

Floristry and fine art — a practical and conceptual investigation

Byoungsung Son

A thesis submitted for the degree of MA by Dissertation in Art and Design

Design Programme Area, Writtle University College

Awarded by University of Essex

Date of submission February 2018

## Abstract

This dissertation investigates the concepts of both floristry and art and how they are interrelated, drawing on the author's 15 years' experience in the floristry industry. The research is based on both theory and personal practice.

The most common theoretical concepts of both art and floristry were reviewed. Based on these theories a clearer definition of art appropriate to this research was developed and this is then elaborated further in discussion of the author's own personal practice.

Two experts, who work on the boundaries of both floristry and art, were interviewed.

Willem de Rooij is a Dutch artist who regularly integrates flower compositions in his exhibitions. Rebecca Louise Law is a florist who developed herself as an installation artist working with natural materials.

The interviews revealed that both artists are driven by respect for the natural materials they are working with. However, their views on flowers as material for their art are different.

Willem de Rooij is motivated by the freshness of the flowers and regularly changes the flowers during the exhibition period. Rebecca Louise Law aims at making compositions which are long lasting. In this way she explores the long lasting potential of flowers going beyond their natural freshness.

Finally the author's personal art exhibition is discussed. The exhibition was based on the traditional East Asian painting of the so-called "Four Gentlemen", a representation of the four seasons through four plants: plum blossom, orchid, chrysanthemum and bamboo.

Through the application of floristry skills, the theoretical concepts of East Asian art were widened, and more modern western art ideas and practices were incorporated.

By taking a wider approach, both floristry and art can come closer to each other. By constantly evolving on the boundaries between both disciplines, floristry can continue to develop itself and explore the freedoms that art allows.

## Contents

|                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Abstract.....                     | i  |
| List of Plates.....               | v  |
| List of Appendices.....           | v  |
| Acknowledgements .....            | vi |
| 1. Introduction .....             | 1  |
| 2. Literature review .....        | 4  |
| 2.1 Art Definition.....           | 4  |
| 2.2 Floristry Definition .....    | 8  |
| 2.3 Four Gentlemen .....          | 11 |
| 3. Materials and Methods .....    | 14 |
| 3.1 Objective .....               | 14 |
| 3.2 Interview Structure .....     | 15 |
| 3.2.1 Selection .....             | 15 |
| 3.2.2 Method.....                 | 17 |
| 3.3 Personal Exhibition.....      | 18 |
| 4. Results .....                  | 20 |
| 4.1 Expert interview results..... | 20 |
| 4.1.1 Rebecca Louise Law .....    | 20 |
| 4.1.2 Willem de Rooij.....        | 21 |
| 4.2 My Art Practice .....         | 23 |
| 5. Discussion.....                | 47 |
| 5.1 Art versus Floristry .....    | 47 |
| 5.2 Flowers as material .....     | 49 |
| 5.3 Floristry background.....     | 50 |

6. Conclusion..... 52

7. Recommendations for future study..... 56

8. References..... 58

Appendices..... 64

## List of Plates

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Plate 1 Cho Huiryong: Four Gentlemen (Naver <sup>2</sup> , 2017). .....               | 11 |
| Plate 2 Rebecca Louise Law: The Iris, Now Gallery (author, 2017). .....               | 21 |
| Plate 3 London Colombia Road Flower Market (author, 2017). .....                      | 24 |
| Plate 4 Shadows Bouquet, London (author, 2017). .....                                 | 25 |
| Plate 5 Shadows Bouquet, London (author, 2017). .....                                 | 25 |
| Plate 6 Cy Twombly: Blooming, Centre Pompidou Paris (author, 2017). .....             | 26 |
| Plate 7 Willem de Rooij: Fong Leng Collection, MMK in Frankfurt (author, 2017). ..... | 29 |
| Plate 8 Performance, Writtle University College (author, 2017). .....                 | 34 |
| Plate 9 Performance, Writtle University College (author, 2017). .....                 | 35 |
| Plate 10 Four Gentlemen “Spring”, Writtle University College (author, 2017). .....    | 40 |
| Plate 11 Four Gentlemen ‘Summer’, Writtle University College (author, 2017). .....    | 41 |
| Plate 12 Four Gentlemen “Autumn”, Writtle University College (author, 2017). .....    | 43 |
| Plate 13 Four Gentlemen “Winter”, Writtle University College (author, 2017). .....    | 45 |
| Plate 14 Four Gentlemen, Writtle University College (author, 2017). .....             | 46 |

## List of Appendices

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Appendix i. Rebecca Louise Law Questions and verbatim replies. .... | 64 |
| Appendix ii. Willem de Rooij Questions and verbatim replies. ....   | 66 |

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank wholeheartedly Dr. Michael Szpakowski for his continuous support whilst undertaking this research project. His expert knowledge and guidance have been of great assistance. Nikolas Barrall helped me to ensure a correct use of English. I heartily thank both Willem de Rooij and Rebecca Louise Law for their time and for sharing their views and expertise.

A special thanks to Ward Vanoverberghe for his encouragement and support during the completion of the research project.

Finally, I will be eternally grateful to my mother who enabled me to study in the UK and supported me throughout my entire study.

I am grateful to all and have greatly appreciated their constant encouragement, support and guidance.

## 1. Introduction

I have been studying and working in floristry for more than 15 years, both in Korea and the UK. I first obtained an Association Degree in Floral Design at Kaywon University and later a BA in Professional Floristry at Writtle University College. This has allowed me to become very confident about my floristry skills and flower related work.

Recently I have realised that I was more and more limited within my flower design work. I felt restricted by the boundaries of floristry techniques which I had learned during my BA in Professional Floristry. Working with live material like flowers requires that one is aware of the correct and relevant techniques to apply. However, floristry techniques and theories can also limit me in my design work so that I cannot freely express my creativity with the flowers.

This is one of the reasons why I started my MA Degree in Art and Design. I wanted to explore new work and seek more inspiration to have a wider view on floristry design, so that I could further develop myself more completely.

I visited several exhibitions both in the UK and abroad which either integrated flowers into art works or were built around other floristry related topics.

My frequent freelance work with UK floristry design companies has taught me that this is not just limited to applying floristry skills. The design and aesthetic elements have just as much importance in the final product which is offered to customers and for which they are happy to pay. There seems to be a clear gap between the floristry business, floristry



competitions and academic floristry studies on the one hand and art and design on the other.

This becomes clear in the different flower competitions in which different florists compete and whose work is being evaluated (e.g. Chelsea Flower Show). Such competitions are assessed primarily on traditional skills, theory and techniques being applied correctly to flower composition. However, in the present day floristry industry flower compositions are becoming more and more innovative. These new types of compositions seem to have a more open perspective and are often influenced by new and modern art and design elements. Artists who are using flowers as material include Rebecca Louise Law and her hanging flowers or the *Bouquet* series from Willem de Rooij, and they are not focused on employing traditional floristry skills or techniques. Their work is considered more as art than floristry and as such it can be displayed in public spaces, for example museums and galleries, and thus be available to a wider audience.

My MA Degree exhibition in May 2017 was built around the traditional Korean–Chinese painting of the so called “Four Gentlemen”, which represents the four different seasons of the year through four different plants. Starting from the concept of this traditional painting I integrated natural materials such as wood, paper, pottery and especially plants and flowers to represent the Four Gentlemen. This combination of natural materials and traditional East Asian painting resulted in a unique artistic concept. I was able to go beyond the boundaries of traditional floristry. It gave me more freedom and allowed me to express myself in a more creative manner. The aim of my exhibition was to understand how I could use my floristry skills and knowledge in art and design projects. I wanted to

investigate how both fields were related and influenced each other based on the background of my floristry studies.

Throughout this dissertation, where the term 'Asian' is used, it relates primarily to the art and culture of East Asia, and in particular China, Japan and Korea, although some parts do refer specifically to Korean art and culture. The terms 'Oriental' has been avoided due to its problematic overtones, in which Western culture and art are seen as superior (Said, 2003).

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Art Definition

It is a real challenge to give an accurate definition of art. The question “What is art?” is forever being asked and the answer has changed throughout art history. A definitive answer is therefore not possible.

Several theories have been developed and have followed the development of the arts over the years.

The Oxford Dictionary (Stevenson, 2010) defines art as:

“The expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power”.

This definition highlights some important elements which are essential in any form of art:

- Creativity
- Imagination
- Visual form
- Beauty
- Emotions

However, since Marcel Duchamp’s famous work, “Fountain”, this definition seems to be no longer completely accurate. His “Fountain” was a simple porcelain urinal which he

exhibited in 1917 for the Society of Independent Artists. However, the organizing committee refused his contribution immediately. The work is now regarded as a major break in art history and the beginning of so called ready-made and conceptual art. Therefore what defines art evolves through history and follows the development of the art itself (Tate, 2017<sup>1</sup>).

A good summary of the most common art theories can be found in the book “The Art Question” Warburton (2003). The following highlights some of the key theories in the philosophy of art:

- Significant form: (Clive Bell): “All art is significant form” i.e. all objects can become art as long as they have an inherent potential to produce aesthetic emotion (so even a urinal).
- Expression of emotion (Collingwood): art distinguishes itself from craft through the emotions it evokes within the observer.
- Institutional Context (Dickie): any work of art has to be artefact. This is a necessary condition but not sufficient. The status of art needs to be conferred (conferral of status) by putting it in an exhibition or observing it in artistic way. A urinal in the context of an art exhibition becomes art and will be looked upon as such by the audience.

All these theories constitute different elements which are proposed as quintessential to define art. However, none of them are sufficient, and history demonstrates how they could be made irrelevant by new developments in art.

East Asian art can be defined as the art of those East Asian countries that are strongly influenced by Chinese culture. For the purpose of this dissertation, this refers more specifically to China, Japan and Korea. Traditionally the concept of East Asian art was not defined in the same way as Western art has been in western countries. However, in the twentieth century, Korean art started to employ western concepts in order to define what is and what is not art. Abstract art did not exist in traditional East Asian painting. The concept was taken from Western art in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. East Asian “art” has not been defined in the same way as Western art. The concept of East Asian art is not as clear and specific (Choi, 2003).

To describe East Asian art appropriately, one needs to look at three essential elements which are considered the basis of East Asian art (Song, 2005).

- Mind or soul
  
- Lines
  
- Space or negative space

Asian art is not just about the object, but more about the ideas or emotions it represents and refers to. It represents the mind and soul of the artist and is focused on expressing culture rather than artistic style (Naver<sup>1</sup>, 2018).

The three constitutive elements of East Asian painting are reflected in the use of three

different art forms:

- Poetry
  
- Calligraphy
  
- Painting

Traditional East Asian painting as it is known in Korea is not a simple representation of reality. The ideas behind the work are more important than reproducing a facsimile of the subject. Through his/her art work the artist is expressing his/her mind and soul. It is not simply technique but a training of the mind.

The above three constitutive elements (poetry, calligraphy, painting) come back in the paintings of the Four Gentlemen. In classical education, when scholars were painting the Four Gentleman, they did this through expression of their mind and soul, rather than painting an accurate picture of the subject. In this way the scholar was expressing their personality through the painting. Each art work in Asian art will generally include calligraphy and poetry besides the actual painting. The use of black ink and rice paper is very common. By using ink as material, the artist needs to create his work in one go. There is no possibility to overdraw or redo. This is why lines are so important, since they can only be produced once and cannot be edited any further. Self-discipline is therefore very important. The artist needs to use their ink in moderation so that they accurately express their mind (Kim, 1994).

The Western and Asian definitions of what is art are clearly different because the cultures on which they are based are different. However they both refer to art and artistic

expression. Art is therefore strongly related to and influenced by the artist's own personal background. Personally I grew up in Korea and I have developed my interest in flowers over many years of study. Therefore my final project *Four Gentlemen* draws on both my own upbringing in Asia and my personal passion for flowers. As such it is an expression of my personality. No art definition can be fully accurate without reference to the artist's personality.

## 2.2 Floristry Definition

According to the Professional Floristry Manual (Owen, 2014) the purpose of floristry is to “showcase and fashion the flowers into natural designs that exceed customer expectations. Diverse in their beauty, flowers can portray a thousand emotions that words fail to communicate”.

In this way Owen is highlighting two constitutive elements of any floristry definition: emotions and customer focus. Florists aim at provoking emotions which should answer and go beyond customer requirements. This can be done in many forms, from commercial bouquet to artistic flower installation. However, all of them are created for commercial reasons and therefore need to be able to please the customer. This is not possible without focus on visual beauty and perfect craftsmanship. For this the quality and freshness of the flowers and plants used is essential. Florists aim at keeping flowers as fresh as possible as long as possible. By applying correct techniques and skills the florist can produce a floral design that goes beyond the customer expectations. For this the personality of the florist and their creativity together with respect for the natural

materials employed can bring the floral composition to a higher level.

Floristry is not a process that lends itself to industrialization (Hall, 2016). Flower compositions are always hand-made. As such they are regarded as craft. Applying the correct floristry skills is essential for a florist. Therefore flower compositions cannot be replicated by a machine process with no human involvement, i.e. they cannot be industrialised. In his book *The Craft Reader* (Adamson, 2005, cited in Hall, 2016) Glenn Adamson suggests a definition of craft: 'the application of skill and material-based knowledge to relatively small scale production'. He does not refer to floristry directly but his theory can be applied to a wider range of activities such as gardening and cookery, which, like floristry, use natural, organically-based materials.

However, modern floristry is constantly evolving and opening up to more contemporary design practices. In this way it is developing itself more and more away from traditional floristry practices.

This evolution of the floristry into a more artistic direction has been a source of some controversy. In September 2004 an exhibition was organised in the Design Museum of London on the work of Constance Spry under the title *A millionaire for a few pence*. Spry was a florist who built up a highly successful flower business working for high society customers (Queen Elizabeth II was among her customers). She was famous for her innovative floral designs making use of natural materials such as wild flowers, and vegetable leaves. She wrote several books and was able to establish her own brand whose influence lasted many years after her death in 1960 (Shephard, 2010).

The mounting of this exhibition drew huge criticism from two of the co-founders of the



design museum, Sir Terence Conran and George Dyson (Shephard, 2010). They considered an exhibition about a florist as completely inappropriate and a betrayal of the original purpose of the museum. According to Dyson, “Design is about serious technical things, not shallow styling (Shephard, 2010)”. The debate over this issue lasted several months and ended with the formal resignation of George Dyson from the Board of Trustees (The Guardian, 2017).

This discussion revealed that floristry on one hand and art and design on the other are still often considered to be very different things. It is difficult to bring floristry into the environment of an art and design museum and as such it is not always easily accepted or taken seriously. Dyson referred to floristry as “high society mimesis”(sic) (Shephard, 2010).

This wider approach in contemporary floristry which takes in artistic elements is already more advanced in South Korea. In contrast to the UK, the academic study of floristry is more developed (Ra, 2010). By offering additional degrees at post-graduate (Masters) level the research and academic study of floristry is more widely acknowledged and explored. This is different to the UK, where only BA studies in floristry are available and academic study is more limited. The BA degree in floristry I did at Writtle University College is the only such programme which is offered in this domain in the UK.

This more mature and more widely available research and study has led to a more open approach regarding floristry in Korea. Therefore the interaction between floristry and art happens more easily and barriers between the two disciplines are being broken down. In particular, in contemporary art installations flowers and other natural materials are used

just as any other material to create a required environmental effect. Modern installation art is increasingly embracing floral design in its creations (Hong, 2008).

### 2.3 Four Gentlemen

Since early Confucianism, bamboo, orchid, plum blossom and chrysanthemum have been known as the so-called “Four Gentlemen” in East Asian traditional (see Plate1). They are the symbols of the virtues and qualities that define the perfect gentleman, i.e. highly cultured, and with good character and personality (Brushmeisters of Brooklyn, 2017).



Plate 1 Cho Huiryong: Four Gentlemen (Naver<sup>2</sup>, 2017).

The Four Gentlemen first appeared as a topic in Chinese traditional painting during the Song dynasty (960–1279). It was later also used by artists in other East Asian countries, mostly in Korea, Japan and Vietnam. The Four Gentleman traditionally refers to the four different seasons during the year (Smithsonian Gardens, 2017).

Depending on each country and generation, the representation of the Four Gentlemen can vary. In China plum blossom represents winter, orchid spring, bamboo summer and chrysanthemum autumn. More recently and especially in Korea (Plate 1), they have come to be associated with different seasons: plum blossoms bloom in the early spring, orchids in summer, chrysanthemums bloom in the late autumn and bamboo is green throughout the winter. In the state exam for court painters in Joseon period (1392–1910), the highest scores were given to bamboo paintings (Kim, 1994).

When Koreans refer to the seasons they always begin with the spring season. This is based on Korean culture, which considers the spring as the first season of the year. Therefore the Korean representation is different from the Chinese (which starts with winter).

The Four Gentlemen painting was developed mainly by Zen Buddhist monks for whom the different plants used are very much linked with Chinese and Korean spirituality. In Korea, the Four Gentlemen are considered a metaphor for three Asian philosophies: “Seunbie” (Korean Confucianism), Zen Buddhism and Lao Tse Taoism (Kim, 1994).

As explained above, Asian art is based not just on painting but integrates poetry as well. This allows the viewer to reflect on the painting through the poem, and in doing so enhances their aesthetic experience. Each poem makes reference to a specific season and helps in understanding the emotions that the painting is provoking. The plum tree is the first tree of the season to blossom during spring. It produces buds before the leaves emerge. Because it blooms during the beginning of the year, it became a symbol of purity and virginity. The orchid has a very sweet smell and as such it is thought to

symbolize love and beauty. Finally the chrysanthemum is a symbol of autumn because of its fading colours. It refers to character and longevity. In nature bamboo is evergreen and as such it became a symbol of longevity and winter. At the same time it was associated with the virtue of modesty (Lee, 2011)

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1 Objective

My dissertation is based both on interviews with expert practitioners and on my personal exhibition work.

