

Dirk Joseph

Visual artist, Performing Artist, Art teacher
Graphic Designer, Film Maker

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Career Summary

For over 30 years Dirk has been involved in the arts in almost equal parts as an exhibiting visual artist and as an arts teacher and community art facilitator. In 2016 he added storytelling and theatrical presentations to his artistic practice using the fine art of puppetry. In 2024 he completed his first large scale public art installation.

- **VISUAL ART** - Dirk's visual art primarily encompasses paintings and sculptures, but his creative repertoire extends to digital art, animation, film, illustration, tile mosaics, murals, and recently, augmented reality art. His work explores a broad range of themes, often focusing on the interplay between the forces and processes of nature, and the multifaceted dimensions of human consciousness and culture. Drawing inspiration from traditional African iconography and diverse indigenous visual traditions, Dirk seeks to forge authentic connections with self, community, and nature through his art. His creations have been showcased in various venues, including galleries, libraries, schools, and restaurants. During his time in New York in the 1990s, Dirk served as president of the Long Island Black Artists Association. He also relishes participating in public festivals, where he engages directly with the community while presenting his work. Additionally, Dirk has an extensive background in graphic design and web design.
- **ART TEACHING/COMMUNITY ARTS** - Dirk has been teaching art since 1993, beginning as a volunteer in his local elementary schools in NY. This experience paved the way for his work with several "teaching artist" agencies in New York and Maryland, as well as delivering slide lectures at several universities in New York. In Baltimore, Dirk has served as a middle and high school art teacher. As a community arts facilitator, he often collaborates with Baltimore-based community organizations to promote artistic engagement and education. Dirk currently teaches set design in Baltimore City Public Schools, and also conducts his own arts classes and community workshops. As the art director for Urban Earth Synapse, Dirk organizes and facilitates nature themed art workshops on various urban farms and community gardens.
- **PERFORMANCE** - In 2016, Dirk founded String Theory Theater (STT), a traveling puppetry troupe he leads with his daughters, Koi and Azaria. STT produces and performs engaging puppet shows for audiences of all ages, with appearances at prominent Maryland venues such as the Baltimore Museum of Art, Black Cherry Puppet Theater, Creative Alliance, and Baltimore Center Stage. Their performances have extended beyond Maryland to include the Detroit Institute of Art, the University of Connecticut, and various venues across the Northeast United States. STT has partnered with the Baltimore City Board of Education and the Enoch Pratt Free Library system for public performances and has received numerous grants and awards in recognition of their work.

In 2021, Dirk wrote a screenplay for a theatrical film titled *Underground*, which was performed by the Baltimore Rock Opera Society. In 2023, he received a grant from the Jim Henson Foundation to develop a new production titled *Defrag*. That same year, Dirk made his curatorial debut, curating, hosting, and performing in a puppet slam at the Locally Grown Festival at Baltimore Center Stage.

Before establishing STT, Dirk was part of The Drapetomaniacs, a two-person puppetry performance team he formed in 2014 with artist Pierre Benu.

Education and training

- Primarily self-taught visual artist
 - Foundation art classes - School of Visual Arts, NY 1989
 - Technical drawing/drafting classes at College of Aeronautics, NY 1987
 - Computer science courses at State University of New York at Old Westbury, NY 1985
 - Hempstead High School, NY 1985
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Professional Affiliations

Current

- String Theory Theater, founder, director, principal artist - 2016-present
- Urban Earth Synapsis, Art director for AudaCITY and Garden Art Party initiatives, 2021-present
- Youth Resiliency Institute, Lead Family Engagement Art Facilitator, 2013-2023 (on hiatus)

Former

- Free-Up Community HomeSchool Cooperative, art instructor, 2018-2020
 - Futuremakers, Instructor/t Coach, 2021-2022
 - Art teacher for Child First Authority via Concepts by Cash, 2012-2019
 - Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women, Middle-High School Art-Teacher, 2009-2011
 - Baltimore Office of Promotion, Artist in Residency program teaching artist, 2005-2007
 - Artist assistant to artist Jean-Pierre Weil (framing, touch up, representative, sales), 2006-2009
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Art Instruction

Instruction, community arts, and workshop facilitation (partial list)

Current positions:

Art Director for Urban Earth Synapse / Garden Art Party, since 2022
Set design instructor for Moving History, MD, since 2023
Community Arts facilitator for Youth Resiliency Institute, MD, since 2014
Instructor/coordinator for Community Art Lab, MD. 2023

Recent/past:

Theater teacher at Road to Freedom Summer Camp, Northeast Towson Improvement Association (NeTIA) 2023
Workshop facilitator and performer at EPFL Imagination Celebration Govans 2023
Instructor/coach for FutureMakers, MD 2022
Instructor at Free Up Village Community Homeschool Co-op, MD 2021
Virtual workshop presenter for The Ballard Institute of Puppetry, UCONN 2020
After-school arts instructor in Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) through Concepts By Cash, MD
After-school arts instructor in BCPS through Child First Authority, MD
Art instructor at Ravens Adult Medical Day Care, MD
Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women (middle/HS school art teacher), MD
School 33 Art Center, Bright Starts Artist Residencies, MD
Artist in Residence for BCPS through Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts, MD
Savvy Seniors Art Classes – BCCC, MD
Reginald E. Lewis Museum; artistic consultant for genealogy project, MD
Art Mentorship Program – Rush Arts Philanthropic Arts Foundation, NY
Reginald E. Lewis Museum; artistic consultant for genealogy project, MD
Africa Art Exchange Program, Red Clay Arts, NY
"Dreamers Program" Art Instruction and Vocational Training - Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration, NY
Teaching Artist Residency, Open Classroom Collaborative, NY
Cultural Crafts Workshop, Ancestor Theater, NY
Creative Workshops at Afrikan Poetry Theatre, NY
Earth Art, The Nature Place, NJ
Lectures at: Adelphi College, NYIT, SUNY at Stony Brook, and several NY public schools.

Awards, Grants, Commissions

2024 Urban Field Station Artist in Residence awarded by The Nature of Cities / USDA
2024 Free Fall Baltimore Grant recipient
2023 Commission by The Peale Museum to create a historic crankie
2023 Jim Henson Foundation grant to produce a theatrical puppet show titled "DEFRAG"
2023 Arts in Action Grant from BOPA to develop and implement an experimental art education curriculum
2023 Grant from Maryland Historical Society to create large scale puppets for Artscape 2023
2022 Free Fall Baltimore Grant recipient for STT
2021 Commission by University of Maryland for puppet film titled "Material Witness"
2021 2nd place award in 48 hr Puppet Film Project for puppet film titled "Inflorescence"
2021 Awarded film commission from Ibex Puppetry, Handmade Puppet Dreams for "Not By The Hairs"
2020 #Reflect Baltimore Award from Baltimore's Black Arts District
2019 Recipient of the a Grit Fund for String Theory Theater Baltimore Tour
2019 Free Fall grant recipient for STT
2018 Recipient of BOPA grant to create large scale puppetry performances at 2018 Artscape

Exhibit History

Dirk's Artwork has been shown at numerous galleries, libraries, community centers, and restaurants. A partial list of exhibit sites/events are listed below.

Gallery 1448, MD	Corridor Gallery, NY
MICA, MD	Rush Arts, NY
The Whole Gallery, MD	Skylight Gallery, NY
Station North Arts Cafe Gallery, MD	Magill House International Art Gallery, NY
BHO Gallery, Canada	African American Museum of L.I., NY
George Washington Carver Gallery, NY	

Clients

Graphic design, data visualization, Illustration, film, animation (partial list)

ReBuild Metro, MD	Youth Resiliency Institute, MD
DewMore Baltimore, MD	11 West Café - MD
Ingleside Press, MD	NYC Public Schools – NY
UConn, CT	NYC Housing Administration- NY
Enoch Pratt Free Library	Gabriel Toys Inc. - NY
Wadigidigi Publications - MD	Brooklyn Perinatal Network - NY
Tumba Productions -Senegal	CSEA Labor Union - NY
Woman's Work Birthing - MD	Talon Security - NY
African Ancestors Living Theater - MD	Office of Black Ministries - NY
NowChild Soundstage- MD	ALIBI Clothing Co. - NY
Femmes Africa Solidarite – Senegal,	Basilias Music - NY
Urban Earth Synapsis, MD	
