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Director's Message-June 2021

Chris Wyer

Thank you to all for making such a successful June workshop. The two days showed that we really enjoy coming together to share our learning and friendship. There will be more workshops coming, so keep that diary open. Our next gathering will be for the General Meeting 24 July. The theme for the arrangements prior to the meeting will be 'Outside Arrangement'. If the weather is fine will have the opportunity to use the outside space at Perrin Park Community Hall. 10:00am - 10:30 for arrangements before the meeting 10:30am - 1:00pm - General Meeting.

Just recently, I visited the Woodturner's Society of Queensland's Open Day where I was pleasantly surprised at some of the works which were presented. Many pieces had such simplicity and yet such attention to detail. I am familiar with the skill required to complete such exhibition pieces and am also in awe of the patience needed. After several conversations with different people on that Sunday, I felt myself being drawn back to the beauty of Ikebana and its deep connection to nature. On coming home, I opened the book *Japan Style: Architecture + Interiors + Design* (Kimie Tada and Geeta Mehta, 2005). When I became Director, I inherited a couple of boxes of files and...included was this book which I continually enjoy reading and scanning - the photography is brilliant! The book was presented to Sogetsu Ikebana Association Brisbane/Gold Coast Inc. by our patron, John Massy, in August 2013, in recognition of the 50 years of Sogetsu activity in Brisbane. The beauty of nature is integral to this book.

The authors (p.68) write of how Ikebana keeps a fragile balance between asymmetrical balance and flowers. We all know that form is also one of the elements to be considered when creating an arrangement. Teshigahara, Sofu (p.29) writes '*in just one flower or one leaf rises a multitude of possibilities!*' We can explore these possibilities whilst we find the fragile balance in an arrangement. Sofu (p.37) considers the art of space is when '*the space between the branches and flowers come alive. This space is a plentiful void projecting tension and power!*' Do I hear you agreeing to these important points about the sensitivity of space and form? How do we achieve this balance? Again Sofu (p.29) says this can be achieved in the '*act of seeing*' and using the sensitivity of your feelings. In using these elements, we are able to explore the possibilities of '*seeing*' the space both inside and outside of our arrangement.

Dates to Remember

General Meeting
Saturday July 24:
Perrin Park 10:00

Annual Exhibition
August 21/22
Set Up

With our exhibition 'My Art of Sogetsu' on 21/22 August coming towards us faster than we think, I am again drawn to our personal arrangements as we consider our assigned space in the Mt Coot-tha auditorium. How will you capture one of the many possibilities offered to show the space both inside and outside of your arrangement?

Warm Regards
Chris

Reference

Kimie Tada and Geeta Mehta, *Japan Style: architecture + interiors + design*. Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2005 p.68.

Teshigahara, Sofu; *The Book of Flowers*. Tokyo: Sogetsu Bunkajigyo Co., Ltd, 1996.

Workshops with Seiseki Umemura

The photos in this article are of Umemura Sensei's arrangements



Workshop 1: Composition using leaves only-Nageire

Umemura Sensei is an excellent Master. He can be relaxed but when it comes to lessons he is very encouraging. It was a surprise to many of us as to what could be used as a nagerie container. The container does not have to be tall and straight, as long as it is not a moribana container. We had many laughs and discussion over the question asked of Sensei, "What is considered a leaf"? He explained in this particular lesson, leaves should not be attached to a branch. When we were shown the difference it became easy to understand. To give the arrangement interesting movement and form, he suggested manipulation of different shapes of leaves.

I thank Christine and her committee for organising this very interesting workshop. I loved the 4 lessons but the tsubo arrangement was an inspiration for me. So much so that I did another one at home from the flowers I took from the left over bucket on Saturday.

Peggy Perkins



Umemura Sensei used a standard brown Tsubo container, however that's where the simplicity ended. He started with 2 quite different branches; a straight delicate pepper tree and then a wide full branch of yellow spotted green crotons which faced outwards. I did wonder how balance and harmony would be created with these contrasting branches.

He then fixed the 2 branches with the 'kousa-dome' method which required some additional support. He also suggested we could use a kenzan. Umemura Sensei did use quite a lot of material; however, he was always aware of creating balance. I think some of us felt quite under resourced with our own material.

He started to fill the space by layering of foliage. He used dwarf sacred bamboo to cover the mouth of the container and then added layers of grey eucalypts, goldenrods and some pepper tree.

For colour he added small goldenrods on the sides and as contrast he added 5 giant pink long thin-stemmed Chrysanthemums, placed facing forward and upward.

The fullness of the varied foliage together with varied textures and colours supported the great width and height of the arrangement and it did come together in an energetic and harmonious way. I could well appreciate how this would more than fill a public space. Mr Umera also explained that plant material arranged in Tsubo containers can be quite long lasting.



I attended both workshops today with Yoshi Sensei. I found he was very peaceful person and with great sense of humour, I really enjoyed the workshop. I was amazed by how he demonstrated the tsubo vases with lots of material but it came out beautifully and colours are well balanced. Opened my eyes too! And I also appreciate how honest he towards everyone's arrangements so we can keep improving our skills.

