Ikebana in the Expanded Field (1): Hiroshi Teshigahara and Contemporary Art

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Abstract

The field of free style Ikebana today has expanded to incorporate many themes in common with contemporary Western art, in particular with installation and assemblage. From 1980 to 2001 Hiroshi Teshigahara explored the possibilities of installation through his bamboo works. Focusing on his unique attitudes toward the natural materials and his creative strategies of repetition and accumulation, this paper agues that his site specific installations fall within the context of the contemporary Western art, moving beyond the underlying Japanese cultural and spiritual traditions.

Introduction

Among traditional Japanese art forms, Ikebana has been comparatively malleable and has developed with influences from external factors including new aesthetic attitudes and sociocultural changes. Since the Meiji Restoration the influence of Western art has been the significant external force. Moving away from traditional styles and rules, *jiyu-bana*, free style Ikebana was developed in 1920's. This led to the development of the New Ikebana movement in the 1930's and Avant-garde Ikebana after World War Two. It appears today that the distinction between some current Ikebana work and the broader arena of contemporary art has become blurred (Singer, 1994, p. 46).

In her highly influential essay, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, Rosalind Krauss observed an expansion in the definition of what sculpture could be. The development of American sculpture in 1960s and 1970s revealed the limitations of modernist sculptural discourse (Krauss, 1985). Free style Ikebana, as opposed to the formalized classical styles of Ikebana, seems to require a similar expansion around a set of terms, particularly site specificity and juxtaposition, in order to fit in with the modernist and postmodernist spaces of post war Ikebana.

The idea of site specificity is related to the fact that Ikebana traditionally developed as a decoration for an alcove in Japanese architecture. Sofu Teshigahara often asserted the desire to "release Ikebana from alcoves." In moving towards seeing an Ikebana work in an environment as a three dimensional art form, allowing it to be viewed from various points, Ikebana moved closer to sculpture. What also emerged at this point was the relationship between an Ikebana work and its environment and ultimately the investigation of Ikebana as installation. Hiroshi Teshigahara's work clearly represents this direction.

On the other hand, the idea of juxtaposition involves the denial of some basic Ikebana principles. Materials are no longer selected and arranged according to traditional principles. Ikebana artists now have to rely on their inner sense to organize and present their forms. This process of creating new free style arrangements has become similar to the larger processes of assemblage and juxtaposition of materials, making it possible to include new layers of interpretation. This direction was in an extreme form explored by Rosalie Gascoigne through her assemblage using segmented found objects. Although she was not in the strict sense an Ikebana artist, it is generally recognized that her time as a student of Ikebana had an influence on her work.

While their passage as artists presents a striking contrast in terms of their apparent relationship with Ikebana, both Hiroshi and Gascoigne created their works stemming from the essence of Ikebana. This paper deals with Hiroshi Teshigahara, focusing on his bamboo installations, which were created over two decades from 1980 to 2001.

New Ikebana

In the 1920s Suido Yamane (1893 - 1966) advocated *jiyu-bana,* free style flowers that valued individual expression and denied the formality of *seika*. *Jiyu-bana* was further developed by the New Ikebana movement in 1930s with the influence of the modern art movements in the West and continues to have a significant influence on Ikebana today. One of the most active members of the movement was Sofu Teshigahara (1900 - 1979), the founder of the Sogetsu School of Ikebana which is one of the largest Ikebana schools today. He successfully promoted "Avant-garde Ikebana" after the World War Two not only in Japan but also internationally. Generally he is regarded as the most important Ikebana artist of the twentieth century (Kudo, 1993).

Sofu owed much to Mirei Shigemori (1896 - 1975) in forming his new approach to Ikebana. It is not difficult to find the roots of Sofu's views on Ikebana in the wrings of Shigemori. Shigemori is best known as a garden designer, but initially he was a well

published researcher of Japanese traditional arts such as Ikebana, gardening and the tea ceremony (Tschumi, 2005). He constantly tried to renew these traditional art forms incorporating into them attitudes of modern Western art.

