

Source: From **Save Our Coral Reefs**, an educational manual published by Ocean Voice International, Ottawa, Canada. Used with permission.

53. MAKING FISH AND SHELL PRINTS: GYO-TAKU

Methods that enable a natural resource to be re-used several times to make saleable objects are much gentler to the environment than methods where thousands of animals are sold directly, as in shellcraft. Fish and shell-printing is one such gentle craft. Fish and shell-prints, printed in color on fine paper, are craft-items enjoying a growing interest amongst American and Japanese tourists.

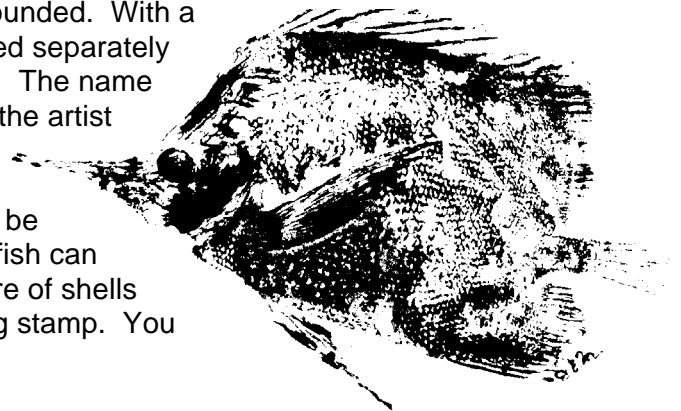
Gyo-taku is a method of making a print or illustration of an object using the object itself. Fish, molluscs, leaves and other natural objects may be used for gyo-taku. In the **direct method**, the object is lightly and evenly inked or painted. The inked object is then pressed against paper, leaving behind an image. If the object is rounded, then the object may need to be rolled up and down or back and forth to print the whole surface. If the object is rolled, take care that it is not shifted during rolling or a double image may be printed. In the **indirect method**, the object is wrapped smoothly in paper and a piece of cloth lightly dipped in ink or paint, is rubbed over the outside of the paper; paper over ridges and bumps on the object are inked more heavily, "valleys" remain white.

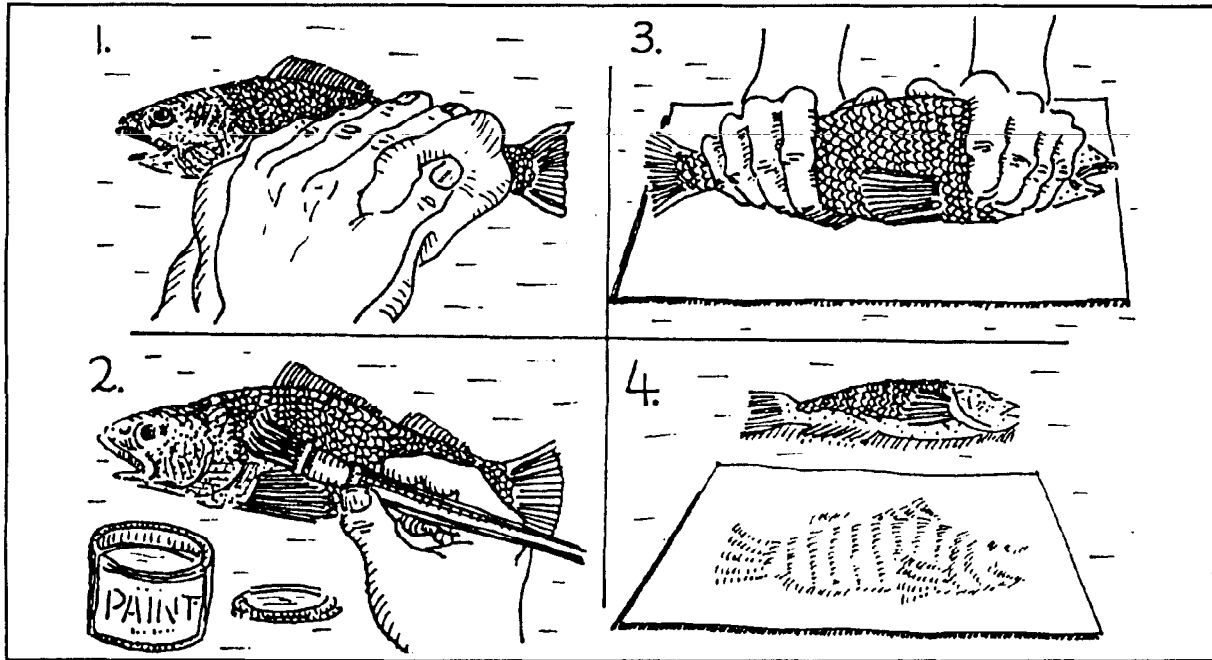
What do you need to make gyo-taku? Obtain a quality paper that will last well, has a nice color and texture. Choose a paint or ink that is **non-toxic** (not poisonous)—then afterwards, if desired, a fish used for printing can be eaten, and it will be safe to leave the ink or paint around the house where there are young children. Find inks or paints that will not bleach when exposed over time to sunlight. With good paper and permanent-style ink, the purchaser of the gyo-taku will then be able to enjoy the print for many years. Chinese or Japanese **sumi** ink or India Ink can be used for black; non-toxic artist's water colors, poster colors or gouache can be used for colors.

A clean dry shell requires no previous preparation. But a fish should first be wiped clean with a cloth so there is no mucus or moisture on the skin. The object to be printed, is covered with ink using a brush or a wad of cloth lightly dipped in ink or paint. Only the raised higher points are inked, the grooves and crannies are left free of ink. The object is then pressed firmly on the paper and lifted off, or carefully rolled once if it is rounded. With a fish, the fins can be spread out carefully and pressed separately against the paper. The print can then be left to dry. The name of the mollusc or fish, your town and province, and the artist can be neatly written on the print.

By treating the fish carefully a number of prints can be obtained. If non-toxic ink has been used, then the fish can be washed, skinned and cooked. The hard structure of shells lets them be used any number of times as a printing stamp. You could sell one shell a hundred times this way!

Once the simple method of gyo-taku has been mastered, you can try fancier ones. If the fish you are using has stripes, like a Moorish idol, then just paint the stripes, or paint two or more colors on the fish for printing, matching the natural colors on the fish. It is also possible to make simple scenes using fishes, seaweed and shells to print the picture. Or you may wish to add value to your print by mounting it on paper, making a mat, framing it with wood or bamboo, and covering the print with glass or plastic.





A damp cloth to wipe the fish clean, sumi ink, a brush or wad of cloth to spread the ink on the fish, and suitable paper are needed to make a gyo-taku or fish print.

Correlation to National Standards from McREL (<http://www.mcrel.org>) :

Geography

16. Understands the changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution and importance of resources

Visual Arts

- 1. Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts
- 4. Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures