

DINAMICA

TAI CHI CHUAN E ARTI ASSOCIATE

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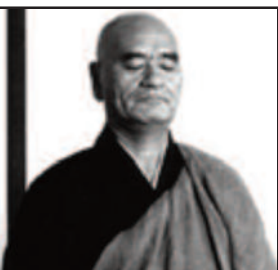
2022



**EDITORIAL**

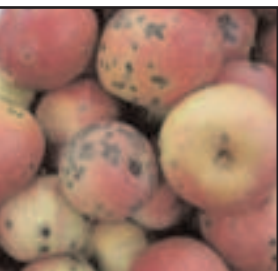
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The Association 'Dinamica Tai Chi Chuan e Arti Associate A.S.D.' was created by people who gathered in order to activate and share their potential through arts and psycho-physical disciplines, specifically Tai Chi Chuan. Alongside Tai Chi Chuan, it deals with other arts and activities, meditation techniques, breathing and Qi Gong, Taoist Yoga (Tao Yin) to name a few. The association is affiliated to the International Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan Association (IYFTCCA©). Its aim is to promote Tai Chi Chuan and to offer the opportunity to learn and practice the traditional Tai Chi Chuan following the method and teachings of Master Yang Jun, the current 5th generation lineage holder of the creator of the Yang style Tai Chi Chuan.



Constancy, patience, determination and humility are fundamental virtues to grow in the way of Tai Chi Chuan. As our teacher Anna Siniscalco explains in the article that opens this first 2022 issue of Dinamica - La Rivista, the fundamental method for beginners to start learning is to repeat, repeat, repeat. This takes patience, perseverance, and determination to practice. But we have all experienced that this mantra, at various levels, is also valid for the more advanced practitioners: each one can discover by himself how much a greater knowledge of the technique and of himself implies the surprising discovery, each time more, of how great is the missing part of the path ahead, of how many other improvements are necessary, of how much more work is needed to progress. From here, the necessary push due to humility. No matter how much each person may feel they are master of their own body, emotions, thoughts, if you do not know and recognize your limits, this becomes the insurmountable limit of your growth. As Zen master Taisen Deshimaru says in Budo, the way of the warrior, that is the set of martial arts of Japanese samurai, "it is not only about competing, but about finding peace and self-control". Because, as Lao Tzu, the noble father of Taoism, explained well several centuries before the common era, "He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened. He who overcomes another is powerful; he who overcomes himself is strong."

Roberto Seghetti

It is hard work: I have to think about what I am doing

by **Anna Siniscalco**

Technical Director of Dinamica Tai Chi Chuan e Arti Associate asd

6th Grade Certified Academy Instructor of the IYFTCCA©

Disciple of GM Yang Jun



Frequently, at the end of the lesson, beginner students tell me that Tai Chi Chuan is tiring, not only because of the physical effort, but because they have to think about what they are doing. That is exactly right, to be present in what you are doing, to develop awareness is tiring. This fatigue, which we can somehow accept as the measure of how disconnected we are, we should use it as a springboard to accept the challenge of a path of study and practice that leads us towards the awakening of our potential, the dormant, the forgotten and, why not, even the unknown.

In the 10 Essentials, the Grand Master Yang Chengfu tells us that it is a question of intention and not of strength. The use of mental activity in the practice of Tai Chi Chuan was well known to the Masters as well as the necessary effort that even a beginner has to make. Following the exhortation in 6 of the 10 Essentials we see how a beginner can apply this principle. A

