

Gyotaku: Capturar l'anima dels peixos

by Rachel Ramirez

On the evening of the 26th of June 2014 I had the tremendous pleasure of meeting the artist Victòria Rabal Merola at the inauguration of her exhibition entitled *Gyotaku: capturar l'anima dels peixos* (Gyotaku: capturing the soul of the fish). Victòria's monumental art work was displayed at the Maritime Museum in Barcelona, Spain from June 27th until September 28th. This exhibition formed part of the series of cultural events held for the *Spain-Japan Dual Year 2013-2014*, which commemorates the 400th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Maritime Museum is appropriately housed in the building of the former royal shipyard which represents a jewel of Catalan Gothic architecture. Dated from 1378 the building is one of the largest and most complete medieval shipyards in the world. Situated in the Port Vell area of the city beside the Mediterranean Sea and opposite the Christopher Columbus monument, the Maritime Museum proved to be the perfect venue. Not only the location but also the museum's historical connection with the sea and its Gothic, cathedral-like interior added a particular gravitas to the *soul of the fish* imprinted and captured forever by Victòria.

The direct *gyotaku* which formed part of Victòria's installation were produced during the period from 2011 until 2014, using 70 different species of fishes and molluscs. However, the installation forms only part of an ongoing *gyotaku* project which began in October 2010 when Victòria made regular visits to the Mercabarna Central Fish Market in Barcelona. Every morning around 4 am she arrived at the fish market and set up her printing table and materials

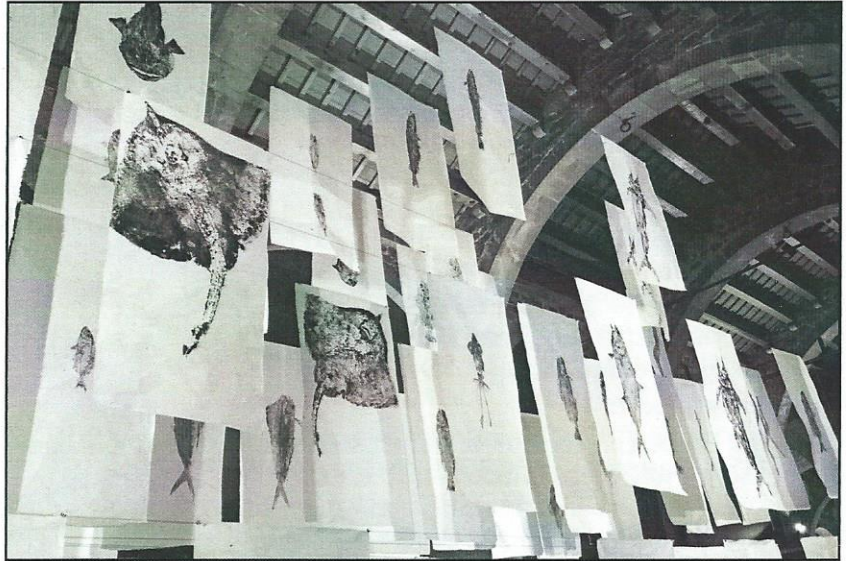


Fig. 1. A small section of Victòria's installation. All photos by the author.

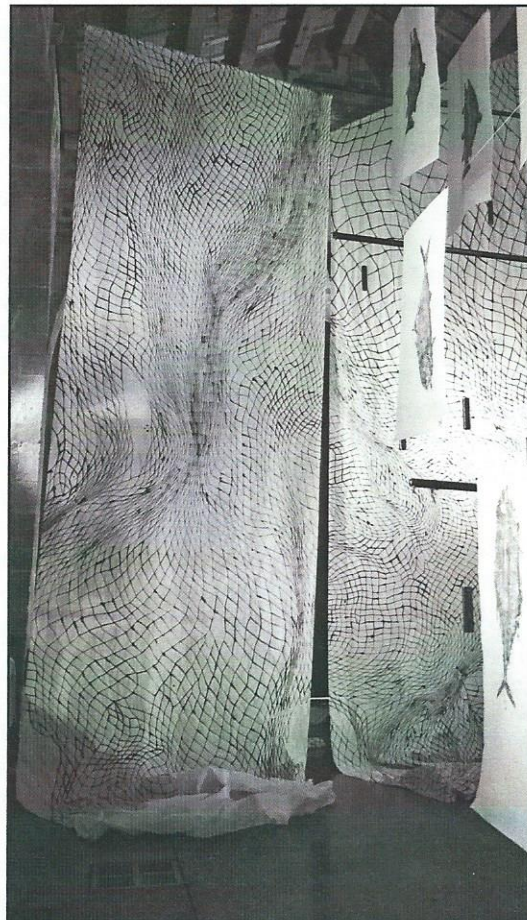


Fig. 2. Ink drawings based on fishing nets.

