

# ART IN BLOOM 2024

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Interpretations of exhibits at the Montclair Art Museum  
by members of the Garden Club of Montclair

Photographs © [Andy Foster](#)

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The Floral Design Chair of this year's Art in Bloom **Cynthia Corhan-Aitken** stands by her inspirational design in the empty Marion Mann Roberts Gallery at the Montclair Museum of Art, scheduled to be filled with the new Native American collection in September 2024.

The following pages show the thought processes behind the creations of The Garden Club of Montclair members at this year's Art in Bloom Exhibition, illustrated with the powerful images of Andy Foster.



Robert Blackburn (1920-2003)  
Faux Pas, 1960  
Lithograph  
Edition 1/100  
Signed and numbered  
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**Designer: Susan Brady Abadan**  
*inspired by Robert Blackburn (1920-2003)*  
**"Faux Pas," 1960**

I absolutely love the colors and shapes in this abstract lithograph by Robert Blackburn. I was thrilled to find these unique containers that reflect both the tones and modern, three-dimensional forms represented in "Faux Pas," The three stands help emphasize the two-third, one-third proportions defined by the vertical white line.

The overall feeling of this piece conveys windswept late fall which led to the choice of dried plant material in lieu of fresh including (left to right) natural pea shooter branches, variegated dogwood branches, orange craspedia billy balls, and protea balls. The selected plant material juxtaposes shape, size, color, texture, and movement.





**Designers: Fran Ackerly and Floss O'Sullivan**  
*inspired by Gregory Crewdson (b. 1962)*  
**“Untitled (pregnant woman in pool)” 1999**

Inspired by the stark contrasts in Crewdson's work, the designers chose bold plant material and color blocked it by its placement. They selected dark Ti leaves because they represent fertility, and wired and manipulated them to introduce movement. Willow branches symbolizing resilience are coated in diamond dust to make them appear illuminated. Calla lilies dominate the center of the design and embody the idea of rebirth. Shades of darkness and light in our plant material convey feelings of both foreboding and hope.





**Designer: Barbara Baletti**  
*inspired by Velino Shije Herrera [Ma Pe We]*  
**(Zia Pueblo, 1902-1973)**  
**"Animal Dancers," ca. 1930s**

How does one do justice to a depiction of a Pueblo dance such as this? How do I honor Herrera with his use of such vivid colors and eye-catching movements as he captures this event in such delicate and accurate detail? I must channel my own imagination to reflect the colors, the movement, and the spirit of the piece. Will my fresh and dried botanical elements and the addition of interpretive touches give it the hoor it deserves? I hope so.





**Designer: Susan Benner**  
*inspired by John Singer Sargent (1856-1925)*  
**"Corner of the Church of St. Stae," 1913**

The designer wanted to capture the colors of the columns using white flowers with unique shading and to those to reflect the contrasting rust of the chapel and water area.

Dominant to the painting and this design are the columns and they were incorporated to support this design. Then, to reflect the texture of the buildings, the designer painted the containers and glued crushed stones. To highlight the rich colors of the frame, a tray was incorporated into the design, painted with a gold trim.



**Designer: Olga Bequillard**  
*inspired by Gladys John Wollaston (active 1733-1767)*  
**“Mother and Two Daughters,” ca. 1755**

This mid-18<sup>th</sup> century portrait of a domestic scene is undoubtedly influenced by the conventions of its day. Besides being a mere record of their physical appearance, it is a revelation of the essence of motherhood. The piece is filled with dusty pink carnations and roses—both are elegant and signify love and devotion, a mother’s devotion in this case. Mini white calla lilies evoke the girls, as they symbolize purity and innocence. A darker-hued calla stands for the faithful mother (callas are associated with the Virgin Mary.) Overall, the plant material is kept simple with greens and filters, a classicizing element that also signifies eternity and fidelity. A few curly willow branches accent an artful and elegant presentation of the theme.



Deana Lawson, 2009  
Wanda and Daughters  
Deana Lawson's work is a celebration of the everyday life of African American women and their families. Her photographs are characterized by their vibrant colors and rich textures, capturing the beauty and resilience of her subjects. In "Wanda and Daughters," Lawson depicts a woman and her two young daughters in a garden, a scene that is both intimate and universal. The woman, Wanda, is dressed in a dark jacket and purple pants, while the children are in bright red and orange outfits. The garden is filled with various plants, including a large tree trunk and dense foliage, creating a sense of a lived-in and loved space. The photograph is a testament to the power of everyday life and the beauty of the human experience.