Phoebe Sit

I attended the AM workshop only and as an observer again. I really enjoyed seeing everyone's creativity being challenged today and it was lovely to see their personalities shine through their arrangements. I was most inspired by how resourceful some of you are with your unconventional materials. Yoshi Sensei is such a loveable character and I appreciate his light-hearted frankness in his critiquing of everyone's arrangements. I can't wait to actually participate in the next workshop!

Lai Wan Chen

Workshop 3: Unconventional Materials

Yvette Bassett

My first opportunity to experience a workshop with Yosh was in May 2017 at the beginning of my Ikebana journey. I was a spectator there and was so intrigued and amazed at all the arrangements and possibilities to use plant material. Imagine my delight to find myself participating in the workshop this time around.

I surprised myself by finding out how much I had learned and grown while having all the fun and communion with my Ikebana family over the last few years. In particular, during workshop 3, incorporating unconventional material. I learnt that it would be better to use one type of unconventional material and create harmony or connection with your container. It was also refreshing to learn that no expression of yourself in Ikebana is incorrect, there might just be a different way of presenting the composition.



Workshop 4: My Art of Sogetsu

Ikuko Okada

Two days of workshop passed in no time.

Thank you, Yoshi Sensei, a down-to-earth and friendly teacher. I was impressed with his way of thinking about Ikebana.

Be yourself and do not caught up in the rules. He encouraged us to see that there is more than one way to attain beauty in Ikebana. In fact, this made me reflect on the famous phrase by Sogetsu founder Sofu Teshigahara, "Sogetsu Ikebana can be created anytime, anywhere, by anyone in any part of the world, and with any kind of material."

It's always helpful to remind myself that Sogetsu is not about perfection and in fact there is beauty often times in imperfection.

PS Editor: We look forward to seeing everyone's ideas gained from workshop 4 applied to their exhibition arrangements.

Why Choose Locally Grown?

by Annie Donaldson Branch & Sea Florals

(Printed with permission)

Ani Wilson and I were fortunate to attend an event at Currey's Flowe Farm earlier this month and I was very surprised at the extent to which the Australian Flower market has been decimated in the last 10-20 years. There are now only about 35 flower growers operating in Australia. Annie Donaldson is a Brisbane based florist who sources locally as much as possible. She has given permission for this article from her website to be printed in this edition of our newsletter. It makes for some very interesting reading.

Recently I've been engaged in some really powerful and positive conversations about flowers. I am always very happy to discuss the ethics of the floral industry and realised that maybe having a starting place for discussion and further reading for my flower friends and wedding couples could provide some answers for people with questions about flowers too.

One of the main questions I am asked about is:

"Why is it important to buy Australian and locally grown flowers?"

Many people I have conversations with about flowers don't realise that the majority of the flowers they purchase are imported to Australia from overseas. Approximately \$67 million worth of flowers are imported to Australia every year (ABC News: Rachel Pupazzoni, 2019). These flowers are coming from countries such as Ecuador, Colombia, Kenya, Thailand, Singapore, South Africa, Holland and Vietnam.

Unfortunately there are many key issues with this situation for people and our planet:

- Imported flowers to Australia are rarely certified, making the working conditions un-ethical and harmful to international BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) flower farming communities.*
- Demand for Australian growers is reduced over time, with approximately only 900 flower farms in Australia.*
- The impact on the international flower farming environment and workers from toxic chemical use against pests and diseases.*
- The Australian government requires all imported flowers to comply with rigorous quarantine procedures that involve the use of methyl bromide fumigation before entry to Australia.*

International BIPOC Farming Communities *Farming communities in countries such as Ecuador, Colombia, Kenya, Thailand, Singapore, South Africa and Vietnam are rarely under certification schemes to protect their workers or the environment. The majority of workers are often BIPOC women, working long hours for below minimum wage (The Guardian, Oliver Balch, 2015). For example in Colombia, the average pay for flower farm workers is \$317AUD p/m, which in terms of their outgoing expenses would only cover 40% per month. BIPOC women working on uncertified flower farms are also often subject to abuses from employers for needing time away from work or changing shifts (The Guardian, Oliver Balch, 2015)*

Decline of Australian Flower Farms

Over the past decade in Australia there has been an increase in imported flowers and a decrease in Australian flower farms (ABC News: Rachel Pupazzoni, 2019). With approximately 900 flower farmers in Australia providing flowers for approximately 2000 retail store florists (not including online retail florists). This has been due to the demand from consumers for flower availability all year round. As an example imported peonies from Holland are flown into Australia to satisfy demand during April to

July when the Peony season in Australia is from November to December. This is a just a small example compared to demand for imported red roses for Valentine's Day and imported chrysanthemums for Mothers Day with 5.22 million roses being flown in to Australia from Kenya for Valentine's Day in 2017 (The Sydney Morning Herald, Lavers & Kerlake, 2018).