The purpose of the interviews was to collect data from real life experiences and feedback from people working across both art and floristry. The aim was to collect their views and opinions of how they view their work and how they are exploring the boundaries of both art and floristry design.

The purpose of my personal exhibition was to develop myself by working more freely and being more creative in an artistic way. Being a florist, I wanted to explore the boundaries of floristry and widen my perspective on my work. This required more than just creating a flower composition by applying the correct skills and techniques. I used materials other than flowers and tried to build my work around the three basic elements of East Asian art, namely, mind/soul, lines and (negative) space. In this way I hoped to bridge the gap between floristry and art by producing art work which is a reflection of my personality both as a florist and a Korean.

In doing so I set on my first steps to become an artist rather than the florist I had been until then. It helped me to develop a more open-minded approach to what it means to be a florist. It allowed me to focus on more than just applying the perfect floristry skills. The aim of the exhibition was to deliver art work that would appeal to the public in a different way than a flower composition might.

Interviews allowed me to gather artists' experiences and opinions on the connections and relationships between art and floristry as well as the application of ideas and techniques from one field to the other. My exhibition provided me the opportunity to use my own real-life experiences. Obviously as "practitioner-researcher" I acknowledge my subjectivity and my creative involvement, but this does not undermine the quality of data generated (Gray , 2004).

Using two different methods of research enabled me to apply the so-called "triangulation" technique (Gray, 2004). Triangulation is particularly useful to obtain a broader view of a topic by examining it from different perspectives.

### **3.2 Interview Structure**

#### **3.2.1 Selection**

Two expert practitioners were selected, based on their backgrounds in both floristry and art. They have been working on the boundaries of both disciplines and have integrated elements from both into their daily work.

Willem de Rooij is an artist working with flowers. Rebecca Louise Law has a floristry background and currently makes flower sculptures which can be considered to be closer to art as defined above. They both work in both floristry and art but have different backgrounds and bring experiences from their own personal perspective. This fact allows an exploration of my topic from different perspectives in line with the triangulation research technique used for my research. The sharing of their views and ideas generated research data which was highly relevant to this project.

–Rebecca Louise Law

I visited two exhibitions of Rebecca Louise Law: *The Iris* in the Now Gallery (3<sup>rd</sup> March — 7<sup>th</sup> May 2017) and *Life in Death* in Kew Gardens (October 7<sup>th</sup> 2017 — 11<sup>th</sup> March 2018).

Both exhibitions were built around hanging floral sculptures.

*The Iris* exhibition featured 10,000 blue, purple, yellow and white irises suspended with copper wire. The iris were chosen because they typically grow in the wetland marshes on the Greenwich island where the Now gallery is located. The exhibition lasted for two months. During this time the viewers could observe the decay of the flowers as they dry out. Rebecca Louise Law has always been studying and working with the long lasting potential of flowers (Wall Paper, 2017).

History also inspired Law for this year's *Life and Death* exhibition in Kew Gardens. This time she was inspired from ancient Egypt garlands from Ramses II. About 1000 garlands were hanging from the ceiling of the Shirley Sherwood gallery of Botanical Art. They were composed of close to 375,000 of Rebecca Louise Law's dried floral collection. This was another experiment with the use of preserved flowers as sculptural material (Woodward, 2017).

–Willem de Rooij

Willem de Rooij's use of fresh flower materials is particularly marked in the so-called *Bouquet* series. He began working on this series in 2002. Since then de Rooij has created a total of 11 different floral sculptures three of which were part of his exhibition in the Frankfurt Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK) (15<sup>th</sup> October 2016 — 8<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

*Bouquet IV* (2005) consists of a flower arrangement and a framed black and white photograph depicting the work at its actual size. The colours of *Bouquet IV*, when reproduced in monochrome, are all reduced to a standardized, mid-grey. It is a work about the mainstream, the middle, without extremes of blacks or whites. *Bouquet V* (2010), on the other hand, is composed of 95 different flowers of which each appears only once in the composition and in this way it thematises the different sizes, colours and textures of each of the 95 flowers. The work touches on concepts of diversity, and the tension between the individual and the collective. Finally, *Bouquet IX* (2012) is made up of ten different species of flower, all of which are white. Encapsulating ideas of sameness and difference, the work is above all about the multiple meanings attributed to “whiteness” (Shanghai Biennale, 2016).

### 3.2.2 Method

The interviews enabled the gathering of specific information and data, drawing upon the real life experience of expert practitioners. It was important to frame the right questions to obtain relevant research data for the dissertation topic (Cottrell, 2014).

The interview questions were sent to the participants by email. It was a series of five open questions allowing the interviewee to answer in complete freedom and as they felt appropriate. By asking open questions, I invited each interviewee to fully commit to their personal opinion.

The interview questions were individually structured in accordance with each interviewee's



background and experience. The goal was to trigger answers which would highlight the different views of the different experts. Both use flower materials but their perspective and approach are very different. Through the interview I wanted to have their view on the flowers as material and how this influences their work.

Although both interviews had different questions, the topics discussed could be related to the following:

- Art versus floristry
- Flowers as material
- Floristry background

Interviewing by email also avoided any issues related to language and possible misinterpretation of the generated data. The advantage of answering in writing ensured as well that I had complete and correct notes of the interview, which may not always be the case during an interview in person.

### **3.3 Personal Exhibition**

Working towards and setting up my exhibition allowed me to gain more personal experience in both art and floristry. In this way I would experience first-hand how to organize an exhibition using skills from my study and practice of floristry but also to

develop a creative concept unbounded by floristry norms and aiming to be artistic at the same time.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Expert interview results

#### 4.1.1 Rebecca Louise Law

For Rebecca Louise Law the distinction between floristry and art is clear: “A florist is a person who arranges and sells cut flowers.”

In this light a florist is only interested in making use of natural materials and keeping them alive for as long as possible. They create a temporary, decorative, composition to please the customer. The florist needs a paying customer to make their income.

An artist’s motivation is not, first and foremost, commercial, that is, they do not aim to please a patron but to realise their own individual artistic concept, not just temporarily, but using long term means that, in principal, last for ever.

Rebecca Louise Law creates installations with natural materials with the intention to discover more about humanity’s relationship with nature. She believes that it is not necessary to have the formally correct floristry techniques as long as one respects and understands the material one is working with. Her staff rarely consists of florists. Patience and passion are more critical criteria in their selection.

Her installations are mainly hanging designs and are made using the process of preservation (Plate 2). She is constantly experimenting with the longevity of flowers as a sculptural material. By taking away the water, she is left with the ‘skeleton’ of a dry flower and obtains as such a material which she considers to be beyond fresh.

Law is convinced that you cannot control nature. Therefore one needs to be open-minded. .“Never expect to control nature. You need to be open to learn something new every day.”



Plate 2 Rebecca Louise Law: *The Iris*, Now Gallery (author, 2017).

#### 4.1.2 Willem de Rooij

For an artist like Willem de Rooij flowers are working material just like any other material he uses, such as textiles, film, photographs and appropriated materials. In the same way he consults florists as he does all other specialists (such as cameramen, graphic designers, architects) therefore he is less interested in what makes his art different from floristry design. In general he collaborates and integrates many types of work into his art.

Growing up in the Netherlands meant that he has developed a particular relationship with flowers, which are an integral part of Dutch culture and are present in different cultural spheres and economies; they are not expensive and available to anyone.

De Rooij has never studied floristry or any other related skill or technique. Therefore he engages different consultants and co-workers who have specialist skills in the field. He believes that working together with specialists in all sorts of different areas of the art and design world is enriching for all those involved.

For his exhibition *entitled*, which was displayed in MMK Frankfurt in 2017, he used different flower compositions, provided by a local florist, who made sure that they were kept fresh throughout the duration of the exhibition.

Working with local florists is for de Rooij the only way possible to integrate live flower materials into his exhibitions. Each time a flower composition is made fresh and newly installed, it can look slightly different from any previous one, which makes it particularly interesting. These differences are not only part of his work but one of the conceptual foundations of his art. Working with live materials makes a different work of art each time the materials are renewed.

In *Bouquet IV*, which was also displayed in the Frankfurt exhibition, de Rooij used black and white representations of flower arrangements. The black and white photographs were exhibited next to the real life flower arrangement it represented.

The central question that lay at the foundation of this work was which flowers look

middle–grey when depicted in black and white? The flowers that were part of the *Bouquet* /V series were selected in such a way that when depicted in black and white, they would look like a grey mass. No extremes in the black and white spectrum would appear, avoiding any deep black or bright white. In this way, the piece becomes a reflection on the notion of ‘the middle’, or mainstream.