**Designer: Carol Callahan**  
*inspired by Deana Lawson (b. 1979)*  
**“Wanda and Daughters,” 2009**

I was inspired by how Deana set up Wanda and her daughters in the garden by a tree. I love the colors in their clothing and the silver jewelry, denim and hair beading, braiding. Lots of color struck me from the black and brown shadows and clothing, and especially the red outfit of the younger daughter. The wagon I am using helps create an atmosphere of playfulness, gardens, and the accent color of red.







Nanette Carter b. 1954  
"Destabilizing #2" 2022

Artist's Statement  
"Destabilizing #2" 2022



**Designer: Cynthia Corhan-Aitken**  
*inspired by Nanette Carter (b.1954)*  
**"Destabilizing #2," 2022**

As the Floral Design Chair I have the privilege of not only assigning the artwork to designers but also the ability to choose the piece I want for myself. When I first saw this exhibit I was immediately and continually drawn to this piece by Nanette Carter entitled "Destabilizing". I loved the sharpness of the black and white stripes and how they contrasted with the bits of turquoise which added a softness to the work.

Next, how best to design for it? I thought the title "Destabilizing" was important and that the design should reflect that to some degree. After many incarnations in my mind, I decided to use various containers to represent the different parts of the piece and kept them all in black and white. One I wrapped in striped paper to emulate the paper in the collage and also used black and white paper straws.

I wanted the plant material to be all white with just a touch of turquoise. After some research, the only naturally occurring turquoise flower that I could find is grown in South Africa and not available here. So, I substituted some spray paint and dried flowers for the real thing.

I hope I have done this beautiful collage justice with my design.



**Designer: Jessica Fleming**  
*inspired by Willie Cole (b. 1955)*  
**“Mother and Child,” 2002**

Willie Cole is an artist I look up to and I was very honored to be assigned this piece. I created a “moss sculpture”, using preserved reindeer moss, recycled cardboard, and non-toxic adhesive. The moss is naturally dyed and there are no harsh chemicals used in its preservation, using salts and natural dyes. As an advocate for sustainability, I love creating art from recycled materials, much like the artist himself.



**Designer: Karen Fricke**  
*inspired by Will Barnett (1911-2012)*  
**"Old Man's Afternoon," 1947**

This is my first experience with Art in Bloom, and I had so much fun! The strong, bold shapes in deep, rich, saturated colors were what immediately struck me, so I created a container that would speak to the blocks of color in the painting. That allowed me to highlight those colors in the floral arrangement.

I selected flowers primarily for their strong colors, but also their defined forms. Barnett's touches of whimsy, like the bowl of nuts, his father's mustache, and the mischievous expressions of the family pets, inspired me to add my own. The black cat vase holds a chartreuse dianthus, mimicking the spiky globe in the center of the painting. I painted a lotus pod to represent the old man's snack and a dried grass frond reminded me of his mustache. And I couldn't resist using a bird of paradise, as it so perfectly captured the essence of the cat in the upper right corner.

I was hesitant at first to use so much color and texture in a floral arrangement, especially when making the container, but I kept returning to the painting again and again, which is bursting with both. I hope I found the right balance to honor both the painting and the plant material.



**Designer: Nancy Gerber**  
*inspired by Janet Taylor Pickett*  
**(b. 1948)**

**“Me and Matisse (Past Recollections; Me and Matisse & Thinking of Paris; Me and Matisse ... Interiors,” 2001**

The artist uses collage to tell a story about her journey as an artist. It is full of puzzling rectangles, Matisse-like patterns, and images of African culture. I represented Pickett’s work in three floral arrangements:

- ❖ Photo boxes are used to evoke the idea of stored memories, and they provide black space that flowers cannot. In this context, dried flowers are the floral equivalent of photographs.
- ❖ A shelf was necessary to hold a series of arrangements and provide a backdrop of a Kente cloth purchased on a trip to Africa to visit family.

❖ The rectangles made of red twig dogwood define spaces and frame Matisse-like patterns. The rectangles provide increasing dimension as the story flows from one box to another as the artist evolves. I used many flowers that are indigenous to Africa to honor culture and provide bright colors in a nod to Matisse. Some flowers are intended to represent specific elements from the artwork such as the little girl in the white dress, however direct reference defers to a general floral composition that shares some elements with a work of art. I used botanical objects collected on nature walks, little mementos from a journey. So, my treasures will represent hers.



