

Modern Arnis Seminar

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Bothell, Washington

By Joel Priest

There's a lot of ways to learn Filipino martial arts, one of the best I've found is to take one technique and explore it unarmed, with a knife, and with a stick. Fortunately, this is exactly what Dr. Presas did Saturday. I think this style of teaching plays to the strengths of Filipino martial arts, and to Modern Arnis in particular. Rather than merely learning one possible response to one possible (unlikely) attack, instead, you learn to conceptualize a movement, and in that conceptualization, to apply it to any situation. I don't mean to indicate that one attack, or defense, can be made suitable for any

situation. Rather, it is a matter of narrowing the possibilities. By understanding that motion, in response to a variety of counter or prior motions, it allows you to really internalize the reaction. To not memorize it by rote, nor even to have it set into muscle memory and be "triggered" by some particular attack. Instead, it provides a deep understanding of the mechanics and variables involved in using that attack or defense. It teaches your body and mind to accept and internalize the principles behind a particular response.

Then, not only can we build on principles, expanding and adapting them to any situation. But the theory behind finding the foundations or principles of movement and combat slowly begins to sink in. "If this always works like this, no matter what they're armed with, or how big they are, or how limber, or how fast, then maybe that will always work like that, and that other thing must be the same way too." I've been going to write a post about memory, learning types, and student types for a while now. And I don't want to spoil the value of that by posting too much about this here. But basically there are two primary kinds of memory in this context. The first is when you've learned something. The second is when your body has learned it. It has become hard-wired. It's not important to hardwire 4000 blocks, or 90 forms/katas/anyos, or 700 different attacks into ourselves (or our students). Hardwiring principles is of much more value. In traditional martial arts, forms and attacks and blocks are used

to hardwire the principles the founder feels are important. But, Modern Arnis, in particular, is phenomenally suited for shortcutting that process. There's still a lot of stuff to learn and remember, but the nature of the art, and the quality of the teachers in it makes the basic principles much clearer than I suspect they are in most other systems. Anyway, enough rambling, onto my seminar report, we started at 10am, and it was sometime after 4pm when we finally broke up and Dr. Presas, Mr. Patrick Armijo, and Mr. Vincent Domingcil passed out certificates of participation. The over-arching technique in the seminar this weekend was the traditional wrist-lock throw. Most martial arts systems have this throw and I suspect most martial artists are familiar with it. Dr. Presas' take on it was what really made it unique and engaging.

The first implementation of this technique was in response to a right hand punch. As the attacker strikes, the defender does a forearm block, which then uses the back of your hand to 'feed' their arm into your left hand and bring it up over your head. This also has the affect of bending the opponent's elbow, which allows the defender to use their right forearm for the wrist-lock throw.



Moving on, we did a #2 strike. The attacker is armed with a stick, the defender unarmed. As the #2 strike comes in, the defender uses 45 degree angle stepping to get off-line, block the arm (hopefully), and then bring the opponent's right arm into an ulna press under your left shoulder. Then, obviously with a bit of a body turn, the wrist-lock throw is right there.

The Dumog and Sikaran section of this seminar were particularly enjoyable for me. And Dr. Presas' understanding of this topic is something that you don't often see in grandmasters' of stick-based arts, as these are exclusively unarmed styles, which is not to say you couldn't do some of this stuff armed, anyway, the first Dumog technique was the one we did last year as well, a right roundhouse kick is caught, clamped to the chest, twisted and throws the attacker onto their face. When we were practicing this one and the following the group I was working with discussed that Dr. Presas also appeared to be attacking the nerve beside the Achilles tendon.

The second Dumog technique: Right front kick, grab, and throw them over. As they naturally roll onto their back, their only opening is a kick with their left leg.



When they take that opportunity, you grab their ankle and throw it over their right leg. Then collapsing onto them, you grab behind their neck and pull their lower body toward their upper body, putting pressure on their spine and particularly neck.



As for the Sikaran techniques, the opponent does a right punch, the defender blocks that with a palis-palis block, steps in behind their right foot and hooks [their foot with yours]. Then by dropping your weight onto your knee, on the back of their calf, you bring them to the ground. The

second technique begins the same, but rather than stepping to the outside, you step inside, pressing your knee to theirs, or their thigh and bring them down onto their back rather than onto their chest.

At about noon, we broke for lunch and Dr. Presas asked us all to be back there at 1:15pm. We had really great Mexican.

More palis-palis

The palis-palis we do in class weekly consists mostly of what would be called 'the brushing your hair' block in most martial arts systems. Though we do it up, down, in, out, and sometimes side to side, however, when we started back up at quarter to 2:00, Dr. Presa

expanded on that. The first technique was a response to a #1, #2, #3, #4, and #12 strike. In addition, it was a variation of block-check-strike in a way that I found interesting. The strike is blocked, checked, and then rotated off target, using primarily the stick for leverage and force. The #12 strike can be blocked with either a wing or a roof style block, allowing it to be turned off target either way.

Then, building on that technique, attacker armed, defender unarmed, a #1 strike comes in, you block with the right, pass to the left hand, and lift it up over your head (getting it off target again). Your left circles around so the opponent's palm is facing the ceiling and their stick is trapped between your left forearm and left bicep, allowing you to strip it.



We then began knife techniques, knife vs. unarmed. A #1 slash like the last technique, with the same sequence of blocks rather than doing a strip with the knife, you go into an arm bar and then you can lift them back up into a rib stab, or disarm. After that, a #2 strike, with the same blocking mechanisms, and like the first technique I discussed your forearm does a wrist-lock throw (or optionally a strip of the knife).

After that we did some more classical

Arnis-style knife work. A #5 strike, the defender cross-blocks with both hands, the attacker pushes the block off and comes back with a #6, which is blocked again, again the attacker clears the hands of the defender and comes in for a #7. Defender blocks that and the attacker slides them off.

Our final segment this weekend was visidarios. A #1 strike, the unarmed defender blocks, and then catches the back-fist. This allows the attacker to use the same wrist-lock throw mechanism from earlier to catch the fingers and bend back toward the defender's centerline, or rotate and bend toward the floor. There were a couple more, (at least) visidario alternatives, but this is the only one I can remember or have footage of, consistently so I'll stop there.



This was a great seminar, we had beautiful weather and the opportunity to catch up with friends, new and old is always one of my

favorite parts about the MARPPIO organization and martial arts in general. Professor Presas encoded the values of loyalty into Modern Arnis long ago, it is the friendships and brotherhood that comes from that ideal that are his legacy, I feel. Those of us who started Modern Arnis after his passing never got to meet him, and never will. But he continues to make an impact on our lives and our practice of the Presas family art, and thus, be present at every seminar, class and gathering as a result.



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