

**MDK
/
Art Students' Conference**

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Japanese concept of "MA" & negative space to product poster designs

Presenter: NT Trong Nghia Nguyen

Supervisor: Csordás Zoltán

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CONCEPT OF “MA”

1. Intro



The essence of Japanese aesthetic is a concept called 'MA' (pronounced "maah") — the pure, and indeed essential, void between all “things.”

"MA" originates from ancient Eastern philosophical and religious thought, particularly Buddhism and Shintoism.

In Buddhism, "MA" is related to the concept of "Śūnyatā" (emptiness), expressing the empty and impermanent nature of all things.

In Shintoism, "MA" is connected to the reverence for nature, where empty space is considered a dwelling place for spirits.

MA: Timelessness - Spacelessness



Left panel of the **Pine Trees Screen**
by **Hasegawa Tōhaku**.

The **empty space** in this piece is considered
to be as important as **the trees** depicted.

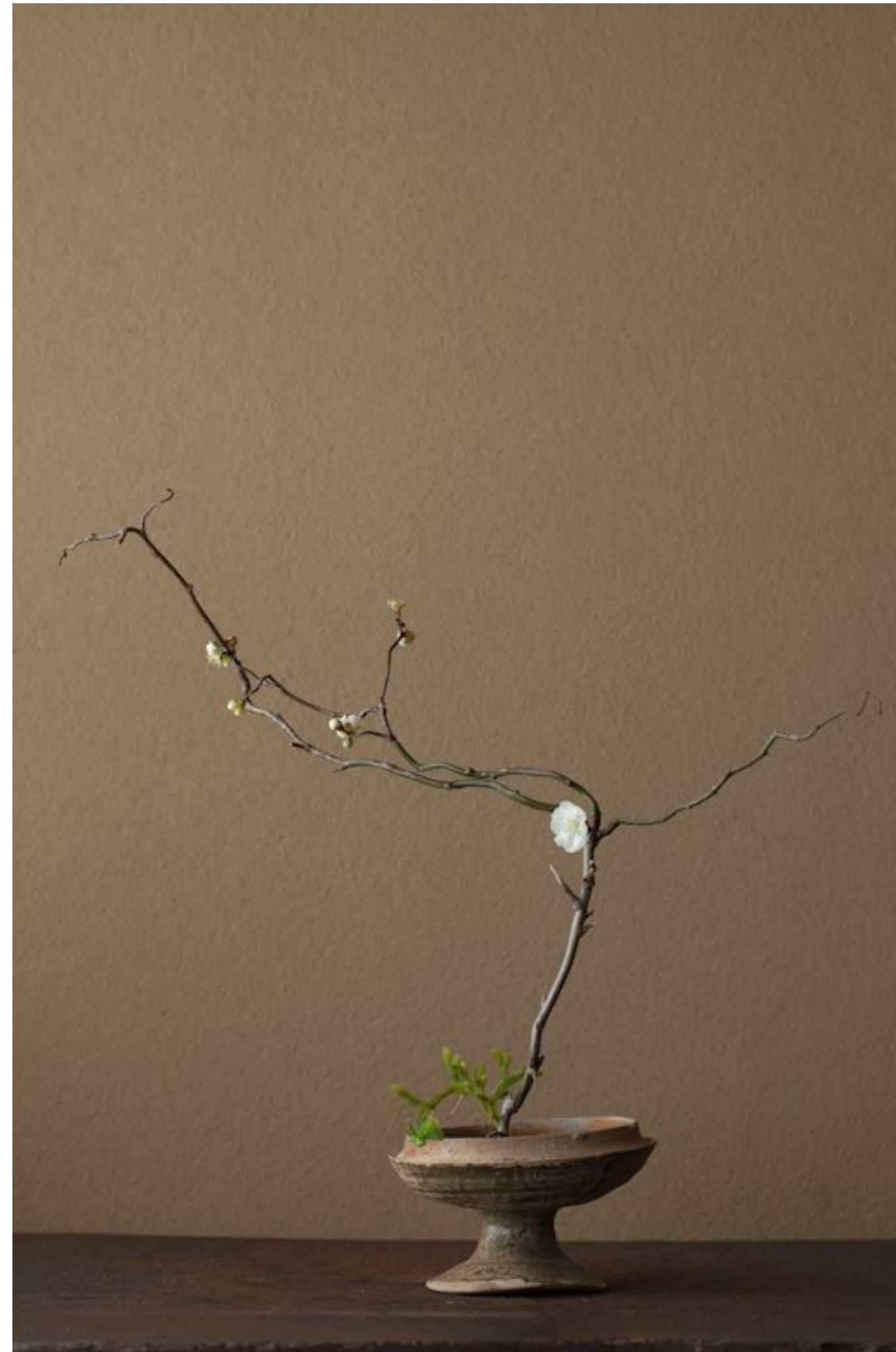
Silent pauses in conversation...