In 1933 he drafted the influential *Shinko Ikebana Sengen* (the New Ikebana Declaration) with Sofu and other Ikebana artists (Kudo, 1993). However, Mizuo criticised the manifesto for its lack of the same kind of necessity that justified the Avant-garde movements in the West (Mizuo, 1966). Mizuo (1966) further criticised the New Ikebana movement as just a superficial imitation of art movements in the West, lacking any profound changes in Ikebana. Recognising a huge gap between Ikebana and contemporary art, Mizuo's comments include a number of useful points for evaluating not only the New Ikebana movement but also the current state of Ikebana.

Nevertheless, *Shinko Ikebana Sengen* reflects well how Shigemori interpreted the Modernist movement in the West in the context of Ikebana in Japan. Tschumi (2007, p.37) noted that Shigemori's view is rooted in the Modernism of the Taisho period (1912 - 1926), advocating an art that was adjusting to a new way of life. In addition, and more importantly, Shigemori's stance that Ikebana should be seen as an art form has had a significant influence on the development of Modern and Contemporary Ikebana. The manifesto consists of the following six major points.

i. New Ikebana rejects nostalgic feelings. We can't find a vivid world in anything nostalgic. There is nothing but calmly sleeping beauty in the nostalgic world.
ii. New Ikebana rejects formal fixation. Creation always brings forth a fresh form. Fixed form is like a gravestone.
iii. New Ikebana rejects the concept of moral principles. Ikebana is neither a religious teaching nor a created moral story. If anything, it is art.
iv. New Ikebana rejects botanical restrictions. Ikebana is an art and certainly not about plant samples or botanical teaching materials. Plants are simply the most important materials.
v. New Ikebana uses the flower vase freely. We accept no limits regarding the flower vase and its use is unrestricted. Either we can make it painstakingly with our own hands, or we can cooperate with a good vase maker. The vase must also follow our new spirit; we must give a new life to old things and make them alive.
vi. New Ikebana undergoes constant development; it doesn't have a standard form. It adapts to the lifestyle of our time, but it is always tied to an artistic conscience. It is neither a traditional old pastime nor a metaphysical existence departing from life. If we take the biased viewpoint and blind obedience of conventional ikebana our

> work would indeed be no different. The new spirit will be expressed by a completely new appearance. (Kudo, 1993, p.184; Tschumi, 2007, p.37)

Rather than writing a lengthy thesis on Ikebana, Sofu made many brief comments on it, many of which can be seen as variations of the manifesto. He also further developed his own views on Ikebana based on the ideas expressed in the manifesto.

> All flowers are beautiful, but not all ikebana is necessarily beautiful. Flowers, when set in ikebana, cease to be just flowers. Flowers become human in ikebana. (S. Teshigahara, 1996, p.10).

Sofu emphasised individual creativity, which he regarded as the essence of modern Western art, and as a fundamental element in Ikebana. Despite being over simplified, this assertion does signify an important shift in the history of Ikebana.

Historically, Ikebana developed as a creative activity based on natural beauty (Mizuo, 1966). The purpose of Ikebana is not just to show the beauty of arranged flowers; it represents a more universal concept, the artists' symbolic interpretation of the universe and its order. Senno, the author of *Ikenobo Senno Kuden* (1537), stated also that Ikebana should be arranged in accordance with the way the materials actually grow in nature. However, as long as plants are the main constituents in creating Ikebana, it has its own limitations in both form and content. By contrast many other art forms are not so specifically bound to particular materials (Mizuo, 1966).

Sofu challenged these limitations by introducing individual creativity as the major motivation. Asserting that Ikebana is a unique creation by man, and is quite different from nature, he defined Ikebana as a kind of sculpture, using living flowers (S. Teshigahara, 2000). The Ikebana revolution initiated by Sofu was further developed by his son, Hiroshi Teshigahara, who has contributed to the expansion of Ikebana in particular in the direction of the site-specific installation. Although their artistic styles seem utterly different at first glance, their approaches to Ikebana share the same theoretical principles.

Hiroshi Teshigahara (1927 - 2001) as a Contemporary Ikebana Artist

Hiroshi Teshigahara is one of the most important contemporary Ikebana artists, for he has contributed significantly to the development of the form over the last decades.