#### 4.2 My Art Practice

During my BA Professional Floristry study I was always eager to develop my floristry skills. At the same time I was conscious of the boundaries of classical floristry within which I studied and must practice. I started working with London event floristry companies to build up practical experience, which was sometimes very different from what I learned in college. My MA study in Art and Design allowed me to create a project freely without too many restrictions. It was challenging to cope with this new freedom. I no longer had to follow the floristry guidelines I was used to during my floristry study. I learned a great amount from this as well from the different exchanges with my fellow students during the research colloquia.

The most challenging part of the preparation of my personal exhibition was going outside my usual comfort zone. Combining two approaches which are sometimes very opposite (Traditional floristry and art) was not always easy because I only had very limited experience with this combination.

I took photographs and shared them on different social media like Facebook and

Instagram. This was for me an effective and efficient way to share my experience and interests with others. It generated feedback and helped to evaluate the effect of my images and ideas on others. Not only did I take pictures of flowers, but also of any other materials related to nature in general. During my regular visits to different flower markets such as Columbia Road in East London (see Plate 3), I took a lot of pictures including people buying flowers, leaves on the ground, and shadows made by flowers. In doing so I used the flowers as the object of my pictures (see Plate 4 and 5), in the same way as a painter of flowers would do. Famous photographers like Helmut Newton and Robert Mapplethorpe have both worked with flowers.



Plate 3 London Columbia Road Flower Market (author, 2017).



Plate 4 Shadows Bouquet, London (author, 2017).



Plate 5 Shadows Bouquet, London (author, 2017).

As a next step I used fresh flowers as the basis for paintings, in the sense that the flowers



themselves served as the 'canvas'. It was quite revolutionary for me to use flowers in such a way and it felt rewarding in my development as a floristry artist.

This way of working is very different from the usual floristry practice since paint is a basic material of art, but not of floristry. By sampling using paint, my flower composition developed in a more artistic way.

I visited the Cy Twombly exhibition in Centre Pompidou in Paris (see Plate6), which was a retrospective of his complete career. I was very much impressed by his work and the "Peony Blossom series" in particular. It inspired me to further develop my own painting of flowers in a related way.



Plate 6 Cy Twombly: Blooming, Centre Pompidou Paris (author, 2017).

In his peony series Twombly shows us how poetry and painting can interact together.

Here the artist refers to a poem of Takarai Kikaku, who was inspired by the 14th century

Samurai Kusunoki Masashige (Art Institute of Chicago, 2017):

AH! The Peonies

For which

Kusonoki

Took off his Armour

The noble warrior has taken off his armour, his garments of war, in awe of the beauty of a majestic bloom. By seeing all this beauty and taking off one's armour, the Samurai warrior makes himself vulnerable to death and decay. Twombly intensifies the aesthetic experience by scribbling haiku quotes onto the canvases: "quiver," "spilling out yesterday's rain," "from the heart of the peony a drunken bee." It is as if Twombly wants us to be intoxicated, as he appears to be when he paints the moment these magnificent peonies are at their fiery fullness (Democratic Underground, 2015).

These Peony paintings very much interested me. Firstly because of the subject (flowers), but more importantly by the strong representation in the paintings, which are visually very striking through the use of vivid and stark colours. Twombly was not just inspired by the flowers, but more importantly by their form and what they represent. At first I thought he was painting roses, but after reading the details I realized they were peonies. In this way I understood that Twombly was not just interested in flowers, but more in their form. By the

use of poetry the work of Cy Twombly feels familiar with the East Asia painting which I learned in elementary school. East Asia painting traditionally is including poetry in its painting.

Willem de Rooij's exhibition in the Museum fur Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt served as the next personal revelation. The exhibition combined flower compositions with the art work. This underlined the different perspectives of both practices. For example, in floristry one does not really care about the number of flowers used or the different types. Contrary to this, de Rooij chose to emphasise the exact number of flowers used, and which type. This type of detailed explanation was very interesting for me. For this exhibition all the flowers compositions were freshly made by a local florist, who also kept them fresh during the time of the exhibition. I was surprised de Rooij did not manage this by himself, but looked for local collaboration.

Part of the exhibition was dedicated to de Rooij's collection of sportswear from the *Fong Leng* label, which he has been collecting for more than ten years. Fong Leng is a Dutch designer of Chinese origin, who gained fame in the Netherlands with extravagant models during the seventies for an exclusive clientele. In mid-'80s to the mid-'90s, her sportswear was popular both among football fans and fashion-conscious middle-class consumers (Mousse Magazine, 2017).

In the exhibition a selection of this sportswear collection was shown, mainly those with patterns of flowers. These were displayed next to real flower arrangements based on same colour patterns and structure (Plate 7).



Plate 7 Willem de Rooij: Fong Leng Collection, MMK in Frankfurt (author, 2017).

At first sight this seemed to me a very strange and unusual thing to do. Looking at the flower patterns used in the displayed clothing, I realized they matched perfectly with the flower compositions. In this way the combination made sense and created its own artistic dynamic.

Many fashion designers use fabrics with flower patterns. In sportswear this might be rather more unusual, but I understand what it represents: the link with nature and actual flowers. In particular, the different colour schemes cross very effectively between floristry and fashion sportswear. Therefore the combination is rare and as such a unique artistic experience.

A de Rooij arrangement on the surface could be looked upon as being just another flower composition. Simply by putting them in a museum in the context of an art exhibition makes these compositions no longer simple flower arrangements, but works of art. A florist is mainly focused on the visual aspect of the flower compositions, together with technical aspects like longevity and customer requirements. As soon as a composition is part of an exhibition in a museum, it becomes a work of art, as opposed to a simple visual experience of some flowers.

This is what Dickie refers to as “institutional context” (Warburton, 2003): at the basis of any work of art is an “artefact” (in this case a flower composition), and by putting the artefact in a museum, the status of art is conferred to the flowers (“conferral of status”).

Since 2002 de Rooij had designed a series of flower arrangements which he each referenced as *Bouquet* (with respective number). To each was appended a brief description and a list of all the flowers used. The compositions are created specifically for the exhibition and only exist during that time. Flowers are regularly replaced in order to keep a fresh look. By constantly renewing the flowers during his exhibition de Rooij acknowledges the economic importance of the wholesale flower business of in the Netherlands. (Mousse Magazine, 2017).

This approach is very different from a florist's, more focused on the application of correct techniques, use of seasonal flowers, budget and flower design composition. In this way florists are more conceptually limited. They aim first for visual beauty and appeal. They have to work with live materials and need to take into account the freshness of the flowers, which automatically reduces how long-lasting their work can be. This is of less concern to artists who aim, not just at immediate visual beauty, but can also integrate ideas behind the visual. This is very much the case for conceptual art i.e. the idea or concept becomes more important, it is not just about what can be seen by the observer, Conceptual art is all about the idea. A lot of work is done before the physical creation of the work of art: the artist thinks first about the concept or idea behind it. In this way the preparation is crucial to the development of the art work. The execution is only the final step and comes after all the preparation work is done (LeWitt 1967 in Tate 2017<sup>2</sup>).

Any idea or concept can form the basis of any art. Therefore almost anything can now be considered as art, this is not the case for a classical painter who will try to express ideas through their painting. Conceptual art on the other hand is not limited by the material it uses. Artists can also express themselves through a performance or any other way that they deem appropriate, As such conceptual art and visual expression stand opposed: the idea is more important than the visual components of the art work. The received idea of what is art seems to be completely rejected (The Art Story, 2017<sup>1</sup>).

This complete freedom in ways of expression underlay the development of some specific trends, particularly since the sixties, These trends have further defined and developed conceptual art (Tate, 2017<sup>2</sup>).

In various human cultures, bouquets of flowers have a variety of meanings relating to different events and contexts. In an art museum, the fleeting, temporal nature of flowers is emphasized, and also how they are complex social signs and the viewer is drawn towards those signs' meanings. Therefore, the *Bouquet* takes on a cultural meaning as it becomes necessary for meaning to be negotiated.

Some of de Rooij's *Bouquets* have clear social or political connotations, others merely formal ones. What they all have in common, though, is that they are like a play or musical composition: if not given a physical realisation they exist only as an idea. Furthermore, all the works are collaborations with a florist responsible for works' execution and maintenance during the exhibition period.

De Rooij's *Bouquet* series is conceptual art because it is based on specific ideas and concepts, though by using flowers the works still contain a very strong visual aspect. However, the flowers that constitute *Bouquet IV* were selected so that when depicted in black and white, they would look like a grey mass, without extremes in the black and white spectrum, avoiding deep black or bright white. "In that sense, this piece is a reflection on the notion of 'the middle', or mainstream," according to de Rooij.

The next step in my development as artist would bring me to my first flower performance. I put together a flower composition in front of a live audience, including music, all flower cutting and related gestures and with the unused flower materials left visible, all forming an integral part of the work.

