

ALAIN DELAYE

WISDOM OF IKEBANA
Floral meditations

From the same author :

- La foi selon Jean de la Croix (Éd. du Carmel - 1975) coll. Sentiers pour l'esprit.
- Zen l'essentiel (Accarias-l'Originel - 1989).
- Les fleurs dans l'art et la vie, des origines à nos jours (Accarias-l'Originel - 1997) Préface de Jean-Marie Pelt.
- Sagesses Concordantes. Quatre maîtres pour notre temps : Etty Hillesum, Vimala Thakar, Prajnânpad, Krishnamurti (Accarias-l'Originel - 2004) Préface d'André Comte-Sponville, 2 tomes.
- Sagesse du Bouddha, religion de Jésus. Bouddhisme et christianisme des origines à nos jours (Accarias - L'Originel - 2007).
- B.A-BA de l'Ikebana, art floral japonais (Pardès - 2009).

*Don't say anything evil
Don't say anything good
Be flowers*

*Be flowers
In these troubled times
smoked out with coal
Be roses and lilies*

Charles Cros

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INTRODUCTION

When we begin to practice Ikebana, it appears to us as a set of techniques that allow the beginner to bring together harmoniously flowers, branches and leaves. The implementing of these techniques then absorbs a great part of our attention. When these are mastered, Ikebana can become an art, a creative activity in which calculation serves sensitivity and inspiration. Techniques are at the same time integrated and surpassed in the search for beauty which takes into account not only lengths and angles, masses and colours, but the individuality of each plant, to give it its place in a whole which has its own beauty.

Nevertheless, this artistic dimension is not the ultimate one. Ikebana aims further than art only regarded as a decorative activity, it aims at leading to a certain inner harmony and this is how all masters of this discipline have understood it, from the first buddhist monks, who invented it, to the masters of modern schools. The wisdom with which it has been linked for centuries is that of Zen. The latter, like the Japanese shinto, aims at making us realise our insertion into a great Nature, which supports and surpasses us.

The universe, all living creatures in the cosmos, and ourselves, share a common existence. We plunge our roots into the same earth, drink at the same springs. We are all part of the same entity, the same energies, and only our unbridled individualism has led us to forget the existence of this participation and of this unity.

Zen doesn't attempt to make us think about this implantation, but it aims at getting us to experiment it in ourselves and reaching a certain harmony and inner serenity. For that, it appeals to methods of meditation and to artistic, decorative or martial disciplines, which show many analogies between them. This implies that the basic styles of floral art are, like the katas of the martial arts, moulds into which the artist can tap and free himself from the leanings of his ego. As certain reactions take place, the «self» fades away, allowing a more profound reality, a new energy to manifest itself.

In Japan, over the centuries, Zen has been at the heart of all these procedures, and the master of archery, like the master of calligraphy, of chanoyu or Ikebana was the one who, in his own discipline, and thanks to it, was able to harmonize with the Universe and all creatures.

So, Ikebana is a plant which has bloomed in the earth of wisdom and which still constitutes a way to reach it : "The way of flowers" as Mrs Herrigel says so prettily. In the following pages we'll try to find again its paths, half-forgotten nowadays, by giving you some thoughts able to inspire your lives as well as your bouquets.¹

FOLLOW THE WAY OF FLOWERS

"It is through beauty, writes Schiller, that one makes one's way towards liberty."² How does beauty act ? By unconditioning us. Most of the time, we are divided between our immediate needs, our instincts, our passions, and the imperatives of our rational nature. Beauty raises us above our primary pulsions and softens the rigour of our moral exigencies. In other words, it creates for us a certain space of liberty, of indetermination, of unselfishness, in which our sensitive and spiritual capacities can find their advantage and be reconciled with each other.

Besides, beauty frees us from the greedy desire for possession and from the violent urge to destroy. It puts a pacifying distance between the objects and ourselves. "The necessity of Nature releases its grip ; time itself stops... and a gleam of Infinite projects its beams on the background of transitory things", writes Schiller. On the one hand, beauty calms down the harshness of our desires, on the other, by showing us Nature and Life in a positive, even sublime light, it gives us the joy to live and the courage to be wise.

When listening to a piece of beautiful music, our feelings liven up, when listening to beautiful poetry, our imagination is stimulated, when looking at a splendid painting, an impressive sculpture, a majestic building, a pretty bouquet, we take a fresh look at things, our way of looking is awakened. Beauty protects us from savagery, but also from despondency. "It restores harmony in a tense man and vigour in a listless person", Schiller also writes. It teaches us to introduce nobility in our desires so as not to feel the urge of desire too harshly.

Harmonization, the unification of our being, through contemplation and creation : such are the power and the aim of beauty, and also what Ikebana offers us : the art of seeing flowers alive and render them beautiful. Such is the essence of an æsthetic game that favours our inner liberty.

When we make a bouquet, we find ourselves before our plants and our vase like a child before the elements of a construction game or paper cuttings, and I have often thought that Ikebana takes us back, in a way, to infant school. What is the spirit of childhood ? if not this state of indetermination, of innocence, of liberty of which Schiller speaks, a spirit propitious to all creations ? This "spirit of beginners" of which Shunryu Suzuki speaks : a state in which our sensitivity and our intelligence find once more their freshness and their original unity, while harbouring the fullest maturity.

The game instinct that presides over the making of a flower arrangement liberates us : from our cares, from our utilitarian preoccupations, certainly, but also from our badly controlled or badly satisfied desires. It opens a new dimension to us : that of beauty, in which we catch a glimpse of the Infinite, a flash of eternity.

Making a nice bouquet relaxes and comforts us. It also stimulates us. Then, we are able to deal with everyday life with a more detached attitude, and renewed energy. The reason is that we have made contact with our sources again : with the vegetable nature and with our own nature, which we tend to neglect too much and allow to be inactive, buried deep in ourselves. We are then put again on what Gusty Herrigel calls : "the Way of Flowers", and this way, which is that of Beauty, can only cause our blossoming out.

ACT WHILE LISTENING TO NATURE

"Wisdom consists in acting while listening to Nature", Heraclitus tells us (fr.112). The wise man observes Nature in order to harmonize his life with it, just as one tunes a violin, to create a harmony.

Nature is the reality which precedes man in existence. That is to say it is not the fruit of his invention, of his making ; he is himself the product of Nature. Nature survives wherever man's technology has not eliminated it, and even, in the very heart of this same technology, only hidden in it.

In its vegetable dimension, Nature reminds man of his roots, his origin, and so offers him the ground for growth. Hence the importance for him to keep it close to him, in the countryside, gardens, plants and bouquets.

As far as bouquets are concerned, each starts from Nature where one finds, observes and gathers the plants which compose it. The walking and picking activity which precedes its making are important, not only through the act of collecting the suitable plants, but also as an observation of the way they grow, and of their surroundings. They are even essential moments for renewing one's resources, for feeling one with nature. Immersion in Nature takes us back into a primitive environment which our urban surroundings hide from us daily.

The starting point of the bouquet is there : in the experience and consciousness that the elements which compose it are not consumer goods, but fragments of a wider life which includes us.

But if outer Nature is a source, our inner nature is a source too, and may be the first one, because it is from our own energy, from our desire for harmony, stemming from our spirit, which starts the project of the arrangement that our hands will complete. That is why our inner nature must also be met with, listened to. This can be achieved in inner silence, in the appeasement of the mind, through meditation.

Nature is thus doubly a source, and we can understand it in a double approach : at the time of picking, and in the silence of meditation, which should both precede the making of a flower arrangement.

Like the sage of Heraclitus, who acts in accordance with Nature, who harmonizes his life with it, the ikebanist is a tuner : he listens to Nature and creates his bouquet while respecting it. He respects the way the plants grow, associates plants of complementary forms, gives them space to live, to breathe, to exhale their beauty. His bouquet then becomes the image of his own being and a kind of project of existence that he has still to transfer into his life.

That means that one must not force things, nor rub human beings the wrong way up, but respect their nature. That also means we should accept and deal with other people's differences as though they were ways to make us richer and not accept them as troubles or obstacles. The aim is, lastly, to leave everyone a space where they can find their own place and blossom out.

RESPECT NATURE AND LIFE

Nature, that is : human beings, animals, vegetals, minerals constitute a whole, a great and fine Universe we are part of. But not only us : all the living beings as a whole occupy a place of choice there. This Nature is now in danger.

Oil slicks polluting the seas, fertilisers poisoning the countryside, toxic products damaging the atmosphere, GMOs reducing the variety of species... All those and many other activities like excessive fishing, some forms of shooting and poaching, put in danger the existence of the living beings on our small planet.

Lots of scientists are pulling the alarm-bell. At this speed, they say, we are going to have to face problems which have already started to generate powerful and noxious effects and soon will become unsolvable as regards pollution, economic and ecological maladjustment, famine and development. Hence a feeling of responsibility as far as our environment is concerned and the green movements.

Ikebana as "an art of living" is committed to the same care to preserve a Nature which is so fine and yet so fragile. This care is first expressed when gathering plants used for arrangements. Collecting plants is not done no matter how, not tackled with a hasty predator's mind but as a quiet lover of Nature who collects indeed, but also respects and gives : his time and amazement.

One tries not to gather more plants than necessary, not to cut inconsiderately trees and bushes, not to uproot plants and bulbs. Once the collecting is done, plants are put together with care, quickly put into water, and utilised with intelligence in arrangements which show them in a favourable light. So, the respect of Nature continues in the Japanese bouquet which, traditionally, requires one to show respect to the trend of growth of plants and sometimes, in landscape arrangements, to reconstruct their natural association. May be these same plants will later give cuttings, rooting in holders and vases, and allow their reproduction in our gardens.

