

# Better living through flowers

Visitor responses to *Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan* at the  
British Museum

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**Better living through flowers: Visitor responses to *Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan* at the British Museum**

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## Contents

1	Summary	4
2	Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan	6
3	Scene setting	7
4	What we did	9
5	Who visited?	10
6	What motivated visitors?	12
7	Exhibition Process	16
8	Social outcomes	24
9	Intellectual outcomes	26
10	Emotional outcomes	28
11	Spiritual outcomes	32
12	Expectations	35
13	The changing arrangements	37
14	Conclusions and recommendations	39

# 1 Summary

## 1.1 Visitor profile

Due to the qualitative research methodologies used in the evaluation, a detailed robust visitor profile is not available for this report. However, the interviews show that a diverse mix of repeat and first time Museum visitors saw the exhibition, with visitors often coming more than once to see the different displays.

## 1.2 Visitor motivations

There was a high proportion of intellectually motivated visitors to the exhibition, with many professing to a personal connection with the subjects covered in the room. This varied from an interest in ikebana and flower arranging to those visitors who had spent some time in Japan, with visitors keen to further their knowledge and understanding.

Some visitors were spiritually motivated to visit and they came to this Room 3 for quiet, peaceful contemplation and escapism.

## 1.3 The exhibition did not match some visitors' expectations

Upon entry into the room, some visitors expressed initial disappointment at the size of the display and the content of the exhibition. A few visitors had thought there would be more arrangements on display at the same time, whilst others commented on the lack of flowers in the displays in opposition to the title of the exhibition 'Living flowers of Japan'.

This is a familiar theme emerging from first-time Room 3 visitors who are unaware of the room's size and previous content and therefore do not know what to expect.

## 1.4 The layout transported visitors to a different time and place

Visitors were quick to praise the layout and design of the room, saying that it offered them a quiet tranquil setting in which to house the exhibition, with some visitors even going so far as to describe the space as 'Japanese'.

## **1.5 The exhibition generated huge intellectual, emotional and spiritual outcomes**

Visitors expressed significant spontaneous outcomes from the display that covered the spectrum of our hierarchy of motivations and outcomes. Although few visitors had emotional expectations from the display, a large proportion of visitors mentioned the aesthetic beauty of the display, with their comments incorporating the arrangements, the vase and the photographs.

Spiritual outcomes such as inspiration and creativity were also boosted as a result of the display with many visitors looking to adapt what they had learnt from this exhibition into their own lives and hobbies.

As is becoming apparent at Room 3 displays we have researched in the past, most visitors leave the room feeling they have improved their knowledge and understanding as a result of seeing the exhibition, and *Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan* was no exception.

## **1.6 The changing displays received a mixed response**

A significant proportion of visitors remained unaware of the purpose of the photograph wall until informed by our researcher, and so did not know about the changing displays over the exhibition's course.

Of the visitors who were aware of the exhibition process, many thought it was an unusual and creative idea to change the arrangements seven times during the course of the exhibition, though others felt that it could only be fully appreciated by visitors living or working in London who could easily return to the Museum and see the arrangements rather than just photographs.

## **1.7 The popular live arranging sessions had logistical issues**

The live arranging sessions proved a popular feature of the exhibition and often attracted the same visitors back to the Museum every Thursday. These sessions were also popular amongst visitors who just saw the crowds outside the room and decided to investigate. Visitors commented that they enjoyed watching passionate experts going about their work.

The actual logistics of the live arrangements caused some problems however as numerous attenders said they were unable to see the arranging process due to the volume of people in the room.

## 2 Ikebana – Living flowers of Japan

The *Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan* display was held in Room 3 at the British Museum from 5 July – 19 August 2007.

The display offered an introduction to the Japanese art of Ikebana, and coincided with the *Crafting Beauty in Modern Japan* exhibition and range of accompanying events at the British Museum.

There were seven different examples of Ikebana displayed in the room over its exhibition period, with the displays changed at a live weekly Ikebana display every Thursday. This helped to emphasise the diverse range of Ikebana schools and techniques, and also the constantly changing nature of Japanese flower arranging.

The arrangements were made by members of Ikebana International, each representing a different school of Ikebana.



## 3 Scene setting

### 3.1 Objectives

*Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan* changed its object of focus on a weekly basis to highlight the variety of ikebana schools and techniques, and aimed to introduce a 'live, evolving' exhibition to the British Museum.

### 3.2 Presentation and interpretation scheme

At this display, Room 3 was left in the smaller, more intimate space that had housed the *Caribbean before Columbus* display. This display however was more brightly lit with lightly coloured walls, with a distinct Japanese feel to it.

The display consisted of three different elements. Firstly, on the visitor's left when entering was a description panel called 'What is Ikebana?' and then a series of 6 panels describing ikebana through the ages, from the mid-500s AD to today.

