



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



## The cultural memory inside a bouquet

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2026, 19(01), 258-262

Publication history: Received on 24 February 2026; revised on 04 April 2026; accepted on 06 April 2026

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2026.19.1.0705>

### Abstract

This article examines how seemingly ordinary flowers can serve as carriers of much deeper meanings — cultural, emotional, and social. Focusing on the intersection of cultural studies, psychology, and floristic practice, the author analyzes how floral arrangements not only decorate space, but also "preserve" the memory of events, feelings, and relationships.

The study is based on a qualitative analysis of scientific sources and practical examples of the use of flowers in different cultural contexts. Particular attention is paid to the symbolic meanings of flowers, their role in rituals, and their ability to evoke emotional reactions.

The author shows that a bouquet can be considered a kind of memory carrier — an object that simultaneously activates the personal memories of an individual and the collective representations of society. Flowers are not only an aesthetic element, but also an effective means of nonverbal communication, helping to convey complex feelings without words.

Thus, floristry appears as a much broader phenomenon than decorative practice — it is part of a cultural process associated with the preservation of memory and the formation of social ties.

**Keywords:** Cultural Memory; Floristry; Symbolism; Nonverbal Communication; Rituals; Emotions

### 1 Introduction

Cultural memory is one of the key mechanisms by which people preserve and transmit their experience, cultural values, and worldviews. It manifests itself not only in texts or historical narratives, but also in material objects capable of accumulating meaning.

One such object is flowers. Their universality combines aesthetic appeal with deep symbolic meaning. In different cultures, they can mean love, memory, grief, or celebration - and these meanings are often read without words.

Modern theories of cultural memory emphasize the role of symbols as carriers of collective identity. In this context, floral arrangements can be considered as "living" forms of memory, in which part of the natural environment is combined with culturally formed meanings [1,2].

The article aims to understand the role of flowers and ornamental plants as a tool for preserving cultural memory and their impact on the emotional atmosphere and social interaction.

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## 2 Materials and methods

The study is interdisciplinary in nature and combines:

- A cultural approach to the analysis of symbols;
- Psychological concepts of memory and emotions;
- Practical experience in floristry.

The basis was scientific works on the theory of cultural memory, symbolic anthropology and psychology of emotions, as well as examples of the use of flowers in various socio-cultural contexts.

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the material, which allowed us to identify recurring symbolic motifs and their emotional meaning.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Flowers as carriers of collective memory

Flowers function not only as aesthetic objects, but also as symbolic carriers of cultural meanings that are reproduced in the collective memory of society. Their semantics are formed historically — through traditions, religious practices, art and social rituals [1,2].

For example, the symbolism of flowers in European culture was largely entrenched in the Victorian era, when the "language of flowers" (floriography) emerged. At the same time, in different cultures, the same flowers can have different meanings, which emphasizes the contextuality of cultural memory [Table 1].

Importantly, these meanings do not require constant explanation — they are "built" into cultural experience. Thus, a bouquet becomes a kind of code that activates collective representations, even if a person cannot rationally explain why he perceives it in this way [3].

In addition, flowers can act as material "anchors of memory": they anchor memories of events (such as a wedding or funeral) that, over time, become integrated into a broader cultural narrative.

**Table 1** The meaning of flowers in the cultures of different countries

Flower	Main symbolic meaning	Cultural context / variations in meaning
Rose	Love, passion	Europe — romantic love; Middle East — beauty and spirituality
Lily	Purity, mourning	Europe — funeral symbolism; Asia — renewal and life
Chrysanthemum	Memory, respect	Japan — imperial symbol; Europe — mourning
Tulip	Love, harmony	Turkey — symbol of paradise; Europe — spring and renewal
Sunflower	Loyalty, life energy	Ukrainian context — a symbol of home and stability
Orchid	Exquisite, rarity	China — elegance and moral purity
Carnation	Respect, memory	Post-Soviet space — military memory
Goldenrod	Resilience, natural strength, national identity	US — symbol of natural heritage; associated with American landscape and endurance

### 3.2 Ritual function of flowers

Flowers are an integral element of rites of passage that structure a person's life experience [4,5]. In such rituals, they perform several functions:

- Symbolic (denoting an event - birth, marriage, death);

- Emotional-regulatory (alleviating stress or enhancing joy);
- Social (creating a sense of community and belonging).

In funeral practices, flowers perform the function of honoring memory and at the same time helping to survive loss through symbolic action. In wedding ceremonies, on the contrary, they personify the beginning of a new stage and life transformation.

Interestingly, even in today's individualized society, ritual patterns associated with the use of flowers and plants remain quite stable. People may change the style of compositions, but the general symbolic structures (for example, "flowers = a sign of respect/love") remain unchanged[4].

This suggests that flowers perform a cultural "stabilization" function — they help maintain the continuity of tradition even in the face of social change.