**Designer: Victoria Herrera**  
*inspired by Gladys Grauer*  
**(1923-2019)**  
**"Tomorrow May Be A  
Thousand Years," 2002**

Gladys Barker Grauer used her paintbrush to illustrate social and economic inequality. She was a community organizer and a political activist against racism and oppression. She said, "Art is my life. It's the way I express my feelings, my emotions, my anger, my joy." As a professional artist myself I can relate to and understand those words. What has inspired me about this piece is the wide range of color as well as mixed media in the form of collage. I have tried to express her feelings in the flowers and colors I have chosen..



**Designer: Deborah Hirsch**  
*inspired by Thomas Wilmer Dewing (1851-1938)*  
**“Lady in Lavender” ca. 1910**

Designing for this painting from the Vance Wall collection was a great privilege. Carol Wall introduced me to her collection of American Impressionists in the quiet elegance of her home over 20 years ago. Her friendship led me to meet Deborah Davis, author of *Madame X* and *The Lure of Frames* among other fascinating books. **“Lady in Lavender”** has both the tonalist ethereal beauty of her form, but also a Stanford White grille frame, and both have aged gracefully.

It hung in her living room, and I sat in Carol’s comfortable rose and lavender silk furniture in awe of its quiet beauty. I tried to allow it to whisper to me about what its owner might wish to see. I immersed myself in the lavender hues of flowers and greenery, then allowed myself to let go of control to the material. I imagined myself making a gown for Carol, who believed in the power of flowers like no one I have ever known.



Kehinde Wiley b. 1977  
Matar Mbaye (Study 1) 2007



**Designer: Florence Leyssène**  
*inspired by Kehinde Wiley (b. 1977)*  
**“Matar Mbaye (Study 1),” 2007**

The very strong contrast between the vibrant colors in the painting’s background and the powerful portrait of Matar Mbaye was my inspiration for this design. The vase with a linear pattern is reminiscent of African art. The twirling twigs from the wreath replicate the weaving vines in the painting. The orange and green plant material adds a striking visual effect.



**Designer: Sydney Milliken**  
*inspired by John Sloan (1871-1951)*  
**"Bonfire Snow," ca.1919**

The John Sloan painting is an atmospheric portrayal of a dark wintery street scene in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Greenwich Village. Neighborhood children play amongst the brownstone stoops and greying mounds of snow.

The dark evening streets are offset by a blast of bright color from the huge bonfire, providing light and warmth for the young people playing in the snow, and which becomes the dominant focal point of the painting.

Interpreting this dramatic painting in flowers I chose very bright strong colors for the bonfire, yellow sunflowers with black centers, deep orange gerberas and feathery greenish yellow astilbe, interspersed with privet berry.

For the snow mounds white hydrangeas and white baby's breath (gypsophila) leafless twigs from my River Birch as backdrop for wintery bare trees

The container, a black tinted woven basket, represents the dark surround of the scene.





**Designer: Ana Zalles Moore**  
*inspired by* **George Inness (1825-1894)**  
**“Breaking Through the Clouds,” ca. 1883-1894**

This work created in me a sense of the passing of time and of the natural cycle of life and death. I was inspired by the contrasting light and dark tones of the clouds against the dramatic form of the fallen tree, soon to die. The orange and blue tones of the setting sun further accentuate the sense of ending, either the end of the day or of life. This in turn is contrasted against the renewal of life represented by the carefree small child observing the ducks, amongst the wildflowers and grasses of the countryside.

Choosing the dark wooden basket brought out the texture and color of the fallen tree, and created a link to a container which could have been stored at the farmhouse in the distance. Dark green foliage for the base of the arrangement represented the branches of the fallen tree. I portrayed the end-of-life aspect of the painting with the dried Laurel branches, the dried orange wild Roses and blue Sea Hollies. To bring in the dramatic light contrast of the clouds I used the Rice Flowers and white Asters. In turn, to suggest the youthfulness of the child and a sense of life’s cycle of renewal, I added brighter, smaller white Carnations.





**Designer: Deborah Moran  
inspired by Jacob Lawrence (1917-  
2000)**

**"October 16, 1859, John Brown  
with a company of 21 men, white  
and black, marched on Harper's  
Ferry," 1977**

Out of Jacob Lawrence's three works, I chose "October 16, 1859 ..." because its starkness and ferocity stood out so clearly. However, I chose my container, with its sharp angles, to reference the angles present in the other two works. Color and plant material choices were harder but dark brown euonymus branches express the severity, red-hued anthurium and yellow spadix reference the blood and bayonets, and woven in, yarn-wrapped wire captures the brooding sky.



