

**THE ART OF
CHARLEY
HARPER**

Creatures Wild and Tame

Large Print Labels

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THE ART OF CHARLEY HARPER

Creatures Wild and Tame

Welcome to the world of Charley Harper! Daily encounters with this Cincinnati icon's delightful imagery—reproduced on downtown murals and a bounty of coffee mugs, puzzles, tote bags, and fabrics—immeasurably brighten our lives. Yet, few people have experienced Harper's original artwork and learned about the genesis of his beloved designs. Today is your lucky day.

Over more than 70 years of artmaking, Charley Harper (1922–2007) produced hundreds of compelling works with genius, expertise, and passion and earned an international reputation. A successful commercial designer, illustrator, and educator, he was—above all—a unique wildlife

artist. The unmistakable Charley Harper style was born in the mid-1950s when the zingy designs of mid-century modernism were in vogue. He called his style “minimal realism,” as he flattened and reduced natural phenomena into elegant shapes, lines, and colors. Embracing a variety of media, Harper loved hand-workmanship and the creative process. He was also a writer and a humorist who relished a good pun, turning serious when the subject required it. Through art of great beauty, Harper generously shares with us his deep curiosity about the natural world and his fears for its future, calling us all to action.

This is an exciting moment for Harper fans. To learn more and experience the distinctive art of Charley’s beloved spouse and creative advisor, visit the exhibition *Edie McKee Harper: Modernist at Play* on view at the Taft Museum of Art from October 17, 2026–January 24, 2027.

Glossary of Terms

Color Screen Print and Silkscreen

Color screen printing refers to the printmaking process in which color pigments are pushed through a fabric “screen” onto paper. The generic *silkscreen*, often applied to the same process, is sometimes a misnomer, as silk fabric is no longer in general use for printmaking.

Gouache

Gouache is opaque watercolor paint.

Maquette

Adopted from French, *maquette* refers to a sketch or model. It is commonly used for three-dimensional forms such as sculpture and architecture. Here it refers to Harper’s mock-ups for printed illustrations, brochures, color screen prints, posters, and murals.

Originals

Harper aficionados call the artist’s drawings, collages, watercolors, gouaches, and paintings (in oil and acrylic) his *originals*, distinguishing these from the screen prints, posters, printed books, and ephemera.

The items in this case are from the Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum, unless otherwise indicated.

1

Charley Harper, first-year Art Academy student, receiving instruction from Myer Abel, circa 1940–41

2

Application for admission to the Art Academy of Cincinnati after service in World War II, September 18, 1946

3

Report card from the Art Academy of Cincinnati, 1946–47

4

**Edie Harper (American, 1922–2010)
Charley sketching outdoors, 1947
Collection of Brett Harper**

5

Charley and Edie (with one of Edie's works) at the exhibition *Artists of Cincinnati and Vicinity at the Cincinnati Art Museum*, 1952

6

**Harper speaking to an Art Academy of
Cincinnati class, circa 1960**

The Life of Charley Harper

1922

Charles "Charley" Burton Harper born in Frenchton, West Virginia, son of Ulma Rexroad, homemaker, and Orval Cecil Harper, farmer and feed store operator



Charley Harper as boy, 1929
Collection of Brett Harper

1939

Graduates from Buckhannon-Upshur High School in Buckhannon, West Virginia

Attends West Virginia Wesleyan College, but quickly grows dissatisfied with his art classes' lack of rigor; a professor suggests he apply to the Art Academy of Cincinnati

1940

Meets fellow student and future wife, Edie McKee, on their first day of classes at the Art Academy—at that time located next to the Cincinnati Art Museum

1941–1944

Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, Hawaii;
the United States enters World War II (1941)
Drafted into the army and begins basic
training (1942)

Harper's infantry division lands in Cherbourg, France, moving through Belgium and the Netherlands before advancing on Berlin (1944)

1945

Harper's division liberates the Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp shortly before Germany surrenders

Leaves France and sails to New York City before reporting to Camp San Luis Obispo, California, for possible deployment to the Pacific theater

Japan surrenders; World War II ends

1946

Spends a semester at the Art Students League in New York City with funds provided by the GI Bill, but feels unsure about both the institution and big city life

Re-enrolls at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, taking courses in painting, commercial art, and design

1947

Graduates from the Art Academy of Cincinnati

Marries Edie and embarks on a scholarship-funded cross-country road trip for their honeymoon

Returns to Cincinnati and lives with Edie and her parents in the Roselawn suburb

The Cincinnati Art Museum acquires two of Harper's watercolors, the first works by the artist to enter its collection



Charley and Edie Harper, circa 1947, Collection of Brett Harper

1948

Works as a commercial artist for C. H. Schaten Studios where his clients include Procter & Gamble and *Look* magazine

Completes first commissions for the magazine *Ford Times*, launching a decades-long working relationship with the Ford Motor Company

Circa 1951

Begins creating color screen prints of his popular *Ford Times* compositions for direct sale to readers

1954

The first of Harper's bird series appears in *Ford Times*; feathered creatures quickly become a favorite subject

1957

Begins teaching illustration and design at the Art Academy of Cincinnati



Rudolf "Rudy" Hermes (American, 1927–2016), architect,
Charley and Edie Harper Residence, designed 1957,
Collection of Hermes Family

1958

The Harpers move into a contemporary home designed by architect Rudolf "Rudy" Hermes on a wooded lot in Finneytown, a suburb of Cincinnati

1961

Golden Press publishes *The Golden Book of Biology*, aimed at young readers and fully illustrated by Harper; it earns widespread acclaim and prompts his lasting focus on natural subjects



Space Walk
(left panel),
1967, after 2015
conservation, First
Financial Center,
Cincinnati, Ohio,
ceramic tile,
Courtesy of Brett
Harper; Ross
Van Pelt (RVP
Photography)

1963–1964

Designs the cover for the children's publication *Creatures Wild and Tame* (1963)

Also designs *Space for All Species*, a mosaic mural featuring insects and animals for the John Weld Peck Federal Building in Cincinnati (1964)

1967

Frame House Gallery in Louisville, Kentucky, begins national distribution of Harper's limited-edition prints; this continues into the early 1990s

Mosaic mural *Space Walk* is installed in Cincinnati's newly opened convention center, a rare non-representational composition in Harper's body of work

1968

Golden Press publishes *The Animal Kingdom*; Harper's painstakingly researched illustrations offer an engaging, but unflinching, look at the wonders of the natural world

1972

Completes first artwork for *Ranger Rick*, a children's magazine produced by the National Wildlife Federation

1974

Publishes Charles Harper's *Birds and Words*, which features many of the birds created for *Ford Times* as well as the artist's pun-filled extended captions

1976

Begins studies for his first National Park Service (NPS) poster; work on later NPS poster commissions stretches into the early 1990s

1977

Retires from teaching at the Art Academy of Cincinnati after 20 years

1978

Receives a commission to create site-specific installations for the Royal Palm Visitor Center at Everglades National Park, Florida

1986

Designs *Web of Life*, a mosaic mural for the lobby of Pearson Hall at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio

1994

Publishes *Beguiled by the Wild: The Art of Charley Harper*, which reproduces dozens of screen prints from throughout his career

2006

Completes final poster commission for New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory

Finishes last painting, *Scary Scenario*, which remains one of his starkest warnings about the consequences of unchecked climate change

2007

Charley Harper, 85, dies after a bout of pneumonia and is buried at Spring Grove Cemetery

Designer Todd Oldham publishes *Charley Harper: An Illustrated Life*, introducing work to a new generation of art and design enthusiasts

Minimal Realism: Charley and Edie Harper, 1940–1960 opens at the Cincinnati Art Museum

2010

Edie Harper, 87, dies and is interred next to Charley

2011

An exhibition of Harper's work opens at Kunstverein in Hamburg, Germany, raising the artist's international profile

2012–2026

Dozens of publications and exhibitions featuring Harper's work pay tribute to the enduring relevance and popularity of his art

Making of a Modern Artist

The country boy from West Virginia never left Charley Harper, whose love of nature and artmaking started in childhood. Quickly outgrowing the art instruction at West Virginia Wesleyan College, he pulled up stakes in 1940 and enrolled at the Art Academy of Cincinnati. There he met his creative and life partner, Edith “Edie” McKee.

