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**CREATIVE ENERGY:** Artist Jonathan Mess works on one of his sculpture paintings at the Bates Mill Enterprise Complex in downtown Lewiston. Mess was commissioned by the Maine Arts Commission to produce the artwork using artifacts from the textile industry.

# Millwork to artwork

Artist renders 'creative economy' from Bates Mill remnants

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LEWISTON — Window frames lie on the floor atop faded bedspreads. Spray cans sit beside heaps of old fabric. Inch-long metal clips litter the floor, illuminated by a bare bulb.

"It's not a pretty, white floor studio," said artist Jonathan Mess, glancing around his drafty corner of the former textile mill.

It looked like Jackson Pollock's linen closet.

But the mess helps, said Mess, who

## GO AND DO

**WHAT:** Jonathan Mess's artwork will be displayed during the Blaine House Conference on Maine's Creative Economy.

**WHERE:** Bates Mill complex, Lewiston.

**WHEN:** May 6-7.

seemed at ease among the discarded remnants of the Bates Mill. That included blankets, bobbins, bits of cotton, thread and the windows themselves. He called them all "found objects."

They are his media. The Maine Arts Commission has hired Mess to create a sculptural installation for its May 6-7 conference. The gathering, on Maine's creative economy, will be held inside the mill and promote a wide variety of Maine's artistic businesses. Mess' installation will be a centerpiece.

## Layering

With a month to go, it's coming together piece by piece, layer by layer. "It's all about the layers, for me," said Mess, 29.

A native of Ohio, he studied at the University of Montana. He returned to Ohio after graduation and obtained a teaching certificate before moving to Maine. He settled in Buckfield and began teaching art at Leavitt Area High School in Turner.

Meanwhile, he continues to work as an artist. He jumped at the chance to create a work as visible as this one for the conference.

By mid-February, he started roaming the cavernous, often-unheated rooms of the Bates Mill with a cart that workers had left behind.

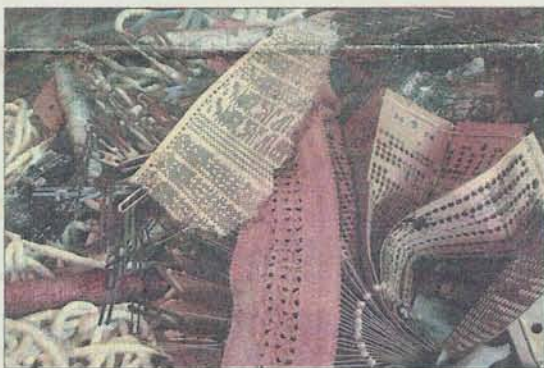
Among his discoveries were windows that had been removed by renovators, blankets, spools of thread and dozens of cardboard tubes, each the size of a wastebasket and shaped like ammunition for a gun.

"I call them shotgun shells," Mess said as he walked through the maze of corridors and creaky industrial spaces.

## First, a studio space

He created his makeshift studio in one corner of the old building, beside one of the few working electrical outlets. That's what powers his only light, critical since he has been working nights after his days in school.

"You start to hear things," said Mess, who purchased a cell phone just days after beginning the mill project. Located far from the site of next month's conference, the heat-



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**TOOLS OF THE TRADE:** Jonathan Mess uses "found objects" from the textile mill to create a work of art.

ing pipes randomly clank. Sometimes people wander past or police appear, startling him.

"It's all good, though," Mess said.

Spread out on the scarred wooden floor, he has all the room he needs to create his art. He has used the frames of the old windows to frame his panels. Between 10 and 20 will hang above the conference space.

Mess broke the glass out of each of the windows and laid the frames on the floor.

With some, he spread material from bedspreads across the openings. On top, he layered scrolls of finely dotted paper, used by the linen machines to create designs the way a player piano recreates songs.

Some of the panels sport vibrant colors: purples, reds and yellows. Some suggest cityscapes.

They are only suggestions, though.

"I don't want to give people too much information," said Mess, who believes each panel could be shown vertically or horizontally and seen from each side.

He wants people to see each piece and the entire installation as a work of art. Yet, given a moment, they might realize the connection each has to the mill.

"I hope they'll say, 'Wow, this is stuff that is made out of the stuff that was made here,'" Mess said.

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