**Designer: Betty Jagoda Murphy**  
*inspired by Frederick Frieseke (1874-1939)*  
**"White Lilies," ca. 1911**

Before buying the flowers, I knew that I wanted the chair, the hat and the parasol to be prominently featured in my final design. Our lovely lady is approaching the chair with the intent of sitting and perhaps, dreaming, under the shade of the parasol surrounded by fragrant lilies and the warmth of the sun.

I chose the Sorbonne lilies, white snap dragons and white baby's breath to convey the overall impression of the garden that Frieseke depicts. As I studied the gown, I saw the hints of rose and purple colors ... as well as blue tones that connect the lady to the flowers and so I added the purple larkspur, blue statice and purple phlox. During the Edwardian period of the painting, there was an increased interest in items from Asia, so to enhance the bamboo parasol handle, I added the Chinese porcelain container to frame the flowers and complement the overall effect of the painting.





**Designer: Tovah Narrett**  
*inspired by Sanford Biggers (b. 1970)*  
**“BAM (Seated Warrior Queen),” 2017**

This work instantly commands your attention. To me, the sculpture looked almost like a tree — lean and muscular, with long sinewy legs planted in the earth.

First, I needed to find hard, tough plant material that would have a dramatic vertical thrust. Luckily, I actually collect uprooted bushes and vines and stumps — they look like sculptures! This is the tallest and thinnest one I could find, with a full base of roots to show connectedness to the earth. I’ve always wanted to build a giant flower, and this seemed the perfect occasion. Right across the street from the museum, there was a huge lawn covered with thousands of locust pods. They reminded me of the long twisty petals of purple coneflower (echinacea), which is an iconic native wildflower. Coneflower seemed a great choice, because it’s a very tough customer, a real survivor, and a source of sustenance for wildlife.

For the central seed cone, I found spiky sweetgum acorns that were carpeting the sidewalk over on Plymouth Street, a few blocks from here. These acorns and pods are native seeds, embodying the will to live. Everything was laced together with delicate jewelry wire. Then I lavished metallic paint on thickly, so that the entire design would seem to be cast in bronze or iron or steel, like a powerful statue.



**Designer: Gretchen Prater**  
*inspired by Ambrose Rhapsody Murray (b. 1996)*  
**“the space between,” 2020**

This painting captured my heart and imagination with the figures that are so powerful and the dynamic colors.

I wanted to capture the beautiful colors with many African plants and flowers, as well as very colorful birds of Paradise to represent the birds in the painting.

I found the two wooden vases and put dried plants in them to capture the essence of the figures. I chose very colorful, beautiful flowers and a bird of paradise to try and capture the magic, warmth, and love that is in this amazing piece of art.

However it is truly impossible to express the feelings that the powerful figures bring to me. I hope you enjoy looking at this glorious painting as much as I do and the beautiful colors that I tried to capture in my arrangement.



**Designer: Celia Radek**  
*inspired by Julie Mehretu (b. 1970)*  
**"Diffraction," 2005**

I frequently design with dried plant material, contorted branches, to establish line and movement, drawing in space. It's serendipitous to find just the right one, but most times you need to manipulate the branch (or the idea) to make it all work.

For this design, I made an initial sketch after living with the image for some time and then constructed a few trial runs which I photographed; notes to decide what's working or not.

My approach was to use components which would emphasize movement, direction, the impact of natural forces. Plant material, including willow, cut-leaf philodendron and herbs provide varied textures; their shapes and colors the result of time and exposure. With a faint echo of the etching's diagonal forms, the container alludes to those natural forces captured in "Diffraction".



**Designer: Marisabel Raymond**  
*inspired by* **George Inness (1825-1894)**  
**"Untitled (Mountain Storm)," ca. 1883-94**

As I examined this beautiful painting, I began to see three separate areas almost like garden rooms. My eye was drawn to the middle, its light surrounded by the darkness on one side and the woods on the other.

The luminous reflections in the moving water are fleeting but penetrating. The only human figure is also in that area, a point of distinctive color. The darkness and the forest surround the light in the painting, providing texture, atmosphere and depth. But these separate elements were unified by the subtle light of the sky.

I decided to deconstruct Inness as three separate parts, evoking this one moment in nature with floral material that tries to capture his feathery, textured brush strokes and ethereal atmospheric depth.



