

Gyotaku

gyo = "fish" taku = "rubbing"

History: Gyotaku (gyo-ta-ku) is a traditional Japanese method of printing fish dating back to the mid-1800s. It was first used by Japanese fisherman to record the size and species of fish they caught for display at market. The ruling class and samurai started to hire these fishermen to print their fish to prove how big their fish were. Eventually, the purpose of Gyotaku changed from being a practical means of recording one's catch to a cherished art form.

Details and Tips:

Step 1: Cleaning

- * Dish soap and vinegar cleans the slime off well.
- * Getting the slime and blood off is especially important if you are printing on paper, as the slime is acidic and will eat a hole in the paper over time.
- * Cut the eye out (Optional). This will leave a nice white space in your print where the eye is.

Step 2: Positioning

- * While positioning, stuff paper towels into the gill plate, or other holes, to soak up any extra liquid.
- * Use straight pins and pieces of foam-core board or cardboard to set the fins into place.
- * Dry the fish as much as possible.

Step 3: Paint it on and "dab" it off.

- * **Use as little ink as possible.**
- * Fabric requires more paint than paper.
- * Sumi ink is the traditional medium and is made from Vegetable oil soot.
- * Many artists now use water soluble acrylic paint.
- * Be careful to paint only the fish. Ink anywhere on the workspace will end up on the paper.
- * The dabbing gets rid of any brush strokes.
- * The dabbing distributes the ink /paint evenly.
- * The dabbing helps to soak up wet spots and areas that have too much ink.
- * Use t-shirt material or paper towels with no patterns to dab with.
- * It is helpful to dampen the towel. This helps the towel absorb and distribute the ink evenly.
- * Dab the fins last. The fins tend to dry out quickly and dry ink does not transfer to the paper.

Step 4: Rub paper on the fish.

- * Some artists mist the paper lightly before putting it on the fish. This is especially helpful on larger or rounder fish. You will get less wrinkles in the print.
- * Don't let the paper move once you start rubbing.
- * Don't rub the belly too hard. "Liquid" may leak out.
- * Rub the fins thoroughly. Fins are important.
- * Careful at the jaw and forehead. You don't want a fish with an oversize forehead and/or jaw.
- * The first print always shows problem areas. After the first print you can address the problem areas and the next print will turn out better.

Step 5: Finish the details of the print.

- * Every artist is different. Be creative. Be yourself.
- * Drawing a good eye is important. It gives life.
- * Take reference pictures of the fish. Especially of the eye, so you can duplicate shapes, colors & patterns.
- * I have found **charcoal pencils** work perfect in drawing in missing details.
- * Add color if you wish. I have tried watercolors, acrylic, color pencils, oil pastels, chalk pastels, charcoal and inks. I now use mostly pastel chalk, to get the desired look I want, but it is different with every fish. **USE WHAT WORKS FOR YOU** and constantly try new things.
- * Mount the print in a matt and put it in a frame.
- * You can buy pre-cut matts.
- * You can also wet mount the print onto a canvas.
- * The internet is a great "How-to" resource.

Printing on fabric:

- * If you can't find "textile paint", then use **acrylic paint** with a **"textile Medium" additive**.
- * Thicker paint works best.
- * A brush of medium stiffness works best when applying details to textiles.
- * Textile paint markers work well for details.

Preserving fish to print another day:

- * When putting a fish in the freezer to print at a later date, wrap its fins with a wet towel (paper towel works fine). This keeps the fins from drying out.
- * You can print a fish as many times as you like. Simply put it in the freezer.

DO NOT WASTE THE FISH. The fish can and should be cleaned and eaten afterward. The ink and paint simply wash off.

Contact me anytime if you have questions.

Ron Graham

P.S. I have created a **5-part series of how-to videos**. The link can be found on my website.

www.FishingForArt.net