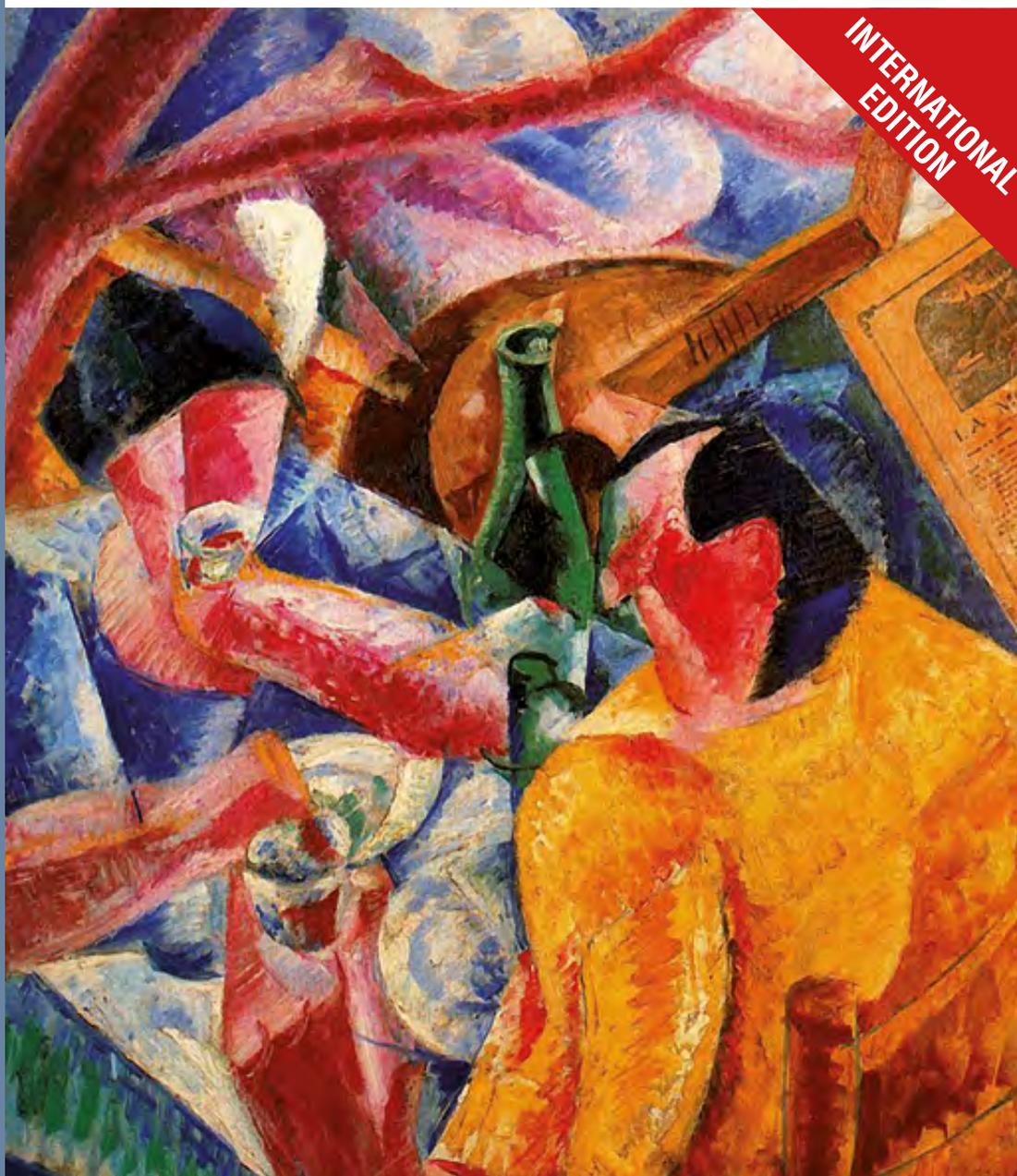


CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIO PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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On the cover: graphic elaboration of Sotto la pergola a Napoli (Under the Pergola in Naples, 1914) by Umberto Boccioni, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan.



Paolo Petroni re-elected President

A new mandate to continue increasing our influence on civil society and raising awareness about the Academy's name and values.

BY SILVIA DE LORENZO



Paolo Petroni and Roberto Ariani

A word heard particularly often in the course of two eventful days in Verona was 'friendship'. And friendship also - visibly, palpably - permeated the atmosphere throughout those two days.