The silent intervals in music 

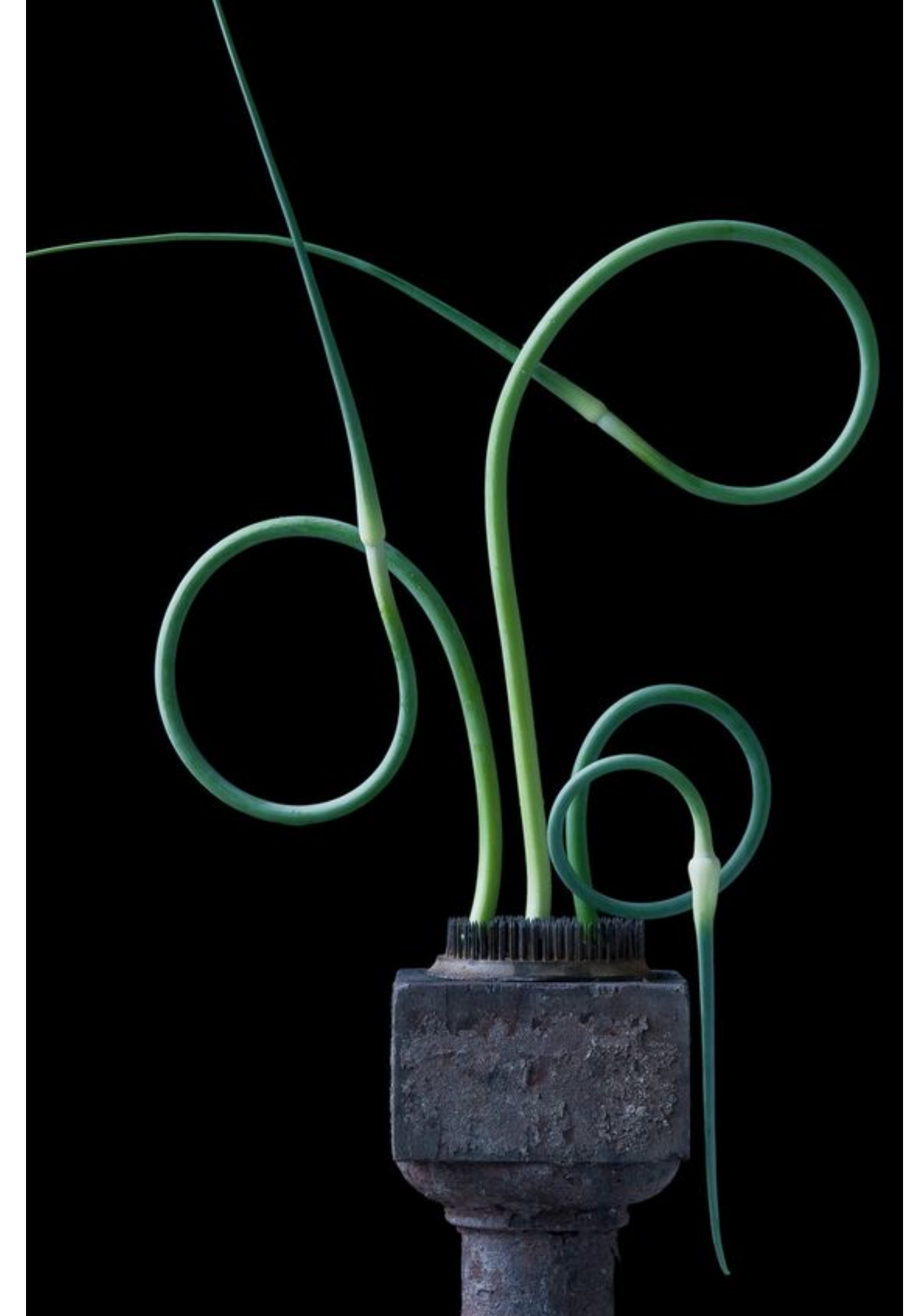
The balance between flowers & empty space is essential to **Ikebana** arrangements



One flower, One leaf



Toshiro Kawase



Garlic Scapes©Lynn Karlin

In architecture, empty spaces contain the energy of endless possibilities



Photo by Stephen Mansfield

“Ma” facilitates the gathering of and connection between beings



ConceptMA GmbH

"Less, but Better": How Dieter Rams Utilized Japanese "Ma"

Japanese aesthetics, especially the concept of “Ma”, significantly influenced European design in the late 19th century.