Art theory defines "Performances" as being very much different from a "happening" (or any other art which is based on some type of performance)(Kaprow,1966)

These were first clearly developed by the *Fluxus* group of artists for whom performances were a significant part of their artistic practice, and which they called *events*. The basis for these was usually a set of written instructions. They were referred to as *scores* by analogy to musical compositions. These scores would then be developed into a specific act or event (Artsy, 2017).

In my performance I was influenced by the Cy Twombly paintings, more specifically the peony series. In these paintings Twombly uses very bright colours and he paints the flowers in such a way that they appear to be dripping with paint. At the same time he included textual references to different poems. This made his paintings more intensely alive. In the performance I tried to copy Cy Twombly's painting in a live version. I did so by covering the flowers with paint at the ends (Plate 8 and 9). This created quite a surprise effect for the audience who reacted with shock, not at all expecting this kind of finishing touch. By analogy with Twombly's poetic references, I created my own story and poem through my performance.



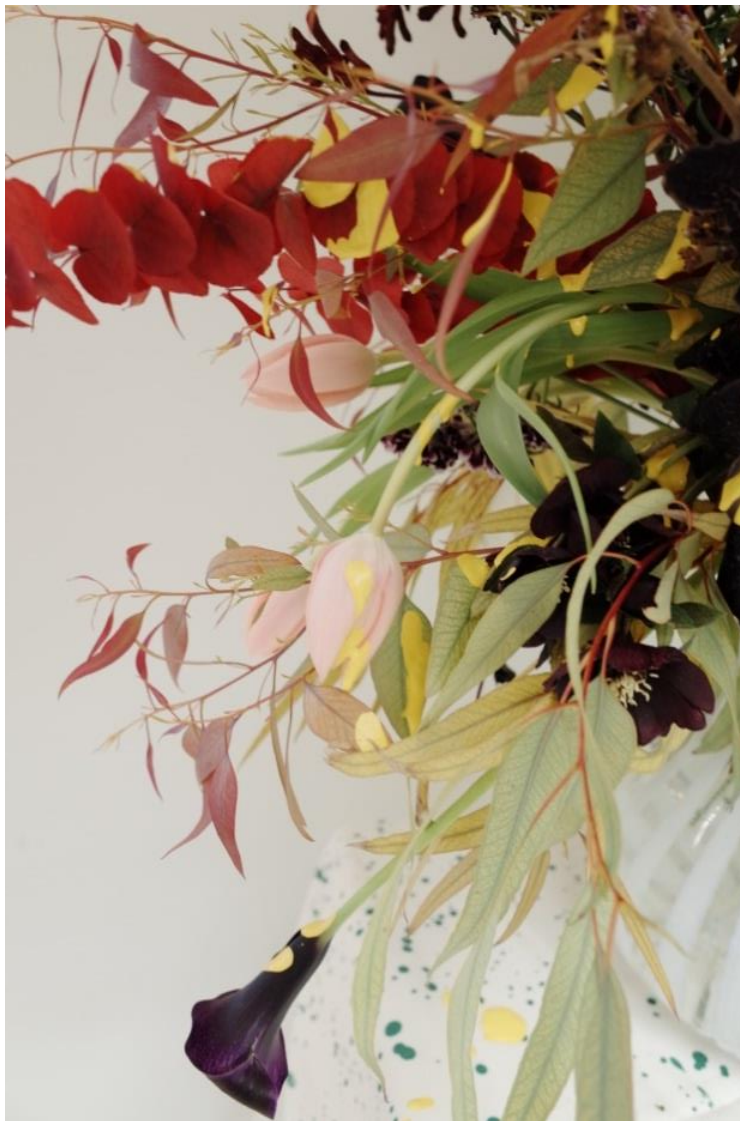


Plate 8 Performance, Writtle University College (author, 2017).



Plate 9 Performance, Writtle University College (author, 2017).

I felt this was a real artistic performance using flowers as material, but I believed it would not be enough for my final exhibition. It felt only like a first step, a flower demonstration from a florist designer rather than a work of art per se. Earlier I mentioned in the definition of art chapter, that Dickie explained that the “expression of emotion” is what distinguishes “craft” from “art”. I felt that the emotion my performance provoked in the observers was

not the same emotion they might feel through looking at a work of art.

I did not have a clear advance idea of the outcome of my performance and how the end result would actually look. In this way my performance was similar to what is a typical element of the so-called Fluxus movement: the use of chance. Fluxus art tries to involve the viewer in the final outcome. The final outcome of a Fluxus piece depends highly on coincidence or chance (The Art Story, 2017<sup>2</sup>). The Fluxus movement was typical of the 50-60's era, in which artists wanted to dismiss and mock anything that would refer to "high art" and bring back the art to the masses. Like the Futurists and Dadaists before them, Fluxus artists tried to go against the museums and the authority they represented in the art world. Museums had a strong influence in determining what art was and what not. Fluxus artists did not accept this influence and they were convinced that level of education (in art or just in general) was not essential for experiencing art well. Therefore they aimed at making art available to the general public be it as artists or consumers.

I felt my development from florist to artist had just started and it would require additional development. I would need to further explore different art forms and see more and more exhibitions. This would allow me to become inspired by how artists use flowers and other live materials in their art.

As a final step, I chose the concept of the so-called "Four Gentlemen". This is a very famous traditional Asian theme in Korea, China and Japan (Korean Culture and Information Service, 2014). Since this is not the case in the UK, I decided I could introduce this – for me – famous idea. I had first encountered it in elementary school as part of a traditional Korean education. Then, as a teenager I participated in several

painting competitions about the Four Gentlemen in different cities. Working on the theme again would bring back all these childhood memories.

To represent the Four Gentlemen, I decided to use wood block printing. And I used both the prints created and the blocks in my final piece. This use of negative space is typical in East Asian art. I did not use plants which were traditionally represented in the Four Gentleman. However, I choose plants which are seasonal and more fit for the purpose of my exhibition: Iris, Viburnum, Japanese maple and bamboo The different flowers, plants and branches I used all came from Writtle University College garden. I specifically chose to use this found, natural material and not to buy things in a flower market. In this way I am emphasize the natural character of my work. All natural materials are different and never look the same. It allowed me to look for a very specific shape of flower and plant that fitted perfectly for my exhibition. This would not be possible in a flower market, where the flowers are already pre-prepared, the same as the plants and branches. Instead I took my scissors and I went to the college garden to look for those specific flowers or plants that would be a perfect representation of the Four Gentlemen. When exploring a garden I get a better feeling of nature and how the different flowers are growing which I can then integrate into my work. I looked at different shapes, ways of growing, colour and their long-lasting potential. This was important to consider since all the natural materials would have to remain fresh during the exhibition period.

I chose to use pastel colours on the walls and floor of my installation. In this way my work would blend perfectly with the environment it was positioned in. Green and pink both refer to colours of both the leaves and the flower itself. The colours also allowed me to clearly

define my exhibition space, and separate it from the other parts against the white covered walls. Painting the space in different colours is a recent Western practice.

I made four different arrangements representing the four seasons and my respect for nature. This is a reflection of the Asian background and tradition, which strongly cares about nature.

Each wood cut print was echoed in my own flower arrangement, which I tried to form in the same direction (either vertical or horizontal) in order to make a coherent composition.

My exhibition tried to reflect the mind of the scholar who originally created the Four Gentlemen and to combine it with the formal elements of Asian art: lines, space and soul/mind.

I used a pin holder to arrange the flowers, which is a traditional tool in Asian floral designs such as Ikebana. This avoids making use of chemical materials (like floral foams) and the helps in holding the branches and flowers straight, accentuating the straight lines of the composition

I was very satisfied with the result because it was so different to my usual work. I was not just focusing on the visual aspect of the design, but tried to include the Asian elements, my own personal experience and a more nature-oriented concept. It was a representation of my Korean origin and background, combined with my floristry skills. I was looking for something innovative by broadening the concept of floristry as I had learned it. For this I used materials which were different from the traditional representation of the Four Gentlemen and by using wood cutting and print making, I gave my own individual

interpretation of the traditional Asian work. The Four Gentlemen is a theme usually represented in painting. I, however, chose different materials and forms and as such I made my own contemporary version, mixing traditional eastern painting with more western concepts of art, though all materials used in my installation are of natural origin such as wood block, paper, ceramic, flowers and plants. In this way I followed the original meaning of the Four Gentlemen, which represent nature and its different seasons.

Western and Asian mind sets are very different. Having grown up in Korea and then studied and worked in UK allowed me to represent the Four Gentlemen in a very personal way. Through experimenting and a lot of trial and error, I tried to develop myself.

The first season in the exhibition is spring and is traditionally represented by plum blossoms in a Four Gentlemen painting. I have cut the plum blossoms in a wooden block and also produced the same as a paper print in black ink. The flower I used, however, is an Iris which is a perfect representation of the blossoming of nature during spring time. (Plate 10). Some flowers are blooming others just have buds. I arranged the flowers in the pin as if they were looking to grow in their natural way in a garden. In this way it seemed that I had dug the flowers from a garden and put them directly into my exhibition.



Plate 10 Four Gentlemen "Spring", Writtle University College (author, 2017).