Environmental Impact

International flower farms from countries such as Ecuador, Colombia, Kenya, Thailand, Singapore, South Africa and Vietnam do not have to comply with the same standards as Australian environmental certifications. They are not subject to the environmental practices that flower farms have here in Australia. Because of this, harmful chemicals to prevent pests and diseases are sprayed by workers without safety protection or outer-wear. These chemicals run off into local water ways, rivers and lakes, which cause algal blooms resulting in damage to local biodiversity and water health for local communities (The Guardian, Oliver Balch, 2015). Air miles travelled to Australia from these countries is also harmful to our environment as most of these imported flowers are part of a cool chain supply process, which transports flowers in refrigerated conditions from farms to your hands.

Australian Import Quarantine Standards

All imported flowers to Australia must comply with fumigation practices to pass quarantine. To reduce imported pests and diseases all imported flowers must now include methyl bromide fumigation before entry to Australia. Methyl Bromide is an ozone depleting substance, that is toxic if inhaled causing damage to the brain, nerves, lungs, and throat. Under the 1987 Montreal Protocol all United Nations countries banned the use of methyl bromide as it was depleting the ozone layer. As part of this protocol, Australia has now changed quarantine policies for imported flowers in 2017 so that the country of origin is responsible for spraying the flowers with methyl bromide (environment.gov.au). This puts the cost back on to international workers in situations that aren't regulated with safety equipment or safety wear for using methyl bromide in fumigation.

And whilst all this information is very hard to come to terms with it is just the beginning of changing the Australian floral industry from the ground up to educate people. It may be difficult to accept that your flowers from Coles and Woolworths are sourced from suppliers in Australia that mix imported flowers with Australian grown to lower the costs of bouquets (The Sydney Morning Herald, Sarah Whyte, 2013). And that those imported flowers may not be certified and that they can be causing harm all the way back to workers in Kenya. The most important and positive aspect that I am seeing every day, is that people are asking questions. Because they care about where things come from and how that impacts people and the planet. Caring about people and our planet is fundamental to how Branch and Sea operates and chooses to make change by sourcing Australian and locally grown.

When you find out how much flowers cost from local growers it's because the workers are paid ethically in safe working environments, under environmental laws and with workers rights. And in my opinion that should be worth the cost.

Sources:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-02-13/industry-returns-to-growing-flowers-locally/10800348>
A Blooming Industry? Christine. Paul Brown, Practical Hydroponics & Greenhouses . December . 2016
<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2015/feb/12/the-women-suffering-for-your-valentines-day-flowers>
<https://www.smh.com.au/national/floral-foam-how-bad-is-the-stuff-at-the-bottom-of-your-roses-20180212-p4z02o.html>
<https://www.environment.gov.au/protection/ozone/methyl-bromide>
<https://www.smh.com.au/national/where-are-all-the-flowers-from-20130622-2op3r.html>

I believe those who finished Sogetsu textbooks 1-4 can now express themselves through ikebana in their own ways by fully understanding how important deep self-knowledge is for arranging flowers.

At the same time, however, they must realise that they are not yet completely ready to communicate this convincingly to the public or confident enough to teach ikebana to others. In other words, there is a long way to go by continuous learning and overcoming difficulties.

Until now there has been no unified curriculum for those who had completed the Sogetsu textbook 3-4. The teachers individually devised ingenious ways of teaching their students according to their progress. This was effective in fostering individuality in ikebana. On the other hand, this resulted in widening the range of ability since skills and knowledge which should have been shared were not available to all in some classes.

The solution is to provide a guideline to help all the students upgrade and reach higher skill levels which can be educational and inspiring for all the teachers as well. Sogetsu textbook 5 was published to meet these needs with the curriculum composed of the 4 key words **"technique"**, **"materials"**, **"placement"** and **"creation"**

Creative ideas or images are of primary importance for every form of expression including ikebana. However, these cannot be realised without proper skills and techniques. Reviewing and mastering skills which have been handed down in Sogetsu since its foundation by evolving improvements are the goals we want to set.

We study various ways of using traditional plant materials, dried, coloured, bleached and unconventional ones. There is also a subject to help students create forms out of their discoveries from the close observation of the plant materials. In principle, the placement is a prerequisite for every ikebana work. In order to raise awareness of this many photos in this textbook include the placements for the works. When practising ikebana, even when not working on a specific placement theme, everyone is encouraged to positively look for new placements besides the ordinary classroom tables. This textbook has several subjects related to "Creation" they are meant to provide the students with opportunities to expand their thinking on how far ideas can be created freely under the given conditions, how much of themselves can become part of that work and how much creative expression can be realised.

Sogetsu has been pursuing the possibilities of ikebana from its beginning and opening up new horizons. This is supported by the spirit which respects individuality and freedom of expression more than anything.

The themes of this textbook are set up as a process to realise these aims. The important point is that each theme is not in itself the objective or the final goal. It is more of a starting point or step for gaining and expressing individuality or free ideas and images. Always keep this in mind. Mastering this can lead all Sogetsu ikebana students to gain more knowledge and skills for their free creations. In this diversifying world today, it is obviously necessary for the people who use ikebana as a means of expression to respond to the changes of society.

We now have the chance to set off into a situation of, so to speak, **"The ocean of diversity"**
This voyage will be exciting for all of us.

Thank you to Pat Mackie for transcribing this article for her students as part of our revision of Textbook 5.