To show respect to life in its vegetable forms, is to respect the world of the living and so to respect ourselves since we are a part of it. Because, as Gusto Herrigel writes : "The heart of a flower, the heart of a man and the universal Heart are One. Man lives in community of essence with plants as with the Universe. The strength which makes the plants grow is also the one which guides one's hand in floral arrangements and which is directly drawn from the universal Heart."¹³

RECONCILE THE SKY WITH THE EARTH

Traditionally, the Japanese bouquet is constructed with three principal elements symbolising the sky, man and the earth. This symbolisation indicates that Man stands in an intermediary space. "Heaven covers him, the Earth supports him", says an old Chinese formula. They are complementary : the heavenly light warms and makes fertile the dark and cold earth to give birth to the world of living things. Under the impact of the Light the dark root of Life is at work.

Here we find again this complementarity in the old Chinese cosmology under the form of the dark passive yin, and of the bright active yang. In the circle of Tao, the light-coloured fish yang has a black eye because, as it reaches its maximum force, it bears the seed of its opposed and complementary yin. The black fish yin has a white eye, because it also bears the seed, the potential of its inseparable yang. So, yin and yang follow one another closely, are in contrast and are balanced in an endless dance, from which the multitude of creatures emerge.

Man participates in the nature of all things : minerals, plants, animals and spirits. He is a microcosm, which sums them up and is their representative in the universe. He also links earth and sky. He is the point of junction of rising and falling energies, of heavenly and earthly attractions, of the expansions and condensations which they generate, he channels them, contains them and guides them like a shepherd gathering his flock. Conducting the Earth to the Sky and the Sky to the Earth, he is as Heidegger says, «the shepherd of existence».

Such is his state and his calling. Situated between earth and sky, and participating in both, he has a mission to bring together what they are and what they mean, to reconcile the density of nature with the lightness of freedom, the strength of fate and the grace of destiny. His task is to become the consciousness of the world : its awareness, unfragmented, unified, assuming the world in its totality.

"Heaven, earth and I have the same root, belong to one Whole", used to say Tchouang-Seu. In fact, the more man becomes spiritual, the closer he comes to animals, plants, and the whole of nature. In his Song of creatures, Francis of Assisi shows that very well when he celebrates sun, moon and stars, wind, air and clouds, water, fire and earth «which produces all kinds of fruits, rainbow-coloured flowers and grass». His love for animals which he talked to, is also well-known.

As Pierre Bertrand writes : "The man who rises in spirit experiences at the same time closeness and complicity with all living creatures... When we go deep into ourselves, we reach something simple which puts us in contact or in direct communication with all living things : other men, animals, plants and also minerals."⁴

Among the numerous styles of arrangements which are built with three elements, there is one which manifests this complicity of man with the whole of nature, this intermediary place which he holds between earth and sky : the "shoka". This bouquet invites us to play in the world the part of a mediator, of a unifier.

Seen from this angle, the floral arrangement is not only an activity of decoration, but also a "religious" act, in the etymological sense of the word, i.e. an act which binds Earth and Heaven through Man.

It is creation because it is directly lined with the primeval gestation. It is beyond petty concerns, because it dissolves the pretensions of the ego.

It is fulfilment because it realises, symbolically, a purpose of universal harmony.

There remains for us to prolong this act in our everyday life, to transform floral art into an art of living.

SEE THE FLOWER IN EVERYTHING

Exotic paradises or mythical paradises, gardens of Eden or gardens of love, all paradises are full of flowers. But, as Krishnamurti says : "Where we are are all paradises, where all our quests come to an end", still we have to see them, and for that to forget ourselves. "Without self-effacement, beauty has no reality."

Noticing that in front of a splendid landscape we are absorbed, unmindful of ourselves, Krishnamurti writes again : "Beauty is where you are not. The essence of beauty is the absence of the ego... All we have to do is to see. To see is an action of love which alone can make the spirit receptive."⁵"One sees well with the heart only", said St Exupéry"Little Prince.

Floral art, like every form of traditional art, supposes a capacity to look at Nature with sensitivity, but that is only possible by cutting ourselves from voluntary ambitions and personal projects, at least for a time. Yet, floral art would be nothing if it did not bring us into a larger, more fundamental art : that of living. It is what the great Japanese poet Bashō invites us to do ; he tells us that we need "to see the flower in everything".

"To see the flower in everything", what does that mean, if not to see its beauty, its goodness, its brightness ? To feel and appreciate that part of the marvellous, the luminous which anybody holds in them, finally to love them.

If we learn to see the beauty of flowers, to enhance this beauty, it is in order to be able, afterwards, by prolonging this look, to see the flower in everything, to discover, under the apparent banality of the people we meet, their deep harmony.

In «la Merveille et l'Obscur»⁶, Christian Bobin evokes this pedagogic value of art : "The look that we can turn every now and then on a work of art, we should turn it on all things before our eyes. Besides, that's what art must help us do, otherwise it is superfluous, a waste of time : to open our look on what exists, without exclusion. To add flowers to our blood. Painters spend hours, spend centuries drawing two roses in a vase, a spotted fruit on a cloth. They serve the humblest features, the most insignificant things, the redness of a fabric, or the wavy lines of a face.

When one has really learned the lesson from painters - but I could say the same thing of writers and musicians - one can go everywhere to find one's sustenance. One sees there is no abundance on one side and poverty on the other ; no art, nobility, greatness on one side, insignificance, triteness, everyday life on the other. One sees that everyday life is abundance. One knows the fragile eternity of all. Everything is of equal worth, not in the nothingness of all, but in the miracle of all."

When one has well learned the lesson of flowers, one can go everywhere and see, in the most everyday things, the fragile eternity, the miracle of all.

ADOPT THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

More than a decorative art, Ikebana is a way, an art of living, in which the way is as essential as the aim, the manner of making the composition as important as the arrangement itself. That implies paying real attention to the attitude as well as to the gestures which construct it.

Let us watch a master operating. His gesture is firm, confident, without hesitation or fumbling. This determination stems from the attentive observation of the plants to be used, as well as from an intuition obtained through a long process of education to harmony (admitting hesitation), but first of all from an inner strength which impels the master to choose quickly, to cut plants at the right places and set them up without any regret.

In his fine book : *The flower art in Japan, yesterday and today* Donald Richie writes : "In the ancient Ikebana, when one bent branches and stems, one learned how to sit, to breathe such and such a way. When one cut a stem, it had to be done just as one would let loose an arrow. The section had to be impeccable and one had to know, in advance, exactly how the bough so cut would be situated in the arrangement desired."⁷

The harmony of an arrangement implies being in harmony with oneself, at least at the moment when it is being realised, that is to say a general attitude, open and peaceful. It means that plants have to be manipulated with respect and care. They should be taken out of the buckets carefully, treated with delicacy, without negligence or brutality. Fragments around the bouquet are collected and the unused plants are gathered up.

During training classes with other participants, one must avoid shocks, display of needless branches, and rushing when a choice of plants is offered. Everyone pays the attention deserved to one's neighbours' arrangements as well as to the master's corrections. To finish up with advice, everyone takes part in cleaning and upkeeping equipment. Sweeping is just as important as anything else.

In short, Ikebana is not an art gliding in the heights and trying to produce rare arrangements, ignoring or scorning other people's work. This elitist and exotic way of thinking is not wise as far as Zen is concerned, since Zen is a way of simplicity and modesty, requiring a beginner's heart in order to advance : « acting with love everyday ».

"The most difficult attitude in Zen is to constantly keep a beginner's mind, a new mind. It is also the very secret of arts. Always be a beginner. Pay great attention to this point."(Shunryu Suzuki)⁸

VIVIFY YOUR INNER GARDEN

Musô Kukoshi, a remarkable figure of a Zen monk who exercised an important influence on Japanese culture, gives us a vision one can transpose in Ikebana, concerning the art of gardening ; it applies particularly to landscape arrangements.

"There are people who do not find in their hearts any particular pleasure in landscape, but they adorn their home with it because they want to be admired. There are also men who like to amass rare treasures because they eagerly cling to a thousand things at the same time. As a fine landscape is a desirable acquisition, they seek out and acquire rare stones and remarkable trees. They do not like the grace of a landscape for itself, but the coarse dust of the world.

Po Kiu-yi dug out a little pond, planted bamboos on its edges and liked it more than everything. Bamboo is my best friend, he said, because its heart is empty, and as water is of a pure essence, it is my master.

People who truly love a fine landscape have a heart like Po Kiu-yi. There are among them some who are pure and simple in essence. We must name them the «lovables» of this earth. Some of them sometimes lack depth, on account of being distracted by other things. There are others whom the sight of the mountains and of water arouses and stirs ; this sight consoles them when they're lonely and comforts them on their way to the truth, but as they always make a distinction between the landscape and their progress towards truth, one cannot describe them as true seekers.

On the other hand, those who have a feeling for mountains, rivers, the vast earth, grass, trees and stones as if they were their own essence, seem tied to earthly feelings by their love of Nature, but manifest a real quest for the truth... They are models : the authentic seekers of truth love the landscape.¹⁹

Ikebana, the art of showing the life of flowers, the art of living with Nature, is also the art of finding one's cosmic roots. Finally, it consists in uniting with the creative strength which remains dormant in us and rushes out as soon as our little «ego» gives way to it.

This power, always present but repressed, waits to be freed, or rather works to liberate itself as soon as we agree to loosen the ties of our intentions, ambitions, and personal desires.

In the spiritual tradition, this loosening of ties is called detachment. It is not the effect of a technique, but the result of a way of life. That is why Ikebana, in its deeper dimension, includes an art of living.

This cosmic strength which frees itself in the artist, following his detachment from every personal desire and his profound introspection, endows him with a sure spontaneity which excludes all random fumbling around and inspires him with gestures that are right from the very first. Directly linked to the source, he becomes the fountain from which springs the cascade which the power of water suffices to beautify.

MODEL YOUR INNERMOST LANDSCAPE

Among the compositions that Ikebana proposes to us, landscape arrangement is one of the strongest and the most original ones. It concerns an open bouquet, evoking the whole of Nature. The basin which contains it supports it but doesn't limit it. The gaze is invited to prolong its space, to make the earth and the sky, the forms and the Formless, join together, to get into it too, deepen its vision towards an interior vision in which all beings take root.