After service in World War II, Harper spent a semester at the Art Students League in New York City, where he debated traditional versus avant-garde approaches. Exposure to the new non-objective Abstract Expressionism and, importantly, Milton Avery’s (1885–1965) abstractions of recognizable subjects proved critical to Harper. His admiration also grew for European modernists like Joan Miró (1893–1983) and Paul Klee (1879–1940) and Americans Ben Shahn (1898–1969) and Alexander Calder (1898–1976).

When Harper returned to Cincinnati later that year to complete his degree at the Art Academy, modernism was thriving. The Modern Art Society (founded 1939, now the Contemporary Arts Center) was a hive of activity, and soon the Terrace Plaza

Hotel opened to fanfare with murals by Miró and Saul Steinberg (1914–1999) and a mobile by Calder (now in the museum's collection). Harper was active in the local art scene, showing his work at the Modern Art Society and the Cincinnati Art Museum's regional exhibitions.

Portrait of Charley (Self-Portrait)

1947

oil on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

This pensive self-portrait is one of several family portraits in oil that Harper made in the 1940s. The painting is in the tradition-bound realist style popular in the United States between the World Wars (1918–1939). For several years, Harper straddled the fence, experimenting with both realism and modern approaches as he debated what kind of artist he wished to be.

Edie Harper
(American, 1922–2010)

Charley Harper
circa 1942

photograph
Collection of Brett Harper

Feedback from Correspondence Course

circa 1936

ink on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

Harper loved to draw from the time he was a boy, though he found little encouragement at his West Virginia school for considering art as a profession. Unsure where he was headed, he signed up for a correspondence course to learn to make cartoons. After completing assignments he received in the mail, which he courageously drew in ink, the teen received commentary in return. The instructor wrote "Good Work" on his elephant drawing but advised "Study action of rear legs on my sketch" on the horse. Anatomy challenged the young artist: "Legs too long for donkey" appears on the example at lower right.

Caterpillar

1939

graphite pencil on paper
Collection of Brett Harper

Throughout his life, Harper kept his school biology class notebook filled with careful drawings, including a precise anatomical rendering of a frog. Made when he was about 17 years old, this independent pencil study of a caterpillar on a branch is in the manner of detailed natural illustration going back centuries. The teen may have made this drawing from life or copied it from a book. Harper often said that one first needed to learn to draw realistically to become an effective designer.

Trio of Color Theory (Nudes)

1940

watercolor and ink on board and paper

Collection of Brett Harper

Harper saved this exercise from Myer Abel's class at the Art Academy of Cincinnati in which the human body is broken into geometric planes defined with light and shade and different color palettes. Lessons like this encouraged him to think about nature in abstract terms.

Eden Park

1947

watercolor on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

This sketchy watercolor of Cincinnati's Eden Park dates from the year following Harper's return to the Art Academy of Cincinnati from New York City. The work was a milestone in his movement away from naturalistic detail. He later referred to it as his first abstraction. The watercolor reflects a synthesis of artistic inspirations, from contemporary artists like Franz Kline (1910–1962; see Gallery 230) to the brushy, evocative landscapes of East Asian masters. Harper explored the moody qualities seen in this watercolor in other landscapes from this early date.

The Rock Pile

1947

watercolor and gouache on paper
Cincinnati Art Museum; Purchased
through the Martin Dumler Fund
1947.530

In the late 1940s, Harper ricocheted from one style to another, giving each work a distinctive appearance. Although he made oil paintings, he apparently preferred the quick-drying medium of watercolor and used it expressively, with paint diluted to a thin consistency contrasted with stronger pigments. In this nearly monochromatic example, he contrasted black with bright opaque white in the jumble of rocks, which he abstracted into rectangles. The trees are spiky resembling calligraphy.

The museum acquired *The Rock Pile* for the collection in 1947, shortly before a solo exhibition at the city's Closson's Gallery brought Harper further recognition for his watercolors.

Untitled (Curled Up Cat)

circa 1960

pencil on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

Cats provided ready models for the Harpers, who lived with felines throughout their marriage. Although Charley considered Edie the “cat person” in the family, and they were her special subject, his feelings for them are clear in this series of affectionate drawings (as well as Edie’s contact sheet of photographs in the next gallery showing Charley making art with a furry “helper”). He said in an interview late in life, “I’m very fond of cats and feel that I relate closely to them, but no, not to other animals.”

Untitled (Curled Up Cat)

circa 1960

gouache on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

Untitled (Stretching Cat)

circa 1960

ink on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

Harper's knack for capturing animals' essential characteristics is apparent in this series of four drawings of curled-up and stretching cats. The drawings also reveal the eclectic sources of inspiration that Charley studied at the Cincinnati Art Museum and in books, including East Asian art in which lightly depicted animals float on a blank background leaving the viewer to imagine the context. Harper's sequence allows us to trace his diminishing of detail until we arrive at the linear ink sketch to your right. It is no less expressive for the minimal treatment, a tribute to his skill at suggesting "cattitude."

Untitled (Stretching Cat)

circa 1960

ink on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

Bird

1940s

gouache and mixed media on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

Captiva Island Bird

(*possibly* Gull)

1947

gouache and mixed media on paper
From the Collection of Beth and
Tim Pierce O'Leary

This 1947 work is an important precursor to the celebrated Charley Harper style. Although still using loose, visible brushwork, we see him reducing this seabird to a simple, flat white shape with circles to denote the eyes and a triangle the beak. Only a dark curving line indicates the wing. The bird's body is oriented sideways, yet it faces us, its head within its body's shape. At this stage, Harper's creatures, like this gull, already have personality.

Harper depicted this bird during a visit with Edie to Captiva Island off the southwest coast of Florida, where they visited their former Art Academy instructor, Maybelle Richardson Stamper (1907–1995). It may be the *Gull* included in Charley's spring 1948 show at Cincinnati's Closson's Gallery.

Little Boy Blue, *from the* Nursery Rhymes series

1950

hand-pulled color screen print on paper
Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

*Little boy blue,
Come blow your horn,
The sheep's in the meadow,
The cow's in the corn,
But where is the boy
Who looks after the sheep?
He's under a haystack,
Fast asleep.*

Stretched out comfortably on a bed of straw with his hands under his head, this contented barefoot boy is a stand-in for young Charley. Without a doubt, the artist identified with Little Boy Blue as he reminisced often in interviews and articles about abandoning detested farm chores to go out sketching. The composition is buoyant—with the curved arc of the lad's body at a diagonal—suggesting the musical cadence of the famous nursery rhyme.

Spy & Try

From three pigs to Little Boy Blue, spy three details that help tell each story. Can you try to find them all, or do you need some clues?

Look & Book

Look closely. Which part of the nursery rhyme does each picture bring to life? Don't know the tales of which we speak—a look in a book will help you find the answers you seek.

Three Little Pigs, *from the Nursery Rhymes series*

1950

hand-pulled color screen print on paper
Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

In the old English fairytale, two pigs, represented in the top register of Harper's picture, built their homes with straw and sticks while the third, in the center, built his of bricks. When the Big Bad Wolf tried to blow their houses down, the brick house was the only one left standing. Harper's elated central swine looks proud of its accomplishment.

The *Nursery Rhymes* series shows Harper coming into his own stylistically; the designs are highly imaginative and sophisticated. Bright colors, insistent flatness, and delightful abstraction of natural elements are features we identify with Harper's best-known work. (Note the reduction of houses to a triangular gable shape.) This series constituted his first experimental attempt at printmaking, allowing him to produce multiple impressions of the same design.

Who Are You? (Flounder and Angelfish) 1951

hand-pulled color screen print on
watercolor wash paper
Collection of Brett Harper

Humor was an essential ingredient of some of Harper's work, but he quickly rejected the cartoon-like approach he took here and elsewhere around 1950. Both the imagery and the title of *Who Are You?* cue us into the joke. This impossible confrontation between two fish of dissimilar breeds—one a saltwater dweller and the other freshwater—may gently satirize human behavior when encountering difference.

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1

General Office Moonbeams, June 1954

Collection of Brett Harper

2

Moonbeams, December 1951

When working for C. H. Schaten Studios, Harper's clients included Procter & Gamble, which published this magazine for its employees. He learned all aspects of design and print production.

3

**Advertisement for Farmers Insurance,
Farm Quarterly, undated, Collection of
Brett Harper**

4

Charles Harper, "My War with the Happy Housewife," One Quarter Scale (University of Cincinnati, College of Applied Arts), Spring 1955
Harper expressed a longing for realistic imagery in his illustrated work, chafing at clients' demand for depictions of "happy housewives," the foundation of 1950s advertising.