Work began immediately with the final meeting of the Academic Council's three-year tenure, also attended by the Regional Coordinators. President Petroni thanked all attendees for their fruitful collaboration, which allowed the Academy to enter this difficult new millennium capable of embarking on a new path. Its readiness is demonstrated by the vitality of the past three years, manifested inter alia by a succession of Delegates (in 60 Delegations) who have succeeded in conveying their expertise to those whose newer energy enables them to cover such an important role. What counts in facing the future, Petroni asserted, is not so much the number of members as quality, values and capacities. Academicians' average

age is now approximately 59, evidence of younger people joining. The President also announced a rotation among the members of the new Academic Council and the possibility of roles overlapping (for example, between Council members and Regional Coordinators).

The next item was the Final Balance for 2017, and Roberto Ariani, the Secretary General and Treasurer, illustrated its various elements (after noting the Academy's "good financial health"), drawing attention, among these, to the confirmed contribution by the Ministry of Culture, facilitated partly by its intensifying collaboration with the Academy, and the funds from the 0.5% of income taxes destined by individual taxpayers for public-interest organisations, demonstrating the solidarity felt by members. The President of the Board of Auditors, Gianni Limberti, declared the Board's approval and that of the independent auditing company BDO. The Final Balance for 2017 was

then submitted to the Academic Council and unanimously approved.



Pier Carlo Lincio (Delegate for Verbanio-Cusio-Ossola) and his wife

A beautiful sunset on Lake Garda greeted the Academicians for their welcome dinner in the port of Lazise, in the Dogana Veneta, the famed 14th-century building which housed the customs house of the Venetian Republic in the



ASSEMBLY OF DELEGATES

From the left: Raoul Ragazzi (Merano Delegate), Roberto Doretti (Regional Coordinator for Eastern Tuscany), Ruggero Larco (Valdarno Fiorentino Delegate)



17th century and is now a restaurant and event venue. The atmosphere was friendly and serene, embodying the delight of good company. A delicious lakeside apéritif was followed by a superlative dinner based on lake fish: risotto with tench from Lake Garda; *macheroncini* pasta with smoked trout and wild rocket, and fillet of *lavarello* (European whitefish) in a potato crust. In explaining the dishes, chef Simone took care to point out that the *lavarello* had been fished the night before and the lemons used in the dessert (lemon cream tartelette with chocolate flakes) were from Lake Garda.

In welcoming the 260 friends seated round the table, Paolo Petroni thanked Verona Delegate Fabrizio Farinati for his contribution in organising the event, noting how the substantial number of Delegates gathered from around the world (Australia, Brazil, Singapore and USA, to cite those who travelled farthest) demonstrated the Academy's excellent morale and health: the joy of

spending time together united the attendees as in a large family.

The following day, the Assembly met to elect the President and the other high officials. Voting booths ensured privacy and calm judgement, and the ballots were counted by eight scrutineers not standing for office, in the presence of a notary.

Before the vote, Benevento Delegate Emilia Pati made a statement explaining her reasons for nominating herself as a candidate for the Academic Council.

During the vote count, the Delegates were free to make speeches. Speakers included the Syracuse Delegate, Angelo Tamburini, who delineated the Academy's cultural and civil mission in our turbulent times; and Nando De Santis, one of the Vice-Delegates for Naples, who congratulated the President for the work accomplished and suggested some ways to attract younger members - an issue also broached by Franco Santellocco Gargano, the Delegate for Avezzano and the Marsica. Gorizia Delega-

te Roberto Zottar suggested that the annual theme be revealed earlier than is customary, making it easier to prepare the associated publications. Several foreign Delegates also spoke, describing the difficulties of cultivating familiarity and appreciation of the Academy far from home, often in locations where a Delegation serves not a small territory but an entire nation, and the challenges of interacting with the host community using another language (Laura Melara-Durbeck, Frankfurt). Mariella Salvatore (Vice-Delegate, Los Angeles) thanked the President for his efforts to meet the needs of foreign Delegations, such as the Newsletter translated into English, the magazine, and the appointment of Council members residing outside Italy; she expressed her hope for increasingly productive interactions with Italian communities abroad. São Paulo Delegate Gerardo Landulfo noted the importance of the events organised for Italian Food Week, pointing out that for several years his Delegation has been involving Italian chefs in activities to promote Italian regional food. Other speakers described their experiences of friendly collaboration and mutual encouragement between neighbouring Delegations (Gianluigi Trevisani, Cesena) and efforts to increase the number of restaurants offering Italian food (Andrea Negri, San Marino), a topic also discussed by the new Monaco Delegate, Luciano Garzelli, who added that the Academy is highly esteemed by governmental authorities in his territory,



The Delegates' Assembly



Paolo Petroni with the notary Emanuele Magnano San Lio



where even the Ambassador has applied for membership and Prince Albert often participates in the Academy's social gatherings.

