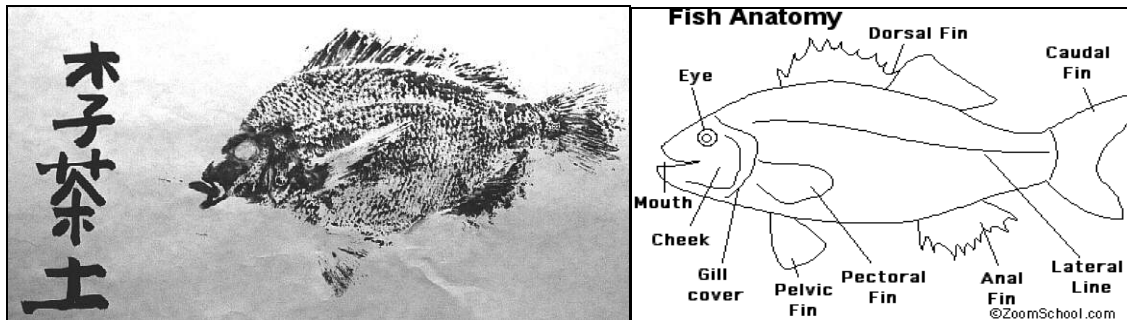


PS 107 Art Day • March 11, 2006 • 8th Ave & 13th Street



Gyotaku – Art Meets Science

Gyotaku (ghee-yo-tah-koo) means fish print. In Japanese, “gyo” means fish and “taku” means a print, rubbing or impression. Gyotaku is believed to have begun in the 1800s by samurai warriors living in the mountains of northern Japan. The ideal samurai excelled both in the military arts (judo, kendo) and in the fine arts such as gyotaku. Fish printing is a good way to appreciate the beauty and anatomy of fish. You can also use this technique for making prints of shells, flowers, and other objects of nature.

Legend tells of a Japanese emperor who went fishing and caught a big red snapper. The emperor was ecstatic, but this big catch presented him with a big problem. Red snapper was the emperor's favorite food to eat, but the fish was so large that he thought he must permanently display the fish in the palace. After much thought, he arrived at the perfect solution. He ordered his servants to paint the fish with ink and then press it on paper to create an impression. He then ordered them to clean the fish and prepare it for a feast at the palace. That night, the emperor and his court enjoyed a fabulous red snapper dinner, while marveling at the beautiful rubbing of the great fish that was now hanging in the imperial dining hall. Who says you can't have your fish and eat it too??

Gyotaku came to America in the 1950s when a Japanese ichthyologist (fish scientist), Yoshio Hiyama, shared his fish rubbings with American scientists. He presented them as scientific illustrations of Japanese fish species. Janet Roemhild Canning, an illustrator of fishes for the Smithsonian Institution, became the first expert American fish printer. A good fish rubbing is probably the most accurate image, in every detail, of a fish's external features. In Park Slope, Stone Park Café (324 5th Avenue) displays gyotaku by Steve Thurston, a scientific illustrator with the American Museum of Natural History (www.fishprintsite.com).

Enjoy making your own fish print!