5

Betty Crocker's Dinner for Two Cook Book,
1958

Harper fully illustrated this delightful classic, bringing his new animal imagery into some of his designs.

6

The Terrace Garden at the Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati, in *Ford Treasury of Favorite Recipes from Favorite Eating Places*, 1954

7

"Design and Commercial Art" Course Outline, Art Academy of Cincinnati,
undated

Hired to teach in 1957, Harper was a beloved instructor for two decades.

Ford Times

In May 1947, Harper won the Art Academy of Cincinnati's Stephen H. Wilder Traveling Scholarship, an honor for recent graduates. He and Edie married in August and hit the road on a months-long cross-country working honeymoon. Visits to the National Parks inspired life-changing ideas about art making in Charley. He later explained, "I started realizing that in order to get a whole bunch of stuff on a piece of paper, you had to simplify it. So a Rocky Mountain or something like that, you couldn't fit everything in, but you could get the impression of it by flattening it out. That appealed to me. I still have examples of superrealism from art school. But suddenly on this trip, it came to me that this is silly. Nature did it better. I couldn't compete."

Harper sent art from this trip to Arthur Lougee, the art director at *Ford Times*, a lifestyle magazine of the Ford Motor Company, without solicitation, launching a more-than-30-year freelance relationship (1948–82). Harper credited Lougee as a mentor who gave him wide creative freedom and encouraged him to write. It was Lougee who introduced Harper to birds as a subject and offered

him the opportunity to sell screen prints of his work through the magazine.

Farm with Mailbox

circa 1950

Variant of illustration in Charles Harper, "The Hocking Parks," *Ford Times*, May 1951

watercolor on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

Flowing passages of watercolor in warm russet and gold hues are brushed on the paper here with ease. Early in his career, Harper tried on different styles and varied the look of his illustrations based on an article's content. This agrarian landscape is close to that appearing in "The Hocking Parks," a feature on Ohio scenery that Harper both wrote and illustrated in 1950. It contrasts sharply with the zippy, simplified modern style he was already using for city themes. His realist interpretation of this rural subject reveals the influence of the Regionalist Movement of the 1930s and 40s and its forthright depictions of "the American Scene."

Harper's country upbringing influenced work throughout his life. Although this predates his specialization in natural subjects, his enthusiasm

for science shines through in the picture's caption:
"Acid, unglaciated soil makes autumn foliage
especially brilliant."

Catfish

1952

Published in "Eight Familiar Fish," *Ford Times*,
March 1952

gouache and cut paper on paper mounted on
illustration board

Collection of Brett Harper

With his illustrations for "Eight Familiar Fish" in the March 1952 issue, Harper announced his arrival. Finally, his artistic explorations were beginning to coalesce. Any attempt at descriptive realism was gone, as he summarized the creatures' appearance in a distinctive, stylish shorthand. When the *Cincinnati Enquirer* featured his fish in a two-page spread, calling them "humorous and highly decorative," Harper's reputation grew.

Harper took an unconventional approach to illustrating an article promoting sport fishing. Rather than showing the fishermen in action or the creatures in unspoiled habitat, he included threatening disembodied hooks. Moreover, you may think this catfish, seen from the front, resembles a blimp. Harper relished unusual, even awkward, vantage points like this, which traditional

nature illustrators avoided as less informative. Yet, he thereby emphasized the “whiskers” that earned this fish its name.

Sunfish

1952

Published in "Eight Familiar Fish," *Ford Times*,
March 1952

gouache and cut paper on paper mounted on
illustration board

Collection of Brett Harper

To create designs like *Sunfish*, Harper cut out shapes from paper, some previously painted, and moved them around on illustration board until he was satisfied. He then glued them down. This trial-and-error method of composition influenced the look of his work. These layered collages bring us close to Harper's hand and reveal his thoughts and processes. Although not the end product, they have their own significant aesthetic merits. The paper additions create depth, their raised edges casting shadows on the background.

Feeding Station

1954

Published on cover of *Ford Times*,
November 1954

color screen print on paper
Collection of Brett Harper

A feeding frenzy at a backyard birdfeeder is viewed through a window with sheer lace curtains. The diving birds are the supposed subject, but the busy squirrel on the feeding table dominates Harper's composition, its bushy tail forming a backward s-curve. Backyard bird feeding in the 1950s was still somewhat novel and gaining popularity. Harper often related the story that when Lougee asked him to depict this subject, with which he was unfamiliar, the artist humorously said that where he came from birds fed themselves.

Although *Feeding Station* appeared on the magazine's cover in 1954, it reflects the cartoony style the artist engaged with prior to his "Eight Familiar Fish" of 1952. The birds represent distinct species, yet they lack the refinement of Harper's later renderings of our winged friends.

Cardinal

1954

Published in E. B. White, "Feeding Station Birds,"
Ford Times, November 1954

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of Larry Smith and Kevin Elshoff

Inside the November 1954 *Ford Times*, with the amusing *Feeding Station* on the cover, are images completely different in conception. Lougee had invited Harper to illustrate the article "Feeding Station Birds" by E. B. White, the author of *Charlotte's Web*. This was prophetic, as it led Harper to fall in love with birds—his signature theme. He became fascinated with the appearance and behaviors distinctive to each species.

This elegant work is Harper's original creation in cut paper and gouache sent to *Ford Times* for reproduction with White's article. It reflects a newfound confidence in extreme simplification and limiting narrative details to just a few elements: a bird eating berries, one leaf, two spiky plants. A strong diagonal line extending from the bird's head to the end of its tail feathers contrasts, like the

cardinal's striking red color, with the curving bands of the snowy background.

The items in this case are from the Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum, and the Collection of Brett Harper.

1

**Selected covers for *Ford Times*,
1951–75**

Harper periodically designed cover art-work for *Ford Times*, for which he regularly created interior illustrations and articles. The covers were plum assignments that increased his public exposure.

2

**"Eight Familiar Fish," *Ford Times*,
March 1952**

3

**E. B. White, "Feeding Station Birds," *Ford Times*,
November 1954**

The invitation to illustrate this article by E. B. White launched Harper's career as an illustrator of birds. From then on, he both wrote and illustrated the articles himself.

4

**Charles Harper, "Ten Western Birds," *Ford Times*
November 1956**

5

**Charles Harper, "America's Vanishing Birds,"
Ford Times, November 1957**

6

**"How to Obtain Prints," in Charles Harper,
"American Bird Architects," *Ford Times*,
November 1959**

When requests for prints of Harper's work flooded into *Ford Times*, Lougee supported the artist by allowing him to sell screen prints through the magazine without a commission to the publisher. Over time, the prices hovered around \$5 (about \$56 today).

Beagle

1955

Published in Edmund Ware Smith, "Eight Sporting Dogs," *Lincoln-Mercury Times*, September–October 1955

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

Look & Find

Look from wet nose to wagging tail. What tiny details about each breed can you find? (Hint: a Beagle has a great sniffer.)

See & Agree

See how few lines Harper used. Do you agree that they still capture a dog's character? If not, how would you depict these family friends?

Irish Water Spaniel

1955

Published in Edmund Ware Smith, "Eight Sporting Dogs," *Lincoln-Mercury Times*, September–October 1955

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

Basset Hound

1955

Published in Edmund Ware Smith, "Eight Sporting Dogs," *Lincoln-Mercury Times*, September–October 1955

gouache on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

In 1955, Harper made five illustrations of dog breeds for the magazine *Lincoln-Mercury Times*, published by the Ford Motor Company (who also produced *Ford Times*). Although he illustrated a variety of subjects, the artist was fast becoming known for his joyful portrayal of animals. His dogs, seen here in the original artwork Harper submitted, cleverly suggest the breed characteristics and have a sense of animation. *Basset Hound* is a perfect example of Harper's mature work. He pared down detail to the essentials and used rounded lines and shapes to establish a rhythm. The squat pup's feet are invisible as they are buried in undergrowth or snow. Just a few prickly plants and twigs suggest vegetation.

Ouzel

1955

Variant of *The Ouzel Walks and Feeds on Stream Bottom*, published in Irving Petite, "The Bird That Flies under Water," *Ford Times*, May 1955

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

On his attraction to birds, like this ouzel (or dipper), Harper explained: "Birds, I quickly noted, possess a built-in functional beauty of form that is imposed by their method of locomotion. In a perched or walking bird there exists a satisfying spatial tension resulting from the heavy body shape supported by unbelievably slender legs. The ratio of mass to support is the secret—the greater the odds, the more gravity is defied, the more potential action is implied in the design."