The first portion of the Assembly's meeting ended with Paolo Petroni's presentation, and distribution to Academicians, of *I Sapori dell'Orto* (*Flavours of the Vegetable Garden*), the latest publication in the *Food Culture Library*, newly available in bookshops.

The 204 Delegates voted: Paolo Petroni was re-elected President of the Academy for another three years. Alongside him, the 15 elective members of the Council, the Board of Auditors and the Arbitration Board were also elected.

Clearly moved, Petroni thanked the Delegates and illustrated some future programmes, including intense international promotion and improvements in publishing activity such as reformatting the magazine for greater unity among topics. He also announced a restructuring of the "Franco Marengi" Study Centre, to be subdivided into working groups to handle the various sectors of the food world more efficiently, thereby becoming a veritable powerhouse of ideas and activity. "Culture is important for the Academy, and if we represent an elite", the President asserted, "we must be proud of it and continue on the path of healthy food criticism, retaining the ability to face the future in these difficult years, with a broad cultural perspective on the latest food trends".

He finished by expressing his pride in being President of this Academy.

The gala dinner to honour the newly elected officials (in the afternoon, the new Academic Council had elected the members of the President's Council) was held in the splendid Palazzo Verità Poeta, an eighteenth-century patrician palace with marvellous frescos and furnishings. A dizzying array of appetisers were offered in the enchanting garden, ranging from finger foods, including dainty sunny-side-up quail eggs, to fried morsels, cured meats and fish. This was yet another chance to linger in pleasant company, allowing the Academicians to meet the international Delega-

The elective members of the new Academic Council. From the left: Vincenzo Rizzi, Renzo Rizzi, Luciano Garzelli, Roberto Robazza, Francesco Maria Palomba, Germano Berteotti, Maurizio Fazzari, Italo Sciarretta, Andrea Nicola, Gianni Carciofi, Marinella Curra Caporuscio, Gioacchino Giovanni Iapichino, Adriana Liguori Proto, Mauro Felice Frascisco, Fernanda Maranesi



tes and strengthen existing friendships and bonds. This continued over dinner, prepared by Burro e Salvia ("Butter and Sage") caterers: artisanal tortellini from Valeggio with butter and sage; mustard-marinated beef tournedos; and the celebrated *millefoglie strachin mil-*

le-feuille dessert made by the famed Perbellini bakery.

"Let us hold high the Academy's name and values", Paolo Petroni concluded enthusiastically at the end of the gathering, "all working together, in friendship".



President Petroni congratulates the First Vice-President, Gianni Fossati



Food myths

Researchers, physicians, scientists and government bodies are working to sweep away the pseudoscience surrounding food.

BY ANGELO TAMBURINI
Syracuse Delegate

To combat fake news about food, one must rely on scientific facts, and therefore on those tasked with discovering them: ministries, researchers, scientists and specialists in the field, who are joining forces to make information available, dislodging misconceptions. Last April in Rome, several physicians and scientists placed fake dietary news under scrutiny, aiming to sweep away prejudices, fads, misinformation, and in short all the pseudoscience that surrounds food. Many are the myths that science strives to dispel. Some examples: there are far more vitamins in the flesh of apples or pears than in their peel; MSG does not produce headaches; brown sugar is not better than white; veal is not the most

nutritious type of meat; and spinach doesn't cure anaemia. This list of 'un-trendy' statements could become rather long. Let us add just one more: freshly squeezed orange juice contains, inter alia, substances classified as carcinogens. Yes indeed, that healthy fresh juice! It may seem strange that food myths are so abundant. Myths gain credibility when grafted on to something widely believed: for example, the idea that human intervention makes food worse, when usually the opposite holds true in the food industry. Undoubtedly, whatever is 'natural' is viewed as better, healthier and safer. For instance, many believe that a longer list of ingredients is always worse, but this would deminise minestrone! Or, again, cooking