Summer is generally represented in the Four Gentlemen by the orchid. I have used Viburnum (see Plate 11). Their light green leaves and white flower perfectly summon up the early summer. When I was looking for the branches to use in the exhibition I chose those branches that were pointing in a horizontal direction in the same way as the orchid paper print representation above. In this way both the paper and natural representations were linked together and placed centrally in the exhibition to powerful effect.



Plate 11 Four Gentlemen 'Summer', Writtle University College (author, 2017).

The Four Gentleman traditionally employs the chrysanthemum to represent the autumn. I have used the Japanese maple (Plate 12). The changing of the maple leaves from green



to red creates a very autumnal feeling in Asian culture. During autumn fruit, berries and grains ripen. The maple seeds are a reflection of this typical autumn seasonal activity. I trimmed the green leaves to better show the line of the plant. This created a negative space which is typical of Korean art. When I learned about the Four Gentlemen painting in school the teachers always explained the importance of negative space and how it is better to avoid filling the space too much. This is similar to Ikebana flower design for which negative space is an essential element in the design.



Plate 12 Four Gentlemen “Autumn” , Writtle University College (author, 2017).

Finally, bamboo is the traditional signifier of winter in the Four Gentlemen. In the exhibition I did use this as well (Plate 13). I considered using pine but this is not readily available in the college garden, so I opted for the bamboo. This is the only time that I used the same plant as the original Four Gentlemen paintings.

The edges of the exhibition space were accentuated with real moss. This created a more lively effect by bringing additional natural material into the exhibition space. Most of the flowers will die within a week but the wood cuttings and paper prints will last, if not forever, then substantially longer. Therefore they accentuate the difference between natural materials and artistic representation. This shows both my Korean background and my experience as florist, bringing together western and eastern tradition (Plate 14).

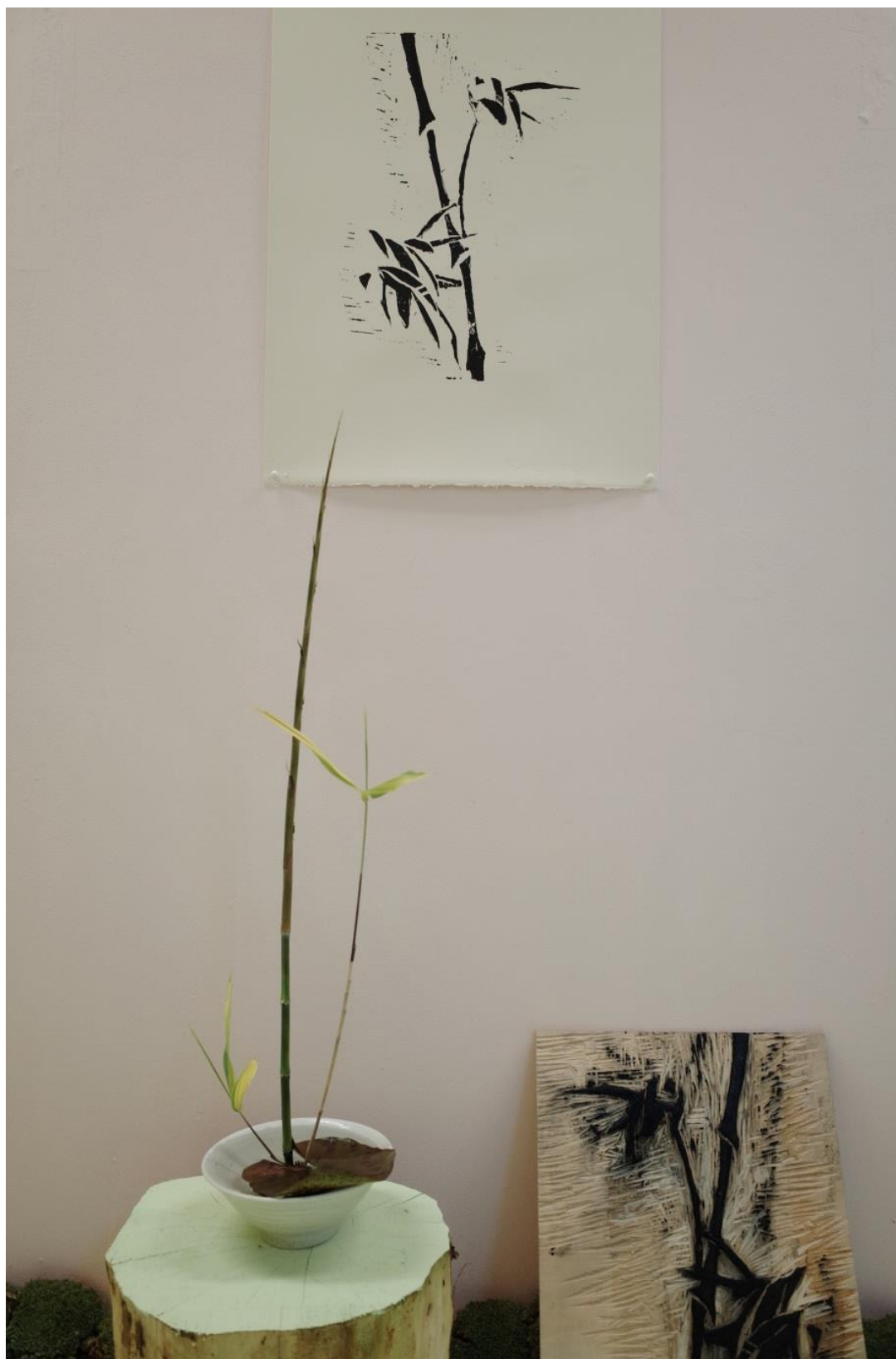


Plate 13 Four Gentlemen "Winter", Writtle University College (author, 2017).



Plate 14 Four Gentlemen, Writtle University College (author, 2017).

## 5. Discussion

As detailed in the methods sections, I did research into both floristry and art, and how they are defined.

I carried out interviews with two experts, bringing two different perspectives:

- Willem de Rooij: an artist who regularly uses flower material in his art work;
- Rebecca Louise Law: a florist who developed herself as installation artist making flower sculptures.

In this way I was able to get expert views from both the floristry and artistic perspective.

In my *Four Gentlemen* exhibition I tried to further develop my personal floristry knowledge into a more artistic conceptual way. I attended several art exhibitions which integrated flower materials into their displays or explored the boundaries between floristry and art. These visits helped to build up my personal expertise and developed my views on the relationship between art and floristry and how they influence each other. I will discuss what I learned during this process as both florist and artist.

### 5.1 Art versus Floristry

Willem de Rooij was not very interested in the question whether art is different from floristry. "It is not my role to define where my work differs from the work of florists," he states clearly. Using flowers as material for his work is just the same as using any other material like textile, film, and photographs. In the same way as he collaborates with

photographers, designers, architects and other experts, he enjoys the cooperation with florists. He is very inspired by working closely with them, and feels that it enriches his work and development as an artist.

Rebecca Louise Law clearly defines herself on her website as an “installation artist specializing in artworks using natural materials”. In her view this is clearly opposed to a florist, who she considers to be “a person who arranges and sells cut flowers”. Florists use flowers for temporary decoration, and they aim at keeping them fresh as long as possible, maximizing profits at the same time. “The artworks are most often made to meet the aesthetic needs of the patron, rather than created for an individual artistic concept.” This is completely opposed to the work of an artist, who is more interested in the human relationship with her flower material. Even if their art is commissioned or sold the artist is not limited by this.

Both artists seem to agree that art is different from floristry in the emotions it is able to generate in the observer. As discussed in the literature review, according to Collingwood, this is what makes art different from a craft like floristry.

My exhibition of the *Four Gentlemen* taught me both how I could combine art and floristry and how they are different. The exhibition as such had less and less connection with floristry. It did not focus just on flowers but on art (wood cutting, paper printing) and I was less and less focused on floristry and its techniques. In this way I developed myself more as an artist rather than a florist. I used different artistic techniques such as wood cutting, paper print and painting. I also made a connection with the East Asia art through reference to the *Four Gentlemen*.

## 5.2 Flowers as material

Flowers are a very common material for Willem de Rooij, and he uses them like any other materials in his art. “Having grown up in the Netherlands I had a particular relationship with flowers,” he said. In his country, flowers are easily and widely available and very cheap. At the same time flowers constitutes a material with a strong and intense cultural connotation. Through the use of different flowers he learned about the different cultural economies of flowers in other cultural spheres.

During his exhibitions, he works with local florists, who regularly refresh the flower material. Each time a flower work is installed and renewed it looks slightly different. These small differences, which are a result of keeping the flower material fresh, constitute an important aspect of his work and are part of its conceptual foundation.

Rebecca Louise Law’s installation art aims at going beyond the freshness of flowers. She has great respect for flowers as material. “Never expect to control nature. You need to be open to learn something new every day”.

