

Nature Contained– A Practice-led Art Project:

*Within the Principles of Ikebana and on the
Nature of Harmony*

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Abstract

This research redefines unity between art, design and urban architecture, and wellbeing as an active reconciliation and conscious construction. The findings resonate with contemporary creative practices prioritizing audience engagement. A practice-led and process driven design/art project, it explores the notion of harmony through the Japanese Zen of Ikebana (flower arrangement) and Chasitsu (Tea room). Situated in Bangkok, the process incorporates cross-cultural interactions between Thai business life and Japanese meditative traditions. The methodology re-traces Ikebana flowers into static lines of a steel sculpture. Placed within a furniture design showroom's internal courtyard, the installation is activated dialogically through a survey that probes the harmony between buildings and people. The findings reveal that the living sculpture of a tree or a large-scale flower arrangement enhances better wellbeing in the urban dweller. A dialectal interplay between the rapid pace of life operating commercial spaces contrasts with a fundamental human longing for something timeless and natural beyond business and the ephemeral.

Keywords: Practice-led, Art, Ikebana, Harmony, Balance, Dynamic

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Introduction

My creative journey began through a love of flowers. As a teenager, I often visited an orchid farm, where I felt enveloped by an illuminated stillness. A multitude of flowers, poised as small living sculptures and positioned within the grey steel structure of the greenhouse, pushed and pulled petals into the air. Undulating planes of orchid flowers teetered at the end of fragile stems. Wandering through rows of orchids I escaped the frenetic nature of a world city, into a partially man-made quietude. Flowers became a central part of my life, and I became a floral designer of repute, balancing flower colors, shapes, forms, sizes, with foliage and industrial materials. At the core of each arrangement is a search for harmony.



Figure 1. Author's Floral Design, INTERFLORAL.

Being a painter, I transposed the language of flowers into existential metaphors. Living through the stages of my life - the sometimes budding, sometimes wilting camellias and roses, half delineated and sometimes receding into shadows, and then re-emerging to fill my monumental canvases. My practice-based PhD research focused on floriography - the language of flowers - tracing their historical meaning and expression throughout painting, design and symbolism. Flowers and the waning phases of nature embody metaphors for life's trajectory - in my case - a mother, a painter and a researcher. I found that nature always seeks equilibrium in order to sustain harmony. Nature Contained is a part of my creative practice to expand the principles of harmony underpinned by the Japanese Zen philosophy that instructs Ikebana.

While the urban landscape becomes increasingly challenging to navigate emotionally, design and art approaches can transcend functional aesthetics beyond the commercial environment to foster harmony and contemplation. A dialectal interplay between the rapid pace of life operating in bustling lobbies and commercial spaces contrasts with a fundamental human need towards stillness and tranquility, for something timeless beyond commerce and the ephemeral. Art can construct an environment beyond a sole focus on commerce to also include healing stillness. Bangkok, the ever-expanding metropolis I call home, a city both orderly and sprawling, becomes the specified site for my artwork. Familiar with both Thailand and Japan, I sought to place into an urban landscape shaped by the hard surfaces of concrete, steel and glass, a city constantly punctuated by the sounds of

automobiles, a moment of meditation, a focal point for harmony in the form of an abstracted, man-made 'Ikebana-ish' steel sculpture.

Although Thailand and Japan are culturally different, the level and depth of cultural interplay through my practice of Ikebana was transcribed into my inspiration and creative process. The sculpture grew out of a flower arrangement, a living sculpture. Ikebana literally means "making flowers alive" or "living flowers." Widely known as a form of traditional Japanese flower arrangement, Ikebana holds certain aesthetic rules and is an art form which lies embedded in Japanese life and culture, seeking the union of nature and humanity in private and public spaces. Its essence encapsulates harmony constructed by balancing a push and pull of flowers, grass, and wood, of levels reaching left and right, descending and ascending in a deceptively disorderly process into a still arrangement that is alive. Deicher suggests that such a dynamic unity is produced by a multiplicity of stiff planes and the undulating lines of flowers. (2021).



Figure 2. Large Scale experimental Ikebana arrangements titled "CONNECT" Akane Teshigahara Solo Exhibition for 20th Anniversary (2021/Sogetsu West, Kyoto).

Drawing on Ikebana's (the arrangement) and Chasitsu's (the room) underlying principles of existential balance I considered how harmony could be embodied. I set out to construct a sculpture incorporating a dynamic equilibrium governed by natural laws - those of balancing opposites. Sciam writes that establishing equilibrium between the manifold appearance of the world and the synthesis invoked by the consciousness does not mean attaining fixed points and immutable truth. Same as a trunk of the tree and then a rectangle or a square is now a metaphor of the unifying consciousness of mankind dealing with the boundless and multifarious space of the world (Sciam 2019).

To understand the nature of harmony, the research revolves around how harmony is often misperceived as static, when it is more a dynamic process of reconciliation, balancing function with aesthetics. The methodology re-traces the organic lines of Ikebana into abstracted lines of steel in a sculpture, then activates the installation dialogically by discuss-

ing harmony with employees and clients of a furniture design show room. A survey also asks the audience if a sculpture or planting a tree in the courtyard would be a better way to communicate harmony between nature, heaven and people. Out of the answers grew discussion around harmony and whether a sculpture or a tree would be a better way to communicate harmony between nature, heaven and people. With Bangkok as the specified site for artwork, the sculpture highlights another implication on cross cultural interaction in a creative process since cohesive urban planning functions in various degrees depending on how wealth is scattered throughout the city.



Figure 3. Traditional Japanese Tearoom with blossom ikebana, Interior Design deliberations.

One of design objectives was to establish a tangible balance that could contribute to emotional and physical well-being in individuals. Interior design is not an isolated phenomenon, but it too, functions or not through its surrounding relationships with materials and people. It is a search for concord amidst tensions. For me, working with Ikebana is a way to construct harmony, to communicate the dynamics of balance by design. To experiment, I primarily draw on the principles of Ikebana, translating its core design of three lines of balancing *Shin* (heaven), *Soe* (earth) and *Hikake* (human) extending vertically and horizontally into the sculpture.



Figure 4. Sculpture in courtyard placed in center as a focal point.



Figure 5. Existing trees in courtyard – relegated to the sides of the courtyard.

Michael Sciam asserts that “we are constantly stimulated by the unforeseeable flow of existence in everyday life and open up to innovation on the one hand while seeking to maintain the integrity of our established equilibriums on the other.” (Sciam 2019) Acknowledging and translating such diversity might result in a dynamic unity if the elements of design are synchronized. Plants and flower arrangements traditionally act as conduits of harmony in commercial spaces meditating unity between nature and human presence.

The text starts by briefly providing a short history of Ikebana to clarify its main principles, the research probes the search for harmony, then moves on to consider the materials and methods used, with results collected through a questionnaire to gauge the public's response. In the discussion, an answer is found as to whether sculptures, trees or flowers contribute more to harmony than sculptures in a commercial space or if the underlying composition of Ikebana following three main lines of *shin* (representing heaven), *soe* (representing earth) and *hikae* (representing man) remain present. The search for harmony is a balancing act central to humans, art, and nature, between earth, and sky. Ikebana too seeks a balance between heaven, earth, and man.

Situated in Bangkok, with a culturally distinct urban context to Ikebana's Japanese origins, this research ultimately interrogates how harmony manifests across cultural boundaries and spatial conditions. It asks whether living trees or sculptures better communicate harmony in commercial spaces, and how the principles of Ikebana might inform contemporary design practices that reconcile Eastern and Western approaches to balance and form.

The project *Nature Contained* extends my creative practice through a combined exploration of flower arrangement as sculpture and a greater conceptual reflection on Ikebana's embodied harmony. To perceive harmony as a state of stillness would be a deception. Harmony evolves, not as a static state but as a dynamic interaction with external forces. Harmony is also imposed as something that is consciously constructed. It is a process of reconciliation. Arranging flowers or welding a steel sculpture both entail structuring compositions in space, working with basic vertical-horizontal lines and color elements. The final form represents a balance of essential opposing forces, be they yin and yang, dynamic and static, or positive and negative.

Ikebana

Historically, the rapid spread of Chinese culture and Buddhism in the region brought the Chinese practice of floral offerings into Japan. Japanese Abbot Senmu, credited with establishing the foundation of Ikebana, learned from flower arrangement traditions in China. In those days, only religious ceremonies or offerings involved flower arrangement, with an example shown in Figure 6 below. However, they eventually became fixtures in courtrooms, temples, and homes (Richie et al. 1966).



Figure 6. Ikebana as One Type of Religious Offering, *The Masters' Book of Ikebana: Background & Principles of Japanese Flower Arrangement*.



Figure 7. Arrangement of Ikebana for Religious Offerings, *The Masters' Book of Ikebana: Background & Principles of Japanese Flower Arrangement*.

Ikebana, the traditional Japanese art of arranging flowers, captures the beauty of nature as a sparse living sculpture. As early as 1400 AD, Ikebana had developed to reflect the Japanese relationship towards nature through its native spiritual belief in animism, Shinto. According to Shinto, everything is alive and equal to a human whether it be a river, stone or flower. In Ikebana, a composition begins with giving lines, heights and planes philosophical and human meanings. Under its basic rules three central branches signify "heaven," "man," and "earth." *The Principle of Three* represents the wholeness in flower arrangement where man ("so") stands in the middle position between heaven ("shin") and earth ("gyo"). True

Ikebana is part of our life, not constrained by time or style of living but a form of design driven by meaning and meditation. Based on Shintoism and Buddhism, Ikebana embodies a harmony reached by transformation and never by opposition – it is more like an embrace, an inclusion of philosophical rules conjoined in a process with a practitioner's individuality and experimentation. The arranger's personality – and a sense of order – remain within the confines of Ikebana, the use of primary colors, and the arrangement of the different blocks, which correspond to the overall floral arrangement, alignment of the stems and leaves, and vessel.

Since WWII, Ikebana practitioners have invited experimentation and its masters have called for innovation. Moribana style, developed by Ohara Unshin around 1890, challenges the learner to express abstract ideas as well as realistic forms. Sofu wrote in a 1959 text-book that "Ikebana will become obsolete when arrangements merely fit a pattern. True flower arrangements should be lively and active. Please think about the characteristics of each flower and tree and the beauty of the changing seasons. Please understand the inventive ideas of flower arrangers and the beauty of containers and surroundings." (Stalker, 2017:23). These are not timid and tiny arrangements, but sculptural works that at times explode into its space. Herrigel wrote that "practicing with the heart, harmonious wholeness of body, soul and surroundings are the important things" lies at the core of Ikebana (1958). Harmony evolves, not as a static state but as a dynamic interaction with external forces.



Figure 8. Floral Design, INTERFLORAL, Author.

When juxtaposing abstract sculpture against an arrangement, Ikebana's fundamental theme of the harmonious union between nature and humanity becomes clear. The arranger's personality – and a sense of order – remain within the confines of Ikebana, the use of primary elements, and the arrangement of the material against the surrounding space as the different 'blocks,' correspond to the overall floral arrangement, its alignment of the stems and leaves, and vessel. Again, by using the horizontal and vertical elements, the actual Ikebana elements are reduced to an abstract minimalistic form, with the goal of depicting universal harmony underlying the tangible objects themselves. In such an integration of contrasts, the borderless blocks in the below diagram reflect that such an abstraction could serve as a universal pictorial language – one that communicates the dynamic, evolutionary forces balancing nature and the human experience. Essentially, the abstraction depicts the purest form. To this point I wondered if harmony is a reduction of something to its purest form, removing noise of unnecessary decorative elements, into stillness.

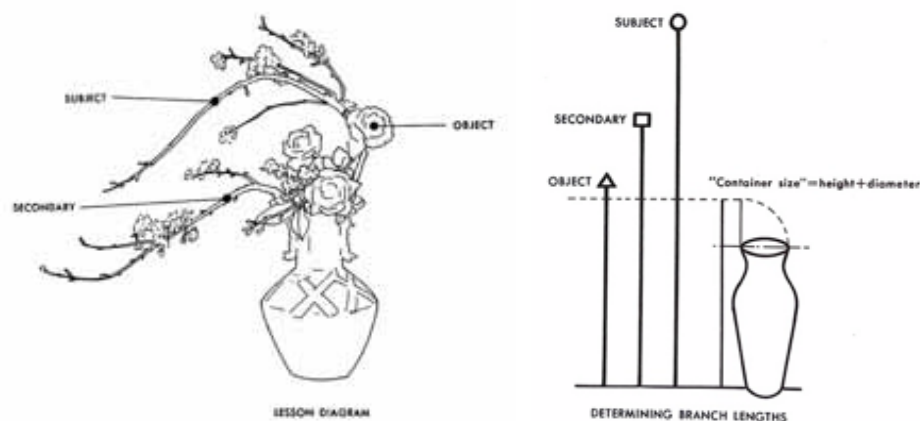


Figure 9. Ikebana principles, *The Masters' Book of Ikebana: Background & Principles of Japanese Flower Arrangement*.

The design of the sculpture *Harmonized Structure* sits within the context of the history of Ikebana because Ikebana always belongs to its place, to a room. The Japanese tearoom, in which Ikebana plays a central role, is also called *Chasitsu* and is designed according to four principles:

- **wa** (harmony) - a desire for reciprocity, both at the tea gathering and in the outside world
- **kei** (respect) - awareness of one's individual role and responsibilities and appropriate decorum
- **sei** (purity) - a commitment to preserve social and spiritual integrity
- **jaku** (elegance and tranquility) - savoring the transient moment to gain renewal (305) (Cartwright, 2019)

What happens to an urban landscape or a corporate building and its usually stark vestibules if the principles of *Chasitsu's* *wa*, *kei*, *sei* and *jaku* are applied in an interplay between the man-made and the natural? *Chasitsu* transposed into a working environment, and Ikebana shaping the sculpture by lines representing heaven, earth and human in an abstraction, structure in space. The sculpture traced the air around the boundaries of its form by pushing and pulling opposites while still being balanced, by a counterpoint. It should wobble and topple, but it did not.

Once finalized, the sculpture was placed in the courtyard of a furniture show room. A survey was conducted, asking the audience whether the sculpture communicated harmony or whether planting a tree in the courtyard would be a better way to enhance harmony between nature, heaven and people. Drawing on Ikebana's underlying Buddhist principles of existential balance, Ikebana may be a way to mediate a harmony which does not come naturally in a corporate space populated by motion and stress in places often stripped to the barest forms of the neutral. The article 'Ikebana a gran escala,' focusing on works of Tetsunori Kawana, states that, "Japanese people of all walks of life find so much well-being with floral arrangements that they include them in their daily chores. In addition to its obvious aesthetic purpose, and its interest in bringing something natural to the domestic environment, they also use it as a method of meditation, since it makes them more receptive to the passage of time, seasonal changes and the cycles of life." ("Ikebana a gran escala" 2009).

To incorporate Ikebana with western interior design is not a novel idea. Australian architecture studio FMD Architects and Ruum collaborated in the project *Ikebana House*, that

aims to depict the connection between nature and self-expression with natural elements, (Design Boom (2023)). A public room in an urban environment could be designed in similar ways. I sought to bring in an element of these ideas, into an existing place as an intervention. Do tree and living plants and flowers contribute greater to harmony than sculptures? Is it only the composition or the live flowers and its presence or nature that counts? The results were surprising.



Figure 10. Charlotte Gyllenhammar Die for You 1993.

An upside-down oak hung above the space between buildings of Stockholm in Sweden. Artists also work with living forms at a grand scale in urban environments to juxtapose the vulnerability of nature within a concrete landscape, Public Art Agency Sweden (2023).



Figure 11. On Running Shoes Office, Zurich.

Setting out on a creative quest echoing contemporary artist and interior design who combine both object and dialogue, Gyllenhammar's *Die for You*, is a sustainable installation of a healthy hanging tree without soil at On Running Shoes Office, Zurich.

The dialogue became an essential part of the investigation. The questionnaire activated the sculpture which could not just be a focal point for looking but had to be a site for discussion, for dialogue and exchanges to come alive. Without the questionnaire and the dialogue, the sculpture would have been just another object, less accessible to grasp its intent of harmony informed by nature. A tree, we understand and respond to atavistically. The reverence of trees is in the DNA of humans, for the shelter it provides, the warmth by its logs it gives to cook food over an open fire, its branches shelter a place to hide from sun and rain. All opposites of functions, enveloped by beauty, a tree is revered wordlessly as a site of harmony. A steel sculpture does not automatically conjure such reverence or trust to be a conduit of wellbeing and harmony. Dialogue had to activate the sculpture because it was not an end product but a process of investigation.

The Australian contemporary artist Ross Gibson used his conversations with visitors as artwork that took place over three months in the lobby at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Conversation logs were then shared online during the 2008 Biennale of Sydney.



Figure 12. The Thai artist Sakarin Krue-On created Terraced Rice Fields, rice field, ca. 7000 sq., at Schloss Wilhelmshoehe in Kassel, Germany for documental 2 in 2007.

An oversize project at one of the world's most prestigious contemporary art events, the field was bound to fail if the goal was to create a conventional rice crop. Instead, its focus was on the involved intellectual journey and process. The rice field became a collaboration between artist, traditional Thai rice farmers, local scientists, art workers, and residents. Such practices result in a kind of practice-led art project, where the journey constructs the goal and an exchange. Similar approaches are adapted in contemporary art and interior design "examining how civil ideas and sentiments can spin out from shared investigation" (Gibson, 2008). Krue-On's Terraced Rice Fields is "a contemporary artwork with focus on the intellectual journey" (Public Delivery, 2022). These works illustrate a compelling trajectory in contemporary art and design, moving from explorations of the human-object relation-

ship to broader socio-environmental engagements. They collectively demonstrate a shift towards experiential, collaborative, and conceptually driven practices that challenge traditional notions of art and design. My open-ended questions are therefore more about an intellectual quest and shared conversations as opposed to functional design realizations. Eventually, such an investigation may inform a design practice and contribute to a greater sensitivity towards harmony.



Figure 13. Final Sculpture, Author.

Materials and Methodology

This practice-led art project applied a mixed methodology, integrating creative practice, site-specific sculpture installation, and audience engagement, bending branches and lines, materials and methods into an experimentation. The sculpture explored conceptual tensions between balance and form through geometric abstraction and tested the boundaries of harmony as the installation looked as if it was about to fall over. Only the center holds it still, by balancing the opposing weights of left and right. The shapes invite the viewer to contemplate the directions of equilibrium. The sculpture Harmonized Union created for the project Nature Contained follows three main lines of an Ikebana composition that include heaven, earth and human and the philosophy of the Chasitsu tearoom.

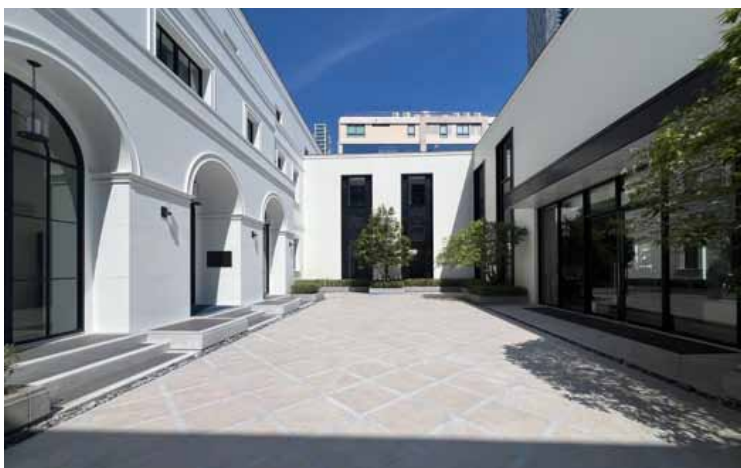


Figure 14. Private urban space, Furniture Showroom Courtyard, Bangkok.

The courtyard is bare, with trees relegated along the walls. Its space waiting for a welcoming focal point. A space filled with the potential to become a calming breathing space away for outside urban chaos.

The project started with flower arranging using the principles of Ikebana then these ideas were translated into a metal structure. This experiment explores the “structures” within Ikebana’s various styles and schools. The lines of Ikebana became a structure in space, balancing shin (heaven); soe (earth); and hikae (human). Through the arrangement, and then sculpture, space is activated by things around it. The sculpture, defined by straight lines, reflects a radical simplification searching for the essence of energy and dynamic forces that govern nature and the universe. Pure planes create harmony by contrast balancing these universal and elemental forces. Developing the sketches of the sculpture, the author considered the interplay of opposites in the world to explain the constant interaction and movement towards balance and harmony. The grid-like effect remains, turning the existing object - the Ikebana arrangement - into an abstraction of harmony's principles, not an illusion but a tangible form of illusion in the visible world.

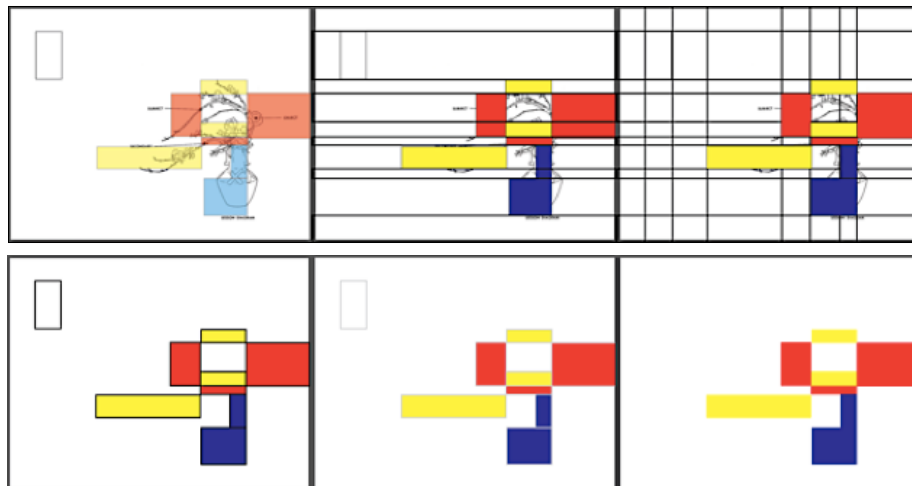


Figure 15. Experimental Composition of Nageire Style with Structure in Space, Author.



Figure 16. Experiment of flowers and metal, Author.

This experiment develops into a 3D metal sculpture in metal with silver, white, and black colors. The space will act as the balancing agent replacing the white block seen in the diagram above. Based on my earlier Ikebana arrangement, integrating steel and hard lines with the decayed soft mass of grass and flowers, I moved into a complete steel version of Ikebana, the sculpture.

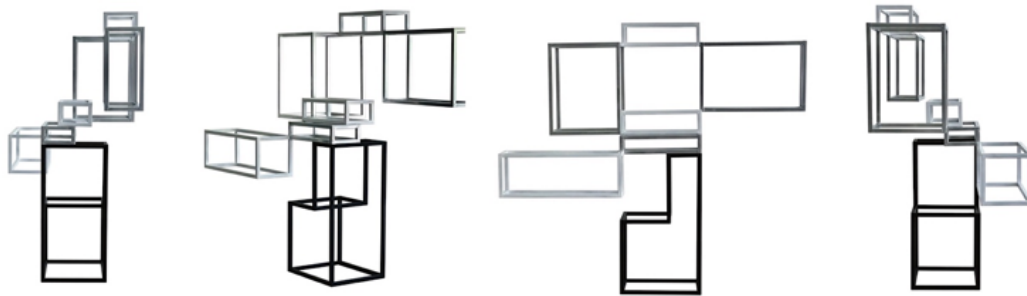


Figure 17. Metal Sculpture, Author.

When juxtaposing abstract lines of metal in a sculpture against a flower arrangement, Ikebana's fundamental theme of the harmonious union between nature and humanity becomes clearer. Without harmony, we lose our balance. The sculpture looks as if it is about to fall over, yet it stays still and stable. Harmony may be understood as fixed, but it is dynamic, a push and pull of contradictory forces. Somewhere in the middle of the unrest, harmony evolves as a quiet place to rest.

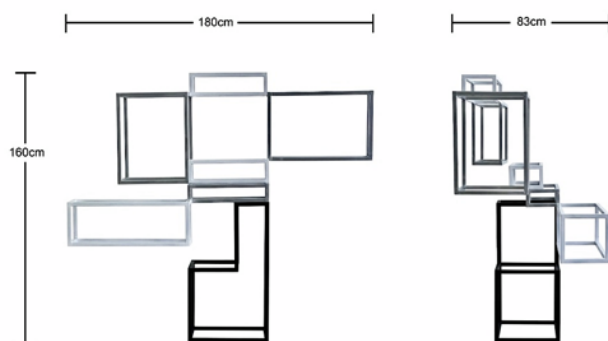


Figure 18. Sculpture with dimensions, Author.

Selected diagram for sculpture experiment: Experimental Composition of Nageire Style (as shown in Figure 15).

Process: 3D CAD Designs



Figure 19. 3D CAD Designs, Author.

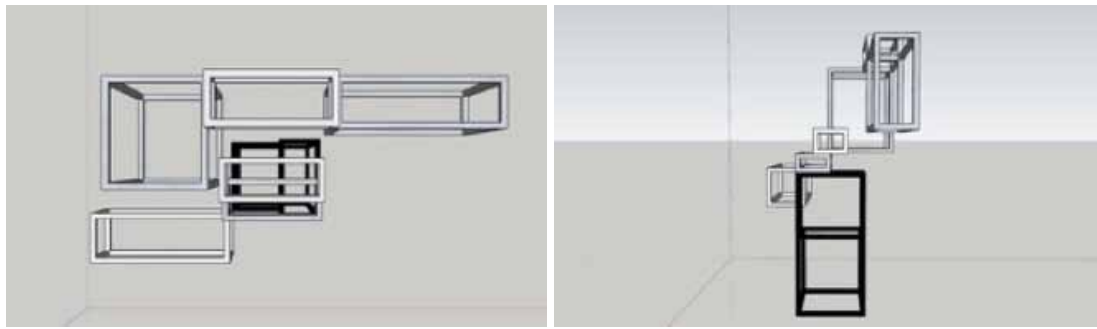


Figure 19 cont.. 3D CAD Designs, Author.

Process: Construction



Figure 20. Construction process, Author.

Installation of Harmonized Structure in Showroom Courtyard



Figure 21. Installation of the sculpture. The sculpture stood in the courtyard of the showroom, aligned with the corresponding lines of architectural black metal steel door frames.

Once installed, I asked the employees, who would be passing the sculpture on a daily basis, how they responded to the work. A questionnaire assessed their perceptions of harmony, as expressed by the installation as well as an alternative option – a living tree already planted in the courtyard but suggesting it to take a more prominent position. The questionnaire finally asked participants to indicate which among the sculpture, flower arrangement, or a tree best represented harmony between nature, heaven and people? The participants of questionnaire found it uncommon yet interesting when sculpture was placed in the center, making it the focus of attention. First, they saw it as a kind of novelty when its intent remained unexplained.



