

REFLECTIONS OF A HEADMASTER

Naohiro Kasuya, Iemoto Ichiyo School of Ikebana

Ikebana International (I.I.), Chapter No. 1, recently caught up with Naohiro Kasuya, the Iemoto of the Ichiyo School of Ikebana, who arrives in America carrying the legacy of his late father, Iemoto Akihiro Kasuya, who encouraged developing one's imagination through their own interpretation of nature, saying "if flower arranging is to be truly fulfilling, it should be a reflection of oneself."

I.I.: Some consider ikebana to be the Japanese counterpart of flower arranging. What makes it the standalone art form it is today?

Kasuya: How to dialogue with flowers, plants, and unusual types of materials differs among the schools and varies with individuals wherever flower arranging is practiced. Ikebana has its own Japanese style, which is based upon the way in which one approaches the material. The characteristics of nature are made unique according to how the arranger approaches and dialogues with the material. Containers, the location where the ikebana is being placed, and other considerations are important in giving energy and a sense of life to the arrangement. I believe these points are the basic fundamentals of ikebana. Whether arranged in a contemporary or traditional style, it is still ikebana and neither style can be classified as a standalone form of art.

I.I.: How has Ikebana changed from its original purpose of adorning Buddhist temples? How do you envision it evolving to meet modern spaces and 21st Century sensibilities?

Kasuya: As I said, I think it is important to consider the environment where the ikebana is placed. This point is a fundamental principle of ikebana, regardless of the historical era.

Japanese culture did not exist all by itself. It was influenced by other civilizations. Although flower arranging began 600 years ago, I don't believe the original purpose of ikebana was exclusive to adorning Buddhist temples. Arranging flowers was practiced throughout the world, but it was different among the diverse cultures and it created a wide variety of ikebana styles, each with its own ceremonial and ritual events, and with different rules and customs, and that became the foundation for the many, varied forms of practice we have today.

Cultural changes that come about through the different eras do not necessarily mean changes in basic, human thinking. In the 21st Century, I believe flower arrangements will adapt to an era where people act upon their inherent desire for a better life.

I.I.: The Ichiyo School introduced crossing lines to Ikebana. What other fundamentals make the school modern? Is it technique, methodology, or philosophical approach?

Kasuya: Even though something may be unconventional and look "no good", with just the right approach, it can become interesting and even beautiful to look at. This was the point my grandfather, the second Iemoto, made with his ideas about crossing lines. It has been said that the first goal of an ikebana school should be to allow beginning masters to develop their own arrangement style as soon as possible. For this to happen it is important to consider what rules may not be necessary and think of a simplified way to adapt a particular point.





Regarding technique, methodology, or a philosophical approach, it is up to each person to decide which way he or she wants to go. It is very important to seek out and develop a personal way.

I.I.: You became the fourth headmaster of Ichiyo School of Ikebana in 2019. What basic philosophy are you carrying forward?

Kasuya: I try and maintain simple, pure thoughts in my dialogue with ikebana. I consider the flowers and plants, circumstances, and containers, and everything else related to the arrangement and then bring out their excellence and beauty by weaving all these elements together. I enjoy sharing my joy and pleasure with school members when my work is successful.

I.I.: How does your approach differ from your father's?

Kasuya: I think my basic approach is the same. However, we're different human beings and therefore, I think there is a difference between my ikebana and his.

I.I. What makes a good Ikebana teacher? Do they share certain traits?

Kasuya: An excellent sports player does not always become an excellent leader. Likewise, a fine artist is not always a fine leader. If you love ikebana and show your passion to students, you are a good teacher. One of ikebana's admirable points is the way in which wonderful relationships and a sense of community are created between people.

I think this personal connection through a mutual love is very valuable for humanity. Never forget to pursue techniques and to share those techniques with students. A good teacher should always seek the best ways to teach and encourage students.

In other words, if you convey your passionate attitude for ikebana to your students, I would call you a good teacher.

I.I.: What is it that you'd like to impart to an American audience?

Kasuya: Whether American or Japanese, human beings are basically the same. I want to believe that people's longstanding passion for ikebana will endure and that through it, we will enjoy a wonderful experience together.

I.I.: From where do you draw your source of inspiration?

Kasuya: The source of my inspiration can come from plants, certain objects, the environment, the location—whatever I consider to be appealing as I visualize an arrangement.

*This interview was done by Catherine Macaulay for I.I.
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