

# **Rethinking Traditional Arts**

## ***Ikebana* in Japan's Postwar Recovery**

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Public Lecture organised by IKOS at the University of Oslo, Monday 6 May 2013

16:15-18:00, Auditorium 3, Helga Engshus

Few societies take as much pride as the Japanese in a reputation for a refined aesthetic in appreciating and cultivating nature. *Ikebana*, a discipline focused on the manipulation of flowers and plant material for decorative and artistic purpose, is a major aspect of this reputation. With over ten million students at its peak in the 1960s, and more than three thousand officially registered schools, *ikebana* was (and remains) one of the nation's largest cultural industries. Like nearly all of Japan's traditional arts, *ikebana* began as a wholly male pursuit, an arena to demonstrate wealth and cultural capital. Early twentieth century educational reforms, highly conscious of the Western gaze, made *ikebana* part of girls' school curriculum, resulting in a complete reversal of the gender ratio. While men continued to dominate the positions of *ikebana* headmasters and senior teachers, opportunities for women's labor and leisure increased steadily, spiking in the postwar period. This presentation examines growth, competition, and transformation among the three leading schools of *ikebana*. It interrogates how these organizations shifted flexibly in response to emerging trends in art, market competition and women's changing lifestyles.

**Nancy Stalker** is Associate Professor in the Departments of Asian Studies and History at the University of Texas at Austin. She specializes in Japanese 20th century cultural history and has published books and articles on topics such as popular religion, traditional arts and cuisine. Professor Stalker is guest professor at IKOS during May 2013 as part of the exchange program between UiO and UT Austin.