"Ma" emphasizes balance and meaning, as seen in the minimalist designs of Dieter Rams.

Example:

His Braun ET66 calculator exemplifies this with its compact form and focus on user-friendliness.

Rams' work demonstrates the enduring impact of "Ma" on creating sophisticated and functional products.



1. Good design
is innovative.

Dieter Rams

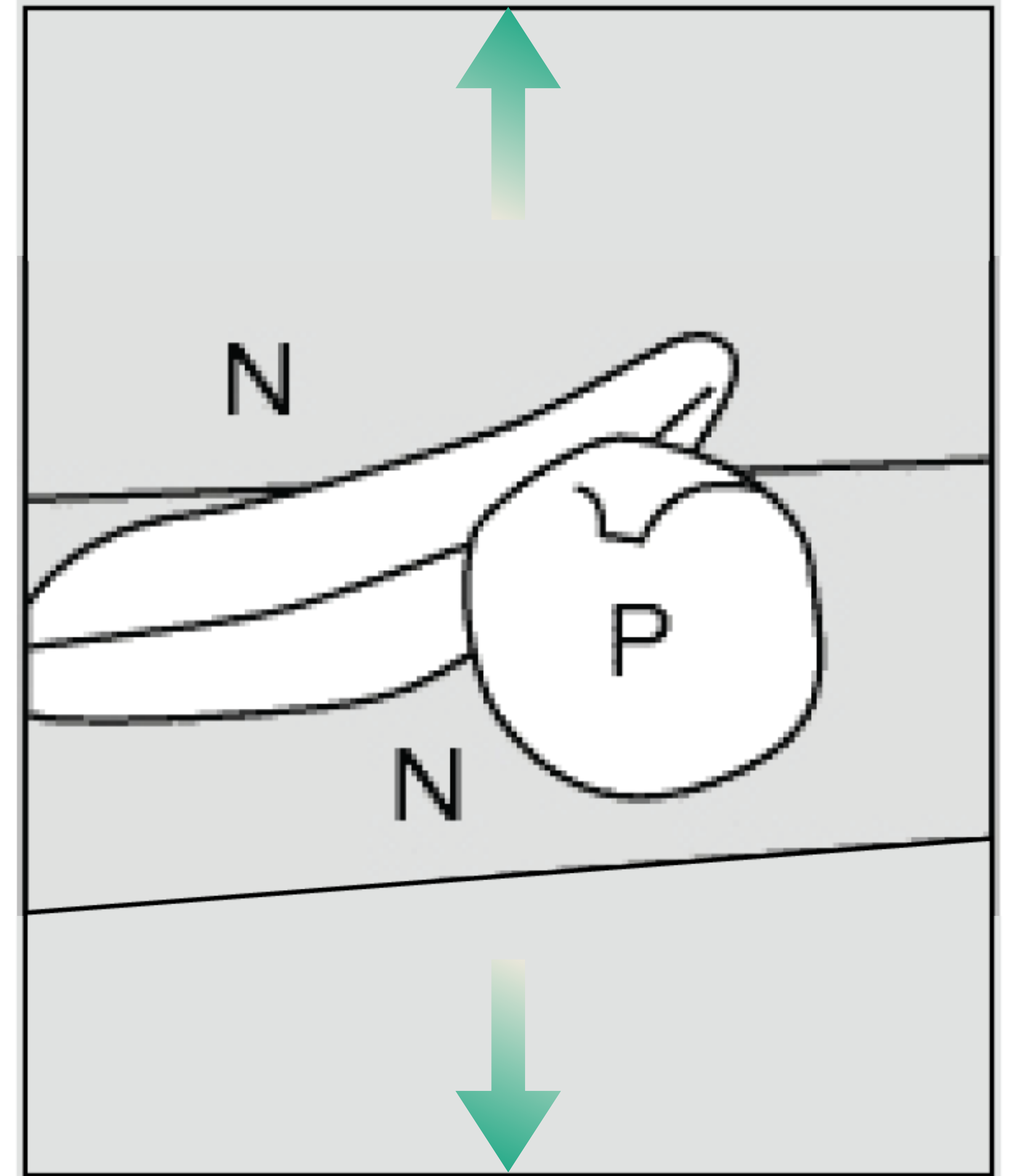
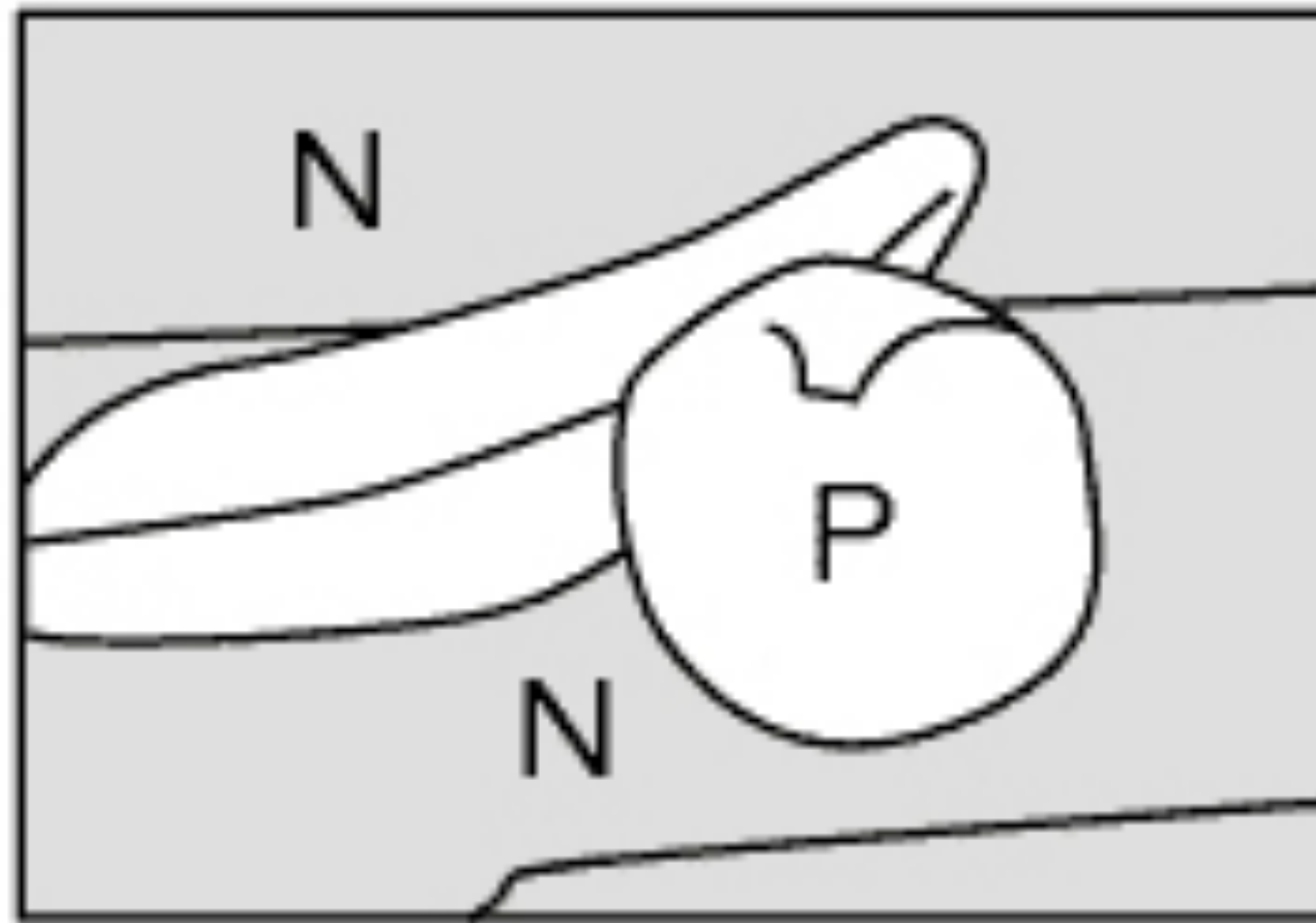
2

