

“The Memphis Flower Show at the Dixon Gallery and Gardens”
by Vi West

The Dixon Gallery and Gardens biennially showcases the celebrated Memphis Flower Show during the weekend of April 26 and 27. The art exhibit consists of sculptures from several prominent local sculptors including Joyce Gingold, Maysey Craddock, Wayne Edge, Ted Faiers, Terri Jones, Greely Myatt, Brian Russell, Allison Smith, and Carroll Todd. The sculptures are displayed in the gallery, and floral arrangers from across the country design interpretive floral arrangements based on the sculptures.

The materials utilized to create the compositions of the flower arrangements include exotic species of flowers, metal wire, glass, and fabric, as well as anything from the sculpture that inspires the artist arranging the flowers. The artist arranging the flowers must consider materials used in the original sculpture, colors and tones, as well as texture, and mood created by the movement of line and form in the sculpture.

The artists are allowed to work in advance preparing the idea for the arrangement from photographs of the sculptures. A total of fifty sculptures in the exhibit are interpreted by flower arrangements. Each sculpture is displayed with a plaque that lists the materials in the sculpture and the flower interpretation, as well as the flower arranger's artist statement of intent and the judges' response to the piece.

There are only eight similar art shows to the Memphis Flower Show that incorporating interpretive flower arrangements in the country as part of the Garden Club of America. The sculptures are all three dimensional, and are composed of a variety of materials such as wood, metal, glass, steel, felt, paint, and fabric. Many of the smaller works are displayed on pedestals, although some of the larger sculptures either stand-alone on the studio floor or are hung on the walls.

Joyce Gingold, local artist and teacher of an afternoon art class for adults at St. Mary's Episcopal School submitted a sculpture composed of a compilation of miniature nude torsos displayed on pedestals of various heights in the exhibit. The torso figure sculptures were then interpreted by five flower arrangers, and displayed side by side to accentuate the similarities and differences between each arranger's interpretations.

Linnea West, artist and student of Joyce's adult art class, explains how the translation between form and flower is a delicate balance that is difficult to achieve, but when rendered successfully, "can be more a more accurate interpretation than words".

"If the floral arranger is sensitive to the movement, the lines within the sculpture, the weight distribution, and mood, the arrangement can focus the viewer on the essence of the sculpture; one must be careful not to go overboard in repeating too many aspects of the sculpture or the arrangement will appear to be a stilted copy", says West.

"A successful example is the pure, simplistic form of the calla lilies and the gracefully arching stems echoed the balanced restrained movement in Joyce's sculpture", she continues.

The sculptures are divided into six different divisions, and separated into rooms according to which section the works belong to. The first division includes ten

subcategories of flower arrangements based on sculptures. The second division is composed of cut-flower arrangements and container-grown plants. The focus of the third division is botanical photography; division four has botanical jewelry; division five focuses on the Dixon Gallery and Gardens' efforts to preserve the Riverwoods native plants, and the last division is based on education for gardeners about native Memphis plants. The Garden Club of America judges the divisions.

One room in the exhibit contained a challenge in which six artists were not shown the art piece they were designing the flower arrangements before the day of the show. The flower arrangers were given a set amount of time in hours and a box of materials from which they were allowed to design the flower interpretations.

The original sculpture was by Greely Myatt called "Shades and Shamrocks", which is a compilation of light bulbs, some lit and some unlit, tangled in wire and hung from the ceiling. Each interpretation was different although the same calla lilies, wire, metal tubing, and other materials were the same.

Many of the art pieces are regularly displayed at the David Lusk Gallery in Memphis, and on loan while being shown in the Memphis Flower Show. The Dixon Gallery and Garden's exhibit of the Memphis Flower Show highlights the trend of modern-day flower arrangers interpreting postmodern art in a manner that uses fewer flowers and expresses the emotion of the creation through simplicity.

In many of the pairings at the exhibit, a long, graceful contour line sweeping upward with the perfect species of flower conveyed the essence of the original sculpture. The flower arrangements will be open to the public for the remainder of the weekend, but the sculptures will remain on display for the rest of the month.