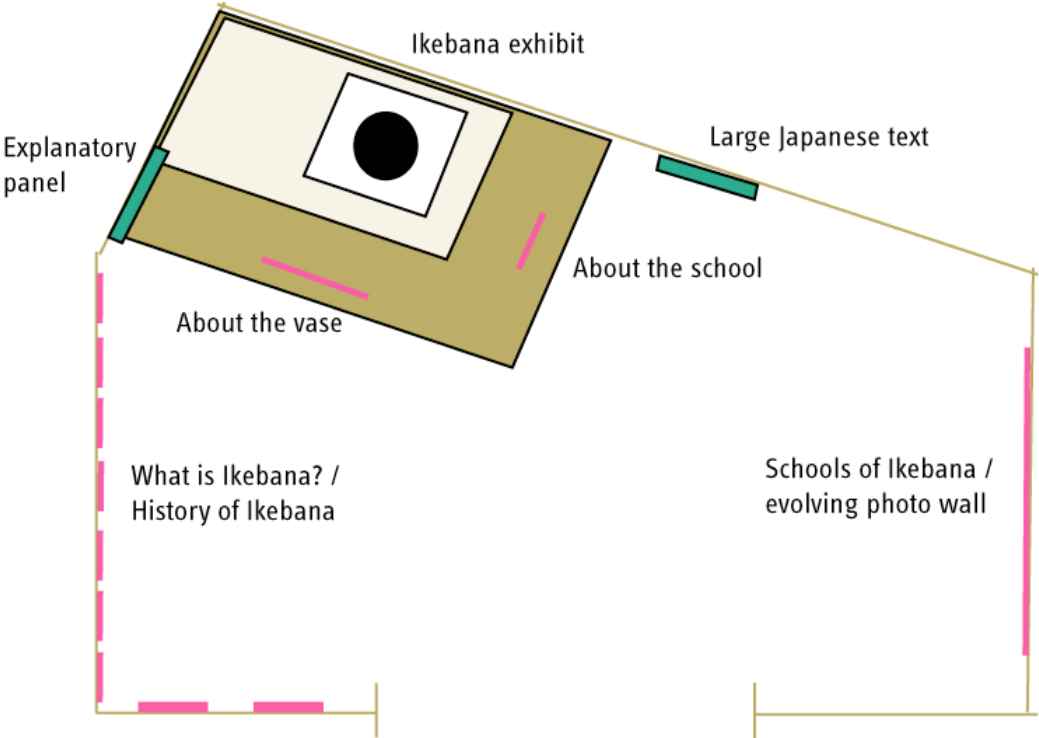
Moving clockwise around the room, visitors then came across an explanatory panel on the wall highlighting the title of the exhibition, before coming to the main object in focus of the display - the ikebana itself. A wooden stage was erected, upon which a taller plinth was placed to seat the vase and the flowers themselves.

Although the exhibition changed 7 times during the course of the display, the vase used to hold the different arrangements remained the same. There was a panel describing the vase and its creator in front of the object, and a panel describing the relevant school of ikebana on the right hand side of the object. This changed accordingly with the different displays.

Next in the room were large Japanese characters on the wall giving the title of the exhibition.

On the right hand wall of the display was another evolving element of the exhibition in a series of panel photographs showing each ikebana display and its creation in progress. These photos were added at the end of each weekly display to show the different varieties of Ikebana that had been on show. There were also descriptive panels for each relevant Ikebana International school.

**Schematic diagram of *Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan***



## 4 What we did

Morris Hargreaves McIntyre was commissioned by the British Museum to evaluate the *Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan* display as part of an on-going evaluation of the Room 3 displays. This report forms the tenth report in the series.

The following primary research took place at the British Museum over 5 shifts between 12 – 19 August 2007, covering weekdays, weekends and the live-arranging session at 1pm on a Thursday.

### **Anatomy of a 3 minute visit**

In conjunction with the experimental nature of the Room 3 displays, it was agreed that Morris Hargreaves McIntyre would test a new form of evaluation for this display in the form of an ‘anatomy of a 3 minute visit’.

Our researcher approached visitors who had already completed their visit in the room, and asked the visitor to talk them through their visit, describing their thought process behind every decision and continuously describing their thoughts and feelings at each element of the display.

This methodology provides a wealth of rich, qualitative data and enables us to get inside visitors’ minds.

As this research method is resource-heavy, some of these interviews were transcribed and the rest were noted down by our researcher.

### **Depth interviews at live-arranging**

Further depth interviews were carried out before, during and after a live-arranging session in the room. This enabled us to get some idea of the type of visitors who attended these sessions and their thoughts and feelings about what they added to the display and the Museum as a whole.

124 ‘anatomy of a visit’ and depth interviews were completed – 77 were transcribed, 47 were noted by our researcher

## 5 Who visited?

Due to the research methodology used for this display, the comparative quantitative data regarding visitor profile was not collected. The decision for this was made partly due to the fact that over the past 9 displays we have researched, a typical Room 3 visitor profile has started to emerge of recent returning Londoners.

Unsurprisingly the exhibition attracted a range of first time and repeat visitors, as well as large numbers of overseas visitors. There was a high number of Japanese visitors, though as will be seen later, a lot of visitors came primarily to see the *Crafting Beauty in Modern Japan* exhibition, and decided to visit Room 3 as part of their trip that day.

The weekly live-arranging session attracted a mixture of recent returners or incidental exhibition visitors. Some of these visitors had attended every live-arranging and had a strong personal interest in the subject, whilst others merely noticed the crowds gathering outside the room and decided to come and investigate.

### 5.1 Pen portraits of typical Room 3 visitors

#### **Serial Room 3 visitor**

This type of visitor is a regular visitor to Room 3 with the exhibition often being the sole reason behind their visit that day. Many of these visitors will just pop into the Museum during a lunch break as they know that they will see something new and interesting in the room.

#### **Visitors with a personal connection**

Room 3 attracts visitors who have come to the British Museum for another reason and come to Room 3 as the subject matter interests them. This is often due to the close subject relations of Room 3 and a special exhibition. For example, in this instance many visitors came to the Museum to see *Crafting Beauty in Modern Japan* and visited Room 3 as the subjects covered in the two spaces were similar and therefore of interest.

#### **Incidental visitors**

Room 3, and the Museum as a whole, attracts a large number of incidental visitors, many of whom are making their first visit to the Museum that day.

The room's close proximity to the main entrance and Great Court and its often intriguing décor attract many incidental visitors into the display.

## 6 What motivated visitors?

Visitors to *Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan* were largely intellectually motivated, with many visitors saying they had a personal connection with either Japan or ikebana that they wanted to explore further.

There were also a number of visitors who wanted to visit the display in order to gain some sort of quiet reflection or contemplation.

