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Annie O'Mohondro opens new gallery on the Bayfront

Creates artwork using Japanese technique for fish painting

By Sue Fagalde Lick

Annie O'Mohondro paints fish. Literally. She catches the biggest examples of their species that she can find, takes them back to her studio and brushes their bodies with paint she has blended with liquid wax. Then she presses the fish against handmade paper or silk to make a colorful impression of her catch.

The results cover the walls of her new gallery, O'Mohondro Originals, on the Bayfront. Her fish paintings are also on display at many galleries throughout the northwest, at the other gallery she owns in Langlois, and at Harp's restaurant in Bandon.

O'Mohondro's work is based on a Japanese technique called *gyotaku*, which started in the 1800s as a way for Japanese fishermen to record the size of their catch. They would press the fresh-caught fish against pieces of paper, making an indentation to be colored in as proof they caught "the big one."

O'Mohondro sees *gyotaku* as a way to capture the essence of the fish. Her latest discovery is the use of alloy paint, with flecks of

shining copper, bronze, gold and silver in the pigments, on silk. When light shines on it, the resulting sheen mimics the shine of fish scales.

An avid fisherman, O'Mohondro seeks fish to paint rather than to eat, although she does eat the smaller fish she catches just for fun. It's more than just making a picture of a fish, she said. "I want to pay homage to them. I'm recreating the spirit and giving life to my fish. I work the piece until I feel I'm no longer in the room alone."

O'Mohondro, 42, who grew up in Bellevue, Wash., always wanted to be an artist but tried several other things before beginning her artistic career. She took French and general studies classes at the University of Oregon and traveled to Europe, South America and Hawaii. When she returned to the Northwest, she found a calling as a heavy equipment operator.

Then an auto accident forced her to find a new career. She was living on the former Chiloquin Indian reservation near Crater Lake at the time. She had grown up with a foster brother who was Native American, from the Makah tribe, and developed a lifelong interest in Native America culture.

While at Chiloquin, she consulted with a Shaman from the Shasta nation, learning the myths of many tribes, and decided to try her hand at art. She opened the downstairs of her home as a gallery, showing art by local artisans along with her own early attempts. She made her first images with a wood-burner, engraving images



Artist Annie O'Mohondro captures the physical and spiritual essence of the fish she catches for her paintings. Her works are on display now at O'Mohondro Originals fine art gallery on the Bayfront. (Photo by Sue Fagalde Lick)

with western, wildlife and Native American themes onto maple burls. Gradually she moved from wood to paper and from bison and wolves to fish.

But Chiloquin is at the confluence of two great fishing rivers, and O'Mohondro said she found herself drawn to the rivers and the fish that lived there. "I actually felt them moving through me on the river," she said.

She started painting fish totems, using her wood-burning tool to make images on paper then applying color with ground pigments melted into heated wax. When she discovered the *gyotaku* technique, it seemed a better way to preserve the essence of the fish. O'Mohondro typically immerses

herself in her subjects. When she painted wildlife on the reservation, she watched bison and wolves for hours. Now she is taking diving lessons so she can record the fish-eye view of life in the ocean. "I really do live, eat, sleep, dream and breathe fish," she said.

Now a resident of Waldport, O'Mohondro has spent the past 19 years on the Oregon coast. She previously lived in Newport for 12 years before moving to Langlois, where she still maintains a gallery, The Langlois Lounge, in a 100-year-old schoolhouse. She decided to return to Newport to be closer to her three sons, who were living with their father in Logsdon.

The Bayfront location will not only give her sons a chance to fish and crab right outside her door, but it also will allow others who fish there to bring their catches to the gallery to be immortalized in paint. She will make a painting of the fish and return it, so her customers can have their fish and eat it for dinner, too. "It's a fine art alternative to taxidermy," she said.

Throughout the day, visitors can watch her paint, getting a better view via mirrors installed above her work surface.

O'Mohondro's Gallery, located at 857 SW Bay Blvd., is open 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. every day except Tuesday. For information, call 574-9174.

WOMEN'S REEL NEWS

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Page 10

WOMEN'S REEL NEWS

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THE ART OF FISHING

Annie O'Mohondro uses an ancient Japanese technique to express her creative sensibilities and indulge her affinity for fish

Annie O'Mohondro paints fish using an ancient Japanese technique!



Working here with handmade paper and a salmon, avid angler and artist Annie O'Mohondro recently began capturing her unique fish images on silk fabric as well. Among the celebrities who have reportedly collected her pieces to date: Ted Turner, Jane Fonda, and Kim Novak.