A landscape is a relational place where plants adjust themselves to form a vaster whole. It reveals to us an original pact, an abounding and unifying strength, which achieves the unity of the world. It is an allusive reality, which evokes other places and indeed the whole earth : the site of all our landscapes. By showing the propensity of things to harmonise together, it reveals the intention of Nature to us and invites us to include ourselves : to become a little more, a little better, dwellers of the world. To compose a landscape arrangement is symbolically to answer this invitation to find our roots.

Otherwise, a landscape is the visage of a country, but a visage expresses a soul, and the landscapes that we compose manifest ours. A good psychologist would be able to read in them the state of our moods, the tendencies of our tempers, to analyse their strong points and their openings, their ruptures and their imperfections... But let us leave psychology aside and let us rather say that we have here a way to mould our soul, to harmonise the features which compose it, to integrate its voids, its lacks, to make visible what is worthwhile, in short to enhance the beauty of it.

Besides, this kind of bouquet is the bearer of a secret, of a truth which it suggests more than it unveils and which has a relation with the mystery of the world, its unity, its origin. That is why it uproots and repatriates. It reveals the strangeness of our exile and the proximity of our native earth, gives the feeling of approaching a deep harmony. Like stained glass, it softens light, diffuses a luminosity, strong enough to light up everything, soft enough not to project shadows around it, and which illuminates the enigma of our lives. One could call it porous, permeable to the Inexpressible, of which it lets the presence filter through. Another world comes to the surface, a mixture of gravity and happiness. One doesn't know its name, but one inhales its perfume and one has an inkling of the eternal in the transient.

To make a landscape arrangement is to mould one's innermost landscape, to dwell in it, to have an inkling of its wealth, to feel its roots, to breathe in its beauty. This activity moves us and comforts us, because if we are often less than we pretend, it shows us that we are more than we believe.

GIVE FORM TO YOUR LIFE

Like every art, Ikebana (living flowers) aims at giving form to life, to organise it, to make it beautiful. Against all the forms of chaos, of disorganisation, of decomposition which, assail us daily, there is only one remedy : "to compose". And composing bouquets has the value of a symbol, because, in the end, it is one's life that one must compose.

Montaigne said : "I put all my efforts into making something of my life. That is my job and my work. I am less a maker of books than of any other task." The Ikebanist can transpose this and say : "I try to give form to my life. That is my art. I am not a maker of bouquets, no more than of other things.

But to give form to one's existence is to make room for the formless, for the void. It is to build one's own life without losing anything of the infinite ; rather, it is to discover in it the infinite which dwells in it. That is the great art or rather the simple art, that of living, of which Ikebana is an approach, a way.

Philippe Jaccottet writes : "Beauty may spring up when the bound and the boundless become visible at the same time, that is to say when one is seeing forms while guessing that they do not say all, that they are not reduced to themselves, that they leave its part to the elusive."¹⁰

That is what the Japanese floral art tries to realise. Hence the importance of emptiness in its arrangements : a void, which relates them to the infinite of the universe.

A Japanese bouquet, whether it is built according to the triad sky-man-earth or unified in the monad of a chabana, seeks to express the cosmic wholeness and celebrates the wedding of the visible and the invisible. It is a micro-world which, like every work of art, seeks to realise the "finite model of an infinite world" (Valéry).

But this can be said of numerous forms of creation. What is then specific about Ikebana ? It uses elements taken from the vegetable world, reorganises the surface of the living world and prolongs the architect Nature. That the animal level should be outside its preoccupations coincides surely with practical imperatives. What painters of flowers of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries did, introducing small animals in their bouquets (slugs, insects, lizards...) one does not see how the Ikebanist could do it. But, more deeply, one can discern with him the desire to return to a quiet nature, from before mobility and animal agitation.

The vegetable kingdom is not so conflictual and tormented as the animal kingdom is. If there is violence within itself, it doesn't cause suffering. By concentrating, meditating on it, the Ikebanist affirms his wish to find an original peace again, the serenity of a time before pain, agitation and noise set in. If the vegetable life is a full life, and indispensable - what would we be without it ? - it is also the image of a human and pacified life, without suffering, that is, according to Buddhism, of an accomplished life.

As Pierre Bertrand writes : "In our daily life, we are separated and dispersed, one foot in the past, another in the future, our spirit agitated and torn. We are only present when we put ourselves in a creative position. Not that creation is separated from life, but it is by its interposition, its mediation, that we can achieve more presence and more intensity in daily life itself... because it is life in itself, in its day-to-day aspect, in its fugitive character, escaping notice, which must become a vast field of creation."¹¹ Creating bouquets is a way, which leads us to the vaster field of the creation of our own life.

To accomplish one's life, to give form to it, is doubtless the ultimate finality aimed at by the Ikebanist when he gives form to his bouquets. The ultimate aim is to be oneself, to be the cause and creator of oneself : "In front of the being that one sees becoming spontaneously the generator of himself, one wonders, one admires, one awaits."¹²

EXPRESS THE GRACE OF NATURALNESS

The Japanese bouquet is animated by a spirit : at least the one which remains faithful to its sources, not contaminated by ornamental intentions coming from elsewhere. This spirit is summed up in two words : *wabi* and *fûryû*.

The *fûryû* means simplicity, discretion, and the love of natural beauty, which is not ostentatious. It turns away from showiness and manifests an inner life. The *wabi* aims at rustic elegance and looks for the beauty of textures more than for the brightness of colours. *Wabi* and *fûryû* express themselves at best in the *bunjin* : a simple arrangement, free from conventions and artifices.

A *bunjin* seeks to harmonise rustic elements with delicacy. It conciliates the gravity of the Earth and the lightness of the sky. It supposes a nobility of the taste, or at least the attempt to reach it. The artists who have promoted it in Japan wanted to renew links with a certain aesthetics : that of the Chinese scholars (*Wen Jen*) of the XVth and XVIth centuries who were complete artists : calligraphers, poets, painters and musicians.

The *Wen Jen*, of Confucian tradition, painted and sang nature in a style both unadorned and refined, but with a sober refinement, exempt from sophistication. Like many Chinese artists, they were metaphysicians, but in the oriental way, seeking to express, through the rough medium of the senses, the deep source of the world and the energy of the cosmic breath. This has led them to an art made of strength and simplicity : a simplicity which keeps only the essential beauty, leaving out superfluous ornaments and ignoring the professional ability.

The Japanese have been attracted by this tradition and they created the *Bunjin Ga* in the second half of the Edo period, in the XVIIIth century : a transposition of the *Wen Jen Hua* (picture of the cultured man). Since this painting concerns flowers - like the painting of the Rimpa school - it has in its turn influenced the art of floral arrangements and in particular, the founders of the Ohara school.

In addition to this æsthetic foundation, the *bunjin* takes root in Zen wisdom, of Chinese origin as well, and it seeks to incarnate the quiet and refined strength of this wisdom. To describe it in one word, we readily would speak of its purity. Disengaged from norms and decorative intentions, it aims at the essential. By its simplicity, the frequent nudity of its design, it avoids the risk of affectation, of ostentation, and expresses a limpidity, a light gravity. It is the floral arrangement of the wises who stick to the essential. When it is successful, a simplicity is produced, a breath, a force passes, and a miracle takes place : the pure beauty of the bouquet.

AIM FOR THE SIMPLE AND THE ESSENTIAL

We live in a society whose complexity sometimes scares us. Whether it is a question of buying a new appliance or taking out an insurance, or selecting in the world of books, records, magazines... we hesitate to choose, so much is on offer. To compel us, advertisements make us dizzy with sounds and colours ; as a result, we dream of simplicity, of quietness, far from the clamour of our consumer civilisation.

Among the bouquets that Ikebana proposes to us, there is one which answers this aspiration : the chabana. Created by the master of tea Senno Rikyû, the chabana - literally «flowers of tea» - is a simple arrangement, animated by a spirit that the Japanese call «wabi». «Wabi» is refinement in simplicity, rustic elegance, nobility without sophistication, beauty reduced to its essential simplicity. Only one flower, perfectly arranged in a modest vase can express it.

It is said that one day, the emperor Hideyoshi having informed Senno Rikyû of his coming to admire his wonderful garden of volubilis, this master had all of them disappeared and replaced with white sand and pebbles. On his arrival, the emperor - astonished, almost angry - was received in the tea-house, where in a Chinese bronze, stood a unique and perfect volubilis.

The chabana is a modest bouquet, not a showy one. It does not seek effect, but it is evocative. It does not seek to dazzle, but suggests the essential. It is an allusive, emblematic arrangement. Its æsthetics is that of extreme simplicity. We find it also in haïkus and the tiny poems of Ungaretti ("I dazzle myself / with the infinite"), in the «minimal art», and also in the simple beauty which sometimes appears along the wayside : "What is important is a flower which we perceive between the disjointed flagstones, or even something smaller still. We simply have to show that, in the serenity of an inexpressible waiting."¹³

The chabana shows a sign of the inexpressible, a flower which sums up everything and asks a metaphysical question. It is a threshold, a passage which does not retain our attention but guides it to the invisible, a door which opens up, not on a decorative space, but on the sober beauty of life. It does not decorate the real, it unveils it. A brief revelation of an original and ultimate beauty, it does not draw figures, does not build space. It is a bouquet which produces a suspension of desire, which effaces itself so that we, too, may disappear, in silent attention. "Beauty is not given to those who force it... but may be given to those that await it, to discreet silence, to the one who is forgotten in the world's praises and who simply augments his love in secrecy."¹⁴

Art is «existence made sensitive» said Rilke, but he also said : «the beautiful is the beginning of the awesome». Great art is at the same time as simple as life and as sublime as love. That is why we can all be artists, and also why there are so few of them.

The chabana invites us to live in simple beauty, the modest and radiating presence of things, i.e. simply to live : to let ourselves be moved and be satisfied with the thousand little things of existence, useless, insignificant from the point of view of busy people, but nevertheless given there like a blessing. It also guides us to the sublime : to go from beauty to splendour.