Her installation art aims to be long lasting and not just a temporary flower composition. This is a major challenge for her. “My installations are made using the process of preservation. I experiment with the longevity of the flower as a sculptural material.” By taking away the water, she is left with the skeleton of flowers, which has been dried. This carries her work beyond freshness and changes the value of her work.

The flower material I used in my exhibition was fresh material only. I used my floristry knowledge and skills to keep them as long-lasting as possible. Therefore I changed the flowers three times during the exhibition period. I used my knowledge as a florist to select



only those flowers which I knew were longer lasting. It also facilitated the care of the flowers since I had the expert knowledge to do so. As a result this exhibition was very much related to floristry since it was highly focused on keeping the freshness of its material.

In the *Four Gentlemen* each season is represented by a different plant. It was not possible to use exactly the same plants or flowers as in the original painting since some natural material was seasonal and therefore not readily available during the time of the exhibition. When looking for suitable plants in the college garden I was considering the seasonality of the different plants and their long lasting capacity. I was also looking for a particular specimen of plants that could be representative for each specific season. The plants identity and character should have relevant references to the different seasons. For this my knowledge as a graduated florist was necessary and beneficial.

### **5.3 Floristry background**

The two interviewees clearly have different backgrounds in floristry: Rebecca Louise Law is a trained and skilled florist, whereas Willem de Rooij has no floristry background or knowledge.

De Rooij has never studied floristry and has no experience or education in flower design. He therefore makes use of experts with better knowledge in the field. He very much enjoys this exchange with specialists: “For an artist the exchange with specialists in all sorts of fields is exciting and enriching for both parties involved”.

The understanding of flowers as material and the necessary respect for working with nature is most important for Rebecca Louise Law. With this necessary respect for the natural material, a background in floristry is of lesser importance for her. This necessary respect could compensate for a possible lack of floristry background. This is also reflected in the recruitment of the people she is working with: she selects her collaborators based on their patience and passion. A floristry education or training is not essential.

When selecting the flowers for my exhibition, I was very well aware of which flowers to use because of my floristry expert knowledge. I know which flowers are blooming in which season. I had already learned East Asia flower arrangement techniques such as Ikebana and this turned out to be very useful for my exhibition. I know how to cut, angle and present the flowers. My floristry skills were also essential when treating the moss.

## 6. Conclusion

This dissertation investigated both floristry and art and how they relate to each other. This was done both in theory and in practice through research of different floristry and arts studies and establishing my personal exhibition. To come to an adequate definition of art, I carried out research into both Western and East Asian concepts of art. I did likewise for floristry, looking at it from both UK and Korean perspectives.

Establishing an adequate definition for art was not easy. Art is constantly evolving, and what is considered art today can differ tomorrow. Our idea of what art is, is always broadening. By contrast, floristry evolves at a slower rate due to more conservative expectations and commercial constraints. The concept of East Asian art has not been defined as clearly as the western art concept. Therefore I studied more closely its culture and historical background. I learned from researching East Asian art that a wider approach is taken on what is defined as artistic; it is not solely about painting or representation. It includes poetry, calligraphy and the cultural mind set as well. By taking a wider approach both art and floristry are able to influence each other.

The artist Rebecca Louise Law works with flowers in her installation art. However, she is not just using her skills as a florist to keep her flower installations fresh. By focusing on the essence of the flower material and going beyond the freshness of flowers, she is creating art and no longer flower bouquets. It is therefore interesting that the artist Willem de Rooij – who has no floristry skills at all – is exactly the opposite of this: he is only interested in working with fresh flowers. During his exhibitions he makes a special effort to maintain the freshness of his flower materials. Keeping flowers fresh and renewing them

regularly during the exhibition means that he can recreate and renew his work each time. In this way he creates different works of art during one exhibition. It is interesting that both experts, each with their own background, have interests which are opposite to their background: the artist wants to create new and fresh and the florist is interested in creating something long lasting beyond the usual freshness of a flower composition. However, both have a high respect for nature and flowers as material for their art, be it as part of an installation for eternity or as part of an exhibition to keep it fresh and new. In both cases, they are behaving as any florist would who has the same respect for the materials they are using.

Nowadays art is approached with a broader view which includes other forms of aesthetic expression. An artist who includes flowers in their work creates art because they are an artist. Artists using flowers as material are not florists, but continue to be artists. Also nowadays commercial floristry can be approached with a broader view – but any form of aesthetic expression cannot be considered as floristry because of the rules and practices dictated by traditional floristry.

Artists who are using fresh flower material are not concerned with floristry theories and techniques. They view flowers as they would any other material to create their art which they apply in a way they consider most appropriate.

Rebecca Louise Law does not view herself as a florist, but as an installation artist using natural material. Willem de Rooij gets a lot of joy in working with floristry experts. However both of them agree that it is not necessary to have any flower skills in order to work with flowers in art. A passion for flowers together with respect for nature is more essential than

specific floristry skills. The personality and drive of the artist can compensate largely for the lack of such skills.

This opens up opportunities for floristry to expand its horizon and offers more possibilities, too, for florists to apply their skills. On the other hand artists working with flowers could be self-limiting if they are not making full use of floristry skills.

In my exhibition I tried to open my personal perspective as a florist to something other than just mere floristry skills. I was inspired by different art forms and tried to integrate the research I did on Western and contemporary art. By keeping my own background, both as a Korean and as a florist, I constructed an exhibition which integrated both my background and artistic perspective.

It is important to reflect on the boundaries and differences between floristry and art. My exhibition was an eye-opening experience for me since I went beyond the application of my usual floristry skills. I felt both more free and more creative in constructing the exhibition in a way that seemed appropriate to me. I was much less concerned about applying correct floristry skills.

My exhibition was not just another floristry installation. By focusing on what I wanted to express and avoiding specific floristry categories I developed the exhibition in my own personal way. Through this personal expression and the emotion it evoked in the visitor, my exhibition started to distinguish itself from the handcraft which floristry usually is and it became art. This exhibition was therefore very different from the one I made during my graduation as a florist. During that time I was focused only on floristry techniques, theories and skills and was only able to be creative as long as I remained within the

boundaries of such floristry techniques and as such my creativity was limited.

In conclusion, it is evident that there are no clearly defined boundaries between art and floristry. Florists are under constant influence of art. This becomes apparent in the different flower competitions where florists are very creative in their designs. However, their designs are always done perfectly according to the standard floristry techniques. In this way florists are not artists because they are limited by strictly defined rules and practices.

Artists working with flowers and natural materials are not florists. They remain artists because they are not concerned about and limited by any standard floristry technique. Florists can become artists if they go beyond the traditional techniques that define floristry as a handcraft. Therefore as soon as they are able to go beyond just keeping flowers fresh and open up to a wider perspective, they become artists. Floristry has adapted to a more modern approach and endorses the freedom that art gives them in their expression. My experience in the floristry industry has taught me that florists do not always fully apply floristry techniques and constantly work on the boundaries of floristry and art. It is therefore necessary that florists keep exploring and evolving around these boundaries and open up to new ideas and forms. In this way both art and floristry can come closer and keep influencing each other.

## 7. Recommendations for future study

The basis of this project was both practical and theoretical. The interviews with two artists using natural materials provided necessary expert views on the subject matter. The interviewees were selected based on their experience working at the boundaries of floristry and art.

More expert interviews could have been undertaken with either florists and/or artists who are not necessarily working on the edge of both disciplines. A pure floristry view could have contributed in the same way by sharing that point of view, be it art or floristry.

I visited many different exhibitions in both the UK and abroad which were relevant for the purpose of my study. However, a different selection of the exhibitions, or even a larger number of visits, could bring new perspectives and result in appreciating different approaches from different artists.

Only a limited number of pure floristry experts were involved in the research of this project. Having input on a wider scale from experts with a floristry background is recommended.

The interviews were conducted by e-mail. A face-to-face approach could have provided a different result. It would have allowed interviewees to explain their answers to the different interview questions more deeply or triggered additional questions that would further contribute to the research. Body language or any other soft indicators might have provided greater understanding of the responses and if further exploration was required.

The exhibition was built up around a very specific tradition from Asian traditional art. Research on this Asian tradition, and the *Four Gentlemen* in particular, was not widely

available as a resource. Resources in English are sometimes different from Asian or Korean studies in their explanations. This did not facilitate a full research study. Therefore a more in depth study of Korean resources regarding art history could result in a more adequate definition of Asian art. In particular the translation of Korean resources is challenging to make sure that appropriate understanding of the subject matter is reached. Being Korean myself, I probably relied too much on common understandings of Korean or Asian traditions, which are not necessarily clear in the same way to a western mind-set.

My personal practice was based on one single exhibition. Gaining more experience in setting up exhibitions or adding additional personal practice would be useful to elaborate further.

It has not been easy to find relevant resources for the dissertation topic in the UK. In Korea more research studies are more widely available due to the existence of a floristry as a post-graduate level, such as a Master's degree. However, investigating similar resources in other countries, either in Europe, Asia or any other part of the world could result in integrating different views and theories.



