



CADE TOMPKINS PROJECTS

The Boston Globe

WORKING ARTIST

Bob Dilworth weaves childhood memories and more into his art

‘Often I don’t know where it’s going to go,’ says Dilworth, currently the subject of a show at Fitchburgh Art Museum

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated December 30, 2024, 7:00 a.m.



Bob Dilworth working with fabric and paper. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF



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PROVIDENCE — When he was growing up in the small town of Lawrenceville, Va., painter Bob Dilworth played in the woods.

“There was a creek back there,” Dilworth said in his Providence studio during a recent visit. “It was the kind of place you read about in novels. We didn’t realize how wonderful it was until we left.”

That primordial experience is in many ways the backdrop for his paintings. Dilworth, whose exhibition “[When I Remembered Home](#)” is at Fitchburg Art Museum through Jan. 12, often paints landscapes and portraits of his family and historical figures that spring from magical, entangled layers of leaves and flowers. He’ll give an [artist’s talk](#) at the museum at 2 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 11.



Bob Dilworth works on a painting in his home. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

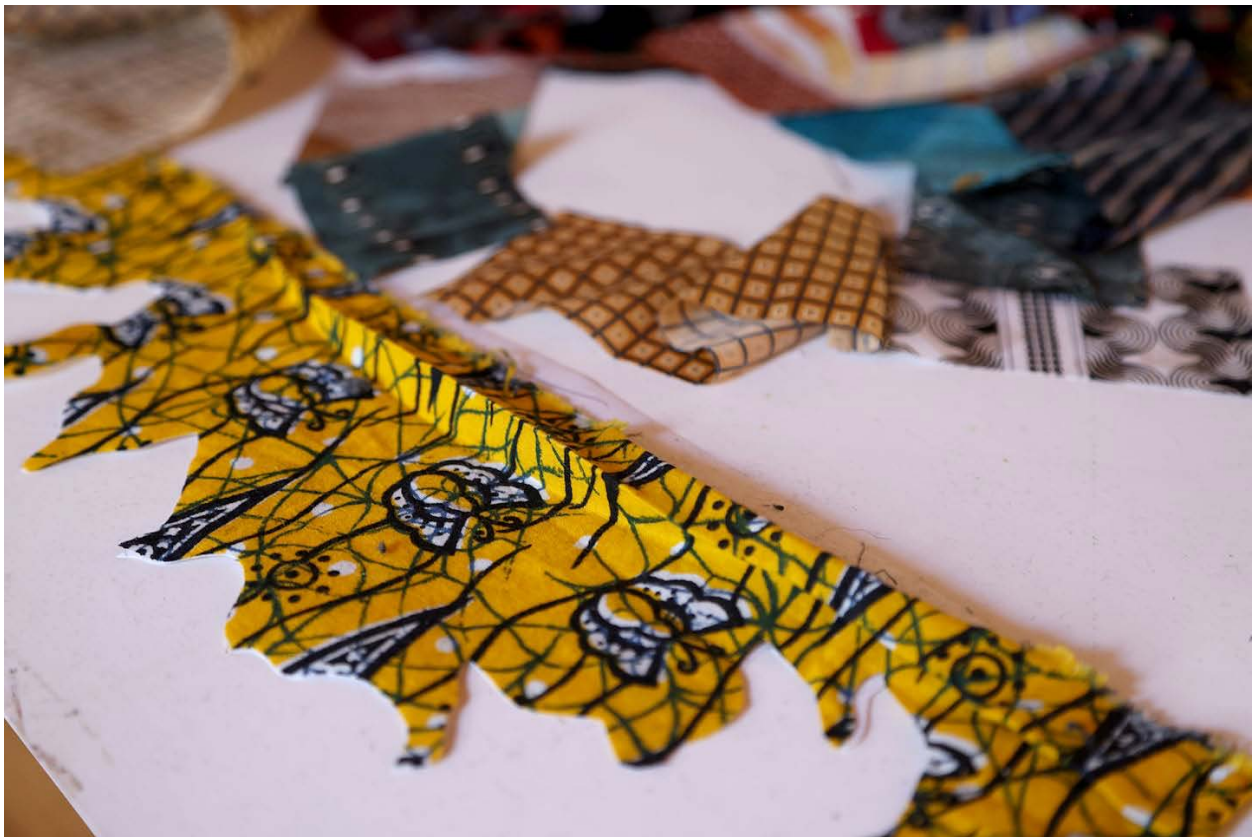


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In the last eight years, he's been sewing and affixing fabric scraps and cut paper to his paintings. Now he sometimes abandons the stretched canvas and draws figures with free-motion sewing. Many scraps come from Lawrenceville, as Dilworth weaves the magic of his childhood forest, his familial memories, and his creative process into his art.

Age: 73

Originally from: Lawrenceville, Va.



