

The Gyotaku Guru

Local Angler: Why fish rubbings? What is your connection to your subject matter?

Greg Aragon: After a lifetime of fishing and being on the water, I really feel I've found a way to capture and record the true impression, color and detail of fish (which helps people appreciate fish even more!) To me, Gyotaku is an elegant art form and traditional method of immortalizing and celebrating the natural beauty and diversity of fish. I've always been a heavy-duty nature lover; Especially marine life and have also always collected shells and made things from the sea all my life. I lived in the Florida Keys when I was 20 for a few years and saw a small fish rubbing one day in an old little gallery in Key West. I was amazed at the detail and years later, when I moved back to Largo, I did some for fun. I became more interested in the technique so I studied and slowly began to perfect and devise my own unique methods and look that many others have tried to follow. Before I knew it, my rubbings were in demand by many locals and tourists. I even taught quite a few interested customers who became accomplished Gyotaku artists.

In 15 years of doing Gyotaku full-time, my work is still improving and in demand. I've had numerous TV coverage specials and news segments on my art work through the years and I've been able to donate to many local charities as a sponsor. I've been donating work to local charity fishing tournaments for the last 10 years or so.

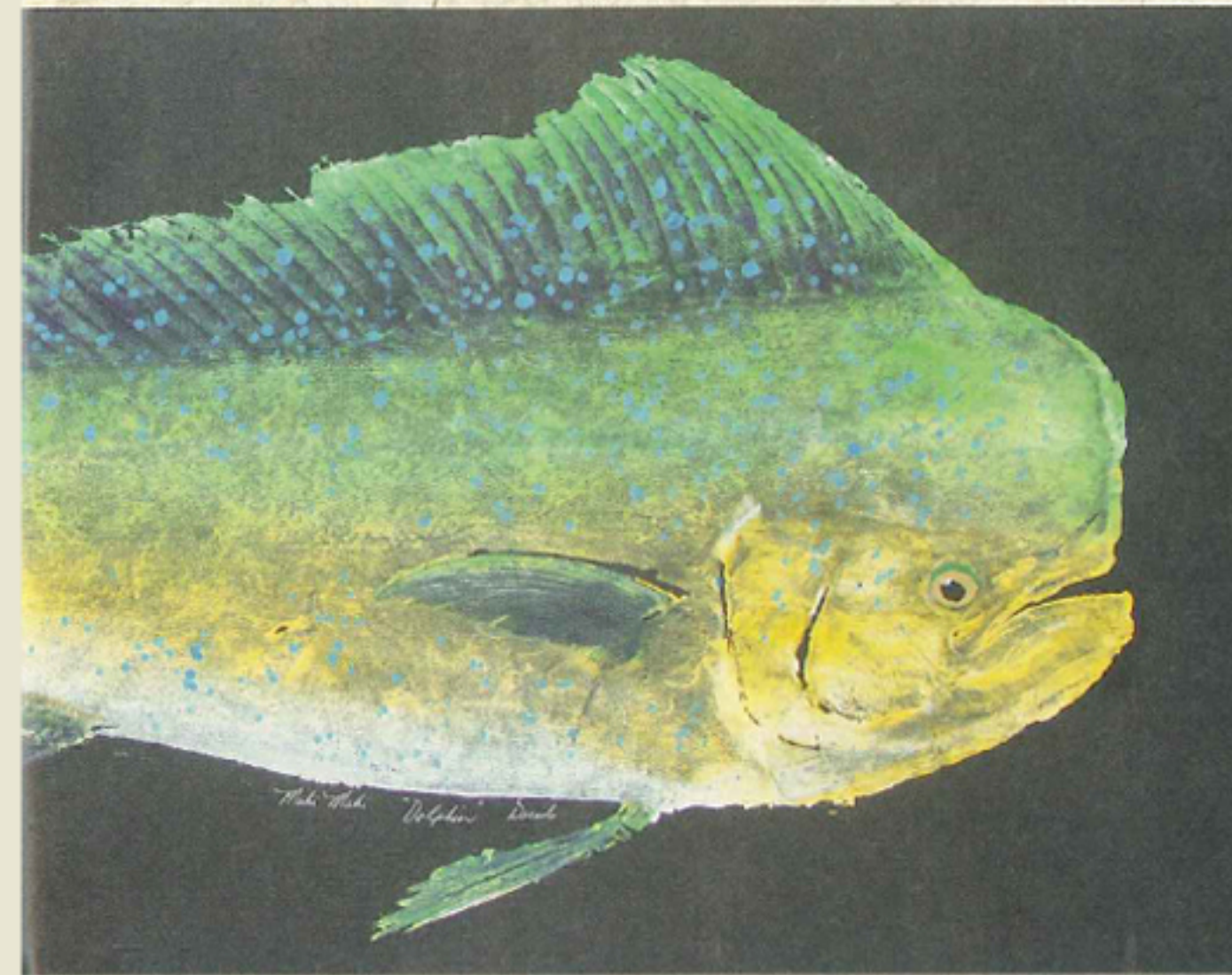
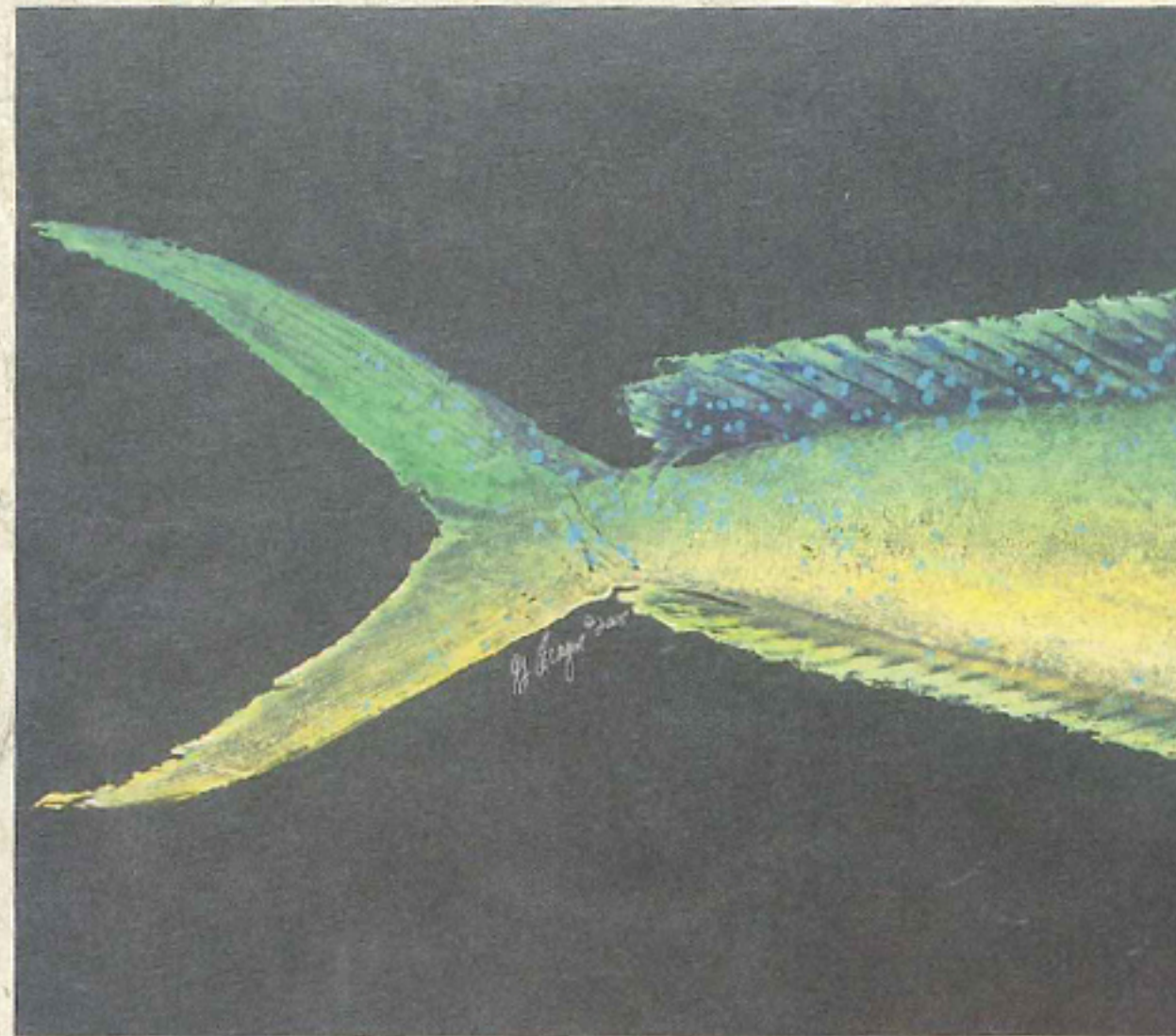
LA: How did you acquire your love for fish and fishing?