Harper's ouzel may remind those familiar with 1950s decor of the organically shaped plywood chairs supported by spindly metal legs which look as though they could walk away like animals or

insects. Harper's work complements mid-century modern design, which he admired, due to shared aesthetic sensibilities.



Charles Eames (American, 1907–1978) and Ray Eames (American, 1912–1988), designers; Herman Miller, Inc., manufacturer, *Side Chair Model DCM*, 1946
molded walnut plywood, steel rod, and rubber shockmounts, Museum of Modern Art;
Gift of the manufacturer
553.1953

Black-Billed Magpie

1956

Published in Charles Harper, "Ten Southern Birds,"
Ford Times, November 1956

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

"Gay, braggartly, pilfering, the Magpie is the Capone of the Plains. He puts up a half-bushel, two-door, reinforced-mud ranchhouse and has the shortest of widowhoods—up to twenty-four hours. He goes formal to every meal but never bothers to read the menu, being no food snob. From him come the tenderest of filial utterances, but his loud-mouthed yackety-yack in a crowd of male companions is unprintable. He imitates humans—at least, he learns to talk like one."

—Harper, "Ten Western Birds"

Wood Ibis

1958

Published in Charles Harper, "Ten Southern Birds,"
Ford Times, November 1958

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

"The Wood Ibis is our only native stork, but he does not, as you might suppose, hang around obstetricians' offices. He hangs around swamps instead, where, from his cypress maternity ward, arises a cacophonous chorus of grunts, croaks and squeals, suggesting that he is too busy with his own domestic difficulties to run a delivery service on the side. Sometimes, just to get away from it all, he rides a thermal to dizzy heights. He can also fly upside down."

—Harper, "Ten Southern Birds"

Great Auk

1957

Published in Charles Harper, "America's Vanishing Birds," *Ford Times*, November 1957

color screen print on paper

Cincinnati Art Museum;

Gift of the Estate of Charley Harper

2009.65

"The Great Auk swam like a fish, walked like a penguin, and flew like a stone. But he adapted happily to ocean life, prospering from Iceland to Florida, while heading the menus of North Atlantic islanders for three hundred years. Then the professional hunters invaded his nurseries, butchering relentlessly for oil and feathers, encrusting Funk Island with discarded carcasses. The last of the Great Auks was clubbed to death in 1844, heading the obituary column of American birds."

—Harper, "America's Vanishing Birds"

Passenger Pigeon

1957

Published in Charles Harper, "America's Vanishing Birds," *Ford Times*, November 1957

color screen print on paper

Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

"Plural beyond comprehension, the Passenger Pigeon once swept our skies like feathered flash-floods, eclipsing the sun, staggering the mind, devouring the field, glutting the Eastern woodland with his chaotic tree-tenements. But by 1914 he had vanished. Gentle and trusting, he found no safety in numbers; where he paused to feed, the countryside feasted and pigeoners prospered. The left-over corpses, streamlined and iridescent, were used to fatten hogs and fill mudholes, or left to rot."

—Harper, "America's Vanishing Birds"

Charley Harper's Tools

Collection of Brett Harper

"I reduced all lines and edges to straights and curves (that's all there are) and began to render with mechanical drawing instruments—ruling pen, compass, French curve, T-square, triangle. I saw forms as hard-edged shapes of flat or textured color with enough lines added to complete identification."

—Harper, *Introducing Charles Harper*, 1967

Harper's perfectionism may give the false impression that his art is not handmade. Yet, nothing could be farther from the truth. For precision when drawing and painting, he employed the drafting implements you see here designed for use by engineers and architects. Also in this

case is a squeegee he used when screen printing to smooth the ink and push it through the fabric screen onto paper. As computer aids became the norm for many artists, Harper steadfastly rejected them, preferring—and enjoying—crafting his work by hand.

Minimal Realism

“To me the whole ballgame of art revolves around how the artist deals with form. That is, how he manages to put on a two-dimensional plane his feelings about a three-dimensional object. This is the ecstasy of painting. Long ago I opted for respecting the picture plane and accepting it as a tool, as important as the pigment, the color, the idea and all other elements of the picture . . . I believe there is . . . a discernable progression of my treatment of form . . . all directed toward simplifying as far as possible while retaining reality. This is why I like the term minimal realism better than any other I have come up with to describe my work. I also like the term because it is an irreverent spoof of the apparent need of critics and art historians to categorize art.”

—Harper to instructor at West Virginia Wesleyan College, date unknown

Bank Swallow

1959

Published in Charles Harper, "American Bird Architects," *Ford Times*, November 1959

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

"Dig this crazy architecture! Bank Swallows nest in cooperative apartments with sieve-like facades, excavated with beak and claw in the clay or sand of river banks, gravel pits, highway cuts and sawdust heaps. At the end of a 2-to-4-foot hallway, they place the family room, wall-to-walled with feathers and grass. Utilities? They eat, drink and bathe on the wing. But how do they know which hole to come home to?"

—Harper, "American Bird Architects"

Ladybug

1959

Variant of illustration in Charles Harper, "Ladybird—
Lore and Legend," *Ford Times*, April 1959

color screen print on paper

Cincinnati Art Museum;

Gift of the Estate of Charley Harper

2009.67

"All the world loves a ladybug. Since time began they have been pals to people, and over the centuries ladybugs have built the kind of image that can only be earned: Insect Friend Number 1. They portend good luck and dine only on other insects whose very existence plagues people. Nobody swats, stomps or sprays a ladybug. It's the only bug that doesn't bug anybody! Folks are even flattered when they find a ladybug CRAWLING ON THEM! Can any other insect make that statement?"

—Harper for a different ladybug print, 1961

The Window and the Pyramid

1965

Study (variant) for illustration in Charles Harper,
"Twenty Dudes in the Wilderness," *Ford Times*,
March 1965

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

"Trail riders indeed! I liked the sound of it, but felt utterly inelegant in my new ten-gallon hat," Harper writes as an urbanite on a Wilderness Society pack trip in Colorado. "Following a snowball fight on the Continental Divide . . . we descended Ute Ridge for our first glimpse of the Pyramid, a 13,830-foot peak, and the Window, a unique rectangular notch on the skyline nearby."

—Harper, "Twenty Dudes in the Wilderness"

**Remember, Birdwatchers Aren't the Only
People Who Visit Cemeteries (*later titled*
Tombstone Tourist)**

probably 1970

Published in Michael Harwood,
"Birdwatcherwatching," *Ford Times*,
February 1971

gouache and acrylic on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

Who's Watching Whom?

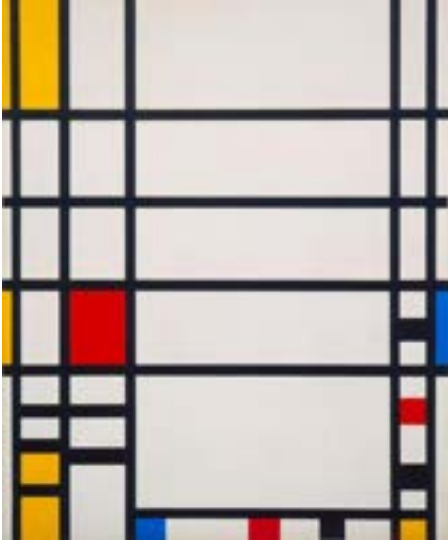
1972

Published in Lew Dietz, "Meet the Whiskey Jack,"
Ford Times, January 1973

gouache on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

Unlike most nature illustrators, Harper often dwelt upon familiar encounters between people and wildlife in cities and suburbia. In *Who's Watching Whom?*, a bird appears with a pair of bird watchers' binoculars suspended on a tree from their strap.

Harper deployed references from art history in various combinations to create sophisticated, sometimes playful compositions. Here, he paid homage to the earlier twentieth-century European Constructivist and De Stijl movements (see an example of the latter here) to provide a geometric scaffold and suggest the patterns of birch bark in abstract terms.



Piet Mondrian (Dutch, 1872–1944)
Trafalgar Square
1939–43
oil on canvas
Museum of Modern Art, New York;
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William A. Burden
510.1964

Edie Harper

(American, 1922–2010)

Tree House

1977

color screen print on paper

Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of Ken and Katie Lipincott in memory of Patricia Fitzgerald Felty
2010.22

Parallels exist between the Harpers' works. For example, one might compare Edie's *Tree House* with Charley's nearby *Who's Watching Whom?* of a few years earlier. But Edie had her own distinctive artistic voice. Although she delighted in animals—primarily cats—and shared her husband's enthusiasm for artists like Joan Miró (1893–1983) and Paul Klee (1879–1940), she more often favored human narratives and a quirky, whimsical attitude. In this comparison, his lines are straight and conform to a grid while hers are a little off kilter.