Ikebanists work on that frontier which distinguishes and connects the finite and the infinite, the ephemeral and the eternal, the simple and the essential. They seek to escape the utilitarian to find the deeper life, to open themselves up to the ultimate reality. May be they don't always know that, but what they are looking for, is not to decorate, but to uncover and reveal a hidden harmony, to unveil something they have in them and which also goes beyond them. They start from modest beginnings, but are the witnesses of the immense and the mediators of the unknown. They work, as Vigny said, with their eyes on the horizon, on this simple line of the sky which, in every arrangement, is the first and the basic one.

COMMUNICATE THROUGH A BOUQUET

The Japanese bouquet, like every work of art, is a means of communication. It is not made to be hidden, forgotten somewhere, but to be seen, admired, loved. So, it is the instrument of a relationship and of an exchange.

In the ancient Japanese way of life, there was a ceremony for tea, a ceremony for incense, and also a ceremony for flowers. The latter originated in the offering of flowers in the Buddhist cult. In short, the practice of this religious service became a social rite. How did it take place ?

At first, the guest stood quietly before the niche (*tokonoma*) where a floral arrangement and a picture (*kakemono*), prepared by his host, were placed. Then, he gave his whole attention to them, to impregnate himself with the spirit which had inspired their creation.

Secondly, he took it upon himself to make an arrangement, after the master of the house had invited him to do so, the latter having provided material for it, and left him alone. Then, the guest squatted down, examined the plants and the bowl entrusted to him. Looking at them, he awaited an inspiration which was to guide his work, which took him a certain time.

Finally, the master of the house invited his family to come and admire the work. Everybody stood in a semi-circle around the two arrangements and contemplated them silently, trying to commune with what their creators had wanted to express.

Today, such ceremony is out of fashion in Japan and it would be regarded as artificial in our country, because it supposes a kind of silent relationship which is foreign to us. Nevertheless, we can keep two elements of it and we shall find them useful :

- The meditative process which, in the confection as in the contemplation of the arrangement, tries to connect us with the mystery of nature and the universe.
- The social proceeding which turns the bouquet, into a means of communication and communion between people.

These two dimensions can be retained and adapted to our western practice of Ikebana.

The first attitude concerns our way of making bouquets which should go with silence, quietness, sparing gestures and the search for harmony with nature, through the plants we use.

The second attitude concerns our way of looking at them and displaying them. The bouquet, if it stays in its corner or is seen only by its creator is a lonely object. So, it is suitable to show it to other people with all due modesty just as it is suitable to look at those which other people composed, and that, not only in a cursory way, but in taking one's time. Then, Ikebana becomes a creation and a contemplation, communication and communion.

Beauty, says Schiller, civilises us. That is why he considers the artist to be an educator capable of helping his contemporaries to become detached from their primary instincts : "Let them remove caprice, frivolity and roughness from their pleasures. Surround them with noble forms, full of wit. Surround them with symbols of what is excellent... Taste puts harmony in society because it creates harmony in the individual."¹⁵

In short, floral art humanises society in harmonising our individuality. At least, if we know how not to reduce it to a solitary activity or to a society occupation and how to integrate those with whom we practice it. This is made possible through the reciprocal contemplation of the bouquets, quiet social intercourse, or even a meditation in common.

TAKE A WALK AFTER YOUR ARRANGEMENT

Floral arrangement starts from gathering : from wandering in Nature to spot and collect plants, which will be used to make it. There, one observes their way of growing, their associations in woodlands, fields, and ditches. There, one selects the finest branches : those which will make the bouquet lively. But this bouquet, once created, is not closed on itself. It reminds us of where it comes from and ought to bring us back there : to Nature, its source and completion.

Before the arrangement : gathering, but after it : a contemplative walk, just for pleasure, seems to be a normal and artistic continuation. As Christian Bobin writes : "Walking is an art, without doubt, the most ancient one. One can compare it to weaving, to this way of interlacing threads, of composing a texture with such tight stitches that one does not see its details but enjoys its whole. Walking is an amorous art, an art of weaving. The movement of bodies and of thoughts, the sigh of a brook, and the rustling sound of frightened animals among the bushes, all of those go together, all make a unique texture, interlacing the air and dreams, the visible and the invisible."¹⁶

At bottom, the finest arrangements are those composed by Nature itself, in its landscapes, clusters of trees, forests. And our own compositions are only reflections of them.

Many of our western thinkers conceive Nature as something that Man must control, transform, or of which he must emancipate, liberate himself, by his spirit, his culture, his freedom. Oriental thought is more conciliating, more serene. For it, Man is a being of Nature and his liberty first consists in accepting that.

Of this nature, which Chinese people name «Tao», the sage Lao Tseu tells us it is the "Mother of all beings", as simple and good as water :

"Supreme goodness is like water
Which favours everything and doesn't vie with anything.
In occupying the position despised by human beings,
It is very close to Tao
Its heart is deep, its gift generous,
Its word trusty, its course perfect.
It fulfils its task. Its acts opportunely."¹⁷

But this goodness of Nature is also a beauty which calls on us to resemble it : to forget ourselves, to give ourselves. "Beauty, writes Krishnamurti, is a total self-abnegation and the eyes which have renounced the «ego» are able to see trees, the beauty of everything and the magic spectacle of the clouds. When you see a splendid mountain, it appears suddenly ; it is there ; everything has disappeared, save the majesty of the mountain. This hill, this tree absorbs you entirely. Thus, beauty means sensitivity. It implies a sensitive body, a sober way of living and a still, silent spirit."¹⁸

The eyes which have renounced the «ego» seek contact with the collective beauty of flowers. The perfect Ikebanist does not see only Nature ; he lets it live in him. If Culture is what remains when everything is forgotten, Nature is what stays when the «ego» is forgotten, and it is essential. That total self-abnegation then becomes a silent opening up to the universal, a musical disposition to choral art, an aptitude to felicity. "Happiness is absence, it is to be absent from oneself at last, given back to all things around us", says Christian Bobin again.

"I am nothing by myself, but this nothing can become the whole of what is not me, when to the dream of my autonomy I prefer the opening up to what is."¹⁹ That is what Zen calls : "to see into one's own nature". Those things cannot be described ; yet some artists know how to evoke them. Firstly because they experience them in the intimacy of silence, but also because they have received the ability to describe them. Painters or musicians, dancers or sculptors, ikebanists

or poets... these guides help us to connect with a beauty which is around us, which is in us, which is us. Nothing exceptional, in fact only the wonder of what is already there and which we did not see.

"I cry out, look,
The light
Lived there, next to us !
Nothing has changed.
These are the same places, the same things,
Almost the same words,
But, see, in you, in me,
The indivisible and the invisible reassemble...

I cry out, look,
The almond tree
Is suddenly covered with a thousand flowers
Here
The gnarled, the ever earthly, the torn
Enters the harbour. I, the night
I consent. I, the almond tree,
Go dressed into the bridal room...

Here blooms the slightest thing ; and its corollas,
Its colours of dawn and dusk, its yield
Of mysterious beauty to the earthly place
Its dark green too, and the wind in its boughs
Are the gold which is in us : gold without matter,
The gold which doesn't last, which is not possessed,
The gold to have consented, the unmatched flame.

Yves Bonnefoy

ABSORB BEAUTY

The Japanese bouquet, like the plants which it uses, is living. That is why its sight refreshes our eye, jaded by the meanness and the banalities of Life. Indeed, these will return to claim us again. But, buried in our minds remains a trace of the beauty perceived in a flash, and this, imperceptibly, changes us.

"What is art, Sir ? It's concentrated Nature" says one of Balzac's characters. Artists condense life, compare things, and make them more typical, more moving. So does the Japanese bouquet, which brings us back to the whole of Nature.

Nevertheless, this concentration is not compression, suffocation ; it is airy, living, and emerges in a dilatation, an expansion. The bouquet pulses with life. It is irradiation. It is an open and radiating reality, a suggestive hearth, a revealing dawn, which refers us to the great Universe. That is why it enlarges us and delights us. As Keats writes : "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." But what is a joy for ever, if not bliss ?"

"Beauty, says Stendhal, is a promise of happiness." Yes, but providing we see that happiness, if it comes, is not in grabbing and possessing, but in opening and liberating. It is to this that the bouquet invites us, because its fragile, ephemeral beauty, cannot be seized and kept, being of the kind of the grace which charms us and then disappears. So we are led to conduct our lives well without clinging to them.

In short, if the bouquet gathers together, captures Nature and Life in its beauty, the aim is not to make us his «masters and owners», but his dazzled lovers.

Etty Hillesum, the young Dutchwoman who died at Auschwitz, testifies to this love in her diary :

"Why shouldn't one experience a true loving feeling, tender and deep, on contact with spring, or with all beings ? I remember the red beech of my adolescence. I had a very particular relationship with this tree. Some evenings, taken by a sudden desire to see it, I cycled half an hour to visit it and I turned around it, hypnotised by its bright red look. Yes, why shouldn't one fall in love with Spring ?"²⁰

MAKE THE SEASONS YOUR COMPANIONS

The Japanese bouquets reflect the state of Nature at the moment they are composed. One finds in them plants in bud in Spring, a profusion of flowers and leaves in Summer, branches with berries, with yellowing or reddening leaves in Autumn, and bare branches in Winter. They express in that way a way of thinking named in Japan : *mono-no-aware* : «the pursuit of harmony with changing Nature».

Bashô, the greatest Japanese poet, wrote : "In art, it is fitting to follow creative Nature and to make the four seasons one's companions... Follow Nature ! Return to Nature !"²¹

This respect for the law of the seasons which characterizes Ikebana, harbours a wisdom that human beings have a tendency to neglect. Today, man has difficulty accepting the cycles of Nature : he is often active during the night, is up and about in winter when Nature rests, and makes love at all times, which animals do not do. He has trouble accepting that he ages, will die, and always wants to go further, in the hope of ever increasing wealth and indefinite life. But here he deceives himself, because Nature will take both his wealth and his life.

Instead of accepting the natural time, cyclical, the differentiated time of return of the seasons, man wants all immediately and always more. But one cannot cumulate the boons of life. One has either Spring or Autumn, Summer or Winter. What one season brings, another removes. After the gain the loss, the condition of a new gain. In short, whether it concerns the seasons of the year, of life, or the world, there exists between them a law which is not of indefinite progress, but of succession in the difference and even of opposition : winter is not summer.

