

AN EYE FOR NEW

A JAPANESE ARTIST WHO LOVES FISHING FINDS HIS UTOPIA IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

BY MARK BEAUCHESNE

Koji Yaoita has an eye for New Hampshire. The 40-year-old artist, who lives in Chiba, Japan (a suburb of Tokyo), has visited New Hampshire regularly since 1993 to fish, explore, take photos and capture the essence for his canvas back in Japan.

Yaoita discovered fishing when he was 8 years old, worm and bobber fishing for small carp in drainage creeks that flood rice paddies.

Always drawn to art, Yaoita graduated from Nihon Design Art College in 1982. While in school, his work was exhibited at the prestigious Tokyo Art Gallery.

Yaoita soon took a job with a graphic design office in Tokyo. While there, Yaoita realized that there was little demand for the kind of art he was interested in. So, he left the design office to pursue his passion of painting scenes of fishing, wildlife and nature.

As a freelance illustrator, Yaoita quickly became one of Japan's top five fishing illustrators. His works have appeared in many publications, including the cover of *Tackle Box*, a popular Japanese magazine about bass fishing. Yaoita has also illustrated the posters for the 1995 and 1996 Tokyo International Fishing Shows. Yaoita's illustrations have also appeared in the Japanese

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Artist Koji Yaoita (inset) has been fishing in New Hampshire since 1993, providing him with inspiration for many evocative works of art.

Right: *TIGHT LINE depicts the trophy stretch of the Connecticut River. Yaoita himself has a landlocked salmon on the line, and guide Angus Boezeman looks on.*

ANGUS BOEZEMAN PHOTO



HAMPSHIRE



KATE WATTS



One of Yaoita's favorite fish on the flyline – the largemouth bass. Here he captures the explosive excitement of the topwater strike.

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magazine *Fly Rodder* and have been featured at the “Fly-Fishing Hand Craft Show 2002” in Tokyo.

Yaoita is now the primary freelance illustrator for the leading fishing tackle manufacturer in Japan, the Daiwa Corp.

Fishing the World

Yaoita has traveled and fished in many exciting places, including Wyoming, Alaska, Minnesota and Canada. All of these places were nice, but they were missing something for Yaoita.

At a fly-fishing show in Tokyo in 1993, Yaoita met Angus Boezeman, a fly-fishing guide from New Hampshire, who is fluent in Japanese.

They talked about the fishing opportunities in New Hampshire, and Yaoita took Boezeman's card and walked away. Something told him to look at his card again. This chance meeting was an act of fate, he thought.

Yaoita's first trip was a memorable one. He and Boezeman paid a visit to the American Museum of Fly Fishing in Vermont, and then they were on to Pittsburg to fish the Connecticut River. They camped at Lafayette State

Park in Franconia and also fished the Newfound River. Koji still remembers the nice brown trout he and Angus caught on the Contoocook River.

As their tour of New Hampshire continued, their friendship grew stronger, as did Yaoita's appreciation for the state and its fishing.

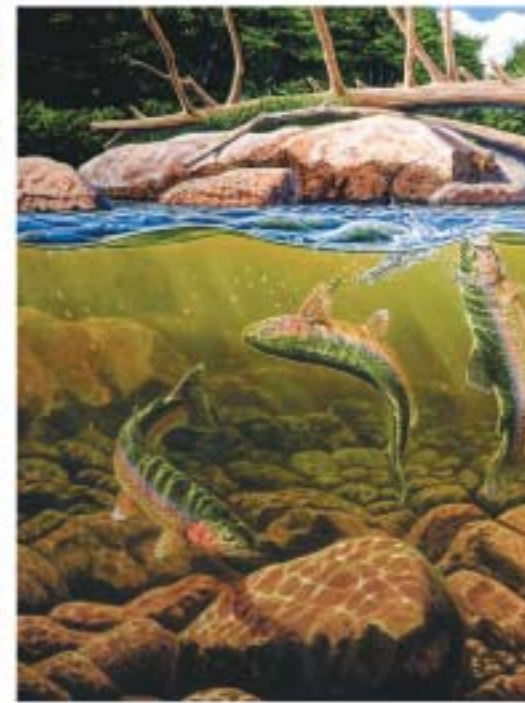
Yaoita had found what he was looking for.

“I found my utopia,” he says. “New Hampshire has the nicest forests, lakes, rivers, scenery, fish...as well as nice friends.”

Details of The Great Outdoors

Yaoita had found in New Hampshire the elements of his artistic philosophy. The people of Japan have a strong

Rainbows' mesmerizing pursuit of hatching mayflies is illustrated here in FEEDING RHYTHM.



respect for friends, history, culture and natural resources. He captures all of them in his artistic view of New Hampshire.

His yearly visits are filled with fishing and sightseeing. Because Yaoita's time is short in New Hampshire, he makes good use of his time by photographing the background material needed for his paintings.

“I would love to be able to sketch while I'm here in New Hampshire,” Yaoita says, “but I don't want to miss

PETER'S DRIFTBOAT is a visual meditation on the quiet creaking of oars...the subtle swish-swish of the flyline...the river's silence broken by the splash of a rising trout.



out on the great fishing.”

Yaoita takes these photos and memories back to Japan to create his wonderful works of art. He primarily paints with acrylics on canvas.

His great eye for detail allows Yaoita to capture the finest details of his subjects, including the subtleties of light and movement. He shows the minute details, like mayflies emerging from their nymph state.

Yaoita is able to bring his paintings to life. I look at his paintings and I feel

like I'm there fishing with him. The casual observer can see the beauty of New Hampshire from a unique perspective – through the eyes of a Japanese artist and angler.

A Journey to Philosophy

Yaoita's trips to New Hampshire are part of what he calls his "journey to philosophy." Like others before him leaving their music, literature, photos and fly patterns, Yaoita leaves his painting, capturing his unique views of New Hampshire.

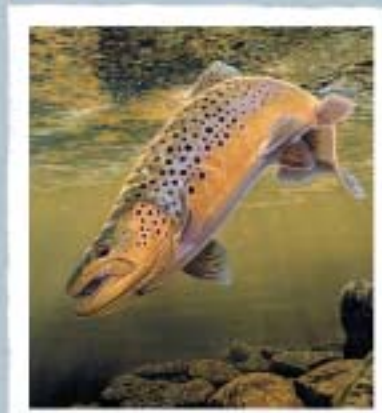
He'll continue visiting New Hampshire and his friends here, and he'll keep creating wonderful works of art that interpret his vision, philosophy, passion for fishing, friendships and love for New Hampshire.

"I want to represent these thoughts; and if you can feel this

through my work, it makes me very happy," Yaoita says.

Knowing Yaoita personally, I truly understand what makes him happy. I've had the pleasure of fishing with Yaoita and have seen New Hampshire through his eyes. He finds beauty in things that I have grown accustomed to seeing.

"When I'm there," Yaoita says, "I can feel that I'm back to the place where I should really stay." ■



Mark Beauchesne is coordinator of Fish and Game's Let's Go Fishing program and is also a registered fishing guide.

Limited-edition prints of Koji

Yaoita's artwork are available in the U.S. through Angus Boezeman. Contact Angus c/o Pip Printing, 30 1/2 South Main Street, Concord, NH 03301; or phone (603) 225-7363.