When asked if they ever collaborated on artwork, Charley responded "no" but quickly added, "On

the other hand, we help each other a lot with our work. When we get stuck—when I get stuck, I say ‘What would you do?’ And she’ll say, ‘Well, I would do this.’ And then I do something else. But she gets me moving again, you know? So, we discuss our work a lot like that.”

Canada Goose

1978

Commissioned for Ford Motor Company's
75th Anniversary

gouache on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology "All About Birds" website tells us that while we used to see Canada Geese most often during migrations, "... as lawns have proliferated, more and more of these grassland-adapted birds are staying put in urban and suburban areas year-round, where some people regard them as pets." Nevertheless, what people often misinterpret as aggressive behavior comes from their natural territorial attitude and fear of loud noises.

Harper humorously satirizes our relationship with these personality-plus creatures in this work he made on commission for Ford's 75th anniversary. We see here Harper's original gouache illustration for a final design of unknown medium and form.

Ruby-Throated Hummingbird

1959

Published in Charles Harper, "American Bird Architects," *Ford Times*, November 1959

color screen print on paper

Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

"Hummers can fly backward, vertically and pause in midair. This is handy when you do your housebuilding in a tree. Mr. Ruby-Throat checks out after the honeymoon and something tells Mrs. to start building the tiny attached-saddled nest, glued by salivary secretion to a down-sloping branch. It's made of plant down, lichens, and silk borrowed from a neighboring spider, whom she later has over for dinner—hers."

—Harper, "American Bird Architects"

Snowy Egret

1958

Published in Charles Harper, "Ten Southern Birds,"
Ford Times, November 1958

color screen print on paper

Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

"The Snowy Egret wears a silky white wedding gown with a long lace train and pledges his troth with a twig. She does, too—and it's a double twig ceremony. But who can tell the bride from the groom? They can, and a few weeks later they're taking turns at babysitting, keeping their love alive by swapping twigs at nest-relief. The Snowy's recovery from near-annihilation by plume hunters is one of our country's happiest examples of conservation in action."

—Harper, "Ten Southern Birds"

House Wren

1959

Published in Charles Harper, "American Bird Architects," *Ford Times*, November 1959

color screen print on paper

Cincinnati Art Museum;

Gift of Mrs. Joseph S. Schumacher, Jr.,

in memory of Mr. Joseph S. Schumacher, Sr.,

and his wife, Dorothy J. Schumacher

2001.364

"If House Wrens were people, they would probably remodel old farmhouses. But they're not, so they remodel other things, like old shoes, tin cans, cows' skulls and clothespin bags, using twigs, grass, feathers, bark and spider webs. He stakes off the lot and fills some holes with sticks. She decides which one they'll call home, throws out all his furniture, and starts from scratch. Maybe House Wrens are people."

—Harper, "American Bird Architects"

Eastern Kingbird

1960

Published in Charles Harper, "American Bird Census," *Ford Times*, November 1960

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

"The Kingbird is one of the Tyrant Flycatchers, Tyrannidae—America's largest bird family—365 different species. But this feathered gadfly is less a tyrant than a foe of tyranny, for he strikes like a guided missile at any larger winged creature that violates his airspace. Hawks, crows, owls, vultures, even eagles—all have played Goliath to his David, and he protects many a chicken-yard from surprise attack."

—Harper, "American Bird Census"

"The Ideal Process for Prints of My Work"

"I learned about silk-screening when I started work in an art studio. A fellow worker there [Ray Podesta] had a silk-screen set up in his basement and he said to me, 'The way you're working flat and hard-edged is ideal for silk-screening. So, let's try it. . . .' I was immediately attracted to the process and found its limitations a further stimulus to the simplification of my designs."

"Silk-screen printing, also called serigraphy [or color screen printing], is a stencil process in which the printing ink is forced through openings in a stencil that is adhered to a sheet of silk [or other fabric] stretched tightly on a wooden frame. The printing paper, which is placed directly under the silk, receives the ink, then is stacked for drying and replaced by the next piece of paper to be printed. A separate impression is required for each color in the design, and the problem of registering the colors becomes more acute as more colors are added. Indeed, some of the most traumatic experiences of my life have resulted from the difficulties and frustrations encountered in silk-screen printing.

But it is the ideal process for prints of my work. And I feel that, of all printing processes, it provides the most intimate contact between the artist and viewer. The rich surface of the print has all the quality of an original. In fact, I find my prints are usually more satisfying than the originals."

—Harper to designer Todd Oldham, circa 2007, and *Introducing Charles Harper*, 1967

Swallow-Tailed Kite

1958

Published in Charles Harper, "Ten Southern Birds,"
Ford Times, November 1958

gouache on illustration board

Collection of Larry Smith and Kevin Elshoff

"Countdown starts at dawn for the Swallow-tailed Kite, America's most graceful flier. Orbiting over the marshland, he keeps close tabs on the comings and goings of snakes, lizards, and frogs, which constitute his breakfast. Occasionally, too, he plucks a newly hatched alligator from this planet. He is wise to spend most of his life in space because Earthmen usually greet him as they might a visitor from Mars—shoot first, ask questions later."

—Harper, "Ten Southern Birds"

Skiing on Crystal Mountain

probably 1966

Published on the cover of *Ford Times*,
February 1967

gouache on illustration board

Collection of Brett Harper

Book and Magazine Illustrations

In the 1960s, Harper discovered a latent talent as an illustrator of natural science books for young people. He had a critic close at hand: "Since much of my work is intended for children's books, I check all illustrations with him [my son Brett] to make sure they will be understood." Harper fully illustrated two books for the Golden Press: Gerald Ames and Rose Wyler's *The Giant Golden Book of Biology: An Introduction to the Science of Life* (1961) and George S. Fichter's *The Animal Kingdom: An Introduction to the Major Groups of Animals* (1968). Harper now embraced the career of a nature artist in the mode of his own making. In *Biology*, which took him a year to complete, he made complex concepts not only comprehensible but also brought them to life (no pun intended) for readers. By 1968 and *The Animal Kingdom*, he had carte blanche, the text largely developed around his pictures.

These beloved books, published in multiple editions and languages, spread Harper's renown internationally and led to further work. He became a favorite illustrator for *Ranger Rick*, the children's monthly of the National Wildlife Federation, and created artwork aimed at adults for *Wonderful West*

Virginia, the *Sohioan*, and other publications.

A Python Grows as Long as It Lives

1961

Published in Ames and Wyler,
The Golden Book of Biology

gouache on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

Although Harper grew weary of depicting “happy housewives” in advertising work, he represented people willingly in *Biology* when appropriate. Here he takes the basic idea of comparative scale to provoke understanding and a sense of wonder. He also makes scientific study seem like fun—the men work together congenially, some of them smiling, as they measure the huge snake. Note their changes in posture and weight-bearing as they move down the line.

Young Charles Darwin in the Galapagos Islands

1961

Published in Ames and Wyler,
The Golden Book of Biology

gouache on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

Harper depicted the English naturalist Charles Darwin as an adventurer who hid behind foliage to observe animals in their habitats unawares. Darwin's vessel, the HMS *Beagle*, portrayed in the background, complements the section's subtitle, "A Great Voyage of Discovery." The text revolves around Darwin's notice of disparities between species in various locales: "Tortoises of neighboring islands were different enough so that people who knew them could look at a specimen and tell which island it came from. What was the meaning of such differences? Darwin was to wonder about this for years."

Impala in the Grass (Daytime)

circa 1961

Alternate for Ames and Wyler,
The Golden Book of Biology

gouache on illustration board

Cincinnati Art Museum; Museum Purchase: Bequest
of Mr. and Mrs. Walter J. Wichgar
2008.17

This brilliantly colored gouache on paper is one of a pair, the other nocturnal, that explores predator-prey dynamics and the benefits of camouflage. These are alternate studies for *The Golden Book of Biology*, in which a variant introduces the section "Training for Young Lions." In an ironic reversal, Harper made the oblivious intended victim the main subject of the illustration. Although he is known for the crisp, geometric designs seen in the impala, the windblown grasses concealing the cats reveal a loose, expressive, and calligraphic touch.