Ikebana integrates and reflects this law and teaches us, not only how to create arrangements, but how to live. Let us make the seasons our companions, accepting the natural cycles, let us welcome the gifts of life and make them ours, let us create, and act, but also detach ourselves from what is not essential and not be held back anyway.

Let us listen to the wise Boethius :

"Heavens have the right to offer us days bathed with light, and then to make them disappear in the gloom of night. The year has the right to crown for a time the face of the Earth with flowers and fruit, and then to render them unrecognizable, sending rain and frost. The sea has the right, one day, to seduce, offering a calm surface, and another day, to erect waves built up by storms... Often it resembles a mirror, serene and calm, with motionless waves. But often also, it unchains its hurricanes which upheave it. Beauty on earth seldom lasts long, it often changes. Believe in transient fortunes, believe in fleeting blisses. An eternal decree has clearly established : Nothing that comes to birth is permanent."²²

BURST FORTH WITH THE SPRING

Time has abandoned its coat
Of wind, cold weather and rain
And has clothed itself in embroidery
Of shining sun, clear and fine.

Charles d'Orléans

Spring inspires poets who find in Nature, the same vital impulses which animate their poetry. But it also inspires other writers :

« Spring lifted up the forest, the hornbeam and the birch-tree covered themselves with tiny golden leaves, which seemed not to cling to the boughs but to envelop the trees in a halo... Everything which revives on warm days, which rises from the earth and from water overflowed above the things that were dead and submerged them. In the beds of rushes, in the fern glades, appeared swords of new growth, and crosiers unrolled themselves in the sun : day after day, the faded growth of autumn gave up its place and disappeared, wiped from the face of the earth by vivid new greenery.

The grass bloomed in the alleys. White stellarias rocked their stars on the blue purple of pulmonarias, on the flaming carpet of lotuses. Big euphorbias, when touched, released a pearl of milk. The air smelt of plants and animals, all the odours mingled into one single, strong, universal emanation lingering in the layers of light.

This also blended with the songs of space. The buzzing flights of insects, the cheeps and trills of birds, as well as the shouts of the carters in the plain, all these noises lived and vibrated in the fragrant thickness of the air of the forest. »²³

It is in spring that the strong vibrating force of Nature is most obvious to us. And this force stimulates every artist and all the arts, including floral art which in spring finds new motives to compose, to create.

The bouquets of spring reflect the season in which they are composed.. They echo of that season. In them, one finds branches full of buds, newly-formed leaves and flowers. In them, one breathes the first perfumes of a Nature which is reviving, which is coming out of its winter sleep ; and with them return the euphoria, the relaxation, the life, the energy which always come back to us after a time of absence. How can we fail to be impregnated with it, to saturate ourselves with it ? How can we refuse this invitation that Nature offers us of reviving with it ? Then, our bouquets incite us to go out walking, in the open air :

First thing in the morning, along my usual ways
Which go through fields and orchards
I set off light-hearted and fleet-footed
My body wrapped in wind and light.

I walk with the pride of loving the air and the earth
Of being vast and being mad
Of mingling the world and all
with this intoxication of elemental life.
Tell me, is it true that yesterday these things existed
And that everyday eyes
Before mine, watched
The crimsoning vines and the triumphant roses ?

For the first time, I see the bright red winds
Shining in the sea of the branches,
My human soul is ageless ;
Everything is young, everything is new, under the sun.

Emile Verhaeren

PLAY AT CREATING SPONTANEOUSLY

Nature expresses itself in a creative spontaneity. It plays freely to produce an infinite number of new forms, among others, plant forms : a countless multiplicity of bushes, trees and shrubs, of flowers, branches and leaves. As Claude Nuridsany writes : "The leaf is not only a machine to capture the sun's energy. If the strictest functionalism prevailed among plants, we would not have the two hundred thousand variations on the theme of a leaf that all the earthly species offer us. In the plant there is a space of liberty, a possibility of interpretation, of rambling, from which this mixture of rigour and freedom is born."²⁴

Nature works, says Kant, without finality, for the sheer pleasure of creating, and it creates infinitely. And we ourselves, when making our arrangements, should, as it does, abandon all precise project, all finality, so that it becomes a playful, gratuitous and unpredictable activity, with no other desire apart from that of seeing the novelty and beauty bloom.

For that, one must let Nature act, play within us, let it flow in our veins, express itself through our hands. As Shilling asks, it is this creative strength, this "spirit of Nature, that the artist should take as a model."²⁵ Rilke illustrates this in a poem in which he says he feels a dark force carrying him, going through him, creating in him and by him :

"It is possible that some great force
Moves near me.
You see, I want a lot
Maybe all :
The obscurity of infinite falls
And the sparkling game of every ascension.
There are so many who live and want nothing.

O infinite present...
I find you in all these things
That I love fraternally.
Semen, you warm yourself in the sun of the small ones
And in the great ones with greatness, you are fulfilled."²⁶

We are on the path of that warming up, of that accomplishment and we realise it symbolically in our bouquets, when we give way to the spontaneity, which is within us and which seeks to create through us.

But this inspiration of Nature does not exempt us from learning. It must be nourished by the examples and advice of masters in whom it has expressed itself before us. Kant said : "How many unsuccessful attempts would we make, if everyone always had to start from the very beginning with the savage forces of Nature, and if other people had not preceded us along the same road, not make mere imitators of us, but so that their examples might put us on the right track of the principles that we have to find in ourselves, and so follow our own way.

To follow a guide and not to imitate, those are the right words to express the influence that the works of an author, having become a model, can have upon others. That only means : to draw from the same sources that he does, and to learn from him simply the way to proceed... Taste is, among all the faculties and talents, that which has the greatest need of finding examples if it is not to become unrefined and fall back once more into the basic coarseness of its first attempts."²⁷

Cézanne said more briefly that, for artists, "the return to Nature" must first "pass through le Louvre". It is because Nature acts with predilection in certain beings and educates us through them so. Let us learn from our masters how to set about it, and then let us forget them, and forget ourselves, in order to rely on the inspiration of the moment.

SMILE WITH FLOWERS

*Every face lights up when beholding a flower
Every flower blossoms out in a smile*

Dôgen, a great Zen master, expresses himself thus, when referring to a famous episode in Buddha's life.

Long ago, Buddha held up a flower before the assembly of disciples gathered on the Mount of Vultures. All remained silent. Only Kâsyapa smiled. Buddha then said : "I hold the treasure of the eye of true reality, the subtle spirit of Nirvâna, the real form without form and the marvellous doorway to the truth of the world. It depends on no language and is transmitted without being written down. I entrust it to Kâsyapa."

Zen monks were the first to practice Ikebana, offering floral compositions to Buddha. They certainly thought of this moment of foundation when doing so. And we, who are neither Buddhists nor monks, but who, after many centuries, practice the same art, can also think of it.

The message of this episode is simple : wisdom does not require long speeches to be transmitted. It requires only a flower and silence. If we know how to look at the flower with attention, with love, it can bloom in us in a smile, and the silence, when we look at it, can blossom out in joy.

Concerning the smile, Christian Bobin speaks in praise of it in an interview which he gave, one day, on France-Culture : "In a smile, the lips do not open and do not let out a plague of words or meaning. A smile is the greatest intensity possible. It is a mute intensity of our life. I know of nothing more elevated and more enviable deep down than a smile. That is how life begins. Cradles light up with the smile given and received from mother to child and from child to mother... A smile is kindness from you to me, from me to you. It is perhaps the justification of our words when they are loving. Perhaps, we only speak then to transmit on the sound waves of the voice this impalpable mute thing which is a smile.

Faced with the harshness of times, the violence of mankind, the cruelty present in the world, is there a better weapon ? Remember this photo which marked us, at one time, of a woman facing guns, with a smile on her lips, a flower in her hand. Of course it is a symbol. We know very well that wars are not stopped in this way. Nevertheless how not to believe that with a little more love and joy in one's heart, a smile on our lips and in our eyes, things would go better ? Ikebana is a means, among others, towards feeling better together, calmer with one another, more attentive, more given to smiling ... and more loving.

LIVE THE STRENGTH OF SUMMER

The coming of summer is indicated by the progressive growth of the greenery. The fields and ditches fill up with grasses and flowers, the forests cover themselves with leaves, become real vaulted caves. An impression of abundance, of luxuriance, invades our space and we perceive time differently.

As Philippe Jaccottet writes : "The long evenings are warmer, the moon pink or orange, the world blue, suspended and full of sweetness and of something approaching kindness. When there is a full moon, when the trees seem to breathe due to a weak wind, the nights are like a balm ; they bring peace to the heart through warmth and quietness."²⁸

The yellow colour is often associated with summer. It is the colour of the sun, of straw, of dry graminaceous plants, of large fields of corn which rustle in the wind and which Van Gogh painted so well. The lavender fields, full of butterflies, contrast with them.

For the ikebanist, summer is the time of more luxuriant, more colourful arrangements, of exotic bouquets, of leafy landscapes, with the danger of masking the lines, of blocking that space which, more than anything else, seeks to open up. But he would be wrong to regret the exuberance of Nature. If it is fitting, as Basho says, to make the seasons one's companions and to listen to Nature, we have to go along with summer in the expression of its abundant strength. Let us not fear luxuriance in our bouquets, and in our lives let us not fear generosity. Let us break with the idea that an ikebana can be only stripped down to the essentials and an ikebanist is stingy.

Summer is the time of creation in full-flow, of the gift of oneself, of one's presence with others. We are invited to manifest our vitality, our sense of celebration. Because, basically, that is what it's all about : a certain sense of joy without any apparent reason, without any idea of "why". As Clément Rosset writes: "Joy is what constitutes the pre-eminent strength... the major strength. And this joy appears to be independent of any circumstances able to provoke it."

"The approval of life remains for ever impossible to express, every attempt to express it necessarily falls into a sort of stammering. The accumulation of love, in which joy consists, is, basically, extraneous to the causes which provoke it. It is free and somehow senseless. The really joyful man is paradoxically someone who is incapable of specifying what makes him joyful."²⁹ He is like that, that's all. So, let us stop saving, let us live to the full the joyful strength of summer !