### 6.1 Social motivations

Due to the high number of first time and tourist visitors at the Museum as a whole, there is always a high proportion of socially motivated visitors to Room 3.

#### **To spend time with other people in a nice place**

*The friend I've come with today, she said that this was here so we thought we'd come and take a look at it* Visitor at live arranging session

*We were just coming to the Museum for a wander* Visitor

### 6.2 Intellectual motivations

#### **I have a personal / professional / academic interest in the subject**

The visitors who said they had a personal interest in Japan had often either travelled or lived there themselves, or had friends or family who had done so.

*I lived there for 2 years* Visitor

*I am hoping to go back to Japan, I was in Japan many years ago for a short period and have been hoping to get back ever since* Visitor

*I'd had the opportunity to visit Japan about 10 years ago* Visitor

There was a large number of visitors who had some experience of ikebana, or whose friends or family had an interest in the subject.

*My sister does ikebana in Japan* Visitor

*Where my daughter had been at school there were some Japanese families and I had been to a Japanese evening where they had performed a tea*

*ceremony and done an Ikebana display ... I really enjoyed seeing it and so when I saw this was on I thought it would be a fun thing to come and look at* Visitor

*My parents do Ikebana in Australia* Visitor

*My mother is very involved in Japanese flower arranging* Visitor

*I have a sister in law who is Japanese and she has studied flower-arranging* Visitor

Other visitors felt that their personal connection to the subject was wider than that of Japan or Ikebana specifically, and visitors cited a number of different interests as relating to this exhibition.

*I belong to an ordinary ... English flower arranging group* Visitor

*I used to do flower arranging* Visitor

*I'm interested in ceramics generally. Japanese ceramics are particularly important. I came in initially to see the pot, not the Ikebana. The display was interesting itself, but my interest would be primarily the pot* Visitor

*I am not really interested in Japanese culture. I love flowers, I love botany, I love grafting of plants and I think that ecology plays a vital importance to the world* Visitor

*I'm a sculptor and my art tends to be orientally informed* Visitor

*I like flowers and I just like horticulture and gardening at home, so I was just curious really* Visitor at live arranging session

### **To improve my own knowledge and understanding**

Many visitors were keen to learn more about the subject in order to find out more about other people's interests, or as research for an upcoming or recently completed trip.

*A friend of mine does Ikebana and so I thought it was quite interesting to learn something about the history* Visitor

*I was particularly interested in the Ikebana because I have just been in Japan and really loved the Ikebana stuff that I saw there* Visitor

*I am actually going to Japan later in the year and I actually wanted to take classes on flower arranging whilst I was there and obviously I thought I would have to come and see it first* Visitor

Once again visitors related the subjects on the display to their own more diverse interests, and looked to learn something by relating the subjects.

*I am always intrigued by the way other people achieve their technical ends as well as dealing with the aesthetic problems* Visitor

*I am interested in all things visual and I like the boldness and simplicity I guess of the designs, but also they are quite complex and so I find it very subtle to look at them and understand the shape and concept* Visitor

### 6.3 Spiritual motivations

The atmosphere in the room motivated some visitors, as it offered a haven from the rest of the Museum, and more specifically the busy main entrance. Previous research in Room 3 has showed that many visitors consider the room to be a quiet place where they can have some time to themselves.

#### To escape or recharge my batteries

*Didn't want to follow everyone else - not packed, lighting was nice, seemed calm and quiet* Visitor

*I wanted somewhere quieter with all the noise that is going on out there* Visitor

#### To reflect and contemplate

*I just escaped the office for a bit of peace* Visitor

### 6.4 What were visitors expecting from the exhibition?

Visitors' immediate responses to the exhibition show us that many were expecting a significantly bigger exhibition with a number of displays on show at the same time.

For many this was as a result of them making their first trip to the Museum, or more specifically Room 3, and therefore being unaware of the exhibition and its display.

*Was under the impression there would be seven [arrangements]. Wanted to have them physically there to compare. Disappointment that physical comparisons could not be made* Visitor

*I thought there would be more arrangements Visitor*

*Was expecting more Visitor*

*I thought it would be a number of different styles on display at one time  
which I think I would have preferred rather than this Visitor*

*It could have been a much larger exhibition Visitor*

These comments are subsequently echoed in the social outcomes section of the report where visitors expressed further disappointment regarding the size of the exhibition.

## 7 Exhibition Process



### 7.1 Publicity and marketing

#### Pre-aware visitors

As at previous Room 3 displays, *Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan* attracted an audience who came specifically to the British Museum to see this exhibition. There was a wide range of ways in which these visitors found out about the *Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan* display before their visit to the Museum that day.

*My brother found the information in Time Out Visitor*

*Saw it in the Guardian Guide Visitor*

*Read about it in Sunday papers Visitor*

*Saw it on the British Museum website Visitor*

*I saw it on the internet – looked on the British Museum website, looking for something to see for free today Visitor*

*My husband said I should see this exhibition Visitor*

This shows that the exhibition clearly struck a chord both in the national press and with visitors who recommended it to others.

### Unaware visitors

However, for visitors who were not aware of the display before their visit, the signs outside the room were a crucial element in publicising the display and attracting visitors into the room.

*I'd come to see Crafting Beauty and saw posters for this Visitor*

*I saw the adverts for the crafting bit in Modern Japan and ... I've always thought Japanese art and particularly the crafts and items that are usable, are always really beautiful Visitor*

*I saw a sign outside Visitor*

*It was only coming through this door that I saw it advertised Visitor at live arranging session*

*Came here to find out about [Crafting Beauty in Modern Japan] and saw posters for Ikebana Visitor*

*I came specifically to see Crafting Beauty and saw signs for Ikebana as passing Visitor*

The additional information available in the *Crafting Beauty in Modern Japan* display in Room 35 was mentioned as another key source of information for visitors.

