



Smithsonian Associates

Gyotaku: The Japanese Art of Printing with Fish

Instructor: Sue Fierston

Hi everyone!

Over the three-hour class I'll show you how to set up your space and how to prepare your fish. Then I'll demonstrate the printing process and set you free to make your first gyotaku. Along the way, I can help you troubleshoot your prints, choose papers, and draw a realistic fish-eye, one that will bring your prints to life.

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Please see the fish preparation instructions on Page 2

MATERIALS

From an Asian market, Whole Foods, Wegman's or any store that sells very fresh whole fish (or maybe your own catch?)

A whole fish weighing between 1 and 2 lbs. including tail, all fins, all scales. Don't let the fish merchant gut the fish, simply buy it whole one or two days ahead of class, bring it home, and keep it cold in the back of the refrigerator.

Art supplies to purchase, available online at Dickblick.com, Jerrysartarama.com or at your own art supply store

- 3 Speedball brand water-soluble printing ink, 1.25 oz.
 - 1 each of black, blue and silver
- Speedball brand ink retarder, 1.25 oz
- watercolor round paintbrush size 10 or 12, an inexpensive brush, not a sable
- pad Aitoh brand sumi-e calligraphy paper, 12 x 18, 50 sheets. You will use between 5 and 10 sheets of this paper, so feel free to share a pad if it is logistically possible. It makes beautiful, lasting prints. Yasumoto brand is more common, but the paper is not as good for our purposes.
- 1 white paper plate or 8 x 11 inch piece of freezer paper

Optional supplies

- sheet unryu paper, 24 x 39 inches. You can fold or cut it smaller, depending on the size of your fish
- colored pencils, Prismacolor or similar:
 - Warm gray 90%, Gingerroot, Celadon Green (neutral colors for drawing)
 - the fisheye, if you have similar colors, you can use them instead)
- Watercolor paintbrush size 0 or 1 for painting the fisheye on the print

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You likely have at home

- Pencil
- Paper towels
- Salt and dish soap to wash the fish
- Newspaper or an old tablecloth to cover your work table
- A trash bag

Hi everyone! Prepare your fish for printing in these five steps:

1. The day before class, purchase a whole, ungutted, unscaled, head-on fish weighing between 1 and 3 pounds. If you can choose the fish yourself, look for whole, untattered fins and a fish body that is sleek and unblemished. Fish merchants may look at you as if you're crazy, but tell them that you're making art! Store the fish in the coldest part of your refrigerator overnight.

2. The next morning, lay out newspaper or newsprint in a spot next to the place you will be printing.

3. A few hours before class, unwrap your fish and wash it gently in the kitchen sink using your hands, not the sprayer. If you want to wear gloves, go ahead. You may find there is a quiet magic in peacefully rinsing your fish under cool water and getting to know the shape of its fins and the color of its scales. Many fish have spines in their dorsal fins. For this reason, take care as you wash the fins.

4. You can use a few drops of Dawn dish soap, a sprinkling of baking soda, or a sprinkling of salt to help you remove the slime from the body of the fish. Your aim is to remove all slime so the printing ink will stick to the fish.

5. Transfer the clean fish to the newspaper. Leave it out to dry, uncovered, until class begins. The fish will come to room temperature in this time, and the combination of dry, clean skin and a room-temperature fish will help you make the best prints.



Please plan to keep your Zoom camera on for the first hour of class when I will be demonstrating and taking your questions. Next, we will spend the next hour to hour and a half practicing, and I will keep my camera on and be ready for your individual questions.

For the last 30 min of the workshop, we will have a class gallery of work and collect class advice for making more prints at home, including how to print on fabric.

Looking forward to meeting you!

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