**Using "MA" & negative space in their
poster designs**

The Ma concept is often defined as 'negative space'.

The apple has its **own soul both yin & yang**, so the empty space behind needs to be more open in both directions.

This extension acts as a "**stop station**" for our eyes and helps them focus more on the apple in a more comfortable way.



Putting **MA** in **MiniMALism** and beyond

一度でいい。
生で食べてみてほしい
人参です。

きつと想像以上の甘さに驚くはずですが、グリーンコープの
産直人参。その違いは、畑の土作りから化学合成農薬
(殺虫剤・殺菌剤)はもちろん、土壌消毒剤も除害剤も一切
使わず、有機肥料や堆肥を施した土で育った人参は、香りの
のよさも、味の濃さも、酸っぱい苦みや苦味も少なく、あ
まやかな甘味が広がりますが、生産者が手間を惜し
まず育てています。中でも甘みが特に強いのは、生産
地でフルーツのような甘さで、人参嫌いの人々もおいしく
食べられます。ぜひ一度、きつと想像以上の甘さで、生産
者大粒が育てた人参のおいしさをお確かめください。

おいしい人参
のものが、
グリーンコープ
★

(お試しサンプルのお申し込みは、)
電話受付 (お電話: 0120-349-017)
0120-349-017
http://www.green.coop.jp/