*Didn't know about it - saw it after Crafting Beauty under the list of all related exhibitions Visitor*

Visitors who had come to see the *Crafting Beauty in Modern Japan* exhibition were pleased to see another exhibition in the Museum relating to contemporary Japanese art and craft.

*Since you're featuring modern Japan it really would be remiss of you not to have something like this Visitor*

*We have just been to see Crafting Beauty and this seemed to marry with it and so we thought we would come to see this afterwards Visitor*

*I thought that it was an excellent idea to have the two [exhibitions] together Visitor*

## 7.2 Attractors

As stated in the publicity and marketing section of this report, the signs outside Room 3 were crucial in raising awareness of the display, and in turn encouraging visitors to enter the room. However, there were a number of other elements which attracted visitors into the room.

### Japanese characters

When walking past Room 3, either into or out of the Museum, many visitors noticed the Japanese writing on the back wall and said that it was this that had initially attracted them into the room.

Research at previous Room 3 displays has shown us that many visitors are drawn into the room by a sense of curiosity, and this Japanese text invariably piqued visitors' interests. This is especially prevalent for those visitors who had come to see the *Crafting Beauty in Modern Japan* exhibition, as they saw the Japanese writing and were interested in seeing other related Japanese art and craft.

*I noticed the [[Japanese] writing first from outside, was curious and decided to enter Visitor*

*Saw 'ikebana' on the back wall and was drawn in Visitor*

*The calligraphy is of course very nice - as I was walking in I was thinking 'how are we going to find...' and I was like 'oh, it's right here' so it's perfect Visitor at live arranging session*

### Main display

The object in focus of this display (both the ikebana and the vase) was a major attractor for visitors to enter the room. The positioning of the main display meant that it was easily visible to visitors outside the room who might otherwise have passed it by.

*The main arrangement - it is very well located and spot lit and so it is eye-catching Visitor*

*I just came through the entrance and my eyes were just averted this way because I saw the floral display Visitor*

*The flower drew me in Visitor*

*I noticed the display first and thought it looked interesting - wasn't sure until I saw the writing whether it was about the pot or the plant Visitor*

*Display caught my eye Visitor*

### **7.3 Layout**

The layout and display of this Room 3 exhibition received widespread praise from visitors who felt it helped create a Japanese-style ambience and provided a backdrop that provided optimum surroundings for the main display and interpretation.

#### **The room felt Japanese**

A sentiment that was expressed on more than one occasion was that the atmosphere in the room felt 'Japanese'. Some visitors thought this was due to the colouring of the walls and the lighting in the room.

*I like the levels of light – lovely, very simple. Very Japanese Visitor*

*It is very Japanese Japanese Visitor*

*It's all lit up really beautifully and you ... walk over to it and really appreciate and then I wanted to look at the walls to find out what it all meant Visitor*

#### **Visitors liked the simplicity and elegance of the room**

Many visitors appreciated the simplicity of the room, commenting that it added to the Japanese feel of the room and helped focus attention on the display.

*I like the room layout – very clear and simple like Ikebana should be Visitor*

*Simplicity and elegance Visitor*

*It is very simple. I thought it was going to actually be a little bit bigger but I am actually quite happy with the size it is and the more I read about it just seems appropriate Visitor*

*Simplicity – really always think of Ikebana as simple and think this is a reflection of that Visitor*

*The back wall is a huge success and that is partially because there isn't anything there and less is more with these things Visitor*

*It is so simple and beautiful at the same time Visitor*

*Simplicity ... balance Visitor*

*So simple and typically Japanese I suppose. I just love the combinations of colours and shapes and form and how they are displayed and lighted and the photographs* Visitor

The simplicity of the design of the room helped to create an ambience in the room which was genuinely appreciated by visitors. They were quick to describe the atmosphere as quiet and calming, and even commented that it had helped transport them away from the hustle and bustle of much of the Museum entrance, into a relaxing, Japanese environment. This atmosphere complemented the room's contents perfectly and helped visitors focus on the object and interpretation.

This shows how the display and layout of a room can help encourage visitors to engage with the objects and interpretation on display and can help take them on a journey to the 'time and place' of an exhibition.

#### **7.4 Interpretation**

Visitors were pleased with the amount and level of interpretation in the room, even amongst visitors with differing levels of knowledge about ikebana.

##### **The interpretation offered a good introduction to ikebana**

Visitors said that they felt the information available was a good introduction for visitors who did not know a lot about ikebana, and whilst it may not have taught experts a great deal of new information, they were happy that the subject was being covered by the Museum, and happy that more people would become aware of ikebana through this exhibition.

*Enough information but it's like a taster / flavour* Visitor

*It is a good introduction to most people that know little or nothing about it* Visitor

*The information itself is fascinating and I am quite sure it is a good introduction to most people that know little or nothing about it* Visitor

*Very good introduction and explanation for someone like me who didn't know about Ikebana* Visitor

*I think it explains how to make ikebana and it is good for foreigners ... not for Japanese I think* Japanese Visitor

*It is impressive because most people don't even know what ikebana is and so I think it is very simple. The descriptions are very ... straightforward and no one is going to get confused* Visitor

*Precise, easy to understand information - I knew about [ikebana] before but it's understandable to people who don't know much about it too* Visitor

### **Visitors were happy to research more information on their own**

Of the people interviewed in the room, many said that they were happy with the amount of information and would be happy to go and research more information if they wanted to.

*If I want more information I'll go ahead and get it someplace else* Visitor

*Just enough to make you look it up if you're interested but not too much* Visitor

*I thought there was enough information - if you want more you can go to the library and look it up* Visitor

### **The information available did not appeal to all visitors**

Other visitors were more interested in the display itself and did not want to invest the time to read the interpretation.

