

Throughout this class, my journey with Ikebana has been more than just about arranging flowers; it has been an exploration of personal growth, creativity, and understanding the delicate balance between nature and art. As I moved through each lesson, I began to realize that Ikebana is not only a skill but a practice that goes beyond aesthetics—it is about connecting with the materials, expressing emotions, and embracing a mindful approach to creation. Each arrangement, from my first to the last, has been a unique reflection of where I was emotionally and what I was learning about myself and the world around me.

The first few arrangements I created were rooted in a desire for order and symmetry. I was drawn to the idea of balance, but I soon realized that true beauty in Ikebana doesn't necessarily come from perfection—it comes from the interaction between elements. In the early stages of my work, I struggled with the concept of asymmetry, which was something I had not explored much in my past artistic experiences. However, as I worked through the different assignments, I started to appreciate how asymmetry could lead to a more dynamic and organic composition, allowing space for each element to breathe.

The most significant lesson I learned in this class was about **Ma**, the Japanese concept of negative space. Initially, I was concerned with filling every inch of the vase, thinking that the more flowers and elements I added, the better the arrangement would be. However, as I studied Ikebana more deeply, I understood that **Ma** is not just the absence of material; it is an active, thoughtful space that holds the composition together. The space around the flowers allows for flow and movement, creating a sense of balance and harmony that might otherwise be lost in a crowded arrangement. This lesson was transformative for me, not just in my arrangements but in my daily life. I realized how much I tend to overfill my schedule or my thoughts, believing that constant action or thought was necessary to feel productive or complete. Embracing **Ma** taught me the value of pausing, of allowing space for stillness and contemplation, both in art and in life.

In my first arrangement, titled “Starry Cheer,” I used bright, vibrant flowers and an asymmetrical design to express the joy and liveliness of spring. The main concept was to evoke a feeling of cheerfulness and vitality. The **dominant** element in this arrangement was the **yellow billy balls**, which pointed upward, creating a sense of movement and lightness. The **subdominant** flowers, such as the **pink carnations** and **yellow asters**, added balance and depth. By the end of the arrangement, I realized that I had unintentionally embraced the principles of **line** and **dot** in the design—each flower had its own place, and the lines of the bear grass helped guide the eye through the composition. The playful nature of the arrangement reflected the exuberance I was feeling at the time, which reinforced the power of flowers to express not just visual beauty but also emotion.

As I progressed, I began to experiment with more subtle, serene arrangements that focused on quiet reflection. One of my favorites was “Autumn,” which used warm colors and delicate textures to express calmness and nostalgia. This piece incorporated **negative space** as the empty areas around the branches and flowers were just as important as the material itself. It allowed the flowers to stand alone in their beauty, rather than being overwhelmed by other elements. For this arrangement, I used a **dry leaf** with a **Ginkgo** design, evoking the feel of autumn's quiet progression. This experience taught me the importance of slowing down and embracing the simplicity and elegance of **space** in both art and life.

Each of my seven arrangements allowed me to explore different aspects of Ikebana and Japanese aesthetics. The principles of **line**, **mass**, **dot**, and **surface** became key to my understanding of composition. I learned that the placement of every material was a decision that impacted the overall feeling of the piece. Through this process, I grew more confident in my ability to create something unique and meaningful, understanding that every decision, from color choice to flower placement, was an expression of my own internal world.

In addition to the technical aspects of Ikebana, I learned about **kokoro**, the concept of heart or spirit. Throughout the class, I began to realize that Ikebana is more than just arranging flowers; it is about creating with intention, allowing your emotions and state of mind to guide the process. For example, my arrangement titled "Joy" was directly inspired by my feelings of happiness and optimism at the time. The bright yellow billy balls and cheerful carnations mirrored the lightness and warmth I felt inside. In contrast, my arrangement "Echoes of Stillness" focused on creating a quiet, reflective mood with more muted tones and a gentle flow. These pieces allowed me to express my emotions without needing to say anything aloud, demonstrating how Ikebana can be a deeply personal form of self-expression.

Reflecting on how these lessons can be applied to my own life, I recognize the influence that Ikebana has had beyond the art form itself. The concept of **balance**, the importance of **negative space**, and the understanding of **kokoro** have reshaped how I approach both my work and my personal life. For example, in my academic work, I've started to embrace the idea of **Ma**—allowing myself time to reflect and breathe rather than constantly pushing forward. In my relationships, I have learned the importance of balance and understanding the space between people, allowing for healthy distance and connection.

The experience of arranging flowers has taught me patience, attentiveness, and a deep appreciation for the beauty found in simplicity. These are lessons I plan to carry forward, whether in the way I approach my future work, my interactions with others, or the way I move through the world. By bringing the principles of Ikebana into my daily life, I hope to continue cultivating mindfulness, balance, and beauty in everything I do.

Ikebana has given me more than just the ability to arrange flowers. It has offered me a way to slow down, connect with nature, and find harmony within myself. Through this class, I have learned that art is not just a process—it is a path to self-discovery, reflection, and expression.