GA: When I was around 10 years old, the family moved to north Tampa and I started fishing for largemouth bass on Lake Carroll (and other great bass lakes north of Tampa) with my dad. My biggest was 12 1/2-pounds (we caught lots of 8 to 10s) and I have my Dad's 13.9-pounder mounted. Then came weekends

at Indian Rocks Beach and I was slamming 100-pound tarpon. We moved to Largo back then and were pier regulars. My dad, Jack Aragon, was very well-known pier regular. At 13-14 years-old I was sitting on the railing of the pier with a 25-pound catching big snook while my 4/0 rig was tied to the railing. As a teenager, after rowing out two or three big shark baits in a leaky aluminum rowboat we'd dropped off the end of the pier, I'd stay all night long on the pier "snookin" and shark fishing. (We caught) Lots of big sharks in those days and I saw 9/0 and 12/0 reels get stripped many times.

LA: Tell us about some of your latest work (i.e. fish)...

GA: My latest project was a major accomplishment for me in that I did rubbings of a eight-foot, 233-pound tarpon (caught by local angler Al Willis). I had the fish on my garage floor for two days and worked until sunrise producing three, full-size, full-color acrylic Gyotaku (fish rubbings) on black rice paper. One original rubbing of this giant will be on display at Middle Grounds Grill in Treasure Island. I also did quite a few rubbings of the head of the tarpon which look really great! For many years I've done rubbings of the winning kingfish in both the Fall and Spring



for the Old Salt King of the Beach tournament. The framed, original winning fish rubbing is auctioned for local charities. The last one I did was 55-pounds and was also a tournament record-breaking fish.

My next big project is a giant Warsaw grouper (149-pounds) and a 30-pound red snapper that just won the Desoto offshore tourney for Capt. Tom Butler.


I am fortunate to know many top-notch local fishing guides that supply me with great fish to rub! I've rubbed many rare and record fishes and even corrected the National Marine Fisheries Service on a rare fish they gave me to rub (It was a "bulleye" that they swore was a bigeye until they borrowed my fish book). I get to rub and learn about fish that even old timers that have fished all their lives have never seen like longtail bass from 400 to 500 feet; bulleye from 900 feet; 11-pound world record yellowtail snapper; 104-pound black grouper; 45-pound red snapper; 23-pound hogfish; bull dolphin, queen snapper, bluespotted coronetfish and endless other cool fish!

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Gyotaku (fish rubbing in Japanese) is a tricky procedure because you're working with the actual fish as your canvas and then pulling your work of art off the fish by rubbing or pressing paper on the wet painted fish.



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