*I was interested in the idea of ikebana, but then I wasn't interested in the detail I'm afraid* Visitor

*Not enough real exhibition - too much information* Visitor

One person felt that a video showing people actually arranging the displays would have added more depth to the information available, and another wanted more information about how the individual schools approached ikebana.

*It says about the different [ikebana] schools but not information on how each school approaches ikebana differently* Visitor

*[Would be] much more interesting if they had a video to show how it was done* Visitor

## 7.5 The vase

Using the same vase throughout the display period was a decision praised by most visitors who liked the presence of a common denominator in a constantly changing display.

*The vase, the container is a common denominator – makes it even more interesting* Visitor

*It lends continuity and also you can distinguish the actual orientation of the flowers from the container itself. The container provides a common foundation* Visitor at live arranging session

They felt that using the same vase helped to emphasise the beauty of the arrangements and accentuate the differences in styles of ikebana.

*I think that is very good because it is obvious that there is going to be variations in schools, but one can only really understand a variation if there is a constant and so by putting in a constant the variation is thrown into relief* Visitor

*If it was a completely different vase every time you wouldn't concentrate on the flowers necessarily, you would be looking at the vase, whereas if it is the same vase every time you can actually see differences between the styles* Visitor

*It just gives a consistency to what the subject's about. You've got your base which is the pot, and then the creativity of the various people showing their displays, it just enhances each different style* Visitor

Some were also inspired by how a vase could be made to look so different just by changing its contents.

*It just shows how with the same vase you can do so many different things and so it is quite inspiring that you can go home and have a vague idea* Visitor

*The flower display changes the bowl completely. The bowl looks bigger in some of the pictures looks smaller [in some of the pictures] and in some it almost disappears* Visitor

*I think it is fantastic to show how different people interpret it and how to use the vessel* Visitor

*I think that makes it more interesting because you can see like something stays the same but the things around it how they want to affect it, how they want to change it* Visitor

## 7.6 The photographs

A common theme which emerged from the interviews was a significant proportion of visitors were unaware of the purpose of the photograph wall, and therefore failed to understand that it showed arrangements from previous weeks.

Those first time visitors who did understand this concept were invariably glad that they had attended towards the end of the exhibition period as it meant they could see all the varieties of ikebana that had been in the room.

*If you just had the one [arrangement] it wouldn't really show you what ikebana was, I think to show lots of different ones is a very interesting way of doing it* Visitor

The photographs helped to not only teach visitors about the variety of styles, but it also piqued their curiosity in the arrangers themselves.

*Pictures are so beautiful and so striking I didn't look too much at the words* Visitor

*The photographs of past displays made me want to know more about the people. How did people who weren't Japanese come to ... be interested in ikebana* Visitor

Some visitors felt that the design of the frames, or the actual photographs themselves did not work in this exhibition.

*I was conscious ... that I was looking at pictures of flower arrangements rather than flower arrangements* Visitor

*I think it is a terrific idea. I could have done without the shooting screen effect. I would have liked to have seen the whole shape without being interrupted by the grid – that is just crass to be honest, it is not even subtle* Visitor

*You can't see the flower arrangements properly because of the grid and it is ... frustrating for me* Visitor

## 8 Social outcomes

Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan successfully provoked a number of outcomes in its visitors, which have been categorised here in accordance with the hierarchy of motivations and outcomes.

### **To spend time with other people in a nice place**

Visitors who achieved positive social outcomes had an enjoyable experience in a pleasant setting.

*I don't think there are key messages significantly that I will be taking away from here, except that I am glad that I have seen it, it has added to the overall experience of being here and so it will be a sense of general enjoyment Visitor*

*I don't think [it's had] a massive effect. But I do think 'Oh, I'm quite glad that I went and had a look round it' now Visitor*

Room 3 is obviously a completely different element to the rest of the Museum, focussing in this instance on one object in focus. Some visitors liked the fact the display was roomy and sparse.

*I like the fact there's only one thing and information [in the room], and the rest of the British Museum has so much stuff Visitor*

*It's clean, it's sparse ... it encapsulates a lot of what Japanese art is about Visitor*

However, as at other Room 3 displays, many first time visitors had thought the room would be bigger and were therefore slightly frustrated that there was only one exhibit on display.

*Saw the display first - thought 'is this it?' Visitor*

*Smaller than I thought when I first came in Visitor*

*Not much in it - first thought Visitor*

*Thought 'oh my god - just that one?' Visitor*

*I thought that it was quite small. I would have expected more flower arrangements Visitor*

*Initially disappointment because I didn't know there was going to be one, I thought there was going to be more Visitor*

Although there were a number of negative comments about the size of the exhibition, many of these visitors progressed up the hierarchy of motivations during the course of their visit to the room and thus went on to achieve significant intellectual, emotional and social outcomes.

## 9 Intellectual outcomes

### **I have a personal / professional / academic interest in the subject**

Upon entry visitors were keen to relate the subjects covered in the exhibition to their own interests and experiences, and the exhibition went on to spark an interest in even more visitors.

*Our son is getting married next year and so I am always looking out for displays that I may be able to do something with Visitor*

*Japan's not a country I've had a great interest in but it's sparked my interest in a stylish way of life Visitor*

*Interesting, curiosity was raised Visitor*

*It's made me more interested in it Visitor*

### **To improve my own knowledge and understanding**

The exhibition was able to offer significant learning outcomes both to visitors with no prior knowledge of ikebana, and those visitors who already had a substantial knowledge of the subject. The interpretation of 'What is ikebana' and 'Ikebana through the ages' gave an important introduction to those with little prior knowledge.

