



MOTION CAPTURED : HARU ONODA'S SCULPTURE

By *Frank Mathys*

Sculptors are, in general, far less aware than painters that plastic art offers a possibility and a promising means of gaining greater insights into the essence of modern sport.

Much of what can be represented in painting is impossible in sculpture. The fundamental subject matter of both is people and animals, but sculptors can portray landscapes and interiors only in relief. That would be one reason for turning to sport as a theme, and the Ancient Greeks bear eloquent testimony to the fact that this is indeed possible. Turning to artists of our own time, René Sintenis (1888-1965) and Gerhard Marcks (1889) — to name but two of the most representative — have long since turned to using plastic art to depict sportsmen. In Germany, it is in particular the competitions of the National Olympic Committee which have proved fruitful. In this context we could cite "Starter" and "Pole-vaulter" by Erich Reuter; Ruth Speidel's "Female Skier" ; Lothar Fischer's "Rider" ; Wilhelm Greivius' "Female Swimmer" ; Karl-Heinz Hoffmann's "Runner at the start" ; "Sulky" by Werner Schürmann ; "Rider" by Kurt Mergenthal ; and Wolfgang Hirtreiter's "Javelin Thrower".

There is also "Judo" by René Collamarini, born in France in 1904; "Swimmer" by Robert Couturier (1905); "Boxer" by Georges Guyot (1885); "Tennis" by Polish born Leopold Kretz (1907); "Jumper" by Georges Oudot (1928); "Women Wrestling" by the Italian Antonicci Volto (1915) and various small sculptures of athletes by Henry Plission and Daumier, all of which draw their inspiration from sporting themes.

But in no other country — with the exceptions of Greece — has sport found such great and diverse expression in art as in Japan. There they have the advantage of sporting traditions which date back hundreds of years during which time we had nothing that could be called popular sport. Paintings in old castles and temples

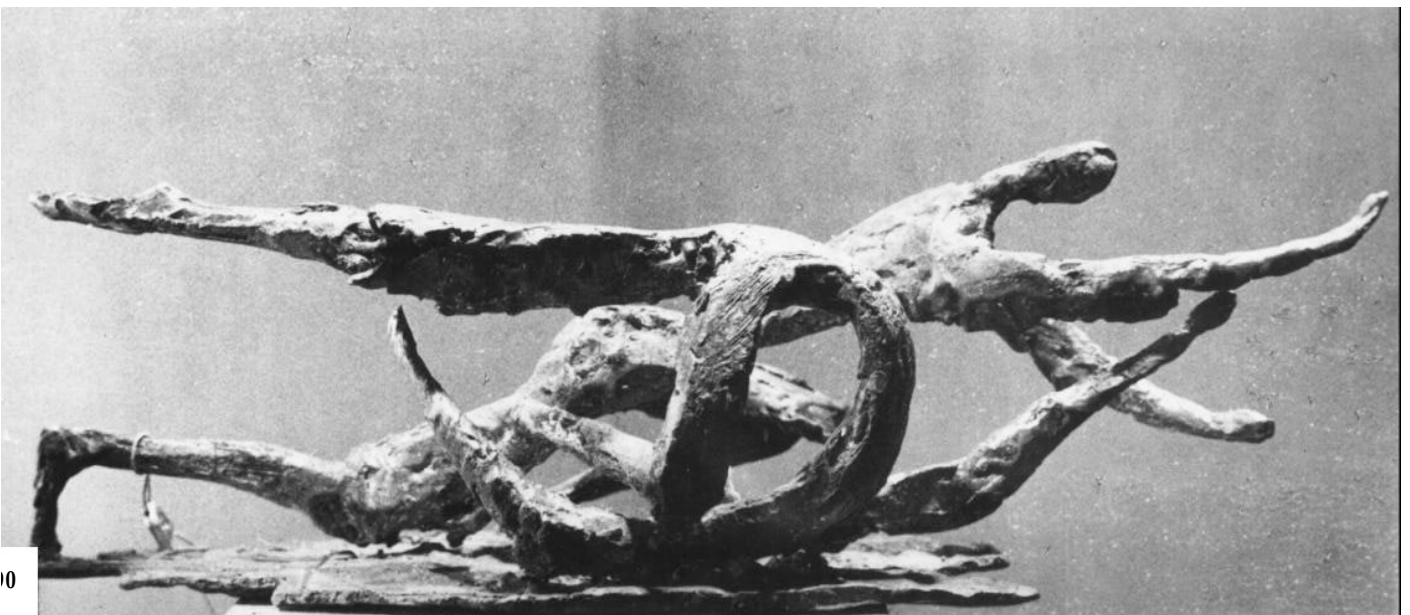


pay eloquent testimony to how much physical exercises have always been an important part of life and culture in the land of the rising sun. With the development of woodcarving, the great masters of the art like Shuntei, Kunisada, Sharaku, Utamaro, Eisen, Sukenobu, Utagawa, Toyaharu, Shunro, Toyokuni and, above all, Hokusai immortalized countless bathers, swimmers, riders, sumo wrestlers, archers, Kemari footballers, fencers and acrobats in their colourful engravings. One must of course remember that in the Far East physical exercises are not just a recreational activity, and do not serve simply to use up excess energy or to get oneself fit. Instead, sport there serves much more as a way of attaining a correct spiritual attitude, with an inward effect rather than an outward one.

One such sport, related in many ways to the well-known judo, is aikido which means the way to spirit and harmony. One young Japanese artist has devoted herself enthusiastically to this sport, practises it regularly in order to gain insight into the secrets of these skilful throws and swings,

and grasp the most essential stages. Born in Tokyo in 1929, the daughter of an industrialist, **Haru Onoda** first of all completed sculpture classes at the Tokyo Academy of Art before travelling to Europe to continue studying in the workshop of the Italian sculptor Pericle Fazzini in Rome, in order to improve her ability to transform her feeling for plastic form into outward expression in sculpture.

Stylistically, there is no doubt that Germaine Richier also had certain influence as with her dynamic groups of aikido figures she comes close to her style, and has had success in many exhibitions in her own country and also in Europe. Haru Onoda carries on the old Japanese tradition, working not with paintbrush and engraving tool, having instead devoted herself to sculpture. She simplifies and translates the real life processes in sport onto a higher spiritual plane ; she fills her groups of figures in combat with a rhythmic harmony in their movements. For her, the bodies of those involved belong totally to the world of the eye. But Haru Onoda does not capture



individual scenes in the way a camera lens does, in frozen movement. In her statues the human body is not just celebrated as the most beautiful expression of the physical world, but has the effect of a wheel, constantly in motion, rolling out of itself. In general, plastic art is bound to the world of the static, however in the works of the Japanese sculptress, the fixed is transformed into dancing, pulsating movement, which consequently arouses enormous and lasting fascination on the part of the observer. It is not just the art expert, but also the sportsman who cannot help but become enthusiastic about these living sculptures which, in the most economical way, embody the fluctuating motion of the whole sporting action.

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