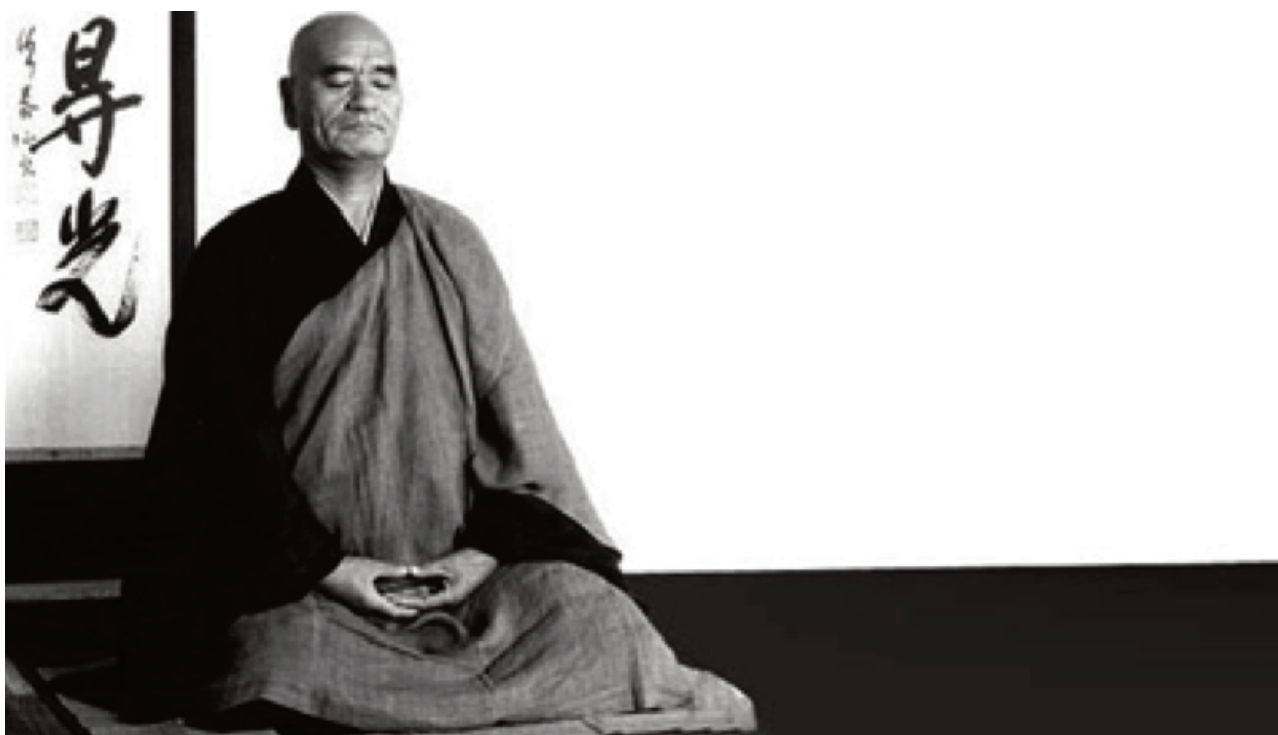
inexperinced practitioner must strive on two aspects, memorising and coordinating movements. To succeed in this, it helps to know the meaning of each gesture and position, or at least to have an idea of it. Knowing the meaning of a position, the purpose of a gesture, helps to direct and maintain attention in what you are doing and thus to develop a first state of awareness. Warning: I am talking about a first state in which the new practitioner has the idea of the action or application of the gesture but is certainly not able to apply it with an opponent. However, this 'idea' of the action is crucial and it is important that it is clear in the mind so that the gesture that is made does not seem empty, lacking energy and meaning, so that a connection is created between the intention and the gesture, between mind and body. And this is only the first step on this issue, precisely that of a beginner. Another aspect is memory. The well-intentioned practitioner after a few lessons surrenders to the evidence: he does not remember. Yet at the end of the previous lesson he seemed to understand everything and to know how to do it again. So what to do? There is only one honest answer: repeat, repeat and repeat. In order to remember the sequences and gain confidence with the movements one must repeat many times, in the presence and guided by a master or teacher, in groups with other practising students and alone. I remember what Grand Master Yang ZhengDuo said during a seminar, perhaps in a moment of pause: 'To learn a Tai Chi Chuan movement you have to repeat it at least 300 times'. It may be an approximate number, but it makes sense that he did not say 3. We could argue about the meaning of 'learning', but not this time. Now let's keep the focus on the point, let's repeat.



He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened

by Roberto Seghetti

Journalist and Editor-in-Chief



Taisen Deshimaru

Lao Tzu, one of the fathers of Taoism, is credited with writing: *"A strategist of ancient times said: 'I dare not be the host; I prefer to be the invited one. I dare not advance an inch; I prefer to retreat a foot. This is what is called: "Walking without a path, rolling up one's sleeves without arms, drawing one's sword without a sword, beating one's hands without an opponent". There is no greater misfortune than to take one's opponent lightly. If I take my opponent lightly, I risk losing my treasures. For when the adversary's weapons meet, he who yields wins."*¹

And again: *"He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened. He who overcomes another is powerful; he who overcomes himself is strong."*²

In various martial arts, both external (e.g. Aikido or Judo, but not only) and internal (e.g. Tai Chi Chuan), it is considered decisive to learn how to 'use' the energy imparted by the opponent in an attack, to divert the action and thus to be able to attack him in turn at his moment of maximum weakness. But in order to use this technique, there is always has an unavoidable prerequisite: self-awareness and a calm mind, which are refined by practising the way, and openness to the full understanding of the other, which is obtained by training skills and sensitivity, alone and with one's fellow practitioners. There cannot be one without the other. The path of growth is only one: psychological and spiritual growth and growth in martial skills are two sides of the same coin, because they hold together the confrontation with oneself, the battle against one's own limits (and one's own demons), and the confrontation with external adversaries.

This is true, as mentioned above, for external martial arts. Zen Master Taisen Deshimaru says: "In Japan, Do means 'the Way'. But how to practise this Way? Through what method can one follow it? Budo is not just a technique, a waza, and even less a sports competition. It includes arts such as Kendo, judo, Aikido and Kyudo, or archery. But also Kanji (the ideogram); bu also means "to interrupt, stop the fight". Because in Budo it is not just about competing, but about finding peace and self-mastery'.³

In Tai Chi Chuan this singular unity of path is even more important, decisive, fundamental. It can be found everywhere in the texts of the classics. For example, Li Yixu, grandson of Wu Yuxiang, founder of the Wu/Hao style, writes in the "Principles concerning the way of executing the concatenation and of fighting": "The ancient masters used to say: "If you can attract the opponent, make him advance and make his strength fall into the void, then four ounces can overcome a thousand pounds". Otherwise, four ounces cannot overcome a thousand pounds. These words have a profound meaning. But since beginners do not understand this principle yet, I will add a few explanations, so that those who have the will to penetrate the secrets of this technique will acquire a good foundation and can progress every day to achieve the desired result. In order to attract the opponent and make his strength fall into the void, so that four ounces win a thousand pounds, one must first know oneself and know the opponent.....".⁴



1 Lao Tzu. Tao Tê Ching, pag. 153. Adelphi editore 1973.

2 Ibidem. Pag. 90

3 Taisen Deshimaru. Lo Zen e le arti marziali. Pag. 17. Se editore 1995.

4 Catherine Despeux. Taiji Quan, tecnica di lunga vita. Pag. 106. Edizioni Mediterranee 2007.

Ugly but tasty

Ugly foods that taste good

by Alberta Tomassini

PhD in Biological Sciences and PhD in Chemical Sciences



The figures are well known and clear. We are all aware that, according to FAO estimates, more than 820 million people in the world suffer from hunger and, according to the various estimates, two to three billions people are in a serious state of malnutrition. Equally evident is the gap between those who do not have enough food to sustain themselves and those who have too much, with consequent waste of food and resources. Indeed, 2 billion adults worldwide, or two out of five adults, are overweight, as are 40 million children under the age of five, and not just in the developed countries.

