



Sunflowers are displayed.



Assorted flowers are showcased at the annual Philadelphia Flower Show.



Reeanne Frantz with Flowers by David places roses in preparation for the annual Philadelphia Flower Show at the Pennsylvania Convention Center, Thursday, Feb 27, 2014, in Philadelphia. — AP photos

Philly Flower Show brings art canvases to life

Winter-weary gardeners and painters alike may find inspiration in the colorful palette of the Philadelphia Flower Show, which uses plants and petals to pay homage to work by artists like Matisse, Calder and Kandinsky. The main exhibitors partnered with major US museums to produce "ARTiculture," this year's floral extravaganza which opens today and runs through March 9.

A perennial harbinger of spring, the flower show will be perhaps more fervently welcomed this season after the toll of an unusually cold and snowy winter along the Eastern Seaboard. "Living in the Northeast ... everyone is so sick of snow that coming in and seeing color, and seeing the flower show, it's going to be a welcome respite this year," said Drew Becher, president of the show's sponsor, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society.

Previous themes for the 10-acre show have been places: England, Hawaii, Paris. But this year's museum-related theme is more abstract, in some cases literally. Schaffer Designs of Philadelphia partnered with the Guggenheim Museum in New York to come up with "Kandinsky's Canvas," a floral representation of three abstract paintings by Wassily Kandinsky: "Circles in a Circle," "Little Accents" and "Dominant Curve."

The "circles," for instance, have been transformed into colorful balls of carnations and other plant material. They look randomly placed until viewers stand on a premarked spot and see them a through an empty picture frame. "They will actually see the painting come to life as it was originally meant to be," said designer Bill Schaffer.—AP



Rita Stanton with Robertson's Flowers is seen working.



Lupita Nyong'o arrives at the 71st annual Golden Globe Awards at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, in Beverly Hills, Calif. — AP

Nyong'o admits complexion was 'obstacle' in youth

Best supporting actress Oscar nominee Lupita Nyong'o says when she was a young girl, she wished her dark-hued skin would become lighter. The "12 Years a Slave" star delivered an emotional speech while accepting her honor for best breakout performance at Essence magazine's seventh annual Women in Hollywood luncheon Thursday. She confessed that she tried to bargain with God to see a change in her skin tone. It wasn't until she discovered supermodel Alek Wek that she began to believe in her own beauty. Essence also paid tribute to Cheryl Boone Isaacs, the first black president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Also honored were Ava DuVernay, the first black woman to win best director at the Sundance Film Festival, and the champions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. — AP

'Batman vs Superman's' Ben Affleck visits Washington

One year after his film, "Argo," took home the Best Picture Oscar, Ben Affleck said he finds the real US State Department "quite intimidating." "It's just a pleasure to be back here in the State Department after - the real State Department. I had to fake it for 'Argo,'" Affleck told reporters in Washington, DC Wednesday. "I get to see the real thing here, so it's quite intimidating."

The actor-director was in the nation's capital to testify at a Senate committee hearing about peace efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Affleck founded the Eastern Congo Initiative and recently appeared in a fundraising video for the charity with friend and "Good Will Hunting" co-writer Matt Damon.

Affleck appeared alongside Secretary of State John Kerry and Special Envoy for the Great Lakes and the Democratic Republic, former senator Russ Feingold, at the State Department to thank Kerry for making the Congo region - which also includes the Republic of the Congo - a priority. Affleck was asked by a reporter how the real State Department measured up to what he depicted in "Argo."

"Well, this part's much better," Affleck said about the ceremonial room in which the men appeared for remarks. "In fact, this was - this area was too fancy to

try to recreate so we just recreated white hallways with colored stripes," he added. At the committee hearing, Affleck said that while the dire situation in the Congo has improved from when he last testified to Congress 14 months ago, the US needs to do more to ensure that progress continues.

"I am working to do my part for a country and a people I believe in and care deeply about," he said. "I am thankful that I can tell a more hopeful story one of small but powerful victories. It reinforces our belief that when the international community acts and the Congolese government rises to the moment, these problems are indeed solvable."

However, the Oscar-winner still argued that now is not the time to step out. "People view the fire as having gone down now. We cannot start to walk away. This is the critical moment." Affleck went on to say: "I am also here with an urgent message. Our work is not done. We cannot risk diminished US leadership at a time lasting stability and peace are within reach. Accomplishments over the past year were hard fought. They are fragile. They are reversible." Senators praised Affleck's commitment to the cause. "Your credibility is remarkable because of the depth of your commitment," said Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz. — Reuters