Impala in the Grass (Nighttime)

circa 1961

Alternate for Ames and Wyler,
The Golden Book of Biology

gouache on illustration board

Cincinnati Art Museum; Museum Purchase: Bequest
of Mr. and Mrs. Walter J. Wichgar
2008.16

"The family that preys together stays together
—but only for a year and a half. That's how long
it takes mama lion to teach her cubs to scout
up a meal. Lesson One: approach downwind of
the goodies. Lesson Two: sneeze, and you get a
swat from the den mother. Steady! The impala is
skittish—snap a dry twig now and you blow the
banquet. By the way, what's the den dad doing
tonight? What all papa lions with any pride
are doing—waiting for the pride to serve the
antelope steaks."

—Harper, on the related *Hungry Eyes*, in
Beguiled by the Wild, 1994

Creatures Wild and Tame

1963

Book cover design for Untermeyer and Untermeyer, editors, *Creatures Wild and Tame*

gouache on illustration board

Collection of Brett Harper

Harper designed the cover and several internal illustrations for the book *Creatures Wild and Tame* edited by Bryna and Louis Untermeyer. In his cover art, we see the glowing eyes of nocturnal predators, a theme he explored earlier in *The Golden Book of Biology* and the later print *Hungry Eyes*. Another version of the latter composition appears nearby.

Within *Creatures Wild and Tame*, the artist illustrated "Bambi Finds the Meadow," an excerpt from the popular coming-of-age story about a young deer. Yet, in later interviews, Harper expressed dislike for the story's unscientific assignment of human emotions to animals.

The Animal Kingdom

1968

Alternate front and back cover designs
for Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*

gouache on paper on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

In the case nearby is *The Animal Kingdom*, with its cheerful, brilliantly colored cover depicting animals on the move. It is easy to guess the reasons why this dark preliminary design was rejected, with an owl whisking away its prey, circling bats, and nocturnal creatures at large; it could trigger nightmares in small children.

**An Okapi Washes His Ear with His Extra
Long Tongue *and* A Thick-Coated Alpaca;
One of the Many Animals That Have
Been Domesticated by Man**

1968

Published in Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

**A Baby Hippo Riding on His Mother's
Back Is Safe from
the Cruising Crocodile**

1968

Published in Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*

gouache on illustration board

Collection of Brett Harper

Spy & Try

Can you spy the hidden friend (or foe) lurking in the water? Can you try to find it before everyone else does?

Look & Hook

Look across the water and let the scene hook your attention. What small details tell the story?

**The Scrappy Blue Crab
Will Attack Any Intruder
No Matter Its Size**

1968

Published in Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*

gouache on paper mounted to board
Collection of Brett Harper

Gannets Choosing Mates at Their Nesting Place

1961

Published in Ames and Wyler,
The Golden Book of Biology

gouache and cut paper on paper
Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

This action-filled illustration is among the most expressive of Harper's early depictions of birds and required reading up on his subject. Gannets are seabirds that have developed unique features allowing them to descend from great heights to catch fish, as Harper indicates with the streamlined diver at the left. Although they spend much of their lives at sea, they mate in boisterous colonies on rocky promontories. Gannets mate for life, and to attract their partners, as Harper shows us, noisily clack their beaks together like a fencing match while they loudly converse and rub necks.

The items in this case are from the Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum, and the Collection of Brett Harper.

1

Gerald Ames and Rose Wyler, *The Giant Golden Book of Biology*, 1st edition, New York: Golden Press, 1961

2

Gerald Ames and Rose Wyler, *The Golden Book of Biology*, revised edition, New York: Golden Press, 1967

3

Gerald Ames and Rose Wyler, *Les Merveilles De La Vie*, French edition of *The Golden Book of Biology*, New York: Golden Press, 1973

4

George S. Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*, New York: Golden Press, 1968

5

George S. Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*, New York: Golden Press, 1968

6

Bryna and Louis Untermeyer, editors, *Creatures Wild and Tame*, New York: Golden Press, 1963

7

***Discovering Music Together*, Chicago: Follett Educational Press, 1966**

The items in this case are from the Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives, Cincinnati Art Museum, and the Collection of Brett Harper.

1

**Jack Denton Scott, "Woe to the Farmer's
Foe, The Crow," *Wonderful West Virginia*,
February 1974**

2

**"Are We Loving Our National Parks to Death,"
The Sohioan (Standard Oil Company, Cleveland),
Spring 1972**

3

**"Who's the Fastest?—In Air and Water,"
Ranger Rick, January 1978**

4

**"Who's the Fastest?—On Land,"
Ranger Rick, January 1978**

5

"Pesticides," *Ranger Rick*, May/June 1971

6

"Populations," *Ranger Rick*, April 1973

**A Gila Monster Holds a Skunk's Heel with
a Bulldog Grip, Working Poison into a
Wound *and* Frilled Head of a Galapagos
Marine Iguana**

1968

Published in Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

An Anaconda Catches a Jaguar

1968

Published in Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*

gouache on illustration board

Collection of Brett Harper

Harper did not shy away from nature's violent life-and-death struggles. He made *An Anaconda Catches a Jaguar* for a dramatic two-page spread in *The Animal Kingdom*. Surprisingly effective are the series of polka-dotted bars that represent the snake and its tenacious grip on the jaguar. Harper's illustration communicates in visual form the tenor of Fichter's unsparing passage: "Suddenly a great writhing weight crashes down from the branches of the tree, and the cat is caught in the vicelike, crushing coils of an anaconda, or water boa."

Frogs and Their Tadpoles Make Meals for Many Animals. Leopard Frog Eggs Are Eaten by a Mudpuppy, the Tadpoles by a Giant Waterbug and a Catfish, and the Adult by a Wood Ibis

1968

Published in Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*

gouache on illustration board

Collection of Larry Smith and Kevin Elshoff

As the lengthy title of this artwork in *The Animal Kingdom* indicates, this illustration elegantly translates a food chain into pictorial terms. Harper's abstraction and love of odd vantage points—note the frontal view of the ibis—challenge readers, no matter their age, to puzzle out what is going on in the image. Simplifying for Harper did not mean making things easy. He encourages the viewer's delight in discovery.

A Sand Dollar Is First on a Sea Otter's Menu. Next Comes a Starfish, Then a Sea Urchin (*later titled Otterly Delicious*)

1968

Published in Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

"A portrayal of the sea otter's culinary enjoyment of a sand dollar (a flat type of sea urchin) and other tasty tidbits. Having gathered a seafood platter, the otter rests on its back for a leisurely lunch. Next on its chest? A sea star and a spiny sea urchin."

—Harper, undated

Glistening Moon Jellies Ride the Waves

1968

Published in Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*

gouache on illustration board

Collection of Brett Harper

Although made for a section of *The Animal Kingdom* about jellyfish, this composition does not illustrate any particular discussion. Mostly, the artist shares the wonder he felt about the natural world. Having no brains, blood, eyes, or heart, jellyfish, as he knew, are not social but often float together in groups called blooms. Moon jellies are named for their moonlike bell shape (with short tentacles) and enchanting effect. They are bioluminescent, meaning they glow in the dark.

**All These Non-Migratory
Birds Spend Their Winter
Where It Snows. They Like the Birdseed
Provided by Man
(*later titled Birdfeeders*)**

1968

Published in Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*

gouache on illustration board

Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

Here, amid a black-capped chickadee, blue jay, tufted titmouse, and sparrow, we finally see the iconic Harper cardinal, looking at us defiantly with a sunflower seed in its beak. No other bird in Harper's art has so much personality.

For the rest of his life, Harper riffed on his 1960s illustrations, quoting and repurposing his own motifs like this cardinal. He also later made screen prints from engaging illustrations like this that he felt would make successful independent works of art.

Ohio

1968

Study for logo design, client unknown

gouache on illustration board

Collection of Brett Harper

A Sentinel

circa 1973

Study for illustration in Jack Denton Scott, "Woe to the Farmer's Foe, The Crow," *Wonderful West Virginia*, February 1974

charcoal, pastel, and pencil on paper
Collection of Brett Harper

Harper's note on this drawing to the editor of *Wonderful West Virginia* reads: "A sentinel crow stands watch as the flock raids a cornfield. Although I don't want to encourage persecution of crows, illustration of them seems incomplete without showing them in the cornfield. Hopefully this whimsical scene would not inspire persecution."