All these numbers are bound to grow if things remain as they are, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic is jeopardizing the food and nutrition security of even more people.

So I am astonished when I read: 'There are about one billion people who are suffering from hunger in the world, with enough food available to feed twice the world's population'. Sufficient availability?

In short, always according to FAO estimates, the problem arises from the following figures. Worldwide, 3.9 billion tons of food are produced every year; but 1.3 billion tons of food are wasted every year, equal to 4 times the amount of food sufficient to feed 795 million undernourished people in the world!

Looking up in the dictionary, waste means "the act of using something in a careless or unnecessary way, causing it to be lost or destroyed". More specifically, food waste is defined differently depending on the institutions and even in specialized literature, probably due to the complexity of the phenomenon, which touches all points in the agribusiness system: production, processing, storage, transport, distribution and final consumption, with specific methods and causes that differ for each phase.

When talking about food waste, we must therefore distinguish between food losses and food waste. Food loss means the loss of mass or nutritional quality of food originally intended for human consumption; it is usually caused by inefficiencies in the supply chain. Discarded food, more frequently at the point of sale and final consumption, is inserted into the category of "food waste".

Personally I agree with a definition proposed by the Barilla Foundation (BCFN) that distinguishes between: "Food Loss" and "Food Waste". The former occurs before the supply, mainly during sowing, cultivation, harvesting, preparation, storage and processing and the latter takes place during the industrial processing, distribution and final consumption.

Not to mention that, speaking of environmental sustainability, "waste" means a useless and harmful consumption of resources, first to produce and then to dispose of unused goods.

The causes of the waste are multiple and different along the production chain. At the agricultural level they include, for example, an incorrect harvest time, adverse climate conditions, wrong practices to harvest, to which we have to add storage problems. Transportation, processing and packaging can also cause losses due to technical malfunctions or trivial human mistakes.

And how much does it cost? At present, the estimated economic cost of waste is equivalent to about 1000 billion dollars per year. In addition there is a considerable environmental cost estimated by the FAO as 250,000 billion liters of water, 1.4 billion hectares of land and 3.3 billion tons of CO₂ needed to produce food that is not consumed.

In Italy, food waste costs over 15 billion euros, equal to about 1% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product). The food waste generated each year at a pro capita level is equal to 65 kg, of which 27.5 kg are to be attributed to domestic consumption.

Moreover we have to consider the climate damage caused by intensive agriculture (today 90% of human food comes from 120 varieties, and only 12 plant varieties and 5 animal breeds provide more than 70% of all human food!). About 8-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions are associated with unconsumed food (food waste), but there is not a single reference to this in the Paris Climate Agreements (which just mentions 11 references to food waste) (UNEP Food waste index report 2021).

In Italy, not recent data showed that the thrown away fruit and vegetables were worth the



consumption of 73 million cubic metres of water (water footprint), the use of environmental resources were equivalent to 400 million square metres (ecological footprint) and emissions into the atmosphere of more than 8 million kilos of carbon dioxide (carbon footprint) per year! (Barilla 2012).

In the last two years we have all necessarily become mathematical and statistical oriented, but enough with numbers. Let's see what could be done instead.

In Italy, the quality of policies against food waste is high and is reflected in the National Plan for the Prevention of Food Waste and in the innovative Gadda Law, which has taken action to facilitate donations of surplus food, with a 20% increase in donations in the first year of application, according to estimates by Banco Alimentare. (Law no. 166 of 19 August 2016 Norms for the limitation of waste, the conscious use of resources and environmental sustainability).

In addition, in 2018 the Ministry of Agriculture approved 14 projects for a total amount of 700,000 euros, led by public institutions, universities, NGOs and companies. These projects will allow to extend the expiry date of numerous products, to improve the new packaging technologies, to develop apps and digital platforms, to recover food surpluses within the entire supply chain facilitating the distribution of food to the most vulnerable groups of the population (Barilla 2019).

The European legislation deals with this problem as well. The European Union has 53 pieces of legislation dedicated to food waste: among them there are 29 regulatory instruments, 10 directives, 3 decisions, 10 communications and one parliamentary resolution, perhaps not enough.

Fortunately, reducing food waste policy is now on the agenda of all countries and international organizations. In the 2019 FAO report (FAO. 2019. The State of Food and Agriculture 2019. Moving forward on food loss and waste reduction. Rome. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO) the focus on this issue is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12.3 which aims to "halve per capita



Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition – Novembre 2019 - Fonte: National Geographic

food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along the production and the distribution by 2030".