食品に、
履歴書が
ある。

しょうゆがへるたび、
ふえるもの。

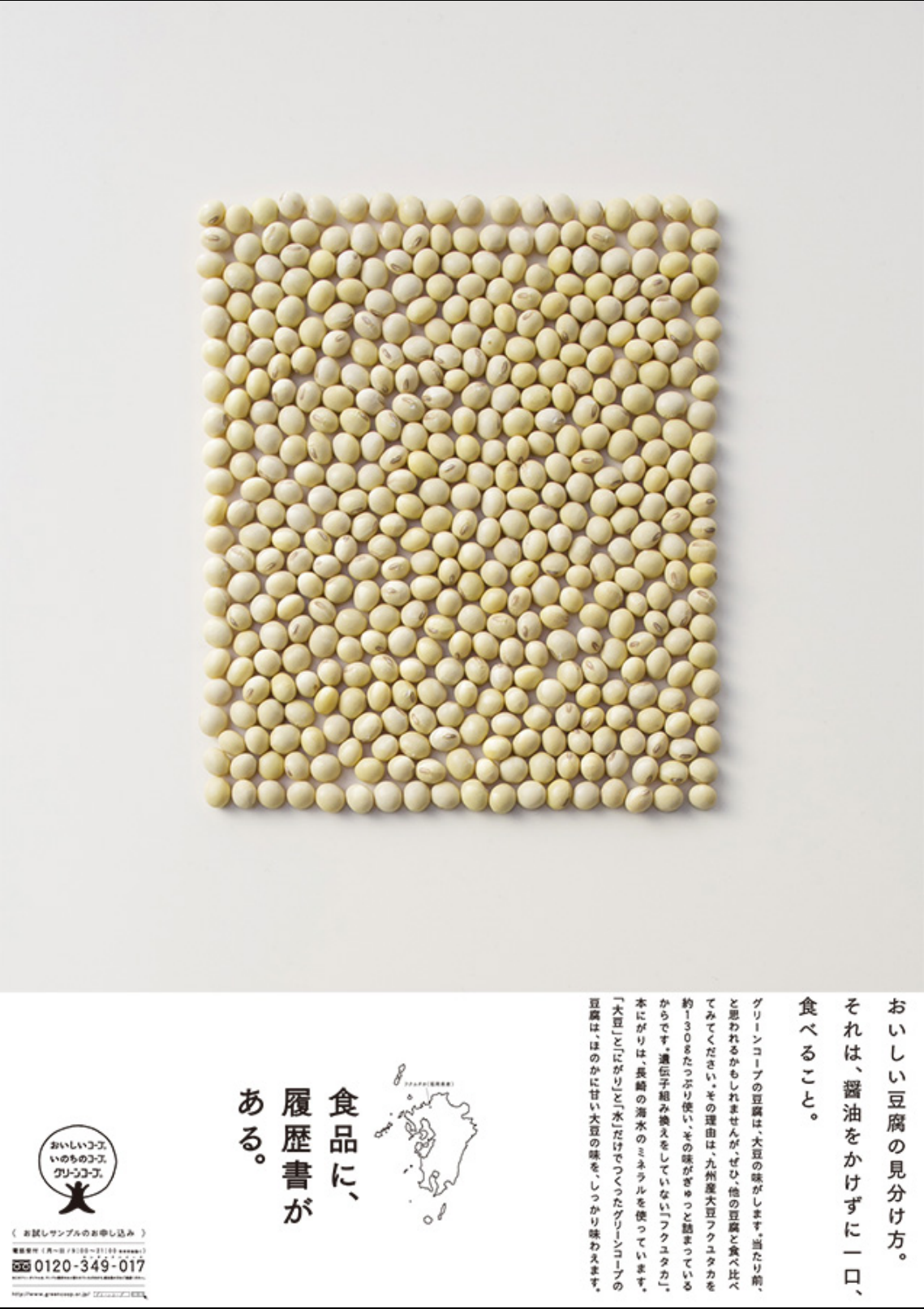
しょうゆは、大豆と小麦を原料とし、自然の力だけで熟成させる。その過程で、大豆のたんぱく質が分解され、旨味成分が豊富になる。また、小麦のデンプンが分解され、甘み成分が増える。このように、しょうゆは、自然の力だけで熟成させることで、独特の風味と旨味を生み出す。その結果、料理の味をより引き立て、食の楽しさを増す。しょうゆは、私たちの食生活に欠かせない調味料の一つである。

日本酒あり ☒

jiā
home

When you are grateful about your origin,
an "Hjā" and then something like "home" will
be created. It is not a house, it is a home.
This is the way to "Hjā" in the world, and
it is the way to "Hjā" in the world.
Hjā is not a house, it is a home.
Hjā is not a house, it is a home.