Ashton (1997) briefly summarised the artistic career of Hiroshi as follow:

> Teshigahara has moved about in the various arts — film, Ikebana, pottery, calligraphy, opera, theatre, and landscape architecture — in an indefatigable quest

> for the delicate thread that joins past with present, tradition with innovations. (Ashton, 1997, p.196)

Although Ashton (1997) successfully outlined the life of Hiroshi as an innovator of traditional arts as well as one of the most versatile and significant artists in contemporary Japan, like many other authors on the artist, her focus was on his films and her arguments about his Ikebana works did not capture the significance of his works. Even in the Ikebana field, his works have not been evaluated adequately so far, perhaps due to their perceived radical nature. However, Hiroshi's contribution to Ikebana is noteworthy in that his works expanded the boundaries of the art form, introducing new concepts and styles. In particular, as Cash (2001) suggested, his bamboo installations are influential, not only in Ikebana but also in the broader arena of international contemporary arts.

> From a Japanese perspective, such works were in keeping with the Sogetsu Ikebana style, which involved large scale natural elements (not just flowers) in dramatic and symbolic configurations; to the Western contemporary art world, they were elegant atmospheric installations. (Cash, 2001)

Pablo Picasso (1881 - 1973) said, "We are heirs to Rembrandt, Velázquez, Cézanne, Matisse. A painter still has a father and a mother; he doesn't come out of nothingness" (1973). So, we need to first look into how Hiroshi learnt from the past and created his own works.

Personal History

At the age of 18, Hiroshi witnessed the atomic bomb in Hiroshima from a distance and visited the devastated city briefly. The end of the war signified a time of profound social and cultural change in Japan. It was a time when the new artistic movements and social ideas in the West were introduced rapidly. At the same time, Japanese traditional culture, including the arts, was widely criticised, since it was thought to be associated with the old anti-democratic society.

Apart from the direct influence of his father, Hiroshi was influenced by various artists and intellectuals, many of whom were his lifelong friends. In 1948 Hiroshi was inspired by Taro Okamoto's (1911 - 96) publication on avant-garde art movements and joined his circle. Okamoto, who was one of the most famous Surrealist artists in Japan, urged the younger generation to destroy everything and reconstruct the Japanese art world. Hiroshi credited Okamoto as his primary influence during the first decade after the war (Ashton, 1997). Okamoto promoted the Jomon culture (B.C.10000 - B.C.3000) as the original source of core Japanese artistic values. His attention to these ancient primitive arts

was probably influenced by the similar attitudes of many artists with whom he studied in Paris between the wars.

Hiroshi graduated in 1950 from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. He then joined two young artists' groups for a short time, *Seiki* (*Century*) in 1950 and *Shinsedai-Shudan* (*New Generation Group*) in 1951. *Seiki* consisted of poets, writers and painters. They were interested in Surrealism and the relationship between art and society (Segi, 2001). *Shinsedai-Shudan* was a group of young Ikebana artists who pursued "socialistic Ikebana." They organized an exhibition reflecting peace movements. Hiroshi left these groups after a short time and started working in documentary films.

He directed his first film, *Pitfall* (1962), in collaboration with author, Kobo Abe and musician, Toru Takemitsu. Throughout the 1960s, he continued to collaborate on films with Abe and Takemitsu. In 1965, the Teshigahara/Abe film, *Woman in the Dunes* (1964) won the Special Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. From the mid-1970s onwards, he worked less frequently on feature films as he concentrated more on pottery.

Hiroshi became the third *iemoto* or head master of the Sogetsu School in 1980. In taking over from his father and his sister, Hiroshi's greatest contribution to Sogetsu was to further renew the Ikebana traditions combining the Western art at their depth. He reconsidered various aspects of Ikebana, in particular, the role of natural materials, which eventually led him to create his own style of Ikebana.

Ikebana and Nature

To clarify Hiroshi's view on Ikebana, it is useful to discuss his comments on Sen no Rikyu's statement that flowers should be arranged "just like they are in the field." Sofu rejected this comment and warned that it could be misinterpreted if it was used literally. Flowers cut from nature had to be carefully manipulated and arranged to recreate nature not imitate it. Sofu discerned the beauty that nature has of itself, and the beauty that humans can create using natural materials. Once the natural materials were cut off from nature, they don't belong to it anymore and consequently lose the beauty they used to have. He insisted that to arrange flowers as they are in the field, to achieve natural beauty, they had to be rearranged by subtle trimming and manipulation (S. Teshigahara, 2000).

