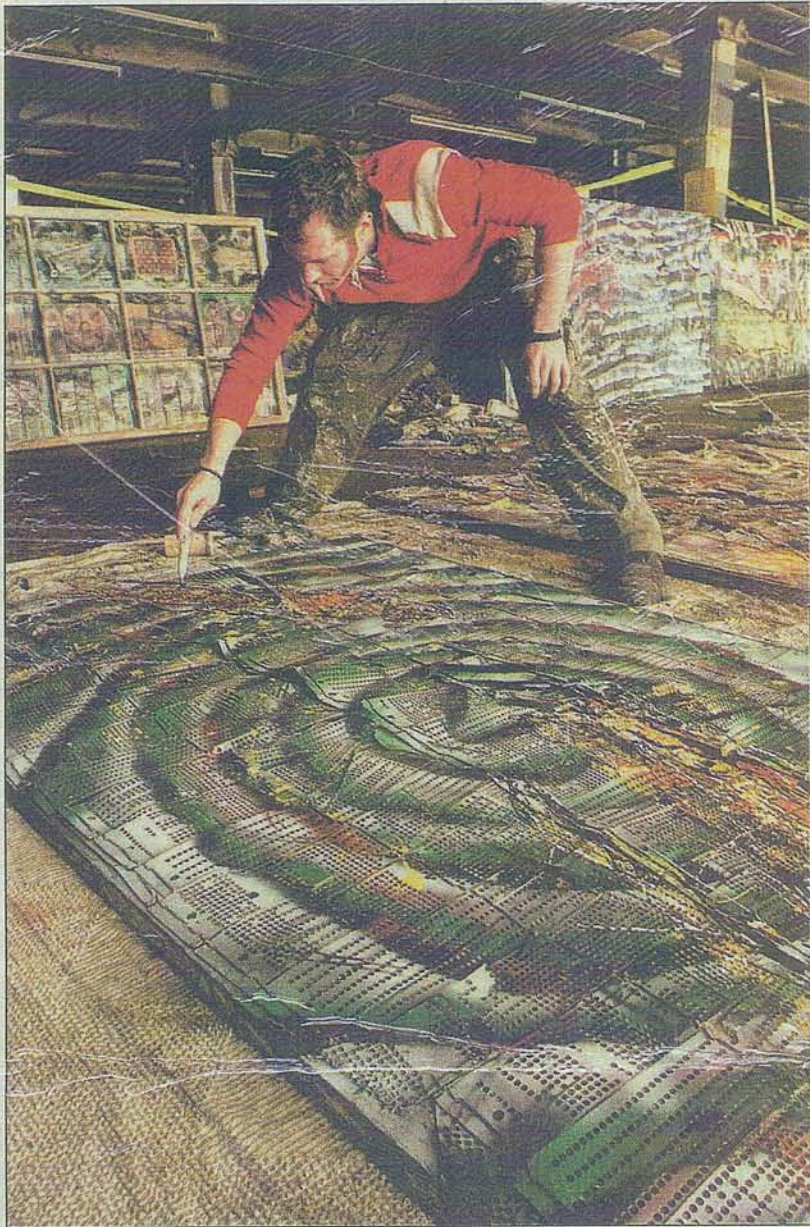
Since February, the 29-year-old artist and art teacher has been scavenging the bowels of the mill, collecting discarded machine parts and throw-away items and incorporating them in a sculptural installation that will serve as the centerpiece for the conference.

In its final form, the installation will consist of several large panels that will hang from the ceiling of the mill, reflecting its past while imagining its future.

"I am taking all the remnants of the industrial revolution and turning it back into art. I am re-creating it, reinventing it and redefining it," said Mess, who teaches art at Leavitt Area High School in Turner.

"Way back when, the Bates Mill made textiles. This conference is about the future and thinking ahead, and what are we going to do with all these old buildings all over Maine? I am taking something that is considered refuse, and I have a vision for it."

Mess got the idea several months ago when a friend told him that the conference was coming to Lewiston. His original



Staff photos by Doug Jones

Literally handed the keys to the Bates Mill complex in Lewiston for his latest project, 29-year-old artist Jonathan Mess incorporates discarded jacquard pattern cards and other found objects into one of more than a dozen panels that will be part of an elaborate installation at this week's conference on the creative economy.

IN TODAY'S PAPER

The creative economy is a new model for Maine development. **Insight, IC**
 Maine already receives significant financial benefits from the creative economy, according to new research. But officials are working to increase the economic activity related to art and culture. **Sunday Business, IF**

BLAINE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON MAINE'S CREATIVE ECONOMY



When: Thursday and Friday
Where: Bates Mill, Lewiston
For information: www.maine-creativeeconomy.org
Details: Thursday's Maine's Creative Economy Showcase is open to the public from noon to 4 p.m. and will include exhibitions, films, art installations, museum tours and other events. The bulk of the conference takes place all day Friday. **More inside, 5E**

Mess holds up one of his nearly finished panels.