allegedly robs food of nutrients, while on the contrary it facilitates the absorption of nutrients. The love of all things 'natural' underpins the success of 'organic' produce, as well as the general conviction that farmers' produce is best; but this is not always true. It is not necessarily better nutritionally: in 2009, to investigate whether organic produce is more nutritious than conventional produce, the British Food Standards Agency commissioned the largest research project ever undertaken in this field, comparing the nutritional value of organic and conventionally grown foods. The researchers found that for 16 of the 23 categories of nutrients analysed, including potassium, calcium and vitamin C, there was no difference

between the two. Conventional produce generally had more nitrogen, while organic produce tended to contain more sugars, magnesium, zinc and flavonoids. In any case, the study concluded that there is no proof that a diet richer in the substances found in greater quantities in organic produce adds health benefits for individuals with a normal and varied diet. Those results were confirmed in 2012 through a huge study by Stanford University. Organic produce undoubtedly has other virtues: it normally contains less pesticide residue; it is generally more flavourful because it is harvested later; and it is grown by less polluting methods, preserving the integrity of soil and ecosystems





which would progressively vanish due to conventional agriculture. Nevertheless, the unexamined preference for the 'natural' is not, at least chemically, plausible. One might speak of 'chemophobia', a knee-jerk aversion to 'chemicals'. In fact, a synthesised molecule is chemically identical to the same molecule arising naturally: in living organisms, poison is invariably a matter of dose. The same substance can be useful or even indispensable at a low concentration and toxic at a higher one.

There are also myths which spread because they are surprising, such as the spurious idea that fruit must not be eaten close to meal times.

This is the case for the 'alkaline diet' myth, which claims that because our blood is faintly alkaline (having a pH around 7.4) we should 'alkalise' our bodies by eating specific fruits and avoiding certain foods including meat, reviled as 'acidifying'. Invented by the American physician Robert Young, it is scientifically untenable because if the pH of our blood exceeded 7.8 or fell below 6.8, we would die.

Another increasingly popular 'counterfactual diet' is the 'Blood Type Diet', invented by the American naturopath Peter D'Adamo, claiming that our diet should be determined by our blood group: an entirely unsupported idea. Diet myths are numerous: it is untrue

that we should eat frequent small meals; as ascertained by an Australian study, there is no difference between three full meals and six tiny ones. Nor does fasting 'detoxify' us; indeed, if prolonged, it can cause ketoacidosis.

Frequently, a minor feature of a food is overstated (such as the iron content of spinach: beef liver contains four times as much iron, dried beans three, and bitter dark chocolate, two) or demonised (such as the fat content in pork, now often leaner than beef). It is untrue, for instance, that brown sugar is preferable to refined white sugar: the sugar molecule is identical. The prejudice against processed, as opposed to more 'natural', food strikes again. It is widely believed that we should not peel fruit lest we lose vitamins; the peel contains fibre (so does the flesh), but is not particularly rich in vitamins. And eating fruit after a meal, as hinted earlier, is harmless - indeed, its vitamin C content promotes the absorption of iron from vegetables, which would otherwise be far less bioavailable, and its acidity helps to cleanse the mouth of fats. Also wrongly accused is MSG, a flavour enhancer common in Asian foods and branded as dangerous, toxic, allergenic and even carcinogenic. However, say researchers, many studies have exonerated MSG, the sodium salt of glutamic acid, an amino acid which is a fundamental component of proteins found

in many foods including tomato, meat, fish and parmesan. There are even anti-egg prejudices, including the claim of poor digestibility, while research confirms eggs as among the most easily digestible foods. Raw egg is commonly considered more nutritional than cooked, while the opposite holds true: the human intestine becomes capable of absorbing the albumin in egg white after it is coagulated through cooking.

A few more myths to dispel? Fish is not particularly rich in phosphorus: there is more in legumes and dried fruit. Furthermore, consuming more phosphorus does not aid memory. White meat is not leaner, as a rule, than red (100g of sirloin steak has only five grammes of fat while 100g of chicken thigh meat can contain as much as nine grammes). Digestive liqueurs might be pleasant after meals, but they do not help digestion: their high alcohol content, around 30-35°, irritates the stomach's walls and can delay the passage of its contents; while a glass of wine during a meal helps because its low alcohol content stimulates the secretion of gastric juices.

In conclusion: gathering information, relying on qualified scientific bodies tasked with monitoring public health, can protect us from the fake food news which invades the media, improving the quality of our lifestyles as well as the foods we enjoy.