Since everything in the world is interconnected, the goal is closely related to SDG2 (reducing hunger, protecting food security, improving nutrition), to SDG6 (rationalizing water consumption), to SDG 11(sustainable cities and communities), to SDG 13 (climate changes), to SDG 14 (sea resources) and to SDG15 (terrestrial ecosystems, forests, lands and biodiversity). Not to mention SDG1 (eradicating poverty) or SDG8 (sustainable economic growth and labour) or SDG10 (reducing inequalities)

In reading all these acronyms and these initiatives we could suppose that we are fine and safe!

Unfortunately, this is not the case, because if you investigate just a little more, you come across "curious" criteria that should not have any importance in food choices and that instead end up producing a huge waste of "less beautiful" food quantities, even if they are fully eatable.



Near Apartadó, Colombia, activist Tristram Stuart examines bananas too short, long, or curved for the European market. Locals consume some rejected bananas, but growers in the region annually dump millions of tons of edible fruit.

Fonte: National Geographic

Just one example among many: the LIFE-Food.Waste Project. StandUp is a European project co-funded by the European Commission under the Environment and Climate Action Program (LIFE 2014-2020) that started on July 7, 2016 with a three-year duration. Among the objectives we read:

1. Reduction of waste due to the reject of products with aesthetic discrepancies (???);
2. Food surpluses due to non-conformity (???) of the product
- 3 Processed products suitable for human consumption in terms of nutrition and health and hygiene that are discarded in the selection process (quality control) due to the product's non-compliance with the requirements established by the transformation process or by subsequent steps in the supply chain (e.g. large-scale distribution) and disposed as "waste". This item includes products rejected for "aesthetic" reasons (???).

What does it mean? By deeply digging into this matter you always get to the marketing and the related appearance consumerism. This particular type of waste can be traced back to the so-called quality standards, such as adherence to dates, product size, colour, weight, degree of defectiveness, and Brix (a measure for sugar content).

So what? Legislative schizophrenia? Blah blah blah, says Greta Thunberg referring to measures to face with the effects of climate changes.

I also say "Blah blah blah", regarding the measures aimed at promoting the fresh food sustainable marketing and fighting against the food waste.

I agree of course with the declaration that says "Fruit and vegetables bound to retail sale as fresh products, may be sold only if they show a sound, fair and trading quality with the indication of the country of origin ". This assertion is in the European Commission's Implementing Regulation (EU) No 543/2011 of 7 June 2011 for fresh and/or processed fruit and vegetable sectors.

In any case I get astonished by the singular pedantry of this regulation (see chart). For example, it is established that "only apples that have no defects, apart from very slight superficial peel defects not affecting the general appearance of the product" are to be sold and eaten? And red apples are of first quality if they have '3/4 of the total surface area of red apple colouring (group A'). Not to mention the size. For citrus fruit, for example, "the difference in size among various fruits in the same package must not exceed...10 mm, if the diameter of the smallest fruit (according to the indication on the package) is < 60 mm". These rules seem designed to boycott the fight against food waste.

That is why, with so many proposals against food losses and wastes, I feel like saying bla, bla bla, like Greta

However, I believe that in my small way, added to your small way, added to our small way, we can all do something and right now!

António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, spoke of an "ethical offence" in a message sent as a contribution to the International Day of Awareness (word that I like so much!) on food losses and waste (29 September 2020). On that occasion he called on everyone to do their best to improve this situation. In particular, it called on "individual citizens to be more careful in their purchases, to store food properly and to reuse leftovers".

In addition, we have to mention the short supply chains, the neighbourhood markets and, last but not least, the consumption of Ugly Foods.

It is not their fault if they are crooked, deformed, spotted, but nevertheless eatable. Strawberries, for example, tend to melt together in case of shorter days or colder seasons. Some varieties of vegetables, e.g. roots or tubers (carrots, potatoes, red turnips) may encounter obstacles in the ground and fit by twisting or growing in various directions or getting deformed.

Consequently do not throw them away, do not choose them just according to their aspect and smoothness, but let's eat according to the nature.

I decided that I'm going to eat those ones in the picture:



A couple of examples from the EXECUTIVE REGULATION (EU) No 543/2011 OF THE June 7th, 2011 EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Apples of extra category

Apples belonging to the category must be of superior quality i.e. keeping the typical characteristics of their variety with an intact stem.

Besides they must show their typical coloration on the following minimum surface

- 3/4 of the total surface of red coloration for apples of coloration group A colour;
- 1/2 of the total surface of mixed red coloration for apples of group B colour;
- 1/3 of the total surface of slightly/striped red for group C colour .

The pulp must be perfect

The apples can show only very slight superficial defects on their peel that do not affect their general appearance , their quality, their preservation and the package:

- very light peel defects
- very light rust-coloured with brown spots not beyond the pedicle socket
- slight traces of rustiness.

The apples have to show the characteristic colour of their variety on the following minimum surface

- 1/2 of the whole surface in red colour for group A apples;
- 1/3 of the whole surface in mixed red colour for group B apples;
- 1/10 of the whole surface in light red colour or just with red stripes for group C apples.

However, the following minor defects are allowed,

- small shape defects
- small growing defects,
- small colour defects,
- less than 1/2 centimeters of light uncoloured dents
- small peel defects not longer than 2 centimeters
- 1 cm² of the whole surface for the other imperfections with the exception in case of scab (*Venturia inaequalis*), not higher than 0,25/2 centimeters of the whole surface
- And so on....