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TASTE & TELL
C.Z. Cramer

rate birthday dinners under the course of our visit, and part all generations.

We began with the house-made country pâté, which was good. Two neat slices of a semi-coar tender mixture of goose liver and were pleasantly classic and seasoned. Extremely chilled, it was served a bit unceremoniously on a curly lettuce leaf flanked by a scattering of small pickled onions. Capers. No toasts were provided there were slices of warm, soft baguette in a basket we'd already been served with a soufflé cup of whipped butter.

Baked stuffed clams (\$4.95) not served on the half-shell as expected. Instead, a small crab arrived hot from the broiler covered in a smattering of chopped and mixed with a lot of generic crab stuffing. There was a lot of bland cheese that lost its chance once it cooled. The dish felt a bit like a rushed, contrived, packaged restaurant-supply ingredients.

Other appetizers included a Eggs Bourguignonne with garlic and shrimp cocktail (each) and smoked salmon (\$4.95). There was good old onion soup gratin crock (\$3.95), clam chowder and other soups du jour - beef muss

ing today's matinee performer Eve Ensler's "Necessary Targ" of the Theater Project, 14 School. Cast members and director Joseph Price will join Vitelli.

The play tells the tale of two women who are sent to Bosnia by the American government to help five women survivors in a refugee camp. Ensler wrote the play on a trip to Bosnia to explore the conditions of women there.

Vitelli has run an international women's group called the Lear Exchange and hosted representerives from the former Yugoslav including Bosnia.

The plays run through May 1. Performance times are 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Free admission.

For reservations or information call 729-3584 or email theater.project@verizon.net.

Wodiczko to speak at MCA commencement

The speaker for the 93rd annual Maine College of Art commencement is Krzysztof Wodiczko, international recognized new-media artist and visual-arts professor in the Department of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The faculty speaker will be Curtis Thompson, assistant professor of art history. Ling-Wen Tsai, assistant professor of sculpture and new media, will deliver the invocation.

The MFA class speaker is Barak Levi Olin, and the BFA class speaker is Jake Stotz.

Commencement will occur at 2 p.m. May 16 at Merrill Auditorium at Portland City Hall.

MECA will award honorary degrees to Hugh J. Gourley III, Merle Nelson and Wodiczko.

CREATIVE

Continued from Page 1E

idea was to concoct an art installation of found objects in vacant storefront windows, with one leading to another down Lisbon Street.

The empty storefronts worked as a metaphor for the past and future, and also provided an ideal showcase. He assumed people attending the conference would walk around downtown, and his art would give them something to look at and consider.

He proposed it to friends at Rinck Advertising, the Auburn agency that is helping the Maine Arts Commission organize and coordinate the conference. The folks at Rinck liked the idea, and suggested he take it to the next level.

Instead of completing the installation in vacant storefronts, why not make the mill itself part of the art?

Right on, Mess concurred. He met with the mill manager, who signed off on the idea and gave him a key. Mess had access to all unoccupied areas of the sprawling complex, which once made blankets, rugs and other textiles. Since the mill went dormant, various businesses have opened, and Lewiston has plans for reusing the mill in a number of ways, including studio and living space for artists.

But it remains mostly empty. For weeks, Mess wandered the rooms and hallways, taking stock of what was there and forming ideas. Eventually, he carted everything he wanted to a work space in the corner of a second floor wing and began his assembly.

In its final form, the piece will encompass 15 panels. Each panel's base is a large wooden window frame, to which he has attached long strips of dusty brown Jacquard cards.

Named for a French industrial inventor, each card is punched with a specific pattern of small holes. Inserted into machines, the cards dictated a decorative weave for a blanket, rug or other textile that the mill produced.

Mess found bin after bin of the old cards - thousands of them, with different punch-out patterns and styles. After attaching the cards to the frame, he laid them on the floor and placed industrial scraps on top. He scattered bobbins, spindles, small tools, gears, nuts, bolts, screws, brushes, knives - anything he could find.

He then covered the mass of stuff in free-form painted patterns, mixing vibrant colors and styles. When the paint dried, he removed the industrial scraps, leaving their imprint and outline on the cards below. To some panels, he affixed leftover fabric. Others he left bare except for the paint.

With the exception of many cans of spray paint, Mess found all his material in the mill.

It's totally abstract, raw and haphazard, full of contemporary

accepting the honorary title of director emeritus. Under his leadership, the museum emerged as one of the leading small-college art museums in the country, distinguished by the breadth of its collection and noted for the appealing design of its facilities.

As a Portland legislator serving in the Maine House of Representatives from 1976 to 1986, Nelson introduced legislation to set aside a percentage of state-funded building costs to commission public art. Approved in 1979, Maine's Percent for Art Act has gen-

Pope.L. rolls out transformative 'Black Factory'

By BOB KEYES
Staff Writer

LEWISTON — Lewiston-based artist William Pope.L will preview his new "Black Factory" installation on Thursday at Bates College Museum of Art.