amongst the hustle and bustle of Europe's largest fish market (defined by species for sale rather than the area). She selected the specimens and, working in the public gaze, produced a minimum of seven direct *gyotaku* prints for each specimen. The preliminary part of the project concluded in December 2011 with an exhibition of a selection of Victòria's *gyotaku* prints held at the Direction Center of the Mercabarna from 16th December until the 20th January, 2011. The *gyotaku* project continued and expanded to include several different species of fishes printed during her visits to cities such as Catania, Italy; Baton Rouge, USA; Mexico City, Mexico; and Buenos Aires and Rosario in Argentina. Victòria has connected her *gyotaku* project with both science and gastronomy through events such as those at the Fundació Àlícia, the CSIC (Institute of Marine Sciences), and the Dos Cielos restaurant in Barcelona owned

by the Torres brothers.

The installation at the Maritime Museum consisted of two distinct and yet harmonious components. Hundreds of direct *gyotaku* printed in black Chinese ink on sheets of soft white oriental paper were arranged on a structure which was suspended from the vaulted ceilings in the center of the exhibition hall (Fig. 1). The large sheets of paper (74 x 142 cm) featured impressions of single fish or pairs of fish and solitary molluscs. Gently undulating, the fishes and molluscs appeared to be swimming and visitors were able to wander amongst them adding to the effect of movement. This was complemented by enormous rolls of billowing paper hanging from the ceiling at the far end of the hall which featured hand drawn images of fishing nets (Fig. 2). At the entrance to the hall the walls were lined with illustrated explanations about *gyotaku* and the artist's work.

Victòria's iconic direct *gyotaku* are instantly recognisable by the fact that she does not paint in the eye or mask out the eye area. Instead of this common practice she applies ink to the entire specimen and the eye is formed naturally during the printing process. In her multiple roles as an artist, master papermaker, founding member of the IAPMA (International Association of Papermakers and Artists), and Director of the Capellades Paper Mill and Museum, Victòria has an obvious affinity with paper which resonates throughout her work. Fishes, aquatic creatures, and the mythology of the oceans are recurring motifs in Victoria's works



Fig. 3. The black and white chef's jacket produced during Victòria's direct *gyotaku* workshop.

of art. Many of the papers used in the creation of her *gyotaku* project were hand made by Shingo Nishimura, Norito Hasegawa and Tsuyoshi Nakahara, master papermakers from the Tottori prefecture in Japan. The

exhibition was accompanied by an illustrated, limited edition catalogue which features text in Catalan, Spanish, and English.

I was fortunate enough to be able to take part in Victòria's *gyotaku* printing workshop held in the Maritime Museum café. This was attended by the catering staff and members of the *Piscifèrics* collective who

organize gastronomic experiences. Linen table runners, aprons, t-shirts, and large sheets of Japanese paper were used to create direct *gyotaku* prints from a range of Mediterranean sea food, much to the delight of the participants and the inquisitive museum visitors (Fig. 3). Children and adults dropped by to examine the specimens and watch the printing in action.

Later that evening as we shared much laughter and a delicious Catalan dinner, I was delighted to hear that Victòria's *gyotaku* project is far from finished. She intends to continue to expand and explore the wonderful world of fish printing.

More of Victòria's work can be seen at www.victoriarabal.com

NPS Member and regular newsletter contributor Rachel Ramirez lives in Portugal, producing traditional and innovative gyotaku prints and networking with other European fish printers and scientists.

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encouraged to apply to teach, and a Call For Instructors will go out before the 2015 workshop.

9. Other Business:

Kathy Bower reported the 2014 Silent Auction net amount was \$1,740.

Susan Hansen collected \$662 for the Scholarship Fund from Happy Hour donations.

John Doughty donated \$805 to the Carol Doughty Scholarship Fund from the sale of his framed prints.

Bee asked if 18 members would like to be pen pals with students at a school on Nantucket Island, sending photos of fungi for each child to research and report on. More information and details to follow. Many members were interested in helping with this project.

Scholarship Recipient Elaine Waters was introduced. She lives nearby in Marion, NC and teaches at the high school, 9th grade history. NPS pays the workshop and class fees, lodging, meals, class supplies, and gives a copy of the *NPS Guidebook* to each scholarship recipient. When requested, the stipend for the substitute teacher is also paid to their school. Bee asked members to think about additional ways we could utilize the scholarship funds. The other scholarship recipient, Marlean Duncan, was not able to attend the meeting.

Stephen DiCerbo suggested that the Facebook page could be improved by making it more interactive by allowing NPS members to post without submitting through the Editor (Cindy Marlow). Options will be explored.

Mineo Yamamoto presented one of his original *gyotaku* Flounder prints to be given to Wildacres Retreat Center on behalf of NPS. All in attendance were asked to sign their name on the back of the print.

Meeting adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,
Lori Ann Loftus
Secretary, Nature Printing Society