Hiroshi's interpretation of Rikyu's comment is more radical. He takes it as Rikyu's criticism against *rikka* that had once flourished, but had become extremely formalised by his time, losing its original creativity. To arrange flowers "just like they are in the field" meant to Hiroshi to arrange them more freely (H. Teshigahara, 1991). As Hiroshi saw what he called "avant-garde spirits" in various Rikyu's works, Rikyu's comment on flower arrangement had to be reflection of these "avant-garde spirits."

However, like his father, Hiroshi emphasises that natural materials are different from nature, once they are cut off from it. What has to be done is to recreate the beauty the flowers had in the field. Flowers in the field are beautiful, not because of their pure forms, but because they are in harmony with their surroundings and even with the whole universe (H. Teshigahara, 1991). Hiroshi's attention to the relationship between a flower and its surroundings seems to be closely related to his interest in installation and site-specificity.

> Site-specificity implies neither simply that the work is to be found in a particular place, nor, quite, that it is that place. It means, rather, that what the work looks like and what it means is dependent in large part on the configuration of the space in which it is realised. In other words, if the same objects were arranged in the same way in another location, they would constitute a different work. (Oliveira, Oxley & Petry, 2003, p.35)

Oliveira et al. notes that what site means for contemporary artists such as Robert Smithson (1938 - 73) is a place not only of environmental, but also of historical and even archaeological interest (Oliveira et al., 2003, p.34). The multi-layered character of sites is also emphasised by Barrett-Lennard (2006).

> . . . site-specificity must involve looking and working at multiple levels — at those of physical and immediate objects and object relations of the site; at the site's use or employment, at what goes on there, how it is constituted, framed and articulated; and at the context of which it is part and its (inter) relations with other sites. (Barrett-Lennard, 2006, p.175)

There is a strong connection between Hiroshi's view on Ikebana and his father's as well as the ideas expressed in the manifesto for New Ikebana. However, Hiroshi apparently went further with the difficult questions that many Ikebana artists have to face, particularly the relationship between nature and art. In this regard, Hiroshi's brief comments on Japanese gardens (H. Teshigahara, 1991) are notable. He stated that Japanese gardens are meant to express the essence of nature, the most beautiful state of nature. Based on a profound knowledge of nature, gardeners create through their gardens, an artificial nature. They do not intend just to design nature according to man-made notions but to express a second nature. In this discourse, Japanese gardens and Ikebana are almost interchangeable. Just like Hiroshi's stance in creating his new Ikebana, the gardener's role is described as being like that of a medium who perceives and expresses the invisible essence of nature. Such mediums are, above all, required to be selfless in attitude to function adequately in the Shinto based Japanese spiritual context. The role of artists working with nature in the Shinto tradition will be further discussed later.

Hiroshi's Bamboo Installations

In 1982 Hiroshi created a series of installations using bamboo which clearly reflect his artistic development. The significance of this development lies not only in the fact that it is related to establishing his strategic approach to natural materials in Ikebana but also to his challenge to the tradition of Ikebana.

His first bamboo work, *Bamboo space* (Fig. 1) represents bamboo fundamentally as it is in the natural world, emphasising its straight vertical green lines. The interaction between the artist and bamboo is rather limited at this stage. Then, Hiroshi started to split the bamboo into several segments up to half its length, the split bamboo segments were then capable of forming curved lines. Importantly, as a result of such a dynamic interactive process, he discovered the curved line or flexibility of bamboo. By means of what he called "reduction", that is actively denying and destroying the apparent naturalness of the materials, he was able to grasp an initially hidden essential feature of the bamboo, namely its flexibility. When the bamboo created curved lines, what he called "substances," he was ready to create his new Ikebana works such as *Takejin* (Bamboo figures) and *Takekazan* (Bamboo volcanoes) in 1982.

Figure 1. Hiroshi Teshigahara, *Bamboo space*, 1982. Bamboo, cloth. h.250cm. Sogestu Kaikan, Tokyo.

Flower as Substance

In general, Ikebana artist are trained to value two elements of the flower in his or her creation: its natural appearance and its traditional use. However, these predetermined aspects of flowers do not leave much room for a creative Ikebana artist who pursues individual expression through flower forms. Hiroshi had to start by rejecting arrangements that use a flower according to its traditional properties. Inui quoted Hiroshi's comment (Inui, 1987) as follows.

> Ikebana is not a miniature version of nature. Accordingly I have to cut away anything which connects the materials to the superficial idea of nature. To do that I have to take away the individual name of each material and treat each as a substance…not imitating nature but creating what is unique…When the object is merely a substance then it has the potential for Ikebana.

To destroy the preconceptions attached to each flower and go beyond prejudice, he had to rediscover new ways of seeing each flower by cutting away its natural characteristics. It is notable that Hiroshi regarded this strategic reductive process as an extension of the essential feature of Ikebana. He recognised an affinity between cutting a flower from the field and obtaining a substance from a range of natural materials, one process follows on from the other.

Further pursuing his own investigation into the role of plants in Ikebana, he later expressed his own radical strategies in a more concise statement. He declared that flowers are to be reduced to substances of colour and line (H. Teshigahara, 1991; 1992). In this context "flowers" means plants materials in general. This statement contradicts comments by Sofu who said that Ikebana should be primarily colour and form, denying nature and the seasons as motifs for its creation. Sofu further stated that flower arrangements do not become Ikebana if nature is displayed too obviously in their arrangements (S. Teshigahara, 2000). Hiroshi's comment suggests that he has extended Sofu's approach to a new realm. In using flowers as substances in his creations, Hiroshi treated them as either lines or colours. He especially emphasised the importance of lines. Hiroshi's early bamboo installations in 1982 clearly show this active and physical process, which progressively developed and became more sophisticated over time.

Hiroshi's work at the 64th Sogetsu exhibition in 1982 demonstrates that he had by then established his approach to working with bamboo and the artistic style which he

continued to explore in the 1980s and 1990s. Inui also noted the significance of this work, pointing out that Hiroshi's work had entered a new phase (Inui, 1987). Inui states that this time Hiroshi split bamboo almost full length. This change in the treatment of bamboo brought a dynamism not found in the earlier works. Inui describes the difference between this presentation and previous works as follows.

> These [*previous works*] had a sharp, elegant beauty, following the character which bamboo material possesses in its natural state. In this new work, however, it is apparent that the artist's intension is to subdue the urge of the bamboo to return to its natural condition of straightness. The tension brought about by this conflict between artist and bamboo creates the charm of the work. It creates a space suffused with the drama of potential movement and simultaneously it isolates the decisive moment, the confrontation between man and plant material. (Inui, 1987, p.261)

It is true that the naturalness of the bamboo was apparent in his earlier works. However, the newly expressed dynamism in this work seemed to be more associated with the essence of the bamboo itself rather than with the conflict between artist and bamboo. In reducing natural materials to substances, Hiroshi's intention appeared to be destructive, which indeed looked like a conflict between artist and nature. However, at the end of the process of transforming the material's original features, what is revealed in the substance is a new feature, a previously hidden pure essence of the natural material. This transformation can be compared to the way materials are broken down into composite parts in creating assemblage works. It also has elements in common with some religious rituals. As a Shinto priest purifies objects for ceremonies, Hiroshi purified bamboo and created Ikebana to reveal the essence of nature where paradoxically there is no trace of humanity.

Repetition and Accumulation

In a somewhat similar way Mondrian (1872 - 1944) progressed from nature to abstraction, disentangling essence from attributes (Hughes, 1980, p.202), Hiroshi broke down natural materials into multiple small components (substances), making them abstract objects. Then, at the next stage of his creation process, it is through repetition and accumulation that he transformed them, taking the site specificity into account, into art forms that represent energy and growth in the universe. His practice from early 1980s to late 1990s has much in common with that of some contemporary artists such as a Post-Minimal artist, Tara Donovan (b. 1969). Donovan's work is often described as transforming industrial materials into living organisms. The materials she uses include

Scotch tape, pencils, styrofoam cups and buttons. Using a single material as a unit, she then accumulate them to create organic forms. Observing one of her major works, *Untitled* (2003), the sense of life seems to be related to the fact that the work, just like a living tree, has an invisible center or a core where the growth starts and moves towards the circumference.

The movement of growth as well as internal natural energy is suggested by irregular and fluid forms spreading organically outward or upward. Repetition of units of material is fundamental to Donovan's creative process. Mergel and Baume (2008) noted Donovan's use of repetition as her distinctive way of working.

> It is only through such manifold repetition that Donovan's abstractions reveal their second nature. The effect of her machinations has been linked to what Baudelaire called the "sacred machinery," as "repetition turns metaphysical, obsession and process become transcendental, and magic happens." (Mergel & Baume, 2008, p.10)

The "magic" seems to involve her creations being taken over by her subconscious or inner life force. The emerging forms, often irregular and haphazard, are determined by physical forces rather than conscious decisions. Donovan actually describes her process of working as "improvisational" and "the material dictates the final forms" (Chattopadlhyay, 2005). Howell also pointed out that "she has always been engaged with a process-oriented approach bordering on the meditative" (Howell, 2000, p.12). While many artists working with nature collaboratively perceive it as an external force, Donovan's process oriented works represent internal natural forces. Her works have connections to the symbolic representation of the universe that Ikebana artists seek to achieve.

Puppy by Koons

An interesting attempt was made by Minowa (Minowa, 2005) to compare one of Hiroshi's bamboo installations, *Hanabutai* (1996) with *Puppy* by Jeff Koons. Unfortunately, partly due to her skewed view of Japanese culture — a notion called *Nihonjinron,* a set of stereotypical views on Japan (Sugimoto & Mouer, 1989), Minowa (2005) failed to articulate the fundamentally important points that differentiate the two art works.

Minowa describes *Puppy* as a huge flowery sculpture or a giant toy, pointing out its novelty as well as its familiarity. She appreciates that Koons presents a familiar toy dog, an everyday popular culture object in startling and wholly new ways. Then, Minowa attributes the popularity of the sculpture to the usage of soil and living flowers as materials.

> In my artistic view, which is admittedly influenced by the Japanese aesthetic, the overarching appeal of *Puppy* is its almost magical ability to introduce the essence of nature into the human – and in this case, urban landscape (Minowa, 2005, p.338).

Minowa focuses on the healing aspect of nature in which she sees "a sense of seamless unity between nature and art." Her identification of art with nature becomes clear in her description of *Puppy*, "this sculpture blooms, grows and dies as does all organic life, and evokes in the viewer feelings of tenderness, joy, and a peaceful, spiritual acceptance of mortality" (Minowa, 2005, p.340). It is this kind of view of nature that is often described in many texts on Japan as the Japanese view on nature, a typical *Nihonjinron* (Sugimoto & Mouer, 1989). So, it is rather disappointing that she treats Koons and Hiroshi equally in stating that they are both "messengers from nature" (Minowa, 2005, p.341).

> Like the experience of nature itself, Teshigahara's Shrine and Koons's *Puppy* work on all of viewers senses: we experience this art with our bodies — and this experience is the essence of ikebana as well. (Minowa, 2005, p.342)

It is also ironic that Minowa sees in Hiroshi's work only the traditional and stereotypical views on nature that Hiroshi had persistently attacked. She argues that the appeal of Koons' work is largely related to its use of flowers, creating what she calls "the experience of nature." In this regard, it is not clear whether any difference exists between *Puppy* and a garden bed. Hiroshi, on the contrary, denies using natural materials as they are, rather transforming them into substances or their essence to express a more purified and possibly more sustaining experience of nature.

The Grid in Hiroshi Teshigahara

At the final stage of his career Hiroshi created a small series of installations that utilised bamboo panels featuring grid structures. The first of the series was *Shun'an* (2000), which was made on the top of the abstract stone garden, *Heaven,* created by Isamu Noguchi (1904 - 1988) at the Sogetsu Plaza (Fig. 2). It was a tea hut surrounded by the bamboo panels, some of which are lying on the floor and some are opening upward at the roof. Seen from below, this work looks like dissolving into the air, responding to and collaborating with the site by his mentor, Noguchi. It is the most extreme form of Ikebana, almost anti-Ikebana in its denial of any superficial notions of the genre.