### **3.3 Emotional activation and neuropsychological mechanisms**

The emotional impact of flowers has not only a cultural, but also a neuropsychological basis. The perception of flower arrangements activates several key brain systems:

- The visual cortex (occipital lobe) — processing color, shape, and structure;
- The amygdala — rapid emotional assessment (pleasure/unpleasantness);
- The hippocampus — activation of memories and associative memory;
- The prefrontal cortex — interpretation of meaning and social context;
- The reward system (in particular, the nucleus accumbens) — a feeling of pleasure.

When a person sees a bouquet, a complex process occurs: first, visual characteristics (color, shape) are processed at the sensory level, after which an emotional assessment is triggered. If the object is associated with a previous experience (for example, a bouquet received at an important event), the hippocampus activates the corresponding memories [7].

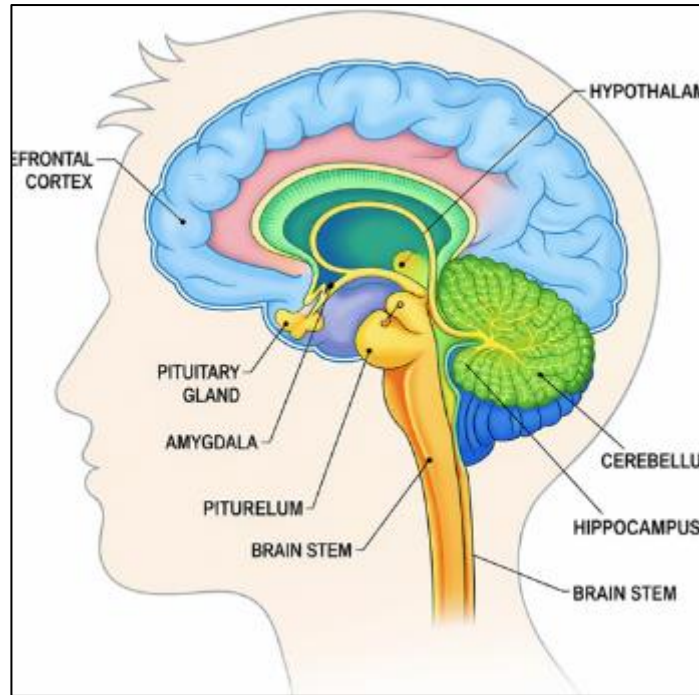
This explains why flowers can cause strong, sometimes unexpected emotional reactions - from joy to nostalgia or sadness.

In addition, studies show that natural objects (including flowers, vegetation) reduce stress levels and contribute to emotional regulation. This is due to evolutionary mechanisms: a person tends to respond positively to natural stimuli that signal a safe environment [8].

Thus, flowers act simultaneously on two levels:

- Biological (through the work of the brain);
- Cultural (through symbolic meanings).

It is the combination of these levels that makes them a particularly powerful emotional trigger.



**Figure 1** Parts of the human brain that are activated when interacting with plants

### 3.4 Bouquet as a form of interpersonal communication

A bouquet can be considered as a special form of non-verbal language, where each element of the composition (type of flowers, color, quantity, style) acts as a carrier of meaning [7,8].

The communicative function of flowers is manifested in several aspects:

- Intentionality — the sender lays down a certain message;
- Interpretation — the recipient “reads” this message through cultural experience;
- Contextuality — the meaning changes depending on the situation.

For example, the same bouquet of roses can mean a romantic gesture, an apology or formal respect — depending on the context of interaction. In addition, flowers allow you to convey emotions that are difficult or inconvenient to express in words [9]. This is especially important in situations of social tension or emotional vulnerability (for example, sympathy).

Thus, flower arrangements act as a “soft” communication tool that reduces the risk of conflict and at the same time strengthens the emotional connection between people.

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## 4 Conclusions

The conducted research allows us to consider flowers and plants as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon that combines material form with multi-level symbolic and emotional meanings [8].

- Firstly, flowers act as carriers of cultural memory, which is stored and transmitted through symbolic codes. They ensure the continuity of cultural experience and support collective identity.
- Secondly, their role in rituals demonstrates the ability to structure human experience and give meaning to key life events. Flowers act as an element of stability in conditions of social change.
- Thirdly, the emotional impact of flowers is complex in nature and is based on both cultural associations and neuropsychological mechanisms. This makes them a universal tool for influencing a person's emotional state.
- Fourthly, flower arrangements function as an effective means of non-verbal communication, allowing you to convey complex meanings without using language.

In general, floristry can be considered not only as a decorative practice, but as a form of cultural activity that combines art, communication and national/cultural memory. Prospects for further research are related to the empirical study of the influence of flowers on the psycho-emotional state, as well as to cross-cultural comparisons of the symbolism of flowers in a globalized world.

The present research work does not contain any studies performed on animals or human subjects by any of the authors.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Acknowledgments*

The author acknowledges the contribution of academic literature and interdisciplinary approaches that informed this study. No specific funding, grants, or institutional support were received for this work.

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

The author declares that there are no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest related to this work.

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