Scarecrows Don't Scare Crows, Especially When They Provide a Feast of Grasshoppers

circa 1973

Study for illustration in Jack Denton Scott, "Woe to the Farmer's Foe, The Crow," *Wonderful West Virginia*, February 1974

charcoal, pastel, and pencil on paper
Collection of Brett Harper

Harper defended wildlife against complaints of inconvenience to people. He wrote to the editor on this draft illustration: "Crows eating grasshoppers off scarecrow. This might illustrate better the general tone of the article: in spite of fact that many people (especially farmers) don't like crows, and have tried every method including scarecrows to get rid of them—in spite of all this, crows persist and prosper, doing good for people, as in grasshopper plagues."

The artist transformed these sketches dramatically before they appeared in the article, displayed in the case nearby. Veering away from naturalism, Harper's ultimate version of this scarecrow is so geometric as to be nearly unrecognizable—a puzzle to decipher.

Crows Chasing Horned Owl (*later titled Owltercation*)

circa 1973

Study for illustration in Jack Denton Scott, "Woe to the Farmer's Foe, The Crow," *Wonderful West Virginia*, February 1974

pencil, charcoal, and pastel on paper
Collection of Brett Harper

**When a Great Horned Owl, the Crow's
Greatest Natural Enemy, Moved onto the
Author's Land, It Was Chased Away by
Angry Crows (*later titled Owltercation*)**

circa 1973

Study for illustration in Jack Denton Scott, "Woe
to the Farmer's Foe, The Crow," *Wonderful West
Virginia*, February 1974

ink and gouache on paper
Collection of Brett Harper

Owltercation (variant)

possibly circa 1975

acrylic on canvas

Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

Owltercation

1990

color screen print on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

"When the great horned owl eats crow, it's not because he's humbled—he's hungry. And they're easy pickin' in the dark when he can see and they can't. But sunrise turns the tables, and any sighting of the flying tiger sets the owlarm that summons a cowliferating posse to pester him. The air is clogged with crowfanities as the raucous ruckus moves from oak to maple to beech. Finally, tired and feathered, he is escorted out of town by the most direct route—as the crow flies."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Who's the Fastest? (On Land)

probably 1977

Published in Robert Gray, "Who's the Fastest?,"
Ranger Rick, January 1978

acrylic on artist board

Collection of Brett Harper

Here, Harper pictures the question "Who's the Fastest?" as a sprint to the finish line and leaves the question for the young reader to untangle. See the nearby case for the page layout of the children's monthly *Ranger Rick*, where this vivid illustration appeared in print. Harper's brightly colored, stylish, and educational compositions are markedly different from the other images in the magazine, in which nature photography and cartoonish illustrations of animals acting like humans are the norm.

Dash & Match

Ready for a speedy dash? Match each animal to the features that help it zoom in a flash!

See & Simplify

See how Harper simplified each racer. Which animal is made from the fewest shapes?

A Natural Curiosity

In 1967, Harper explained, "In creating a bird design, I read all I can find about the subject before touching pencil to paper. I would like to observe it in real life, but this is unfortunately often impossible. Besides, I am not a qualified naturalist in the sense that most wildlife artists are, having arrived at my interest in nature illustration by a more roundabout route. So I rely heavily on my library of excellent guide books by photographers and realistic painters of wildlife for reference when I am searching for ideas. I want to know all about the bird's way of life and how it fits into the ecology of its habitat. I want to know what makes the bird unique and what situation will best express this quality."

Harper was endlessly curious and determined to get things right. Research was central to his methodology. He not only relied on libraries, including his own, but consulted experts at the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History (now Cincinnati Museum Center), Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and elsewhere. He studied specimens at the museum and visited the zoo to observe exotic animals like

giraffes, impatiently waiting for them to turn around to the viewpoints he envisioned.

Wrenovation

1981

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

Harper was fascinated by wrens' habit of appropriating available receptacles for nesting—or "wrenting" to use his pun. Here, in *Wrenovation*, Carolina wrens stuff their building materials into the pocket of a pair of denim cut-offs on a clothesline.

Combining cut paper with lyrical painting in gouache, this evocative collage is among the artist's most inventive. Un beholden to a client, Harper gave full rein to his creativity, playing with our perceptions of reality versus illusion and two versus three dimensions. In the adjacent acrylic painting, Harper flattened the design, intensified the colors, and regularized the machine-stitching on the shorts. For unknown reasons, he never went to the next logical step: a *Wrenovation* screen print.

Wrenovation

1981

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

Wren & Den

Can you spot the wrens' den? What clues show these shorts have become a home?

Spy & Apply

Spy the brushstrokes and cut-paper shapes. How did Harper apply different materials to create the scene?

Jesus Bugs

1960

Published in Fichter, *The Animal Kingdom*

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

"Can you think of a better name for insects that walk on water? Our ancestors couldn't either, but your field guide calls them water striders. They hike around on the pond all their lives without even getting wet feet, and in shallow water on a sunny day their shadows sink like stones and tag along on the bottom. But who minds a wet shadow? If you had wide-spread, waxy feet that didn't break the surface film, you, too, could walk on water. And be famous for 15 minutes."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Brief Bio

1968

color screen print on paper

Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

"The life of a luna moth is one of nature's short stories. Even barring mishap, its span is so brief that it doesn't have time to eat. And its biography may be shortened even further by a bat, an owl, or a boy making an insect collection. This male, hastening to reply to an invitation—sent by scent—from a female, encounters a largemouth bass. But the fish has problems, too. The river it calls home is badly polluted, and the boy, tiring of trapping insects, is going fishing."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

The Wedding Feast

1973

acrylic on canvas
Collection of Brett Harper

"A rose is a rose is a rose, but Ms. Praying Mantis is the ultimate feminist. Don't romanticize her mating. This predatory female is a potential connubial cannibal. Many a male has learned too late that her intent is not wholly matrimony, and that the way to *her* heart is through *her* stomach. Their affair is brief—infatuation, consummation, mastication—and the ceremony is simple, but tasteful—to have and to hold till death us do part. A burp is a burp is a burp."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Paralyzed Unicorn

1970

acrylic on canvas
Collection of Brett Harper

Wrented

1968

color screen print on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

"Many people view the grinning skull as an unpleasant reminder of their mortality, but to house wrens an empty cranium is just another homesite with a domed ceiling. In 1888, a Kentucky doctor reported that a skull he had saved as a souvenir of medical school and hung on his back porch had been remodeled by wrens. It was still occupied in 1945 when his son moved the skull to his garage in Indiana, where it was promptly re-wrented. Home is where the heart is, even if it's a transplant."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Beetle Battle

1971

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Patrick Miller and Amy Plotkin

"It's two falls out of three for the guy in the mahogany trunks. Stag beetles have the rich finish of fine, old woodwork and the nightmarish mandibles of man-eating monsters. They also have all the athletic grace of bulldozers, which is why they spend a lot of time flat on their backs, treading air, totally helpless. Is this wrestling match a fake? Not on your scissors hold! It's for the loving cup. And where is she? Bet she got tired of waiting around and went stag."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Scramble & Gamble

These bugs engage in a mad scramble. What sharp shapes make this battle a gamble?

Sprout & Scout

Scout each sprout and look about. What colors make the mushroom pop out?

Evening Grosbeaks

1979

acrylic on canvas

Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

"Glowing Van Gogh yellow, a flock of Neanderthal-beaked avians with over-the-top markings pays you the ultimate compliment . . . a VISIT. Except for finding a steady stream of sunflower seeds, you wonder why they picked your place. Other folks feed too. Why you? Well, you're kinda special . . . so are they . . . and it just figures the twain should meet, right? With their population down 75% since 1970, more than luck must have sent them your way. Don't change a blessed thing."