Figure 2. Hiroshi Teshigahara, *Shun'an,* 2000. Oil-extracted bamboo poles, green bamboo poles. Sogetsu Plaza, Tokyo.

Creating a tea hut at the end of his career is significant considering his early comments on Antoni Gaudí (1852 - 1926). Hiroshi recognised an affinity between Gaudí's architecture and sixteenth century tea huts in that they are both essentially spaces surrounded by organic forms and that they possessed "individual creative spirits far beyond inspirations from nature" (H. Teshigahara, 1992, p.137). Hiroshi recognised that Gaudí's architecture, tea huts and Japanese gardens can bring to a viewer an immersive experience that traditional Ikebana cannot produce (H. Teshigahara, 1992). It is likely that this was also part of his motivation to extend Ikebana towards installation. He shares the same interest with the artists who developed site-specific artwork in the 1970s as a partial response to the limits of the museum and commodification of traditional art objects such as paintings and sculptures (Barrett-Lennard, 2006, p.172). They were dealing with "a shift from art object to art as process, from art as a 'thing' to be addressed, to art as something which occurs in the encounter between the onlooker and a set of stimuli" (Oliveira et al., 2003, p.26). In site-specific installations "meaning is no longer given, residing in the object until discerned by the receptive perspective viewer, it is something that is made in the encounter" (Oliveira et al., 2003, p.13).

Apparently, Hiroshi's approach to creating a second nature utilising curved lines inherent to the substances, split bamboo was abandoned in the work *Shun'an*. The features of bamboo he focused on are now the straightness of the bamboo poles and the regularity of the joints. Also unlike previous works, dry bamboo rather than green bamboo was used, denying a sense of living evoked by the fresh materials. Abstract, anti-natural characters of the material were further emphasised by the grid structure, which has not been properly evaluated so far in the field of Ikebana.

In her argument about how the grid functions in Modernism, Krauss noted that the flattened, geometrical, ordered nature of the grid represents "its lack of hierarchy, of centre, of inflection" (Krauss, 1986, p.158). Krauss recognizes the effectiveness of the grid as a barricade against noise and the protectiveness of its mesh against all intrusions from outside. She summarizes its "anti-natural, anti-mimetic, anti-real" characters as follow:

> No echoes of footsteps in empty rooms, no scream of birds across open skies, no rush of distant water — for the grid has collapsed the spatiality of nature onto the bounded surface of a purely cultural object. With its proscription of nature as well as of speech, the result is still more silence. And in this new-found quiet, what many artists thought they could hear was the beginning, the origins of Art (Krauss, 1986, p.158).

Krauss' argument suggests that Hiroshi reached the grid as a result of extending, rather than abandoning his approach that transformed natural materials into anti-natural substances. Concerning the significance of the grid in his investigation, it is possible to point out affinity between Hiroshi's approach and that of Mondrian. Using the grid, an extreme form of substances, Hiroshi presented a strong possibility that Ikebana can be integrated into the Western art context.

Another important aspect of Krauss's analysis of the grid lies in her assumption of the grids' mythic power. Just as the structuralists see the function of myth as the cultural attempt to deal with contradiction not by resolving it but rather by repressing it, Krauss pointed out that the grid can deals with the contradiction between materialism (or science or logic) and spiritualism (or illusion or fiction) (Krauss, 1986, p.12). The grid allows the paradox to maintain itself within the unconscious of modernism. In light of this proposed connection between the grid and spirituality, it might be possible to suggest one interpretation of Hiroshi's works from a Shinto point of view.

Art and Nature in Shinto

Segi describes the symbolic aspect of Hiroshi's installations as the "contemporary creation of *Kuu"* (Segi, 2001). *Kuu*, one of the core concepts in Buddhism, means emptiness or non-existence, rather than nothingness (Shimbo, 2009). All existence including self is *Kuu* for the enlightened person and *Kuu* is all existence.

