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Art in Bloom will flower again at the St. Louis Art Museum

After a five-year hiatus, Art in Bloom returns to the St. Louis Art Museum this month. The three-day festival matches floral designs with artworks and offers lectures and demonstrations with floral interpretations throughout the museum.

The interpretations are labors of love for 31 sets of gardeners and floral designers from around the region. Each pulled a number out of a hat for an assignment, “a vase, a loving cup, a painting, something contemporary or something traditional,” said Madelyn Hucker, who got what she called Roberto Matto’s “hallucinatory landscape” in Gallery 210, “Cover the Earth with a New Dew.”

Each interpreter has a standardized pedestal that’s 24 by 24 inches on top and 42 inches high; the floral display can go another 42 inches above that and no further. “It’s really, really hard until you get your plant material to see if God is going to let you do your design,” Hucker said. “When you’re a floral designer, there are many Plan B’s.”

The annual event began in 2000, inspired by others at museums in Boston, Milwaukee and elsewhere. It went away after 2008, when SLAM turned into a construction zone. With the new building done, it’s back.

“We have more spaces to work with this time,” said the museum’s special events director, Kristin R. Lamprecht, “so we’ll see more work from our great community of designers, and a more robust lecture schedule.”

This year’s featured events include lectures by Judith Farr, the set designer for “Downton Abbey;” David Bromstad of HGTV’s “Color Splash” and artist Isabella Kirkland, whose painting “Descendent” is this year’s signature artwork, along with master classes with designer Jane Winter. Sunday features free drop-in events for children, including art projects, a scavenger hunt and a performance of “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe” by the Rep’s Imaginary Theater Company.

Aside from the special events, you’ll see flowers wherever you look. Hucker is coordinating the 16 garden club designers participating in “Bloom,” people who typically undertake what she calls “civic gardening duties and put on gardening shows.” She noted the difference between design clubs and garden clubs. Design is about “the

http://www.stltoday.com/entertainment/arts-and-theatre/art-in-bloom-will-flower-again-at-the-st-louis/article_24a1c399-7b1a-5746-ba54-6bcfe54c2751.html

education, the artsy-fartsy side of it, the principles and elements of design, the kind of balance we're seeing."

Keith McDonnell of Botanicals Design Studio is assisting, with three other florists, in the concept and overall decoration in the main Sculpture Hall; he'll give a demonstration on flowers for entertaining and is also doing an interpretation. The Sculpture Hall concept, he said, is "a profusion of spring, really beautiful. We are doing a huge arrangement of forsythia, with towers of flowers going 30 feet into the air. We'll use all the vibrant colors." The team at Botanicals, which has been part of several earlier "Blooms," has worked on the designs for more than a month; the installation will take three days. "It's just a really incredible, fun experience. There's some unbelievable artistry and inspiration," McDonnell said.

This will be the third Art in Bloom for Bob Hauck, a 27-year veteran at Walter Knoll Florist. He's interpreting an African elephant tribal mask, "four feet tall, a real challenge." "You look at it; of course, you look at the colors and the different textures. You want to try to use flowers that are from Africa if you can; you can fudge a little bit, but I try to use flowers that are native to the piece." He's thinking in terms of Gerber daisies ("They're orange, which works with the colors, and they're from Africa") and rice flower, whose bead-like look will complement the tiny beads on the mask. "You just look at the piece, study it and see what inspires you."

Jane Winter, owner of Wildflowers, will do a pair of hands-on master classes on Friday. She'll talk about how the form and color of flowers affect how they should be arranged and teach some techniques of wiring and the hand-tied bouquet.

She's done classes before, she said, "but usually I'm the one that's demonstrating, making arrangements, talking about what I'm doing and why I'm doing it. This time, I'm going to do demonstrations (of the techniques); people will be given a list of flowers, pick them out, take them to their tables — and I'll help them out."

Wildflowers does a new design for the flowers in the Sculpture Hall each month, but this is Winter's first Art in Bloom. "It is a wonderful event because it draws people into all parts of the museum, even parts they wouldn't go into normally. When you go to Art in Bloom, it's good to take a lot of time and see as much of the museum as you can. It's been fun to work on."

Lamprecht anticipates a busy weekend: In 2008, more than 18,000 people visited over three days, and the event was growing. "Every year during the hiatus, I got dozens and dozens of calls asking if this was the year Art in Bloom was coming back," she said. "It's a very exciting time to be in the museum."