The participatory project will be open in Lewiston for just one day as a tie-in to the Blaine House Conference of Maine's Creative Economy. The next day, it travels to Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams, in a group exhibition titled "The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere."

Pope.L, a Bates professor and 2004 Guggenheim fellow, is known for his exploration of culture and consumerism. "Black Factory" invites viewers to share objects that represent blackness to them.

During the past year at locations including Bates, where he has been a lecturer in the Department of Theater and Rhetoric for 12 years, Pope.L collected such items from the public. These objects are incorporated into the installation, a truck equipped to manipulate and present the objects in various ways.

Part performance, part sculpture and part installation, "Black Factory" aims to create a mobile marketplace and laboratory that gathers, shapes and repackages materials and experiences that form our perception of black America. The goal is to foster a discussion about cultural differences.

"By collecting, recycling and peddling the ingredients



File photo by John Ewing

Artist and Bates College professor William Pope.L created the installation "Black Factory" to encourage viewers to rethink their views of black America and foster discussion about cultural differences.

for rethinking blackness, the 'Black Factory' transforms the tensions and contradictions of race into a dynamic field of possibility," says a statement issued by the Bates museum.

"The 'Factory' performs an inward-reaching outreach effort. It encourages us to take hold of the stereotypes of race and class which bind us to our indecision and apathy and turn them inside out. It challenges us to grapple with the habitual ways in which we consume products, identities and ideologies. It extends open arms to those who feel certain that they have already settled all of these difficult questions, as well as to those who are still actively struggling with them. It asks us to rise to the task of collaborating in the creation of a community built not upon erasing but rather embracing our own differences and contradictions."

The exhibit will be open from 2:30 to 5 p.m. Thursday at Olin Arts Center at Bates College.

MORE ON THE BLAINE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON MAINE'S CREATIVE ECONOMY

The bulk of the events from this week's two-day conference at the Bates Mill in Lewiston will take place all day Friday. The speakers include:

8:30 a.m.: John Rohman, chairman of the Maine Arts Commission, and Christine Vincent, president of Maine College of Art. Both are conference co-chairs.

8:45 a.m.: Gov. John Baldacci

9 a.m.: John Barrett III, mayor of North Adams, Mass.

10 a.m.: Stuart A. Rosenfeld, president of Regional Technology Strategies, Carboro, N.C.

11:45 a.m.: Felicia K. Knight, National

Endowment for the Arts

Noon: Richard Florida, author of "The Rise of the Creative Class"

Breakout sessions follow in the afternoon.

The Maine Music Showcase, hosted by Nick Spitzer of Public Radio International's "American Routes," begins after the breakout sessions.

Scheduled to perform are Maine Jazz Set, 5:30 p.m.; Don Roy Trio, 6:30 p.m.; and Sean Mencher Combo, 7:30 p.m.

Costs: The musical showcase is free for conference attendees, \$10 for others.

catch his passion."

Peter Rinck, the 45-year-old president of Rinck Advertising, owns three pieces of Mess' art. Much of the artist's other work tends to be small, compared to the large, multi-piece installation at Bates Mill. A personal favorite of Rinck's is a photograph of a nude that incorporates rulers.

He saw the piece while Mess was putting it together. When the artist finished it, Rinck bought it.

Rinck likes Mess' work because it's layered in content and meaning. It's odd and different, but not esoteric or random.

"He's very modern and edgy, but also accessible. I can look at his work and interpret it in my own way, and I feel like I get it. The piece with the rulers and the nude, you drill down through the layers and find meaning. It rewards you for each observation," Rinck says.

Mess hopes something similar happens when people view his work this week at the Bates Mill.

"It's a series, and a very readable series," he says, hovering over a panel still under construction. "But each one is very different and each one has its own story. I'm here to tell a story."

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sensibilities and historical references. And for Mess, it's an appropriate medium for his personal artistic quest.

"I love the found object and the inherent story it tells. I love to take it and give it a new story. I love to re-birth it and give it a new history," he says.

That process of rebirth is the hallmark of Mess' work.

"He tends to be very contemporary and abstract, and he also is more interested and fascinated with

objects that people tend to discard. He sees value in them," says artist friend and co-worker Ronnie Decker.

The qualities that make his art engaging also make him a good teacher, she adds. Students like Mess because of his energy, which he reflects back on them.

"One of our students said he's kind of like a hummingbird. He never holds still. He has lots of energy, lots of passion. He is one of those who is so impassioned about the arts, it's contagious. The kids get it. They

those studying the performing arts or arts management.

To apply or for information, email internship@opera-house.org or call 633-6855.

White, Pollien selected for the Carina Residency

ROCKLAND — Sasha M. White of Rockland and Robert L. Pollien of Mount Desert have been chosen for the Carina Residency on Monhegan

an interdisciplinary dance project. Miller also pioneered Dance Project, now dance touring in the and the Cambodian partnership with the Royal University Phnom Penh.

During Miller's tenure, he led its budget and number of artists and serves.

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