

Traveling exhibit features Troll art

By JOANNA MARKELL
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It was 1997 when Ketchikan artist Ray Troll made his first trip down the Amazon River at the invitation of Dr. Kirk Johnson of the Denver Museum of Nature of Science. The voyage was an introduction to the fish, culture and legends of the Amazon, and it would set into motion work that would keep Troll busy for several years.

The Amazon is, after all, a world filled with stingrays, piranhas, dancing pink dolphins and a small but scary fish named the candirú.

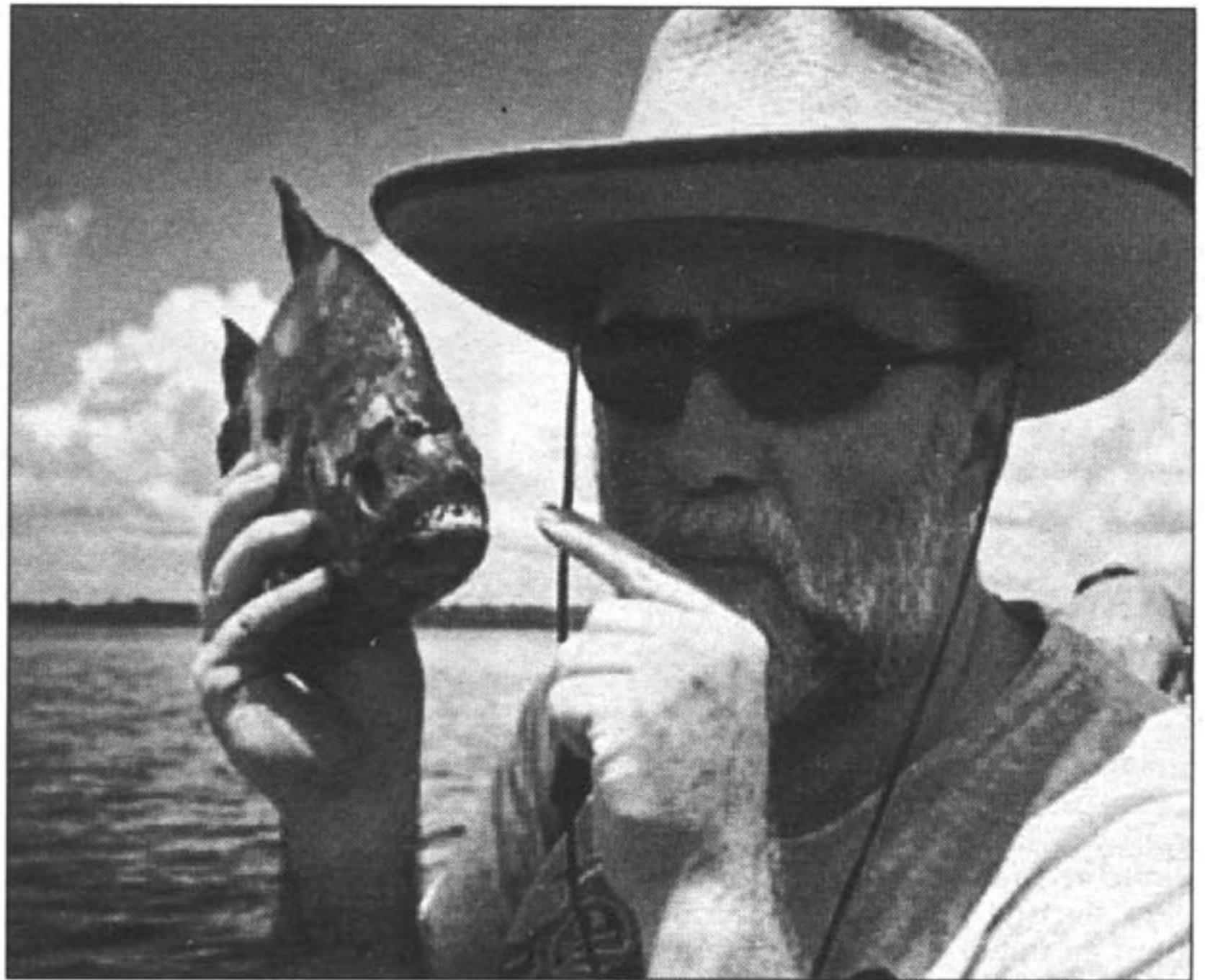
"I came back and did a giant mural of Amazonian fishes," Troll said. "I started looking for a home for it."

The mural eventually found that home in a traveling exhibit called "Amazon Voyage: Vicious Fishes and Other Riches" at the Miami Museum of Science and Planetarium. Troll was the artistic director for the exhibit, which includes two live fish tanks, a giant catfish and a replica of the boat Troll and his colleagues used to travel the river. The exhibit in Miami opened in the fall after weathering challenges from Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma. A party to celebrate the opening is scheduled this weekend.

Troll, who returned to the Amazon in 2000 and 2005, said boat captain Mo Fortes' stories inspired the "seven perils of the Amazon River" which appear throughout the exhibit. And what, exactly, are the perils? The electric eel, the stingray, the piranha, anaconda, caiman, the piraiba and the candirú.

"Piranhas aren't all that scary," Troll said. "People go swimming (in the Amazon) all the time, but there are times you don't go swimming. There never have been any documented deaths from piranhas."

The 5,000-square-foot exhibit is



Ketchikan artist Ray Troll points to a piranha in the Amazon last year. He was artistic director for "Amazon Voyage: Vicious Fishes and Other Riches," a traveling exhibit on display at the Miami Museum of Science and Planetarium. Photo courtesy Ray Troll

hands-on, and tries to connect visitors with researchers in the field.

After museum-goers watch a video of Dr. Paulo Petry sift through bogs of muck, for example, they can reach into a watery tank to discover animals that live beneath the leaves, including the "muck fish," a creature that was discovered by Petry. Development of exhibit took several years and involved 13 scientists from North and South America along with the Science Museum of Minnesota, according to the Miami Museum.

Troll enlisted help from locals on the project, including former Ketchikan resident Karen Lybrand, who created a catfish puzzle and other artwork.

The 4-inch-long candirú, a fish

known for some rather unpleasant things, inspired a song that features Troll, Ashley Byler, Stephen Jackson and Troll's son Patrick.

The exhibit — which is in English and Spanish — was funded by the National Science Foundation after surviving a competitive grant process. After Miami, it is headed to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Over the next five years, it will travel to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh and other U.S. museums.

The candirú song and other artwork are available on Troll's Web site at www.trollart.com.