Negative space in Ma concept **calms us** and lets us "breathe"



3

The Open & Closed negative space in poster designs

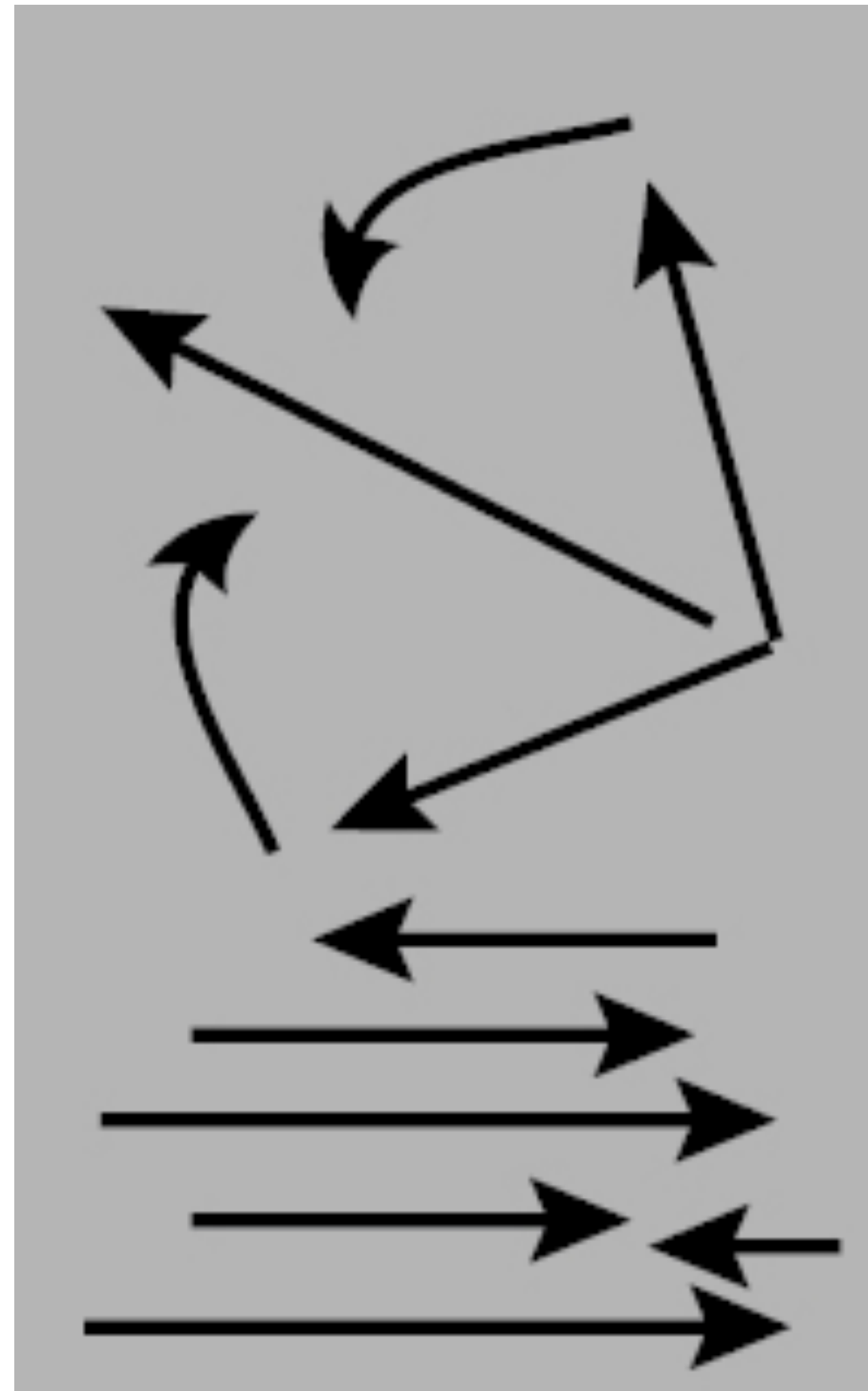
Open negative space



- ♦ **Open Negative Space:** The "This is Sake" poster uses open negative space around the main elements (sakazuki cups, eye, drop).
- ♦ **Emptiness:** The design combats the potential emptiness of open space with careful element placement.
- ♦ **Vertical Centering:** The sakazuki cups are positioned in the vertical center for balance.
- ♦ **Harmonious Alignment:** The title's bottom left alignment creates visual harmony and readability.
- ♦ **Orderly Flow:** The illustrations, arranged vertically, guide the viewer's eye in a smooth, continuous movement.