## 8. References

Adamson, G. (2009) *The Craft Reader*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

Art Institute of Chicago (2017) *Peony Blossom Paintings* [www document].

[www.artic.edu/aic/collections/exhibitions/CyTwombly/peony](http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/exhibitions/CyTwombly/peony) (Accessed 5 October 2017)

Artsy (2017) *What is Fluxus?* [www document]. [www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-fluxus-movement-art-museums-galleries](http://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-fluxus-movement-art-museums-galleries) (Accessed 5 October 2017).

Brushmeisters of Brooklyn (2017) *Symbolism in Brush Painting* [www document]

[www.brushmeistersofbrooklyn.net/articles/symbolisminbrushpainti.html](http://www.brushmeistersofbrooklyn.net/articles/symbolisminbrushpainti.html) (Accessed 20 November 2017).

Choi, H. (2003) *A Study on the Comparison between Oriental Painting and European Painting for the Education of Art Appreciation*, Unpublished MA dissertation, Seoul: Ewha Womens University.

Cottrell, S. (2014) *Dissertations and Project Reports : a Step By Step Guide*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Democratic Underground (2015) *Ah! The Peonies! Cy Twombly's Scattered Blossoms* [www document]. [www.democraticunderground.com/10026424972](http://www.democraticunderground.com/10026424972) (Accessed 9 October 2017).

Gray, C. (2004) *Visualizing Research : a Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Hall, F. (2016) *Doing the Flowers: an Examination of Materiality, Emotion and Identity within Contemporary British Floristry*. Unpublished MA dissertation London: RCA/V&A History of Design programme.

Hong, S. (2008) *A Theoretical Review on Floral Design in the Installation Art*. Unpublished MA dissertation: Hongik University.

Kaprow, A. (1966) *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*. New York: Harry N Abrams Inc.

Kim, H. (1994) *A Study on the Thoughtful Background and the Historical Development of*

*the painting of the Four-Gentleman-Plants in Korea*, Unpublished MA dissertation, Seoul: Sookmyung Women's University.

Korean Culture and Information Service (2015) *Guide to Korean Culture: Korea's Cultural Heritage*. Seoul: Gil Japi Media.

Lee, S. (2011) *Four Gentlemen*. Seoul: Dolbegae.

Mousse Magazine (2017) *Willem de Rooij "Entitled" at Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main* [www document]. [www.moussemagazine.it/willem-de-rooij-entitled-museum-fur-moderne-kunst-frankfurt-main](http://www.moussemagazine.it/willem-de-rooij-entitled-museum-fur-moderne-kunst-frankfurt-main) (Accessed 1 October 2017).

Naver (2017<sup>1</sup>) *Oriental Art* [www document].

[www.terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=1127642&cid=40942&categoryId=32856](http://www.terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=1127642&cid=40942&categoryId=32856)

(Accessed 10 November 2017).

Naver (2017<sup>2</sup>) *Four Gentleman* [www document].

[www.terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=1552658&cid=46702&categoryId=46739](http://www.terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=1552658&cid=46702&categoryId=46739)

(Accessed 5 July 2017).

Owen, L. (2014) *The Professional Florists' Manual*. London: British Florist Association.

Ra, M. (2010) *A Study on the development of the floral design education model based on a transdisciplinary view*. Unpublished MA dissertation Seoul: Ewha Womans University.

Said, E. (2003) *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.

Shanghai Biennale (2016) *Willem De Rooij* [www document].

[www.shanghaibiennale.org/en/artist/detail/62/11.html](http://www.shanghaibiennale.org/en/artist/detail/62/11.html) (Accessed 1 October 2017).

Shephard, S. (2010) *The Surprising Life of Constance Spry*. London: Macmillan.

Smithsonian Gardens (2017) *Orchids: The Four Gentlemen* [www document]

[www.gardens.si.edu/come-learn/docs/Template\\_Orchids\\_The%20Four%20Gentlemen.pdf](http://www.gardens.si.edu/come-learn/docs/Template_Orchids_The%20Four%20Gentlemen.pdf)

(Accessed 30 October 2017).

Song, H. (2005) *Study on Abstraction in Traditional Oriental Painting*. Unpublished MA dissertation, Gwangju: Chosun University.

Stevenson, A. (2010) *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tate (2017<sup>1</sup>) *Conceptual Art* [www document]. [www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/conceptual-art](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/conceptual-art) (Accessed 1 September 2017).

Tate (2017<sup>2</sup>) *Marcel Duchamp Fountain* [www document]  
[www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573) (Accessed 15 November 2017).

The Art Story (2017<sup>1</sup>) *Conceptual Art* [www document] [www.theartstory.org/movement-conceptual-art.htm](http://www.theartstory.org/movement-conceptual-art.htm) (Accessed 10 October 2017).

The Art Story (2017<sup>2</sup>) *Fluxus* [www document]. [www.theartstory.org/movement-fluxus.htm](http://www.theartstory.org/movement-fluxus.htm) (Accessed 25 November).

The Guardian (2017) *Dyson Resigns Seat at Design Museum* [www document].  
[www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/sep/28/arts.artsnews](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/sep/28/arts.artsnews) (Accessed 10 October).

Wall Paper (2017) *Flower power: Rebecca Louise Law lends her green-fingered talents to Now Gallery* [www document]. [www.wallpaper.com/art/rebecca-louise-law-the-iris-](http://www.wallpaper.com/art/rebecca-louise-law-the-iris-)

installation-now-gallery (Accessed 12 December).

Warburton, N. (2003) *The Art Question* .New York: Routledge.

Woodward, C. (2017) *Rebecca Louise Law Life in Death*. London: Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

## Appendices

Appendix i. Rebecca Louise Law Questions and verbatim replies.

1. On your website you introduce yourself as “installation artist specializing in artworks using natural materials”. How do you see the difference between your work as artist and that of a florist? Is there a big difference in the final work?

A florist is a person who arranges and sells cut flowers. They use natural materials for temporary decorative art and are experts at keeping the flower alive for as long as possible, whilst also making the most profit possible. The materials that are used in floristry are rarely intended to last as long term sculptures and the artworks are most often made to meet the aesthetic needs of the patron rather than created for an individual artistic concept.

I create installations with natural materials, my intention is to discover more about the human relationship with nature.

2. Do you believe artists working with natural materials and flowers in particular, need floristry education to work adequately? Why?

No, but I do think that it is important to respect and understand the material you are working with.

3. As a florist we are always considering the freshness of the flowers used and how they are long lasting. Your designs are mainly hanging designs and therefore lacking in necessary basis to water the flowers. Is this an issue? Is this essential element when creating your flower sculptures?

My installations are made using the process of preservation. I experiment with the longevity of the flower as a sculptural material. Taking away water, leaves the skeleton of the flower and a material of value beyond fresh.

4. When using staff to help create your installations, do you select your people based on their floristry skills? If so, why is this important?

No, my staff are rarely florists. I employ people based on their patience and passion.

5. In your view, what is essential for an artist using natural material? What is most important?

Never expect to control nature. You need to be open to learn something new everyday.



Appendix ii. Willem de Rooij Questions and verbatim replies.

1. You regularly work with flowers to make your art sculptures. How do you see your artistic work being different from floristry? What makes your compositions art and not floristry design? How do you see difference?

It is not my role to define where my work defers from the work of florists. I see flowers as material, like any other material I work with (textile, film, photographs, appropriated materials), and florists like all other specialists I consult in my work (cameramen, graphic designers, architects). In general appropriation and collaboration for thematic strands through all my work.

2. How has working with flowers influenced your work as an artist? Did it change your work? If so, in what way?

Having grown up in the Netherlands I had a particular relationship with flowers: it was a culturally intensely connotated material, that was at the same time cheap and available for almost anyone. I learned about the different cultural economies of flowers in other cultural spheres.

3. Have you ever studied floristry or flower design techniques? Is it necessary for

artists using flowers to have any floristry skills? Why?

No I never have studied floristry, which is exactly the reason why I work with specialists in the field: florists. For an artists, the exchange with specialists in all sorts of fields is exciting and enriching for both parties involved.

4. In your exhibition “entitled” you had integrated some flower compositions. They were provided by a local florist. Why did you choose this method?

When an existing flower work is to be installed at a museum the only way to get it done is to work with a local florist. One of the aspects I like about working with flowers in that way is that each time a flower work of mine is installed, it looks slightly different. These differences are part of the work, and its conceptual foundation.

5. In Bouquet IV not all flowers were natural but representations in black and white photography. Do you consider these as floral art or photography or some other art form?

Bouquet IV exists of a flower arrangement and a b/w rendering of that same arrangement. The central question that lay at the foundation of this work was: which flowers look middle-grey when depicted in b/w. The flowers that constitute Bouquet IV were selected so that, when depicted in B/W, they would look like a grey mass, without extremes in the B/W spectrum, so no deep black or bright white. In that sense, this piece is a reflection on the notion of ‘the middle’, or mainstream.