*It is not how I have always thought of ikebana as being. I have always thought of it being a coupe of twigs and flowers Visitor*

*Good to know something I didn't know before and it's very informative and interesting to learn about other cultures Visitor*

*I was just interested to find out how it had developed over the years Visitor*

*I didn't know much about the history of ikebana at all and really enjoyed how it has evolved Visitor*

*Had no idea there was a geometric / mathematical school of flower arranging. Particularly interesting to me as I've always thought flower arranging is emotive and flowing Visitor*

*I'd never heard the phrase [ikebana] before, so if you'd put that in front of me in a pop quiz I would never have known what it was. So at least that's one bit of knowledge I've taken away with me Visitor*

*It's a little bit more knowledge in your head Visitor*

*I didn't know it was so artistic Visitor*

*It's very informative really, he's gone away learning something Visitor*

*I've just added a bit extra to my basic understanding Visitor*

Visitors were interested to learn that such a variety of ikebana styles and techniques existed in the world, and actively compared the different arrangements accordingly.

*Astonished, amazed at how many arrangements there are. Changed my perception of ikebana - so many styles / schools Visitor*

*I wasn't aware of the different schools. I thought it was just ikebana and that was it Visitor*

*I think it's wonderful. It gives a broad view of ikebana. Some is contemporary and some is really quite traditional Visitor*

*It is interesting to see the contrast and the differences Visitor at live arranging session*

A recurring comment that came from visitors was that prior to the exhibition they had thought of ikebana as a solely Japanese pastime, and so it was interesting and inspiring to see individuals from around the world continuing the craft.

*The number of people and [ikebana] schools show a cultural movement around the world - has opened my eyes Visitor*

*I wasn't aware there was so many different approaches, and I wasn't aware that there were masters of ikebana that actually lived in England Visitor at live arranging session*

*I thought it would all be Japanese masters. Amazing. Some of them are quite accomplished - they actually go back to Japan to teach Visitor at live arranging session*

*That they weren't Japanese people, I suppose struck me - the first four weren't Japanese Visitor*

*I thought it was great to see that it was international and they weren't all from one area of the world Visitor*

*Western people especially are still carrying on the tradition which is pretty good Visitor*

## 10 Emotional outcomes

Despite the apparent shortage of emotionally motivated visitors at the exhibition, the display subsequently provoked a huge emotional response amongst its audience.

### **To travel back in time**

One visitor commented that seeing the exhibition has helped them appreciate the culture of ancient Japan, and in turn related the display's themes to the modern world.

*I love the traditional ways of life, and the fact that they are still maintaining these in this awful modern world we have is excellent Visitor*

### **To be moved emotionally**

Some visitors were openly moved by the exhibition and its content, with one visitor even being moved to tears.

*I do feel that I am going to take something special away from it Visitor*

*Saw the arrangement first and initial thoughts were very upsetting – moved to tears. Visitor*

For no reason he could comprehend, the arrangement had reminded this visitor of a recently deceased friend. After thinking, he explained it was the elegance of the display and that she had been a very elegant lady.

### **To feel a strong sense of personal connection**

Visitors were quick to relate the themes and messages of the exhibition to their own lives and experiences.

*All the flower arranging I used to do in the end I came down to just trying to do simple things. I live near the coast, so it's just using driftwood and flowers and things. It's the whole way of it just appealed to me really. Not using lots of things, but creating something really quite nice, so if you walked into a room you would notice it Visitor*

*I think it is a very Scandinavian style. We like simplicity (Norwegian) Visitor*

*We buy fresh flowers every week and I arrange them and it takes me about 2 minutes and you don't know what you are doing and you just do it how you like it and how you find it pleases the eye but when you read what this actually represents to these people – I think it is the amount of thought that goes into it that is really interesting* Visitor

*I'm at a time in my life when I'm downsizing. I'm looking to move into a smaller place and get rid of a lot of clutter, and this just sort of fits in with that. I know that sounds strange, but that's how it is. I just find it lovely and ... peaceful* Visitor

*Being a Christian and looking at the world, the beauty of it and when I look at the heavens and nature around me we only live once and we must live life, we should have life, we should have abundant life which in turn leads to eternal life and so enjoying this life is vitally important because it is so short* Visitor

*I was just saying to my friend, I used to have an aspidistra - it's one of those things that live on forever. It's a plant I'm familiar with, it's not one I would have thought of using* Visitor

### **To gain a deeper insight into the subject**

The display enabled its audience to get real insight into other people and their cultures.

*When I look at the people in the photographs - the look on their faces, the concentration and the looks of passion in their eyes ... you can see they have a passion and a love for flowers* Visitor

*My brother's wife is Japanese, so it's very interesting for me to see some of her culture* Visitor

*I really loved them all because they are all very different and it was nice to see and the creativity was amazing, it was amazing what people could come up with* Visitor

*It intrigues me how the ... people from the different schools have taken [the vase] as a starting point and in an intriguing way have given it a new identity. The pot itself becomes modified with what has happened to it. In some cases more obviously than others, but because the pot and the plant or the vegetation have an interaction with each other ... it is intriguing to see what has gone in it has changed its identity* Visitor

*I just think that they are way ahead of us in so many ways culturally and just the way that they do things and just how it is a very cohesive society and I think that we are losing that a bit in the West Visitor*

*It has made me think about flower arranging a bit more, and it's not as simple as just putting a few flowers in a vase, and there are lots of different ways of doing things, and just by changing flowers slightly you can change the whole feeling completely. From each one, some are busy and some are restful, and some are complicated and some are simple Visitor*

### **To experience awe-inspiring, fascinating or beautiful things**

Perhaps the most common outcome to come from this display was that visitors felt they had witnessed real aesthetic beauty in the room.