This is sake by Hiroaki Nagai

Open negative space



In the poster below by Hans Schleger, each element feels visually connected. Imagine an invisible web pulling between the shapes, holding them together within the open surface of the canvas.

Closed negative space



Miso soup by Kenya Hara

The main objects and background are cut close to the edge of the page. This creates closed negative space.

Each negative region is a closed shape.

The spoon in the poster has definite momentum towards definite. Compare the negative zones above and below the spoon.

Empty space is arranged in balance.

Closed negative space



Ryohei Kojima



The animals are cropped off the edge of the page. This creates closed negative space.

There are two brown negative shapes and one green negative shape between the horns of the elk, and three gray negative shapes surrounding the waterfowls.

Each negative area is a closed shape, so you could trace its contour all the way around.

4

**3 main functions of
Negative space**

Negative space in design serves 3 main functions:

Readability:

Proper use of negative space enhances readability by giving elements room to breathe. This involves careful selection of *typography*, *colors*, and *layout*.



Aesthetics:

Negative space contributes to a minimalist and elegant aesthetic, reflecting brand identity and creating a harmonious visual experience.

Focus and Flow:

Negative space guides the viewer's eye through the design, creating focus and directing attention to key elements.



5

“Ma” & Sustainability

“Ma” and Sustainability

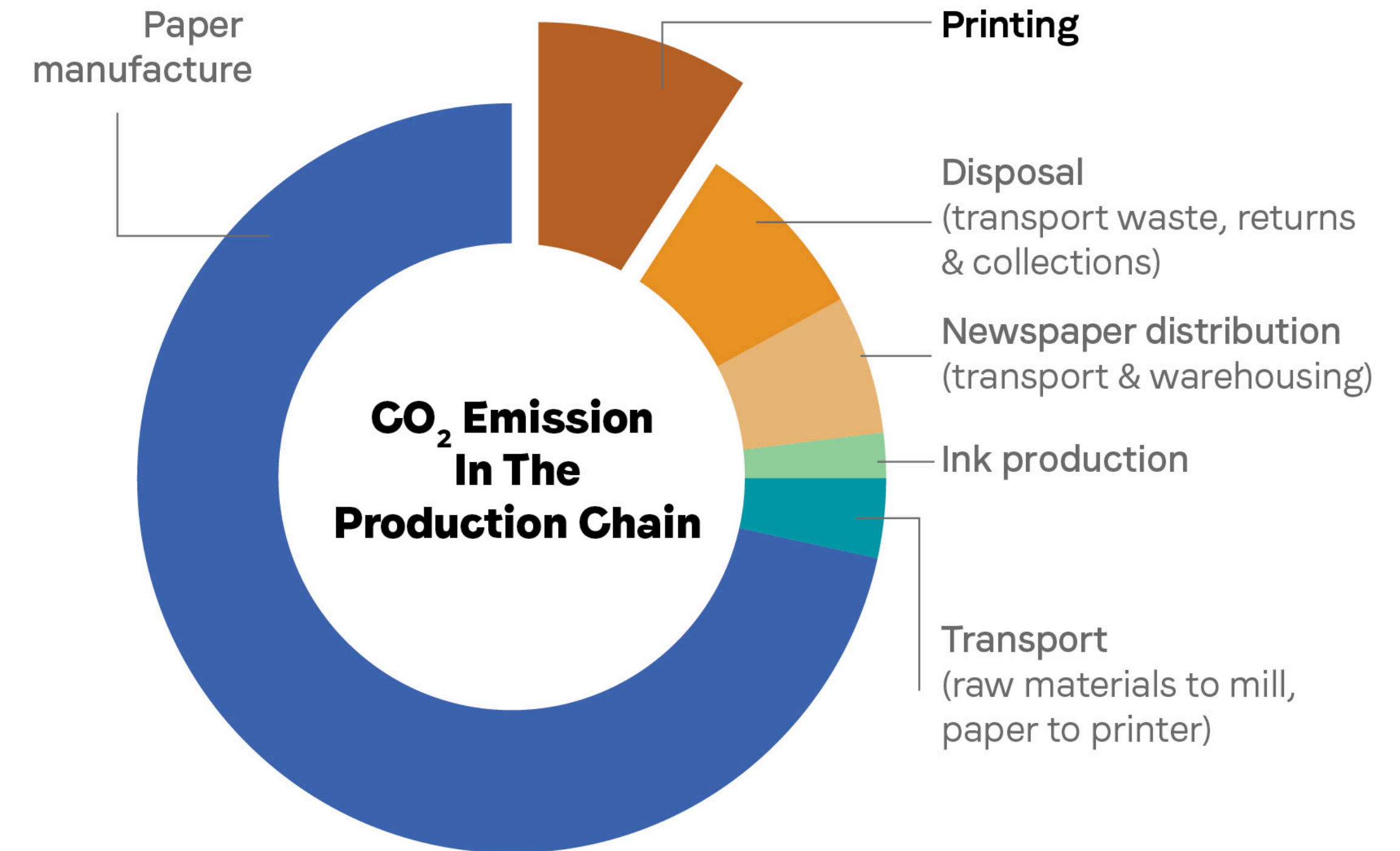
"Ma" suggests a reciprocal relationship between people and their environment.