MAKE THE COLOURS OF LIFE SING

Drawing their inspiration from the artists of the Edo period who painted flowers on folding screens, fans, kimonos... the rimpa occupies a decorative space. One could call it romantic or baroque, with its exuberance, its wealth of colour, the curves of its silhouette, with its display in the space of one or several basins, its form of a fan, a circle or a screen, which takes up and tends to fill our field of vision.

Let us admit that a successful rimpa impresses us. It is an arrangement full of imagination and enthusiasm which makes the colours sing and invites us to be the artists of our life, to give it brightness, strength, to make all its shades vibrate, in short, to live life in beauty.

It keeps a link with Nature by respecting the direction of the plants' growth, by evoking a season, or several, but it is a precise arrangement without twigs or superfluous details, which suggests we weed out the untidy parts of our lives, to take out what could spoil their clarity.

Clear is that which does not disturb the eye, which does not obstruct our vision. When one expresses oneself, clearness is always a risk. The better one sees you, the better one hears you, more you can be criticised. So, it requires a certain degree of courage.

A rimpa does not hide anything and one should be able to be painted. Our lives, too. Not to exhibit ourselves, but to manifest the light which dwells in them. A rimpa invites us to harmonise our being and our appearance, what we are and what we seem to be. It is, through its beauty, a lesson in sincerity.

"Beauty will save the world", wrote Dostoïevski, and it is probably because it is "the splendour of truth". The radiant truth of that which is beautiful amazes us, saves us from the dullness, from the ordinariness of everyday life. It is this splendour of the truth which justified the sale, for fifty-five million dollars (what madness !) of the painting by Van Gogh : "A Bed of Iris" - although Van Gogh himself lived in poverty. But it is also that which attracts us and gives us pleasure in the radiance of a rimpa.

If beauty can save the world, it is because it leads us to its source, to its Creator, say those who believe. As John of the Cross sang :

Spreading a thousand graces,
Quickly he passed by these woods.
Looking at them,
Simply turning his face towards them,
He left them clothed with beauty.

And we, who contemplate the beauty of the world and of its flowers, can also make out in this beauty the expression of an ultimate Marvel, and become ourselves the reflection of its light.

DANCE WITH THE LIVING

Softly brushing the ground, the «hana mai» evokes a dance : movement and lightness. A graceful bouquet, born under the sign of Gemini, it stretches up its double line or bends it down like a rolling wave.

There is a particular grace to the «hana mai». Maybe it is the most human of bouquets, because the plants figure the embraces and the movements of a couple and the form of its lines bends itself to the rhythm of a playful, even erotic music.

The «hana mai» conjures up the curve which bows or leans back, undulation and springing out. It evokes the elegance of the waltz, of the paso and of the tango. Or perhaps it is a sacred dance, seeking to create a mystic communion between man and nature, a plant form of «tai chi» allowing us to join the rhythm of the universe, a floral form of «nô» or «kabuki», showing us transfigured bodies in the grace of the instant.

This arrangement invites us to move, to dance with the living. In the dance, a contemporary Indian sage, Vimala Thakar, sees a marvellous picture of life : "Life is a dance of energies assuming unnumbered expressions. The cosmos is a space, a field in which the dance of Shiva and Sakti expresses itself for ever, a dance of supreme intelligence and material energies. In fact, intelligence and their dance are one thing. And we ourselves are participants in the cosmic dance of life."³⁰

«Hana mai» expresses the feeling of this participation in floral form. "It is a benediction to be living - Vimala also wrote - and the movement of life gives us the opportunity to seek, to explore, to learn, to discover. In spite of all the ugliness and the violence with which man has surrounded himself, the beauty and the majesty of life are still there."³¹ It's our concern to see them, to receive them and to let them carry us along in their ever reascent movement."

There are other arts connected with the dance with which «hana mai» has something in common : calligraphy and «sumiye». They share the elegance of lines, the fluidity of stroke. A successful «hana mai» is a writing without a scribe, a painting without a brush. It assumes the same rhythm, the same grace, strength and subtlety. It expresses this movement which leads the emotions of the heart to the limits of abstraction, to the silent purity of gesture.

GAZE AT THE BEAUTY OF AUTUMN

Our modern societies prefer spring and summer : buds opening, flowers blooming, fresh youth and the strength of full maturity. Flowers fading, leaves turning yellow, faces wrinkling and bodies shrinking with age are things that people want to ignore or try to hide. Nevertheless there is a beauty of autumn in humans just as there is one in plants. Ikebana helps us to see it.

Among the finest arrangements I have ever seen or made were the evocations of landscapes in autumn, landscapes that Philippe Jaccottet has described so well : "In autumn, flowers of another colour bloom, flowers of a particular colour, while foliage grows lighter and changes. Old colours, aged, like rust, or a dying fire. Autumn has the colours of feathers, of fur, or skins... The spirit enjoys those days when the forest becomes lighter, clearer, when a softness in the air persists at times in a generally cooler season."³²

There is also a beauty of autumn in faces, in wrinkled smiles, in softened eyes of elderly people. There is beauty in wrinkled faces, in white hair and in bodies at peace. Serge Reggiani has a song in which he sings of the beloved woman who "is no longer twenty". And he finds her beautiful, more beautiful, he said in an interview, than the «girlies» of twenty who have had no experience of life yet.

Another poet, Rilke, also sings the wonders of "fading" beauty :

"As much as we need the flower in its coming and blooming, likewise we are attracted to this fading, with delicate shades, somewhat plaintive, of the faded : these soft shades of yellow are also in us, and we come to find them beautiful, to enjoy them, we come to accept everything given by the hands of life. Because our acceptance of the fading, of the faded are yet another form of beauty, comparable to the beauty of Nature in its beginnings, its growth and its fruition. In the same way, a plaintive cry, and anguish, and the renouncement we consent to, all these are beauty, too."³³

He often comes back to it in his texts in prose or in verse :

"The leaves are falling, falling from afar,
As if in the heavens, gardens were shedding their leaves.
We all fall. This hand falls.
And look at the others : they all do.
Nevertheless there is one who, with infinite tenderness
Holds this fall in his hands."³⁴

To discover the beauty of autumn, that of plants as well as that of our aging lives, is to be reconciled with this infinite tenderness which expresses itself in them and holds us as we fall.

WITHOUT FORGETTING THE BEAUTY OF FRUITS

Summer teaches us to ripen, to produce fruits, autumn to collect them. It's the season of grape harvest, chestnuts and berries. How could our bouquets ignore that ?

In the arrangements that the Ohara school names «landscapes of autumn», fruits have their place. As it is necessary to miniaturise them, they appear under the forms of berries : the black berries of privet, the red berries of rosehip, cotoneaster, the white and pink berries of snowberries, the purple berries of callicarpa... which constellate the yellowing and reddening leafage of our bouquets with little bright and coloured pearls.

The water landscapes of autumn are adorned with iris in fruits. But other types of bouquets - the morimono for example - call on big fruit-trees : pomegranate-trees, apple-trees, walnut-trees, chestnut-trees, quince-trees...

In short, it is with the whole of Nature : branches and leaves, mosses and grasses, flowers and fruits that Ikebana is concerned, and the beauty of the latter brings an irreplaceable note to the bouquets.

The same happens with our lives which, when they reach their autumn, gather or should gather their fruits, because they are made to be fulfilled in action, production, creation. Creation can be multifarious, can take the forms of works of art, inventions, or books of course, but also children, useful services and many other things. Moreover, it is life which, finally, is to itself its finest fruit. As Montaigne writes : "To compose our way of life is our duty, not to compose books and win battles and conquer countries, but to create order and quietness in our behaviour. Our great, glorious masterpiece is to live opportunely... Nothing is so beautiful and legitimate as to act well and properly as a man should."³⁵

We should also consider that the destiny of fruit is to break off from the bough that bore it. If it does not do so, the seed which it contains will not germinate. So, it is fitting, Nature invites us to do that, to detach ourselves from our work, and from ourselves by the same token. Khalil Gibran reminds us of that in a text about children :

"Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of the call of Life to itself. They come through you, but not from you. And though they are with you, they don't belong to you."³⁶

We have here an invitation to detachment, from our children of course, but also from all our works and productions which have a way they must follow without us, and in which we could only be obstacles.

The beauty of fruits invites us to contemplate them, but also to let them be what they are, without trying to hold on to them, either in our ephemeral bouquets which we'll have to undo some time, or in our lives which also pass. Our fruits are promises of life, which are beyond us and give us fulfilment. Let us watch them with a free, amazed look.

BE PATIENT, JUST AS WINTER IS

Winter strips nature, purifies it. The flowers have faded, weeds have withered, leaves have fallen, and the bare gaunt trees form a kind of rigging which no longer stops the wind. The earth appears bare, denuded, dark, weighed down with stones, and the sky, a faded blue, strangely luminous, now allows one's gaze to roam freely and merge into space. Discreetly, touches of green persist in the ivy, in the oak trees and some evergreens, reminding us that nature is not dead but keeping vigil.

"The strength that winter celebrates is not that which triumphs... it is the strength which lasts and endures, that which is below, patient, motionless, meditative, bearing colours of sackcloth and boxwood, of humility and silence... For a moment, the earth looks like a big barge of tested wood, rigged with clear sky."¹³⁷

In the countries of eternal summer, those which do not know winter, nature presents the sight of an ever luxuriant, abounding paradise. But this tropical, equatorial exoticism, is in the end boring and finally reveals fewer things than our changing seasons. Japan, like Europe, has the benefit of a large variety of climates and floras. There, winter is often severe and begins with a cold, brutal wind which shrivels trees immediately. It is the season of icy north winds and migrations of birds. Also the season for snow. Japanese people listen to it falling : if it flutters with light flakes, it says chira-chira, if it falls thickly, it says doka, if it slides from the roof, it says dosa. When it accumulates, it says kon-kon. In short, the snow sings. Japanese people identify themselves with winter as with the other seasons. This assimilation has come to the point of æstheticizing itself in an attitude, a spirit : *mono-no-aware*, that we could translate as : "the search for harmony with changing nature". This spirit is to be found in the poetry of haïkus, painting, architecture and of course, Ikebana.