*It is about the beauty of the plant Visitor*

*I think it is a beautiful art the way she has done it Visitor*

*It's just beautiful Visitor at live arranging session*

*I think it's really artistic how they do everything, how they arrange the flowers and the plants Visitor*

*Absolutely fascinating Visitor at live arranging session*

*It's great that they do this because it involves fragile, perishable things Visitor*

*Just looking at those aspidistra leaves - I mean they are quite simple. Those are beautiful leaves, they have a beauty of their own and you put them together and they have another kind of form Visitor*

*It was just beautiful ... I just thought it was amazing, and the colour Visitor at live arranging session*

*I was expecting there to be more examples of the ikebana, but that's a very spectacular example, and ... it's nicely presented and I don't think you'd want more really Visitor*

*I liked the beauty of the flowers Visitor*

*Even a single plant like that which is just leaves has got a beauty of its own and that should be allowed to really shine through Visitor*

*Caught by the intensity of the arrangement Visitor*

*It's a very, very beautiful piece Visitor*

Visitors went on to add that the beauty of the exhibition related not only to the flowers themselves, but also the photographs and the vase.

*I think they (the photographs) are beautiful Visitor*

*The pot itself is absolutely beautiful and if you took the green stuff out it would be much better Visitor*

*It is really beautiful ... the last arrangement over there Visitor*

*I think the images are quite beautiful and in fact they caught my eye. I was more interested in the images than the text that went with them explaining at first Visitor*

Not all of the emotional outcomes were entirely positive however, with some visitors commenting that the aesthetic beauty of the exhibition was not as significant as it could and should have been.

*I was conscious of the fact that I was looking at pictures of these arrangements rather than the arrangements themselves Visitor*

*I was quite disappointed in the main display, I thought that there was going to be more lilies and flowers Visitor*

*So unimpressive - needs to be aesthetically challenging Visitor*

*It is very austere, but at the same time it is a bit, well depressing Visitor*

*Was expecting to see a display of floral exhibits, this is not a flower it's a plant Visitor*

*Thought it was a bit disappointing - because title is 'living flowers' to my naïve way of thinking bit dull to see photos Visitor*

*I don't like it ... it is manipulating nature and nature does it so much better Visitor*

*There are questions about it in my mind, a certain questioning of whether I like them or not and whether I was almost questioning what I was thinking about them and I thought they were in some ways a bit too overly manufactured, but nevertheless they certainly had a visual beauty Visitor*

Obviously some of these comments actually refer to the arrangements themselves, and so cannot be considered a criticism of the Museum itself; moreover they show how personal tastes varied according to the different arrangements.

# 11 Spiritual outcomes

## To escape or recharge my batteries

The display was able to offer its visitors the opportunity for escapism, both through the actual nature of the arrangements themselves and the layout and atmosphere of the room.

*I find [ikebana] very powerfully focussing and a kind of meditative experience because of that focus Visitor at live arranging session*

*It is very calming and if you are stressed out it is really good Visitor*

*It was austere but it was also soothing and so I didn't actually see what I was looking for in terms of flower arrangements but I like the idea and I like the atmosphere Visitor*

## To reflect and contemplate

Visitors were able to reflect on their own lives whilst in the room, again partly due as much to the exhibition's content as the design of the room.

*There's more beauty available than we realise, and that we should take a little time to smell the roses as they say Visitor*

*I believe like any topic or issue in the world, once people are educated it stirs up an interest, realising the importance of a lot of things in the world Visitor*

*It helps to slow down life and bring you closer to nature in a sort of busy world, which I think flowers and plants do. It ... helps you kind of relate it to yourself Visitor*

*Very calm, peaceful Visitor*

*Transports you to a peaceful setting – quietens things down Visitor*

*Relaxing, peaceful room Visitor*

*It was so peaceful and harmonic and gorgeous and ... it just had a lot of wonderful energy coming from it Visitor*

*Very calming Visitor at live arranging session*

*Relaxing – simple but relaxing Visitor*

*I was interested in the symbols of Japanese symbols, as well as the last message that ikebana is the spiritual reflection of oneself. It really makes me think actually about what a small thing can have some great effect on a human being as well as bringing some satisfaction and peace Visitor*

There were a few visitors who would have liked to achieve the spiritual outcomes mentioned above but felt that they were unable due to the noise emanating from the Museum's entrance and foyer.

*The only thing I would like is if it was quiet Visitor*

*I did notice that you can hear all of the rest of the noise out there, whereas it's supposed to be more of a contemplative atmosphere Visitor*

### **To stimulate my own creativity**

The *Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan* exhibition successfully inspired its audience in a number of different ways. Many visitors were keen to take away ideas from the exhibition to try in their own flower arrangements or relevant work.

*I am intrigued with it and I am wondering now whether I can combine my work with ikebana itself. If one could make a liaison between what I do and the different arts Visitor*

*It has made me think about flower arranging a bit more, and it's not as simple as just putting a few flowers in a vase, and there are lots of different ways of doing things, and by just changing flowers slightly you can change the whole feeling completely Visitor*

*This has revived my interests in flower arranging. I have done flower arranging but thought I was too geometric, I felt it was too strict Visitor*

Some wanted to go on and learn more about Japan and the art of ikebana.

*A catalyst for stimulation for learning more about Ikebana Visitor*

*I will read more about ikebana when I get home Visitor*

*Might buy book Visitor*

*I am actually very interested in Japan and I think it is quite an alien culture to us and this makes me think maybe I should go back and look a bit more at Japan Visitor*

Others thought they might actually go away and take up ikebana as a hobby.

*Made me think I could do this Visitor*

*I am even more interested to learn it when I go over (to Japan) Visitor*

*It has really quite fired me actually Visitor*

*Might have a go Visitor*

*A lot of enthusiasm to actually do it or just see how it is done Visitor*

## 12 Expectations

One of the major issues to arise from this exhibition is whether *Ikebana - Living flowers of Japan* was an exhibition that visitors would expect to see at the British Museum. Opinions were divided, but most visitors were happy to see it here and praised the Museum for offering something completely different to what can be found in the permanent collection.