Some pieces of fabric in the home of artist Bob Dilworth. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

Lives in: Providence

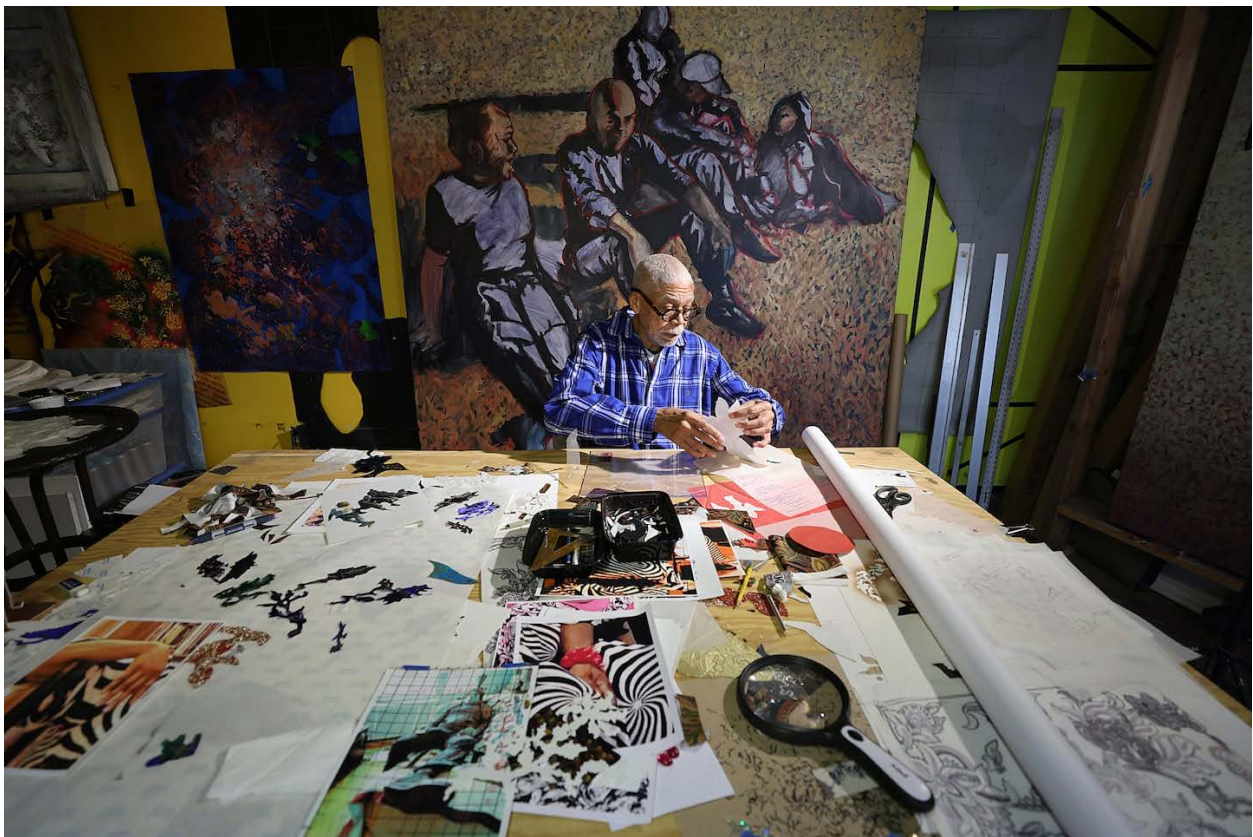
Making a living: In 2020, Dilworth retired from teaching at the University of Rhode Island. But earning your way, he said, isn't the point.



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“When you start focusing on making a living as an artist, I think you’re also setting yourself up for a lot of compromising,” he said. “You’re not making art that speaks to your community. Or making art that speaks to your *self*. You’re making art that speaks to a market.”

Studio: Much of the house Dilworth bought in 1996 is now workspace. He paints large-scale canvases in a converted garage. Paintings and fabric cover the dining room table and works-in-progress hang on the walls. A bedroom has become the fabric room.



Bob Dilworth, photographed in his home studio. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

How he started: “I can’t remember not drawing and not painting,” Dilworth said.

What he makes: He calls himself “a painter and an experimental textile artist.” Fabric came into the work when the artist was visiting his family in



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Lawrenceville. Back home in Providence, he'd ask himself, "How can you make a portrait from a conversation?"

"I had to bring some physical things back that really reflected them. I was getting bedspreads and rugs and curtains and designs and patterns to help identify the spaces they lived in," Dilworth said. Brocade, lace, old ties, and denim from jeans became part of the paintings.



How he works: Dilworth paints from photographs, enlarging images on grids.

"Often I don't know where it's going to go," he said. "The surprises often are what makes the painting."

Advice for artists: "You have to be vulnerable and not control everything, because you get real upset when you're trying to control it and it's not going the



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way you want it to go,” Dilworth said. “You need to find those moments that are completely still and quiet, and you can think your way through.”



Bob Dilworth works with a piece of fabric. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

BOB DILWORTH: WHEN I REMEMBERED HOME

At Fitchburg Art Museum, 185 Elm St., Fitchburg, through Jan. 12. 978-345-4207, www.fitchburgartmuseum.org Artist talk: 2 p.m., Jan. 11. Registration appreciated: www.fitchburgartmuseum.org/upcoming-programs/