**Designer: Cheryl Slutzky**  
*inspired by Joyce C. Scott (b. 1948)*  
**"Harriet Tubman as Buddha," 2017**

The work shows the famous abolitionist transformed into a sitting buddha. Instead of a rifle she holds prayer beads. On a recent trip to Japan where I saw temples and buddhas, I had a vision of an antique Ikebana basket I own. It is the basis of my interpretation and depicts the bumpiness of the shiny beads used in the sculpture. My focus is on the vertical and horizontal elements of the sculpture. The majority of plant material is dried magnolia leaves which came from a huge branch found on a morning walk. The tough, leathery leaf textures said "Harriet Tubman." Cutting that branch into a suitable length was a challenge.

From there I formed a horizontal element, a circular halo of painted and unpainted magnolia leaves attached to three painted bamboo sticks planted inside the basket (weighted down with stones inside a container at its bottom) supported by sphagnum moss and bubble wrap, with the addition of some colorful fresh flowers to suggest the colored beads scattered throughout. To evoke the striking exotic red pedestal, I painted the top of the round table the same color. The flat stones wrapped in silvery netting suggest the necklace in the hands of Harriet/Buddha. I picked up those stones on a serenely quiet beach on Naoshima Island in Japan for that purpose. It was meditative.





**Designer: Sarah Stransky**  
*inspired by Sam Gilliam (1933-2022)*  
**"Fragrance," 1989**

My floral interpretation was designated to be no greater than 35"h x 20"d x 35"w. The container is made of two metal frames posted on a square metal box. There are an oasis, water tubes and pin cushions to anchor and hydrate the plant materials. I sought non-traditional plant material from several sources including my own property that would embrace the uniqueness and abstractness of Gilliam's collage-like art piece. I was also inspired by the artist's remark that "in abstract art the composition is always present, but one must let things go, be open to improvisation, spontaneity, and what's happening in a space while one works."

Plant material: Bird of Paradise, Protea orange, Banksia serrata Spruce, Alaskan Fern, Hydrangea Nikko Blu, Blue Thistle, Snapdragon, Nemesis, Andromeda, Hypericum, white Statice.



**Designers: Susan Straten and Nancy Foster**  
*inspired by Alvin Loving (1935-2005)*  
**"Mercer St. Series IV, #7," 1986**

Dedicated abstractionist Alvin Loving moved from Detroit to New York City in the late 1960s and engaged with the city's thriving art scene. His early hard-edged style gave way in the 1970s to mixed-media works that he composed with torn strips of canvas, fabric, and collage. To make "Mercer St. Series IV, #7" Loving wove together strips of painted handmade paper. The juxtaposition of colors and materials plays homage to the improvisational rhythms of jazz.





**Designer: Michele Tomasik**  
*Inspired by Hilda Kayn (1903-1950)*  
**"Swingtime," 1945**

Plant material was selected and placed to reflect the swirling, graceful movement of the dancers and their attire as well as the painting's moody romantic palette. The container echoes the painting's horizontal format and dark perimeter and allows plant material to be arranged collinearly, like the artwork's subjects.



**Designers: Allyn Young and Sue Young**  
*inspired by Romare Howard Bearden (1911-1988)*  
**"Vere's Garden," 1987**

This rich watercolor on paper is among the last works of Romare Bearden, one of the most prolific and influential artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

In our interpretation of this evocation of a lush location on the island of St. Martin, we wanted to channel his exuberance and joyful embrace of color, heat, and light using tropical flowers and foliage, contrasting waxy dark leaves with the brilliant colors of exotic flowers and a flowering banana stem.

As Bearden said: "Art will go where the energy is. I find a great deal of energy in the Caribbean. ... It's like a volcano there; there's something unfinished underneath that still smolders."





**Designer: Lauren Zodel**

*inspired by* **Native American child's beaded "Dress Yoke" from the Plateau Region of the Pacific Northwest by Unknown Artist, ca. 1950**

The label with this piece speaks of the connections between generations, plants, animals and supernatural beings. The butterflies and flowers in the piece rely on each other for survival. In the Designer's research of the symbolism of the butterfly in the region of this piece, beyond hope and rebirth there was a story of the butterfly and the Raven. The Raven in Native American culture is known as the creator. In the stories, the Raven (who is genderless) steals the sun, moon and stars and puts them in the sky. The butterfly's relationship to the Raven is one of friendship. The butterfly leads the Raven to food and therefore a similar representation as the dress's butterfly and flowers.

Given this story, the designer chose to focus on creating a headpiece worn in the dance ceremony where this dress would be worn. The shapes in the headpiece are related to elements used in Northwest Pacific art. The mix of the dried and fresh flowers represent the harmony of ancestry alongside the childlike whimsy of this piece and the child wearing it.