Citrus fruit:

"Size is determined by the maximum diameter of the equatorial section of the fruit or by the number of fruits"

A) Minimum size: ORANGES: 53 mm - LEMONS: 45 mm TANGERINES: 45 mm; CLEMENTINES 35 mm

B) Uniformity- Citrus fruits may be sized according to one of the following options.

(a) To ensure uniformity in size, the difference in size between fruit in the same package shall not exceed

- 10 mm, if the diameter of the smallest fruit (according to the indication on the package) is < 60 mm
- 15 mm, if the diameter of the smallest fruit (according to the indication on the package) is ≥ 60 mm but < 80 mm
- 20 mm, if the diameter of the smallest fruit (according to the marking on the package) is ≥ 80 mm but < 110 mm
- there is no limit for the difference in case of fruit diameter ≥ 110 mm".

Estimates of global food waste by sector

	Global average food waste (kg/capita/year)*	2019 total (million tonnes)
Household	74	569
Food service	32	244
Retail	15	118
Total	121	931

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Cosmogonie.

An exceptional performance

by Diana Alliata



She is young, she has got long brown, tied up hair. She is sitting on a pillow on the floor, the music loud in her headphones, choosing one colour at a time with her left hand, even though she is right-handed. She spread it on the canvas, caressing the surface at first, sometimes scratching it, others squirting it with the tips of her fingers, overlapping shapes, colours shades. Resulting in an unpredictable piece of art, unknown to her 'aware self' as well.

That is how Maria Michaela Pani works, when invited to a live performance, which is fascinating and enchanting each time.

This special performance was part of an extraordinary event organized by 'Fame di libri Sete di Arte' (Hungry for books Thirsty of Art) Association, in order to promote young Roman artists and writers. This project was among the winners of the competition called 'VitamineG' founded by Regione Lazio.

The event, *Cosmogonie*, took place in the Alexandrian Hall of the Historical National Museum of the Sanitary Art in the beautiful complex of the 'Santo Spirito' (Holy Spirit) Hospital in Rome.

In this large hall, with chairs arranged for the occasion in the middle of the room and works of art along the walls, Michaela made space moving the chairs aside, laid a plastic cover on the ground, put a white canvas on it and sat on two pillows, on her left the colours and some transparent bowls. Without any hurry, she chose the colours: white, blue, purple, black, yellow,



red. She poured them into the bowls and began to spread them on the canvas, one at a time, cleaning her hands with a white cloth between a colour and the next one.

The colours overlapped, her hands caressing part of the canvas, or scratching it, or covering a space, mixing with the underlying colour. A glance to the canvas, and again a new colour, like a wave, and another spread with circular movements. And another one, squirted with snapping fingers. And layer after layer, the canvas became full of colours, movement, life; each layer covering the former, leaving a hint of what was underneath, hidden and yet present.

The performance was accompanied by a

background music which, even though it was not what Michaela was inspired by, was well matched.

This way of painting recalled something ancient, as in a dream where each of us can see our own drawing, our own images. It was really stirring to watch the painting come to life under Michaela's fingers, who seemed to have a bonding with the canvas when she was caressing it, scratching it, merging colours one into another with soft regular movements, in an endless motion. Then, suddenly, the work is done.

A fascinating performance, as we said before, which struck the viewers. Since Michaela is an artist but also a Tai Chi Chuan practitioner and member of 'Dinamica' Association, we asked her some questions.

DINAMICA. Why did you draw with your left hand?

MMP I draw with my left hand, and I am right-handed, because I try to switch off the filter of judgement and the search for perfection, structure and form, which, due to professional deformation, anchors me to the dynamics of evaluation and criticism. Using my left hand, which is also directly dipped in colour, does not allow me to manage the strokes and geometries to perfection and frees me from searching for something predetermined. Expressiveness is instinctual and outside the mediation of rational techniques. Proceeding by trial and error, I realised that activating the other part of the body, the one that has been less conditioned by demands and domestication, is a powerful way of accessing parts of me that have been in the background and gives me at the same time the possibility to observe the emerging thoughts, which is a way of integrating the parts through movement, body and colour.

D. And why did you start with white?

MMP. Every painting is an encounter. In this case, an encounter with a canvas, made of structure and fabric, with the colours, each with its own density, with the context, sometimes familiar and sometimes less so. I also encounter myself, the emotions of the moment, the ones I drag in, making it difficult to let go of, the tensions and rigidities. The initial moment is a very delicate part of the process, it can condition the rest of the experience and it is the first trace, the root. That's why I start with the colour white, to calmly and gently tune in to both the canvas and myself.

D. At times we have the feeling that there are several paintings on top of each other. Is that the case?

MMP. Since I am not looking for a defined image, the aim of painting is not a figure in itself. I usually give myself 30 minutes to an hour in which I try to let what comes with the flow. It happens more and more often that a canvas has 2-3 different overlapping drawings: sometimes they emerge, others they mix together or are covered. It is a training to be in the process, to observe the transformation, to welcome and let go of the various images that emerge moment by moment. Each painting has its own experience: a beginning, a process of evolution, an end, and I believe that this is the most interesting part, beyond the object itself.



Artist Maria Michaela Pani in a live painting performance during the 'Cosmogonie' event organised by the association Fame di Libri Sete di Arte as part of the project that won the Lazio Region's VitaminaG competition'.