In winter, bouquets take on a denuded look. They are made with branches without leaves, stems and leaves without flowers, and flowers too, but small ones. Winter bouquets are lessons in detachment and simplicity. They show the beauty of what subsists when everything seems extinguished, the inward strength which endures, which supports. Of course, they are cold, deprived of colours and odours, without the warmth which animates the bouquets of other seasons. Nevertheless, their coldness is not that of death, but of the strain to last, of the strain which makes its way obstinately through unfavorable circumstances and still carries on living, in spite of everything. They teach us patience and expectation, because winter waits and prepares the rebirth, Spring.

REMEMBER THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS

It is the title of a film which relates the story of a young woman afflicted with an early onset of Alzheimer's disease and of an amnesic man who killed his family accidentally, but does not remember the fact. The man who has lost his memory, recovers it, little by little, thanks to the young woman's love, while she is losing hers. Feeling her past life escape her, she writes in a notebook : «To remember the beautiful things». You should go and see the film, the title of which can throw light on our lives.

The society in which we live shows us so many banal, ugly and atrocious things, gives us so many occasions to accumulate painful memories, that we should clear out our minds rather than fill them with suffering and resentment. In short, we should remember the beautiful things and throw the others into oblivion.

Among these pleasant things are our bouquets. They can mark out our seasons, our years. With them every work of art, every happy event, and every simple reality touches us if we know, as Bashô suggests : how «to see the flower in everything». Perhaps you know this song sung by Brel : "We should watch what is beautiful..." It says the same thing.

Let us know how to see beauty ; let us know how to look at it and to keep it living in our memories. The poet Keats wrote : «A thing of beauty is a joy for ever». Many things are worthless, and need to be forgotten, but some must be kept in mind : those which touch us, amaze us, spur us on. Everyone has to make their choice and furnish the archives of his mind with the beautiful things of his life. It does not matter if there are not many. But they need to be strong and for us like springs on which we can draw during days of drought, of distress.

John of the Cross invites us to drop the veil of oblivion over our past, to live fully in the present, except for some things which have left their mark in us deeply and remain a source of strength and joy. Those, he says, we have to remember : "to remember the beautiful things".

May be we should keep a diary for them, or take photos. May be we need only to remember them from time to time, to refresh the memory of them, to revive their presence. The reason is that in that great palace of the memory, as saint Augustine calls it, there is room for great things near the Marvel which is at the heart of it all : the great inner Treasure the beauty of which all the other treasures can only reflect.

Besides, when the winter of existence comes, when death approaches, when nothing important remains to be done or expected or given, except love which is the final word of life, the time has come to remember : to remember beautiful things. Not to cultivate nostalgia out of them, but to feed gratitude, thanksgiving.

A short time before dying, Etty Hillesum who experienced this winter very young, at Westerbork and Auschwitz, remembering her last years, so rich, so full, in spite of trials, said to God : "I have written one day that I wanted to read your life until the last page. It is done now. I have read it to the end. I feel full of a deep joy : all that has been was certainly good, otherwise I would not have this strength, this joy, this certainty in me." ³⁸

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF BY MEANS OF FLOWERS

Some of you may know of the floral therapy of Dr Edward Bach. This English doctor became interested in plants and perfected a series of thirty-eight floral elixirs³⁹. We do not intend talking about that in detail here, but we would like to retain the basic principle of this alternative, gentle medicine, because it seems to us that it concerns Ikebana. This principle is that many of our illnesses are the result of a rupture of balance, of harmony, in ourselves and that flowers can help us to reestablish it.

Dr Bach invented floral remedies ; we too can care for ourselves by making bouquets. It is no longer a question of absorbing floral substances of course, but of impregnating ourselves with them, with their vitality, in a different way : by looking at them, touching them, breathing in their perfumes, and by integrating them into harmonious compositions which will then dynamise our surroundings.

The great poet, dramatist and philosopher Schiller, for his part, credited beauty with healing virtues. "Beauty reestablishes harmony in a tense man and restores vigour to a weak man"⁴⁰, he wrote. We are fragmented beings, trapped in compartmental knowledge and activities which partition our lives, stress our spirits and dull our sensitivities. It is therefore important for us to take the time to restore the unity and the harmony of our being. In creating a bouquet, the contact with plant life, with the flowers, can help us by allowing us to cultivate the totality of our sensitive and spiritual forces.

Schiller goes as far as to say that beauty, which has the power to humanize us, can be called "our second creator". In any way, we can certify that the beauty of flowers revitalizes us. Making a floral arrangement relaxes us, fortifies us, spurs us on. We are then able to deal with everyday life and life's worries with more perspective, with a more detached attitude and with renewed energy. The reason is we have remade contact with our sources, with plant life and our own nature, which we neglect far too much and leave inactive, buried deep down in ourselves.

Ikebana is certainly not a universal panacea and does not exempt you from going to the doctor when necessary, but it can perhaps be classified, in a certain way, alongside alternative, natural medicines, the restorers of a global balance more or less lost.

ACCEPT THE TERRIBLE AND THE BEAUTIFUL

In this world we walk
On the roof of hell
And look at flowers
Issa

Ikebana maintains an essential relationship with beauty. Has it anything to do with the horror that so many human beings experience, linked with situations of distress or tragic events : circumstances that we may be destined to meet ourselves one day ?

This question can seem out of place, and it is doubtless so if in Ikebana one only looks for a moment of relaxation, an æsthetic satisfaction allowing us to forget the worries of life for a moment. But then, our search might fall in the trap of escapism and "amusement" of which Pascal talked so well :

"Men who have not been able to escape death, misery, ignorance, have taken it into their heads not to think about them in order to live happily. Then, the only good of men consists in being distracted from their condition either through some pastime which diverts them from it or some new pleasant passion which keeps them busy, or a game, hunting, some pleasant show and finally through what we call entertainment."⁴¹

Nevertheless, the question of misfortune becomes meaningful for the person who wants to integrate Ikebana in an art of living and the quest for a certain happiness. In other words : if the way of flowers can be a way towards wisdom, what can this wisdom tell us when we are confronted with the trials of life ? What can it really offer when we face adverse circumstances ?

Life is an enigma; the world is an enigma ; men have always looked for the key to it. What they have first found, is that there were two faces to this mystery : a face of sweetness and a face of pain. Nature can be generous, tender, maternal, and it can be cruel, terrible, destroying ; witness the tsunami not long ago. The world can show us an obverse of beauty but also a reverse side of horror. The temptation then is to choose, the pleasant side of course, and to cast off, to refuse the other side of life. In doing that, we swerve away from wisdom which requires us not to choose, or to choose everything.

Accept what will come to you,
The awful and the beautiful.
Don't allow them to be divided.

These words of Rilke have been put into practice by Etty Hillesum who wrote from 1941 to 1943 a touching diary in which she tells us of her love for the whole of life, in spite of the years of horror she was going through in Holland.

"My new red roses have all opened, when I was over there, in hell ; they have continued to blossom softly. Many people ask me : how can you still think of flowers ?

Yesterday evening, after a long walk in the rain and in spite of the blisters on my feet, I made a last little detour looking for a florist's cart, and I went home with a big bouquet of roses. And there they are. They are no less real than all the distress that I see in one day...

Life is beautiful and full of meaning in its absurdity, if only one knows how to save a place for everything in it and to bear it fully in oneself as a unity ; then, somehow or other, it forms a perfect whole. As soon as one refuses or wants to eliminate some elements, as soon as one follows one's wish and one's whim to accept some such aspect of life and to refuse such another, then life becomes absurd indeed : as soon as the whole is lost, everything becomes arbitrary.

Every day I am near the hungry, the persecuted and the dying, but I am also near the jasmine and the patch of blue sky behind my window, there is place for everything in a lifetime."⁴²

The answer to our original question could then be formulated so : Ikebana has something to bring us in our days of anguish if, through the beauty of the arrangements, it suggests the wonder of Life to us and in that life, the insignificance of our egos and the greatness of our destinies.

Compared to this greatness, every pain could one day appear insignificant to us, and our earthly hells some little fires in fields. Saint Paul had a presentiment of this when he wrote : "The pains of the present time are nothing compared to the splendour which has to reveal itself in us." (Rm 8,18)

Yes, Ikebana can be more than an amusement on the fringe of existence. It brings us back to the essential by restoring our relationships with Nature and Life. It puts us back on primeval ground, in the presence of an invisible and unreachable reality that we bear in us and which makes itself known to us. The beauty of a bouquet aims at the sublime of Nature and gives us trust in the - sometimes terrible - mystery of Life, whatever the name we may call it.

TURN PAIN INTO A FLOWER

In one of her recitals, the Argentine singer Barbara Luna, commenting on one of her songs, said : "We are all made up in some way and we hide our sufferings, our problems, behind pleasant, yet trompe-l'œil façades. Nevertheless, what is beautiful is not to hide one's pain but to transform it, making it into a flower."

The question then is : yes, but how ? Ety Hillesum shows us a way of doing it when she writes in her diary : "Always, as soon as I was ready to face them, trials have been changed into beauty." What she suggests here is that there is a way to accept, to face reality : "I look suffering straight in the face", she said elsewhere. And this look which does not flinch, does not refuse reality, hard as it is, but accepts it and appropriates it, is a liberating look. Quoting André Suarez, she writes :

"Pain is not the place of our desire, but that of our full truth... I don't pretend that we ought to make it a state of our choice. On the contrary, one must do everything to free oneself from it, but one must also know it. The true man is neither the master of his pain, nor its fugitive, nor its slave. He must be its redeemer."⁴³

Here are surprisingly Christian accents on the part of a Jew. They invite us to look at our suffering as well as at that of the world in a positive, active way. «Turning pain into a flower» is to turn our suffering into beauty, taking this opportunity to mature, to grow and, let us dare say the word, to blossom. Because suffering opens up and enlarges those who accept it.