The perception of the British Museum amongst many visitors interviewed is that it only holds older, more permanent exhibits. Seeing a changing exhibition that involved live plants and flowers was therefore a surprise.

*Surprised the British Museum have something green and alive – I see the British Museum as a place of inanimate objects and nothing of that colour*  
Visitor

*I am surprised because I thought the British Museum was more about ancient history and older things rather than contemporary*  
Visitor

*I wouldn't expect to see plants here*  
Visitor

*I think I would associate the British Museum with more permanent things and ... older things actually*  
Visitor

*A change from the static exhibits in the rest of the Museum*  
Visitor

*Bit of a surprise (to have Ikebana) at the British Museum – used to older, more historical things*  
Visitor

*The obvious thing is the contrast of the living to the dead. I mean the Museum is full of artefacts and history and that is something that is contemporary and is happening right in front of us*  
Visitor

*Not 'dead art' as with other British Museum exhibits*  
Visitor

More than one visitor said it was the sort of exhibition they would expect to see at a museum such as the V & A, whilst other visitors almost expected the British Museum to keep challenging them and their perceptions of the Museum.

*The V & A you connect with crafts but obviously there is no reason why it shouldn't be in the British Museum*  
Visitor

*Would expect more of this type of exhibition at the V & A than here at the British Museum. For me I think ancient history, Egyptian, Roman*  
Visitor

*I was a little bit surprised, but the Museum is just wonderful. Surprises are wonderful! Visitor*

*I think this is something unusual here. Most of the museums you have don't have something about flowers, and I think this is something interesting, which I think I'll take back home and say 'I went to London and I saw in a museum there they are having something about living flowers in Japan  
Visitor at live arranging session*

## 13 The changing arrangements

### **Many visitors were unaware the exhibition was constantly changing**

A number of visitors were unaware that the exhibition changed on a weekly basis, despite the explanatory text panel. This suggests that some visitors were either concentrating on the aesthetics of the display (the arrangement, the photographs etc.) or that by the time they reached the photograph wall they had stopped reading all the interpretation.

Visitors who were already aware, or who were made aware by our researcher, thought it was a clever and unusual concept.

*I think it is a terrific idea Visitor*

*I think that it's fantastic because I came in a few days ago and I saw the old display that's now been taken down and I saw the photograph on the wall and I realised that the next one is going to come on at some stage Visitor*

*It is new and exciting and so you know the next time you come it is going to be a little different Visitor*

*Good idea, creative to change the display Visitor*

### **Visitors genuinely appreciated the opportunity to see an expert at work**

Visitors were keen to see the process of the arranging, in order to find out how long it takes and how the arranger would go about forming the ikebana.

*I think it would be interesting to see how long it takes because some of these look like somebody has put these straight in [the vase] but I'm sure it's not that simple Visitor*

*Just to see how long it takes somebody to do it, because you look at that and you think 'Oh I could just grab these together and poke them in', but I'm sure there must be a technique to it that does take quite a while to do Visitor*

Others were keen to take the opportunity to see an expert focussing on their specific craft.

*Just to sit and watch people do things that are marvellous things to be able to do Visitor*

*It is a craft, it is actually putting it together, selecting, arranging, deciding and watching them do it would be fascinating Visitor*

### **The logistics of the live-arranging caused some issues**

Although visitors liked the idea of the changing displays, in reality many found it difficult to appreciate the live-arranging due to the number of people in the room.

*It's hard to see Visitor*

*I thought it was quite interesting. Unfortunately I couldn't see everything because I was at the back, so I couldn't see a lot of what was going on until the end, until I got to make my way to the front Visitor*

*I wanted to see what's going on here, but I can't see! Visitor*

*It's supposed to be a wonderful, beautiful, profound, aesthetic experience and it's a bloody nightmare. I was asked to get out of the way because people want to take photos of each other standing in front of the display. I find it ridiculous Visitor*

Many visitors who became aware of the live-arranging through our research expressed enthusiasm for the concept, but commented that they would be unable to attend the live arranging either through other commitments or because of their geographical location. They therefore felt the exhibition offered less to them than London-based visitors who could return regularly.

*To really appreciate it you have to come back every week to look at them individually and I am not in a position to do that Visitor*

# 14 Conclusions and recommendations

## 14.1 Accentuate Room 3 as ‘taster’ experience

Visitors are not averse to this small-scale ‘taster’ experience as it offers visitors with little or no knowledge to learn something they didn’t previously, whilst more knowledgeable visitors are happy to confirm their own knowledge in the subject.

Publicity and marketing material for future Room 3 displays could even go so far as to accentuate this ‘taster’ experience as visitors know what to expect when they come into the room and may be more willing to visit the exhibition if they know they are not going to be overwhelmed with information.

## 14.2 The layout of the room helped manipulate visitor behaviour

Visitors were quick to comment upon the ambience and atmosphere of the display as being very ‘Japanese’, commenting that they thought of it as a peaceful, calming place.

This was largely due to the colours of the walls in the room and the appropriate levels of pooled lighting which helped visitors to engage with the main display and interpretation. The calming ambience of the room also helped visitors achieve more emotional and spiritual outcomes from the display.

For future evaluations it would be interesting to find out what outcomes the room’s designer was trying to achieve, and then evaluate to what extent this was successful. In turn the designer could use our hierarchy of outcomes as a planning tool when considering what they want from visitors.

## 14.3 The exhibition provoked huge emotional and spiritual outcomes

This display brought about a wealth of rich, powerful responses from visitors which were extremely eloquently expressed. Whilst this is a result of visitors having spent their time in the room in a period of quiet reflection, it is also important to add that this important data was captured through one on one interviews with a researcher probing the right areas of visitors’ minds.

This is an element of research we would like to continue and develop in this room as we feel that deeper, more meaningful insight is attainable from Room 3 visitors.



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