If Hiroshi's creative processes are examined carefully, however, the symbolic aspect of his installations are possibly more related to Shinto rather than Buddhism. Considering also the fact that Okamoto was interested in Jomon period and that a number of Sofu's works were inspired by *Kojiki*, Hiroshi was probably more influenced, if any, by Shinto. Hiroshi's work can be appreciated in terms of Shinto attitudes, in particular, its

core concept, purification. Notions of purity were always inherent in Hiroshi's works, determined by a desired state of selflessness and revealed through a reductive transformation of materials.

I have previously discussed the relationship between the origins of Ikebana and Shinto, which emphasises the importance of touching natural materials.

> In the Shinto tradition, a flower is a special entity that is related to the sacred world. Touching it, in particular, has a significant meaning. By touching it we can receive and enjoy its sacred vital energy. This idea of the flower as a conduit to communication with the sacred has made arranging flowers a special activity in Japan. It has played an important role in the origin and development of Ikebana. (Shimbo, 2008, p.29)

Although Hiroshi's form of reductionism, actively touching and dissecting natural materials, seems to be original, it can be understood in terms of touching in the Shinto tradition. It is a process of purification and rejuvenation through which one can reach the essence of the natural materials.

Kasulis (2004) has explored the relationship between natural materials and artistic creation in the Shinto tradition from a different but closely related perspective. Applying a theory of Norinaga Motoori (1730 - 1801), he tries to explain how a poet writes a poem about, for instance, the mist on a mountain.

> If the poet's responsiveness is genuine - that is if there is *makoto no kokoro* — the poet's *kokoro* resonates with the *kokoro* of the actual mountain mist and the *kokoro* of the Japanese words. Through the interpenetration and common responsiveness of these *kokoro*, the poem is produced. From this perspective, the poet alone does not write a poem about the mountain mist. More precisely, the mountain mist, the Japanese words, and the poet write the poem together. (Kasulis, 2004, p.26)

To understand this passage, the overlapping of materiality and spirituality in Shinto needs to be noted. In creative verbal expression, where the poetic and the sacred meet, *kokoro* plays an important role. *Kokoro* is generally translated as "heart and mind", but Kasulis proposes it to be the "mindful heart." Motoori assumed that objects just like persons have *kokoro*, because the material is considered as interdependent with and inseparable from the spiritual. *Makoto no kokoro* (truthful *kokoro*) is, according to Motoori, the pure, sincere, human *kokoro* that reflects the world like a bright mirror. He supposed that human *kokoro* ceases to reflect spiritual power because we have intentionality and our *kokoro* can be covered with the dust of everyday worries and concerns. Therefore, to produce artistic

works such as poetry about nature the artist has to have a pure and selfless heart that can resonate with the heart of the natural objects.

In reducing natural materials to substances of colours and lines, they are for Hiroshi not simply abstract objects or components for his creations, but they could have another dimension, the essence or *kokoro* of the natural materials.

Conclusion

Modern free style Ikebana has developed under the influence of the Western art. Although there are many Ikebana artists as well as other artists who have attempted to combine Western and Eastern cultural traditions in their works, they often end up as superficial imitations or parodies with very few artists been able to combine them at a profound level. Hiroshi's works represent one of these rare examples. The significance of Hiroshi's approach to Ikebana lies first in his attitude to natural materials. His reductive strategy transforming natural materials into abstract substances may be original in Ikebana history but it was the natural and logical consequence of the influence of Western art on Ikebana. The grid structure Hiroshi introduced at the end of his career is also in the extension of his investigation into Ikebana in the context of contemporary art. Through his innovative approach to his art, Hiroshi demonstrated that Ikebana can be expanded in its form towards installation and consequently have its symbolic import extended.

Acknowledgments

This paper is based on a chapter of my exegesis toward Master of Fine Art at Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, Monash University. I wish to express my grateful acknowledgement to my supervisor Mr Kenneth Smith for his absolute support and insightful guidance. I also acknowledge my wife Julie Shimbo for her understanding and her editorial support. I am grateful to Sogetsu Foundation, Mr Chukyo Ozawa and Mr Kishin Shinoyama for permitting the use of images of Hiroshi Teshigahara's works in this paper.

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