Kakemono, the art of rarefaction



Until April 25th it is possible to visit the extraordinary exhibition organised by Mao (Museum of Oriental Art) in Turin dedicated to Japanese kakemono, rolls of precious fabric or paper, painted or calligraphed, designed to be hung on special occasions. The exhibition called "Kakemono. Five centuries of Japanese painting" is the first in Italy to focus on this art form and presents 125 kakemonos from different periods and in different styles, as well as painted fans and decorated lacquers from the Claudio Perino Collection, an important collection of works acquired by the Piedmontese collector, one of the main lenders and patrons of the Museum of Oriental Art in Turin.

The kakemono, arranged in five thematic sections dedicated to the metaphorical meaning of the object represented according to different styles of representation in different eras (flowers and birds, animals, figures, landscapes, plants and flowers) lead the visitor through a very rich world, in which detailed and naturalistic representations, punctuated by subtle details, are flanked by essential and rarefied images. Among the kakemonos on display at Mao there are works by leading Japanese artists, including Yamamoto Baiitsu, Tani Buncho, Kishi Ganku and Ogata Korin.

The exhibition and the catalogue, published by Skira and available in two languages (Italian and English), both edited by the Dutch scholar Matthi Forrer, an Oriental art historian and an expert on Japanese painting, are the result of a collaboration between Mao and Musec-Museo delle Culture in Lugano and, at a higher level, between the Fondazione Torino Musei and the Fondazione Culture e Musei in Lugano, where the exhibition was presented to the public in July 2020.



Archery

by Giovanni Rea



Lucilla Boari, Olympic bronze medalist

I find archery a fascinating discipline. It surprises and fascinates me to observe the effectiveness of such a simple system, based on the use of a flexible linear element whose ends are connected by a thin, taut string (the bow), which, with just the physical strength of one person, enables a projectile in the shape of a thin rod (the arrow) to be shot far away with great precision and at a considerably high speed.

The origin of this hunting technique, which allows a prey to be shot from a safe distance, dates back to prehistoric times: a depiction of a bow is found on a graffito dating back some thirty thousand years. It then developed independently in the cultures of different peoples in various parts of the world, for essentially hunting and warfare uses (on foot or on horseback), with different shapes and materials (think for example of the longbow of medieval English archers or the yumi of the samurai) and with evolutions and applications that have come down to the present day in an essentially sporting and recreational context (for example, the modern compound bow uses a system of cables and pulleys with eccentric cams to increase arrow acceleration).

Archers are often attributed with great physical strength in their arms (suitable for drawing very powerful bows), or with very sharp vision or considerable precision (to sustain a considerable effort in aiming), but, as I will try to show, archery requires and activates a series of skills that only partly refer to physical strength and sharp vision, which are in fact not essential requirements.

On the contrary, with respect to physical strength, an excess of muscles can limit joint flexibility and be counterproductive to achieving good results, just as an excessive search for precision when aiming leads to stiffness with worse results. On the other hand, since it is such a simple mechanism, one is inclined to think that it is just as easy to learn how to use it well, in the sense of being able to hit the target accurately every time.

The reality is unfortunately a little different: shooting well is in fact one of the most elusive activities that can be performed and, paradoxically, no matter how apparently simple and repetitive the action is, the more you practice, refine your shooting technique and gain experience, the more you realise how many finer and finer details have to be controlled and mastered together in order to express real mastery. One is therefore forced to accept that one has to deal with a continuous study to be applied at infinite levels that become deeper and deeper, and that a total capacity for control can never be achieved. Often, after having shot a number of arrows with the knowledge that you have correctly applied the principles of good technique and all of them have achieved flattering results on the target, you are inclined to think "now I've really understood how to do it! All that's left now is to do things the same way again and again". However, after a short while or even in the following days, you realise with disappointment that the "magical" state you have just experienced is now gone and, no matter how hard you try to shoot correctly, the arrows no longer seem to want to hit the target. In other words, the fine ability to "feel" (in a unicum of body and mind) that you have shot well, corresponding to the gratification of seeing the arrow sink into the centre, has disappeared.

The elusiveness of archery, and therefore a large part of its fascination, is in part linked to the fact that the shot in the strict sense of the word, i.e. the propulsion of the arrow as it leaves the bow, pushed by the string, takes place in such a short time that it is very difficult to control all the phenomena of mutual interference between the parts involved in the shot, among which we must consider the archer's body and, in particular, the hand that releases the string, the hand and arm that support the bow, the conditions of detachment of the arrow from the string, the contact of the arrow on the bow itself. In addition to these reciprocal interferences, which must somehow be effectively governed in the even very short time interval, one must also consider the very important influence on shooting of the archer's mental state, in other words, the archer's ability to manage his emotions during shooting, managing to be effectively concentrated, determined and calm.

Once the arrow has been fired and has exited the bow, the shot is now determined, except for the effect of the wind, which may still marginally affect the trajectory, particularly when the target is placed at greater distances, there being a short but noticeable time interval until the arrow hits the target.