Indeed it is appropriate to relieve it to the utmost, but we know quite well that, in spite of all our efforts to do so, there always remains something which we cannot avoid, which no soothing drug, no reassuring talk will be able to assuage. It is advisable then to accept this pain and bring it out in flowers. No doubt we have there the deep meaning of Christ's suffering blooming in the joy of resurrection, like that of all the poor and persecuted people of the Earth for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven, that of all who mourn and shall be comforted (Mt 5, 3-11).

"One must see the flower in every thing", said the Japanese poet Bashô. Let us be more specific : even in pain. Because, if we accept it in our lives, it can bloom into joy and bliss.

Turn pain into flowers.
Accept the share of trials inherent in every life.
Let it enlarge your heart
And open you up to compassion for others.

LEARN TO SAY GOODBYE

Flowers spring up, bloom, fade and die, in silence and in peacefulness. They teach us how to be born, to grow, to live and to go away. Mireille Jospin, our former Prime Minister's mother, who decided to take leave of life, being ninety-two years old, also gives us this lesson. Here is the letter she wrote the day before 6th December 2002.

"Ninety two years old. It's time to go away before deterioration sets in ! I leave this life serenely. Yet, I am very sad to leave my family, both grown-ups and young, and also my friends. Is that not in the nature of things ?

My husband, my children have made me happy. I am not a believer in the exact sense of the word, but I say and often repeat : thanks, thanks for the magnificence of the world !

I would like, later, to lift up a corner of the veil, to see if human beings have become wiser, if they have renounced the project of self-destruction !

I am very fond of flowers, and thanks to my husband and children, they have accompanied me, from the little posies at the beginning of my marriage until the wonderful roses, hydrangeas and orchids that my children now give me. They gave me a mirror of existence : opening, blooming, withering, over short or long periods, but true to themselves, the images of every life."

To say goodbye with such grace and simplicity at one's last moment she needs to have learned it all her life long.

Vimala Thakar, one of the sages of our time, names one of her short books : "The art of dying while living". She writes in it : "If today, tomorrow, or in fifty years'time, this body has to be given back to the earth, buried, or cremated, scattered in the ocean, why not experience today a new approach to non-possession ? To die is to put an end to the process of becoming, of comparison, of competition and of aggression ; it is to put an end to the movement of refusal, of escapism, of self-pity, it is to put an end to every experience you live through, every pleasure and sorrow you go through. Put an end to that at the very moment when you experience it... Then you'll learn that to die is to be born again with every instant. You'll live and move in eternity."⁴⁴

But, during her long life, Mireille Jospin learned more than to let the past die at every instant. She learned to give thanks for it. A.Comte-Sponville praises that attitude as the happiest and most luminous virtue :

« Gratitude finds joy in what has happened, or in what is happening now. So it is the opposite of regret or yearning, as well as of hope or anguish, which desires or fears something. The sage is happy to live indeed, but also to have lived. Gratitude is this joy of recalling, this love of the past... The happy recollection of what was. It is past time restored to us... Death will only deprive us of the future, which doesn't exist yet. Gratitude liberates us from it through the joyful knowledge of what has been. Gratefulness is a knowledge, through which it touches on truth which is eternal, and dwells in it. Gratitude : the enjoyment of eternity. »⁴⁵

Thus, with our flowers and bouquets : we should give thanks for their beauty. And then undo them without regret, with love and forgetfulness.

Thus do flowers which occupy the eternal present and wither away, but just like rivers, only die to enter the infinite.

LEARN HOW TO LOVE FROM FLOWERS

Seeking to define what love is and above all what it is not, Krishnamurti sometimes takes the example of a flower : "Have you ever looked at a wayside flower. It exists, it lives in the sun, in the wind, in the beauty of light and of colour, it does not come to say to you : "Come and smell me, delight in me, look at me." It lives and its action is love through living."⁴⁶ By that, his ideas are akin to the fine aphorism of Angelus Silesius who said :

A rose is without why, it flowers simply because it flowers,
it does not look at itself, or yearns to be admired.

Elsewhere, he writes : "Love is not dependent on time. It is at the same time personal and impersonal, it addresses itself both to the individual and to the numberless, similar to the flower whose scent is for everybody just as much as for he who takes time to smell it and to look at it."⁴⁷

In these texts and in others, Krishnamurti invites us to learn how to love from flowers. How can he who lives with them, who admires their beauty, who incorporates them in his bouquets, remain insensible to this invitation ?

Though flowers do not seek to show off, have no egocentric intentions, being without ego, yet they are appealing to the insects which search for them and pollinate them, to the human beings who contemplate and admire them, simply because they are beautiful and alive. And so, they show us a way which is all selflessness and a way of living one's life in the simplicity of nature.

To love is not to desire, to attach oneself, to be jealous... but to forget about oneself, to be free, carefree, open to others, like the flowers which open themselves to welcome the passing butterfly, but do not hold it back. There is a gratuitousness, an innocence and also a detachment in a flower. Because when a flower has given what it had to give, when it has fulfilled its role, it wilts and disappears without cries or tears, in the beauty of a wilting which Rilke has sung in a marvellous way.

"Just as we need the flower in its growth and opening, we are bound to its fading, to the delicate sad tones of the somewhat shades of fading : those yellow are also in us, and we end up by finding them beautiful, by enjoying them, by accepting everything that is in the hands of life. For the wilting, the fading and the acceptance of them are one more beauty next to the beauty of what begins, grows and bears, just as a complaint is one, and anxiety, and the willing selflessness."⁴⁸

The flower which opens out, that which blooms, and that which fades teach us how to live, to give, to love. They spread around themselves beauty, scents, colours which illuminate and enliven our lives. If only we could, like them, spread around us a little of this beauty and this perfume of humanity that Nature has endowed us with.

EPILOGUE

Ikebana : living flowers,
The art of seeing that flowers are living,
The art of seeing flowers in everything,
The art of wondering.

"The human being who wonders is as beautiful as a flower"

Paul Valéry

Ikebana : the art of smiling with flowers,
The art of living as flowers live,
in beauty,
The art of living, quite simply.

Isn't that our aim? Flowers have no memories, no projects.
Their energy is concentrated and dissolves in the beauty of the moment.
A flower is without question, without reason.

"A rose is without «why»,
It blooms because it blooms,
Does not look at itself
Neither does it care to be watched."

Angelus Silesius

That is why it is free,
Happy to be what it is.
A flower lives, simply.
It also fades, but this is still living.

"See flowers : to these faithful of the earth
We attribute a destiny,
But is fading galling for them ?
Aren't we the ones who invent their regret ?

Everything wants to float
But we go like burdens
Sprawling on everything,
Entangled in our own importance.

And what voracious masters
We are for all things,
Simply because eternal childhood
Is their bliss.

He who would take them in his deepest sleep
To sleep with them
Oh ! How light he would emerge,
And fresh in the new day,
And they would bloom
To the glory of the transformed one."

Rilke

Flowers, like streams, only die to penetrate the Infinite.

NOTES

- ¹ Those showed here are, for the most part, inspired from the styles of the Ohara School. But the thought engaged overflows the frame of this school and concerns Ikebana in its wholeness.
- ² SCHILLER, *Lettres sur l'éducation esthétique de l'homme* (Aubier - 1992).
- ³ HERRIGEL Gusty, *La voie des fleurs* (Dervy - 1996).
- ⁴ BERTRAND Pierre, *Connaissance de soi et vie quotidienne* (Liber - 2003).
- ⁵ KRISHNAMURTI, *L'éveil de l'intelligence* (Stock - 1985).
- ⁶ BOBIN Christian, *La Merveille et l'obscur* (Éd. Paroles d'Aube – 1993).
- ⁷ RICHIE Daniel, *L'art des fleurs au Japon, hier et aujourd'hui* (Bibliothèque des Arts - Paris & Office du Livre - Fribourg - 1967).
- ⁸ SUZUKI Shunryu, *Esprit Zen, esprit neuf* (Seuil - 1977).
- ⁹ *Mucho-mondo*.
- ¹⁰ JACCOTTET Philippe, *La Semaison* (Gallimard - 1984).
- ¹¹ BERTRAND Pierre, *Connaissance de soi et vie quotidienne* (Liber - 2003) p.32.
- ¹² CONCHE Marcel, *Confession d'un philosophe* (Albin Michel - 2003) p.194.
- ¹³ JACCOTTET Philippe, *La Semaison* (Gallimard - 1984).
- ¹⁴ Ibidem.
- ¹⁵ SCHILLER, *Lettres sur l'éducation esthétique de l'homme* (Aubier – 1992).
- ¹⁶ BOBIN Christian, *Isabelle Bruges* (Le temps qu'il fait - 1992).
- ¹⁷ LAO TSEU, *Tao te king*.
- ¹⁸ KRISHNAMURTI, *L'éveil de l'intelligence* (Stock - 1985).
- ¹⁹ JACKSON J.E., *Yves Bonnefoy* (Seghers - 1976), coll. "Poètes d'aujourd'hui".
- ²⁰ HILLESUM Ety, *Une vie bouleversée* (Seuil - 1985).
- ²¹ BASHÔ, *Le carnet de la hotte*, dans "Journaux de voyage" (POF - 1988).
- ²² BOËCÉ, *La Consolation de la philosophie* (Éd. Rivages).
- ²³ GENEVOIX Maurice, *La dernière harde* (Éd. J'ai Lu - 1938).
- ²⁴ NURIDSANY Claude, *Éloge de l'herbe* (Éd. Adam Biro - 1988).
- ²⁵ SCHILLER, *Lettres sur l'éducation esthétique de l'homme* (Aubier - 1992).
- ²⁶ RILKE Rainer Maria, *Livre de la vie monastique*, dans "Poésie" (Seuil - 1972).
- ²⁷ KANT, *Critique de la faculté de juger*, citée dans "Kant, Le jugement esthétique"(PUF -1991).
- ²⁸ JACCOTTET Philippe, *La Semaison* (Gallimard - 1984).
- ²⁹ ROSSET Clément, *La Force majeure* (Éd. de Minuit - 1983).
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