Figure 22. Installation of Harmonized Structure in Furniture Showroom Courtyard, Bangkok.

The following were asked amongst other questions:

- Without having read the explanation would you have understood that the sculpture is about harmony?
- Does the sculpture contribute to a sense of balance in the courtyard?
- Would adding live flowers improve its message of harmony between Nature, Heaven and People?
- Would planting a tree in the courtyard be a better way to communicate harmony between Nature, Heaven?

Nos.	Questions	Agree %	Neutral %	Don't Know %	Disagree
1	Without having read my explanation, would you have understood that the sculpture is about harmony?	22	50	28	0
2	Does the sculpture contribute to a sense of balance in the courtyard?	33	39	6	22
3	Would adding living flowers improve its message of harmony between Nature, Heaven, and People?	57	28	17	2
4	Does the sculpture communicate something positive?	33	44	6	17
5	Do you feel that art is important for interior design?	78	11	6	5
6	Would planting a tree in the courtyard be a better way to communicate harmony between Nature, Heaven, and People?	67	28	5	0
7	Is there anything in the sculpture that you would like to see me improve upon or change?	22	67	11	0

Figure 23. Table of questionnaire's results.

Findings Results

The questionnaire response demonstrated clearly the preference for the living tree, with 67% of participants selecting it as the most effective embodiment of harmony. The flower arrangement and the abstract sculpture received 18% and 15%, respectively. Qualitative feedback indicated that participants were moved by the living, organic presence of the tree, and others also situated in the courtyard, that associated with vitality, growth, and a direct connection to nature. In contrast, the sculpture was viewed as intellectually stimulating and aesthetically significant but less emotionally resonant. Suggesting placement of flower

arrangements, the employees welcomed Ikebana for its artistry and cultural significance but considered these more fragile and transient.

Findings suggest that while abstract and traditional art forms communicate philosophical concepts, living natural elements evoke a more visceral and holistic sense of harmony in urban spatial contexts.

Constructing Harmony

Results of this study highlight the human preference for living natural elements when expressing harmony within urban commercial spaces. The selected choice of the living tree over both the abstract sculpture and traditional Ikebana arrangement can be explained through a trifecta of psychological, cultural, and environmental factors.

Psychologically, living trees offer restorative benefits grounded in the theory of biophilia, where innate human affinity for nature, facilitates emotional comfort, and sensory engagement. To the contrary, sculptures are intellectually engaging but miss the organic vitality. A tree's presence activates a direct sensory and emotional connection to life and growth, which is deeply embedded in the needs of human experience and wellbeing.

From a cultural perspective, the preferred choice aligns with Ikebana's core principles which emphasize balance, symmetry, and harmony between heaven, earth, and humanity. The living tree embodies these elements physically as it is rooted in earth, grows upwards towards heaven, and interacts dynamically with people. It offers a continuous symbol of harmony that fluctuates rather than remains static. This living, evolving form contrasts with more fixed, abstract sculptures, reinforcing the concept of harmony as a dynamic process rather than a permanent state.

Trees contribute tangible benefits to urban spaces such as air purification, shade from sunlight, connection to nature and biodiversity promotion of the environment. These factors elevate the tree beyond mere aesthetics to an essential component of urban harmony.



Figure 24. Kojimachi Terrace, Japan, by Nendo.

An eleven storey commercial building is designed by Japanese studio Nendo, the balconies are filled with plants to "let the outside in." Office workers can enjoy balconies designed as timber-lined pods, filled with large plants and small trees.

In Kojimachi Terrace, on the three top floors, the balconies have been aligned to create a "Sky Forest" where people can come to enjoy a peaceful hideaway.



Figure 25. Lenne office, Estonia, by KAMP Arhitektid.

KAMP Arhitektid created an office space with the ambience of a "bright summer forest," with living tree trunks, artificial leaves and branches. Small leaves started growing miraculously after a week, said architect Jan Skolimowski, 2021. Despite human control, nature always tried to reconnect life in any environment possible.

Discussion

Nature prevails in its movement towards equilibrium. Still, can balance and harmony be given a man-made form integrating Ikebana's principles? Is harmony really a dynamic balance, a push and pull relationship between various aspects such as lines, blocks, front and back, high and low, centered and off center, fragile and strong, activated and not activated space? When juxtaposing abstract steel lines and blocks against an arrangement, Ikebana's fundamental theme of the harmonious union between nature and humanity becomes clear.

In both the Japanese Ikebana flower arrangement and structuring a steel composition in space, the basic vertical-horizontal and color elements represent the balance of essential opposing forces, be they yin and yang, dynamic and static, or positive and negative. Even the stillness is deceptive, a quietude only achieved by opposing forces. Harmony becomes a tensioned balance. Various schools of Ikebana follow the principles of silence in natural forms, minimalism from Buddhist precepts, graceful lines, found forms, reflection of feelings, Japanese aesthetics, and order or structure of heaven, earth, and humanity. Utilizing the negative space, the empty space, is an important component in achieving harmony and balance in its composition. Similarly, working with geometric shapes produces a sense of harmony and balance with the negative space between lines are important in its overall composition. I deliberately played with the pull and push effects, some metal lines, that form the rectangles hang apart from once connecting pieces. The sculpture seems to display a "floating effect" of blocks, spacing out with size. When the metal outlines are empty, the space they occupy becomes invisible, but that does not indicate the non-existence of

blocks but rather the invisibility communicates the existence of space albeit one that is not visually defined. If it had been flowers, or flowers incorporated with the sculpture, it would have provided a softer and comfortable harmonizing essence to beautify the environment.

The interplay of space - empty or decorated, active or not - is the largest different difference between East and West - what seems just like a background to a Western eye, is considered a resonant space in Japan. A tear room (Chasitsu) is in itself an activated structure in space, delineated by the movements of its visitors. Therefore, the non-activated a space combined with the activated space creates a dynamic, a push and pull between field, not unfilled, busy or empty i.e. the unseen resounds.

The space around my sculpture and the flower of Ikebana is activated quietly, existing in dialogue between object and emptiness. Rozhin said that 'to provide a balance of space, white blocks are carefully included in the experiment to achieve balance and harmony, akin to the "unseen" in Ikebana, which is not empty space but rather a sustained spiritual fullness.' (2013). The sculpture, could, as the Ikebana, operate as a meditation and a longing expression for harmony.

At first glance, sculpture appears to represent a Confucian ideal of harmony - a clean and methodical order. A Japanese approach suggests that harmony forms by opposites, by tension and conflict. The West's idea of harmony expects it to be orderly, by quietly accommodating diversity through control. Tak -lap Yeung argues that harmony exists both in diversity and conciliation, where both can represent something beautiful (2020). Yet, in nature, harmony superimposed by control is an impossibility. Nature rots, and comes alive again, just as an Ikebana arrangement is made from dead flowers made alive. That perfect order, a static snippet of nature is instead a dynamic equilibrium and in the process of change.

Conclusion

This practice-led art project demonstrates that while the modern world can be out of balance, solace is found in realizing that harmony is a dynamic process, an equilibrium of wavering forces and thus can be re-instated to embrace an evolving reconciliation of opposing forces rather than a static ideal. Through the principles of Japanese Ikebana and the design of a tea room, the Chasitsu, the study illuminates how living natural forms can embody harmony to a greater extent in urban commercial spaces than abstract or traditional art alone.

The preference for trees over sculptures among the audience reflects deep psychological needs, cultural symbolism, and environmental realities that collectively enrich urban experiences. These insights suggest that integrating living natural elements into art and design, enhances aesthetic appeal and promotes emotional well-being and sustainable urbanism.

Ultimately, this research contributes to expanding the discourse on art, nature, and cultural design, advocating for a harmonious coexistence of living environments and creative practices that honor both tradition and contemporary complexity.

Tensions can be peaceful, as deceptively still as an Ikebana arrangement. By probing Ikebana through its principles and translating these into a sculpture, the belief shifts from the notion that 'harmony' must be still by incorporating symmetry, balance, and unity and that a living sculpture, a flower arrangement or a tree, in the end, does it best when it comes to balancing a space. Harmony emerges when there is a need to align and embrace disunity.

Nevertheless, the outcome of this experiment brought to life new compositions that bring about harmony in abstract art with floating, colored structures in space and the fundamental structure found in Ikebana. Harmony can be given a form with similar values to those that underpin Ikebana processes: an asymmetrical composition, inspired by nature, and common interest in humanity. Ultimately, harmony arises through a reconciliation between opposing and conflicting parts, through the push and pull of change. Nature is not static, nor does it exert power in hard shiny surfaces rather it works through softer forms, in shapes that often curve softly. Tetsunori Kawana believes that life and beauty are transitory and, therefore, his Ikebana installations must also be “only for the time and place.” A flower arrangement reminds us that we are fragile, yet we endure. Steel has its place, but can never replace the harmony embodied by life, in the living sculptures of trees or flowers.

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