Therefore, if the phase of releasing the arrow is very short and there is not enough time to do anything voluntary (while after the exit from the bow, everything that could be done voluntarily can no longer influence the flight of the arrow), there is nothing left to do but try to eliminate or at least minimise potentially harmful interference, when this can be avoided, and at the same time make the unavoidable interference as constant as possible during release, that is to say that, shot after



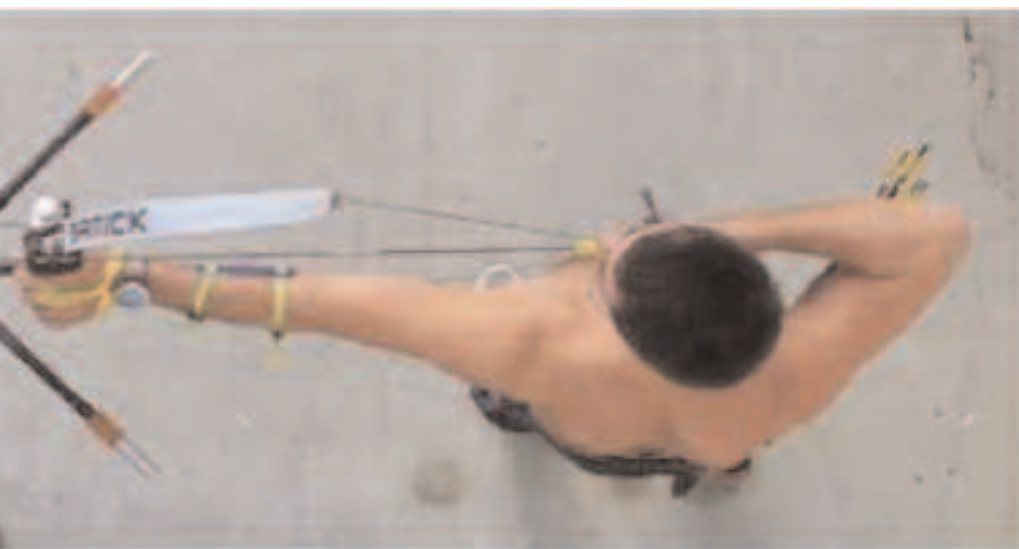
shot, it is repeated with the greatest possible uniformity.

The preparation phase of the shot, in which much of the archer's skill takes place, is therefore of fundamental importance.

Among the various aspects of an effective shooting technique, there is the need for the archer to develop and adopt a correct body posture, in order to favour the setting of the correct alignments of the different muscular-skeletal segments of the body: head, arms, trunk, legs. The alignments described below generally allow you to develop the correct contrast of the muscles and bones of the trunk with those of the arms in supporting the effort of opening and keeping open the bow (which tends to close like a spring). Briefly, for a medium-distance shot (15 - 50 m), the trunk and legs are aligned vertically (the feet are parallel, shoulder-width apart, with the body's centre of gravity in the middle, slightly towards the forefoot); the open arms form a T-shape with respect to the trunk. The arm that holds the bow (then "bow arm") is normally well extended on the side of the body, while the hand (fingers and back) and forearm that hold the string ("hand/arm of the string") in the position of maximum extension (i.e. maximum opening of the bow) must be aligned with the arrow. The line of the shoulders is parallel to the arrow. The head is normally raised and slightly turned to the side of the bow. Both shoulders must remain low and open, i.e. the muscles of the back must counteract the tendency of the shoulders to rise and close in the effort to keep the bow open, with particular regard to the shoulder corresponding to the arm of the bow. In fact, the raising of the shoulder of the bow due to a lack of muscular control produces as a consequence the progressive reduction of the distance between the bow hand and the head (with alteration of the length, as will be seen below) and also determines an alteration of the optimal muscular-skeletal connection of the shoulders and back, with harmful effects on the shot.

During the opening of the bow and up to the position of maximum extension, the traction effort exerted on the string must be transferred as far as possible to the muscles of the back, progressively relieving the arm (biceps) and shoulder (deltoid) of the strain. The muscles of the back are in fact larger and more powerful than those of the arms and are therefore able to support the required pulling effort more easily and with greater resistance, to the benefit of the

overall relaxation of all the other muscles that do not strictly need to be involved in the pull, particularly the forearm and hand muscles that support the rope. The latter must 'work' without developing unnecessary tension, except for that which is strictly necessary to hold the bowstring in the fold of the phalanges at the end of the three index, middle and ring fingers. In particular, the movement of the last millimetres of the bow's opening before the



release of the string and therefore of the arrow, must be supported and guided exclusively by the muscles of the back, which at that instant are at their maximum effort. In this way, the release of the string by the fingers takes place without the conscious action of opening the hand, but simply by the relaxation of the forearm muscles responsible for holding the fingers bent as a hook. To understand the sensation, you can try to hold a heavy shopping bag with the three central fingers of the hand, having the arm stretched vertically along the body, and suddenly



Mauro Nespoli, Olympic silver medalist

drop the bag without intentionally opening the hand, but simply by releasing the tension in the fingers. In this way the action of "opening" the fingers is quicker than if it were performed by commanding the muscles of the fingers to open. In the absence of the voluntary action of the muscles, the fingers remain relaxed and soft, minimising the disturbance to the flow of the string over the fingers and thus to the arrow. The image of the 'string passing through the fingers' is used because the hand appears to remain motionless with the fingers slightly arched.

When opening the bow, the arm of the bow is held out to counteract the pull exerted on the string by the other arm. The hand of the bow must press with the palm on the grip, having the "mouth of the tiger" well inserted in the "throat" of the grip itself, so as to assume from the preparatory stages a deep and stable position, but without the fingers of the hand squeezing the grip itself. On the contrary, the wrist and fingers of the bow hand must be soft and relaxed, as if you were holding a bunch of grapes in your hand, so that when the arrow is released the bow is free to shoot forward and move freely.