Sustainable Practices: This philosophy is reflected in Japan's commitment to reducing its environmental impact.

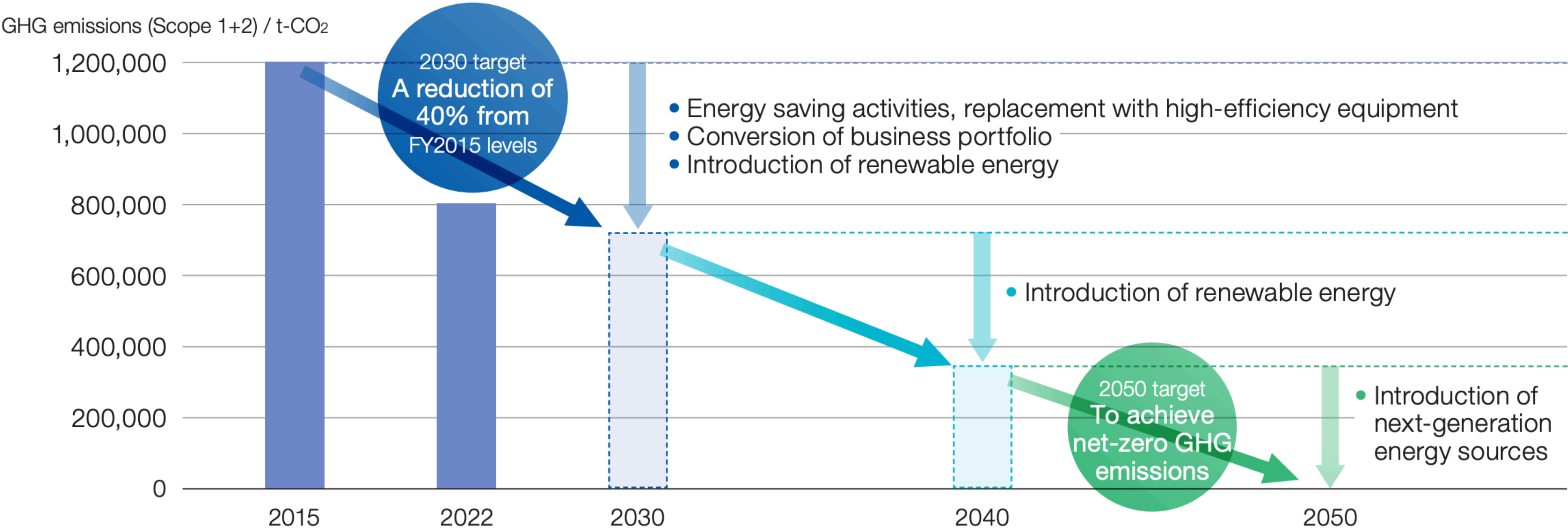
Printing and CO₂: Carbon Trust report highlighted the environmental impact of printing, with 25% of CO₂ emissions coming from the printing process

Solutions: Recycling and innovative printing technologies can help minimize CO₂ release.

Sustainable Materials: Choosing eco-friendly materials is crucial for reducing the environmental footprint of printing.



“Ma” and Sustainability



DNP Group Environmental Report 2023

By fiscal 2030, Japan wants to cut its budget by **46%** from fiscal 2013. In order to meet Tokyo's promise to reaching net-zero emissions by 2050, the new target will aim to maintain the rate of reductions. The report highlights the severity of the climate situation and calls for swift action.

Roadmap for achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 Toward the realization of a decarbonized society, a target in the DNP Group Environmental Vision 2050, we have drawn a roadmap for the reduction of GHG emissions from the business activities of our own sites to net zero by 2050.

6

OVERALL & LESSON

Overall & Lessons

"Ma" is fundamental in design:

It's a crucial element in advertising and graphic design, impacting both print and digital media.

How then can we apply "Ma" to our own lives and find the peace that we need?

It's about **finding balance** in life and appreciating the **simple things**.

Not JUMPING into decisions or from one thing to the next.

Connecting with **NATURE**

Have **"down time"** away from your electronic devices.

Being to see and feel from a **new perspective**.

Creating more space for the things in your lives.





Thank you!