



Flora and art brighten up winter

Event runs from Thursday through Sunday

By Nancy Sheehan
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

You might see some family resemblances in the flower arrangements at Flora in Winter this year. Other bouquets will make you want to hop on your Vespa scooter for a Roman holiday.

Worcester Art Museum and Tower Hill Botanic garden have joined cultural forces again to present Flora in Winter Thursday through Sunday, with events at both institutions. The annual flower fest features fresh floral arrangements interpreting works of art at the Worcester Art Museum. Several arrangers have chosen portraits of, or paintings by, their forebears for their inspiration this year. At Tower Hill, arrangers work off of a theme rather than actual art. This year, they were asked to use flowers to interpret symbols of the Roman Pantheon.

Flora usually is held in February, but a January date was chosen this year to accommodate event schedules at both institutions. This has suited arrangers just fine. "They were happy about it because the closer you get to Valentine's Day, the more expensive the flowers are," Martin Richman, director of development and marketing at the museum, said. "Some people spend \$500 to \$1,000 for their arrangements."

That passion pays off in superb arrangements that echo the artwork (or theme) in surprising and delightful ways. This year, there is a feeling of flora-responsibility.

"It's the first of the floral events around Boston and Central Massachusetts," Flora co-chair Katharine M. Michie of the Worcester Garden Club, said. Those trailers include Art in Bloom, the Museum of Fine Arts event that Flora in Winter is modeled on, and annual flower shows in Boston and Worcester. "It's a very prominent position to be in. We're kicking the whole season off," she said.

Mrs. Michie is one of several arrangers who chose an all-in-the-family theme. She will interpret "Repose," a painting by her grandfather, Harry Siddons Mowbray, owned by the museum. The painting has an Eastern feeling to it as Mowbray, like many Western painters at the turn of the last century - James McNeil Whistler and John LaFarge among them - had a fascination with the Orient. How will Mrs. Michie capture the essence of a painting made by her grandfather, who died before she was born?

"I'm trying to connect with him through

the painting and, hopefully, he's kind of talking to me from another place to guide me on my arrangement," she said. Celestial inspiration or no, it's still a lot of creative work coming up with just the right reflection of painting to plant material.

"The whole designing of an arrangement is evolution," she said. "It goes through seven transitions as it evolves." On Thursday morning she will report to the museum to do the final floral honors on deadline. The doors open for designers at 7 a.m. and they must be done by 10 a.m.

"I'm feeling ready for it," Mrs. Michie said last Friday. "I've figured out what I'm going to do and I've done a mockup. I started by studying books on Japanese flower arranging to capture that Eastern feeling."

Working away nearby Thursday morning will be Mrs. Michie's Flora in Winter co-chair, Susan B. Dewey. She will interpret "Lizzie B. Dewey," a painting by John Singer Sargent. Mrs. Dewey's husband, Steve Dewey, is Lizzie B.'s great-grandson. Lizzie died a month before Steve was born in 1950, but there are lots of family stories about her.

"The family always describes her as a very strong, confident woman," Mrs. Dewey said. She was involved in lots of organizations in the city including the Worcester Girls Club and was a pillar of the Unitarian Church.

"The story is that her husband, and probably Lizzie, was not really happy with Sargent's painting," she said. "They believed it made her look too strong, but I've always thought that Sargent probably saw that commanding quality in her and that he wanted to capture her independent spirit somehow."

Lizzie was a force to be reckoned with, apparently. "She made sure that the Unitarian minister finished every sermon in Worcester's Main Street church on Sunday exactly at the stroke of noon. The family story is that she would sit in the poor guy's line of vision and stare him down if he dared pontificate longer than his allotted time," Mrs. Dewey said.

How do you say that with flowers?

"I picked dramatic strong flowers for the arrangement, flowers that can stand alone and make a statement in any arrangement," she said.

With this year's Flora arrangement there is another family thread that is especially significant to Mrs. Dewey. "I wanted to honor my mother-in-law, Frani Dewey (who died last summer). She was the first person in my



T&G FILE PHOTO

Katharine M. Michie of West Boylston, Flora co-chair, is shown working on a tropical mass arrangement at last year's event. Her arrangement was matched with the painting by Paul Gauguin called "The Brooding Woman."

life to recognize my flower-arranging ability and who encouraged me to join the Worcester Garden Club years ago."

At Tower Hill, 20 arrangers will pay homage to the Roman Pantheon, including Ceres, the goddess of agriculture, Pomona, the goddess of the orchard, and Pandora, the goddess of — wait a minute, she's Greek.

"We didn't put a gun to their heads and say 'It has to be the Roman Pantheon,'" John W. Trexler, Tower Hill executive director, said. "It's being loosely interpreted. We have people interpreting Greek deities and Roman deities and Greek architecture and Roman architecture. The Romans loved the Greek myths so it's all very appropriate."

And attractive, even for those from far away. Trexler said three bus tours from outside the region are heading to Tower Hill for the event. They will see beautiful arrangements by a talented group, including the mega-award winning Julie Lapham of Southboro.

"I think they're going to have a very strong showing this year," Mrs. Michie said, of the Tower Hill contingent. "One of their co-chairs, Julie Lapham, is an award-winning arranger so she's really running with the group out there and I think it's going to be fabulous."