Conversely, the arrow would be affected by twisting or moving the bow through a rigid grip, which would make it difficult to control.

As part of good shooting technique, an important role is played by the ability to always stretch the bow to the same extent as the "draw", which is the distance between the string at the point of capture and the grip of the bow. In fact, the bow is essentially a spring that returns the energy stored during traction: the more you stretch the bow, the more energy the arrow receives and vice versa. Therefore, in order to have constant results, arrows of equal energy and therefore a constant length must be available.

An archer's proper length depends essentially on the length of his arms and the width of his shoulders. In order to check that the length remains constant shot after shot, it is necessary to set reference points, which are usually located on the archer's face. In fact, towards the final phase of the draw, the hand of the string approaches the face to be in contact with a part that



is easily recognisable by touch (e.g. under the chin or cheekbone, in contact with the lip, etc.). At the same time, the rope also approaches the face and comes into contact with other specific (one or two) points (e.g. the tip of the nose, the centre of the chin, etc.). It is therefore necessary to check on each throw that the hand and rope are in contact with the face in the same way.

In order to favour the transfer of the load from the arms to the muscles of the back, the action of opening the bow, that is, the pull on the string, must develop slowly and continuously, without stopping the movement, until the release of the string. The archer must have in mind the intention to continue the opening action even after the release of the string. In fact, even though to an external observer the archer may seem perfectly still in the act of aiming, in reality he is imperceptibly moving to complete the millimetric movement of the arrow in the last phase of traction before release: the intention to continue the traction even after release allows the archer to avoid sudden drops in tension that would have the effect of producing micro-slumps in the opposite direction, that is, closing the bow, with the effect of determining inert, or non-dynamic releases. In the final phase of the shooting action, the bow arm, always well extended, must hold the bow up and keep it around the aiming position on the target, while allowing small oscillations to avoid stiffening in the effort to keep the bow still. The aiming phase essentially consists of collimating the aiming eye (the one on the string side), the string, a reference point on the bow and an external reference point (e.g. the target, but not necessarily). As with the string arm, the bow arm must also continue its thrusting action, with the intention of keeping the bow constantly oriented on the target, until after release, in order to contain possible vertical sags or lateral deviations of the bow hand.

In other words, the shooting action must be dynamic at all times, ensuring that the thrust of the bow arm is always active and well balanced with the continuous pull exerted by the string arm. Moreover, the actions and controls described so far are too many to be carried out sequentially in a short period of time, because they would have the effect of breaking down the overall gesture into a succession of individual parts, to the detriment of the unity of the overall action. An excess of control over the individual parts would in fact make the gesture that constitutes the

shot as a whole lose its dynamism. It is therefore necessary, through practice and training, first to refine and internalise the different individual phases, and then to try to recompose the unity of the action by practising to "feel" the shot as a whole. In this exercise it is important to observe the so-called "follow through" that follows the shot, i.e. the movements of the bow and the archer that occur in the phase following the exit of the arrow from the bow, and through this systematic observation try to understand and intervene on the unevenness of execution.

Practising archery therefore becomes, over time, the exercise of developing the ability to hear the harmony of the whole, i.e. the ability to perceive any out-of-tune notes, a sign that something has not been played correctly, and to discriminate them from the harmony of the whole. The mind plays an essential role in this, because one's ability to quickly and accurately hear subtle aspects and nuances in a broad context of sensations is affected by one's emotional state, which can make one unable to perceive details that at other times would be clearly perceptible. It is therefore necessary to learn to listen to and understand one's own emotions in order to regain that state of active calm (tranquillity) that favours the mind-body connection.

The application of the above principles favours the maximum effectiveness of the interaction of the archer-archery-rope-arrow system in the release phase and ensures that this interaction remains as constant as possible shot after shot, allowing the archer to frequently succeed in hitting the prefixed target with precision, and to demonstrate his skill in the discipline. The skill therefore consists in the ability to "group the arrows", i.e. to repeat the shot several times and each time consistently reach more or less the same point on the target, even if it is not yet the centre. In fact, it is not important at which point of the target the group of arrows (pattern) is made, because by acting on the aiming reference points (for example by acting on the sight if present, but this is not indispensable) it is easy to make the pattern move to the centre of the target. The ability to group therefore expresses the ability to constantly replicate the technical gesture in the same way as possible. In conclusion, beyond the specific level of ability that each practitioner can achieve in the exercise of the discipline, from what I have tried to describe, it seems to me that in order to progress in archery it is necessary to work on oneself over a long period of time in order to raise one's own spirit first of all.

Reciprocally, the discipline itself thus appears to be intimately linked to a process of awareness and transformation that tends towards the manifestation of the spirit.

In this light, the following passage from Eugen Herrigel's *Zen and Archery* seems to me to express well the sense of the mysterious elusiveness of archery:



And behold, one day, after [my] shooting, the Master bowed deeply and interrupted the lesson. "Right now 'Yes' is shot," he exclaimed, as I stared at him in amazement and when I finally understood what he meant, I could not contain my joy. "What I said to you was not praise but a simple statement that must not affect you. And I did not bow down to you because you had nothing to do with it. This time you held yourself in the utmost tension in complete oblivion of Self and of all intention; and lo and behold, the blow came off you like a ripe fruit. And now go on practising as if nothing had happened!"

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better to face the
new year with the
necessary precautions!
I wouldn't want to be
allergic to cats....