—Harper, circa 1979

Hawk Aloft

1978

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

Round Robin

1973

acrylic on canvas

Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

"On the leading edge of spring, the cock robin stakes out his territory and sings up NO TRESPASSING signs. *Cheerily, cheerily, cheerily*, he sings cheerily. Translation: 'Don't land here if you look like me, buster—this backyard's not big enough for both of us.' Then the ladies arrive and singles give way to doubles in the annual round robin. With all the fuss and feathers he wins his match and they settle down to perpetuate the species. And that's the name of the game."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

The Last Aphid

1981

acrylic on canvas
Collection of Brett Harper

"Of all the insects that make house calls, the ladybug has the best bedside manner. Flower bed, that is. If your roses are wasting away with acute aphiditis and you've despaired of home remedies, tired of transplants, and turned agnostic about technological faith healing (let us spray—the medicine works but the world ends up with the DDTs), here's a sure cure that's environmentally friendly. Rx—ladybugs: one teaspoonful, just before mealtime. Their mealtime, that is."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Fearless Feathers

1987

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Anisa and Kevin Willis

"Feather for feather, the hummingbird is the fiercest, fastest, feistiest flier in the firmament. Forget the hawk, the owl, the eagle. This fly-weight will zing anything on the wing, even an airplane, that violates his airspace. Straight up or down, sideways and backward he zips, hovering for frequent refueling on high-octane nectar. Courting, he tosses caution to the wind and barnstorms up a circus to seduce his significant other. Yet, for all his macho, he is so fragile he can easily perish in a spider's web."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

B-r-r-r-r-rdbath

1986

acrylic on canvas mounted on board

Collection of Brett Harper

"It's no Jacuzzi, but a dirty bird's never choosy. And if you provide warm water in your birdbath on cold mornings, you'll turn it into the neighborhood hot tub. Who, you may ask, except for the Polar Bear Club, would go skinny-dipping on a snowy day? Well, how would you like to go all winter without a bath? Like all aviators, the cardinal must regularly clean and preen his flying machine. But how can he dry himself without a towel? Maybe freeze-dry?"

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Seeing Red

1977

color screen print on paper

Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of Donna Herwarth in
memory of Carl J. Herwarth

2003.179

"It's like waving a red flag in front of a bull. Who's that red-headed, red-billed, red-bellied, red-throated, red-tailed, red-winged, red-backed, red-breasted, red-crested, red-capped, red-crowned, red-chinned, red-collared, red-cheeked, red-necked, red-shouldered, red-sided, red-rumped rascal that is trespassing on his turf, mauling his machismo? So begins the war at the window. He has met the enemy and it is he, himself—the red-faced redbird."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Under the Sweetgum Tree

1995

acrylic on board

Collection of Patrick Miller and Amy Plotkin

"[Why] the cardinal? Great color. He looks good from all angles, especially coming at you, because he has that wonderful face and the wonderfully shaped beak. It's a big beak, so you can see it easily. It's orange. . . . He's a great bird to have around—'specially on the green leaves and in the winter on the snow."

—Harper to designer Todd Oldham, circa 2007

Sketches of Birds with Color Notations

undated

pencil on conjoined paper

Sketches of Birds

undated

pencil on paper

Cardinals at a Birdfeeder

1986

pencil on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

Two of these drawings reveal Harper's close study of nature, while *Cardinals at a Birdfeeder* is of a different type and purpose. In the latter, we see the artist's signature tear-drop shaped birds.

Love from Above

1976

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

"Motherly, brotherly, and otherly, love is always in the air. And for a giraffe calf still wet behind the ears, love's a warm, wet tongue that comes down from the treetops. Like moms everywhere, this one's up to her instincts in the project, with her head in the clouds and her feet on the ground. Awake, the towering toddler is a pain in the neck, but when he's sleeping, doesn't that angelic look bring a lummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmp to your throat?"

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Lovey Dovey

1978

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

"Long distance is the next best thing to being there, but a dove in love would rather reach out and touch someone. Spring is in the air, and all lines are busy with local calls as the wooing and cooing commence. HELLO, LOVEY, THIS IS DOVEY.

Fly away, buster, you've got a wrong number.

Dauntless Dovey dials some different digits. HELLO, LOVEY, THIS IS DOV—*Dovey! I thought you'd never call. Come on over and let's get acquainted—person to person.*"

—Harper, for a related *Lovey Dovey*, in *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Phancy Pheathers

1977

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

"The ring-necked pheasant: clotheshorse of the cornfields or haberdasher's nightmare? What's he wearing? White tie and tails, or short-sleeved, long-tailed, loud-mouthed sport shirt with open collar? Is it a smart art deco design, or too many colors and patterns lumped together? Is it the grandeur of silk or the gaucherie of sequins? Does it matter? A rainbow in the snow is better bromide for the midwinter blahs than buying a new spring outfit around the phirst of Phebruary."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

His Eyes Are on the Sparrows

1972

acrylic on canvas

Collection of The Andrew M. Howe V Trust

Harper often quoted his own work, taking a motif he devised for one composition and repurposing it in another. Here, the pose of the watchful feline resembles that of the one stationed under an invisible birdfeeder in *Birdwatcher*, the adjacent screen print, a few years later. Cat people may notice, however, that Harper changed the kitty's markings from tuxedo in this painting to a striped tabby in the subsequent print.

Not all of Harper's paintings made it into a screen print. *His Eyes Are on the Sparrows* exists only in this unique, handmade acrylic painting. Harper brought four or five paintings at a time to the publisher of his prints, who selected one to distribute as a screen print. The complexity of this design and the nearly monochromatic palette may have factored into its rejection as a saleable print.

Birdwatcher

1975

color screen print on paper

Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of Donna Herwarth in
memory of Carl J. Herwarth

2003.176

"There are cat people and there are bird people.
Then there are cat-bird people, who know that their
favorite feline is the ultimate birdwatcher. Who
needs binoculars? This bird lover gets close enough
to count the feathers without snapping a dry twig,
and she knows the best place to fatten her life list—
under the bird feeder! Her eye is on the sparrow,
which is, for her, just as fulfilling as having it on the
condor. But the sparrow
will be saved by the bell—this cat is a cat-bird
people's cat."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Edie Harper

(American, 1922–2010)

Sleepytime Tom

1981

color screen print on paper

Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of Donna Herwarth in
memory of Carl J. Herwarth

2003.173

Ball Clock (model 4755)

designed 1947

Howard Miller Clock Company

(American, est. 1926), manufacturer

George Nelson & Co., Inc.

(American, est. 1947);

Irving Harper

(American, 1916–2015),

attributed designer

wood, metal, paint

Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of the Decorative Arts
Society of Cincinnati in honor of

Dr. Kenneth and Mrs. Barbara Kreines

2016.45

The affinity between this now iconic clock and Harper's *Catnip* of 30 years later is not incidental. Harper's house, built in the 1950s, was in the sleek mid-century modern style and furnished with compatible items. His work matured then, during an era that loved playful animal- and plant-like objects for the home. (Think kidney-bean shaped tables.) This was also known as the Atomic Age,

as optimism about science and nuclear energy intermingled with fears about bombs. This clock's design, with orbs on rays radiating from the center, brilliantly encompasses the spirit of the Atomic Age.

In the 1960s, Harper explored a form resembling this clock in an illustration of a sundew plant in *The Animal Kingdom*. As his nimble mind often led him to revisit his repertoire of motifs, it is not surprising to find reverberations in *Catnip* decades later.

Edie Harper
(American, 1922–2010)

Summer Watch
1981–82

color screen print
Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of Donna Herwarth
in memory of Carl J. Herwarth
2003.174

This print and the one to your right were made by Edie Harper, for whom house cats were a favorite subject. Like Charley's cat images, Edie's rely on strong geometric design principles. Their spirit differs, however. While many of Charley's felines are calculating hunters, Edie's are full of charm and warmth

Catnip

1977

color screen print on paper

Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of Donna Herwarth in
memory of Carl J. Herwarth

2003.177

"The mockingbird patrols his perimeter with the eye of the eagle, the ferocity of the falcon, and the suddenness of the supersonic jet. Cat-a-tat-tat! From twelve o'clock high, he screams out of the sky to strafe his catnapping enemy with bad bird words, pulling up just in time to escape catastrophe while tantalizing the tormented tabby. Will air power win the Cat-Bird War? Don't bet on it, unless you find your feline digging a foxhole."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

The items in this case are from the Collection of Brett Harper unless otherwise indicated.

1

Richard Hough, with Illustrations by Don Eckelberry, *Audubon Bird Guide: Eastern Land Birds*, 1946, Private Collection

Harper referenced bird guides, notably those published by the Audubon Society, when making his depictions. He credited Don Eckelberry's descriptive illustrations, as he needed to know the bird's appearance in detail before abstracting it. He also relied on the text of these books.

2

Charley sketching in a canoe, 1970

Sketching from life was essential to Harper's practice.

3

Spreadsheet on bird nests

Harper kept subject files and pulled them out for reference. For example, his file on bird nests

contains Edie's photographs, including the one here, this spreadsheet, his drawings of examples, and a naturalist's treatise.

4

Attributed to Edie Harper

(American, 1922–2010)

Charley's hands with bird nests,

March 1959, photograph

Harper used photographs as visual aids. Sometimes, as here, Edie, a professional fine art photographer, took the pictures. Other times, Charley took them himself.

5

Study of Insects, probably 1987, pencil on lined, notebook paper

Some of Harper's drawings are surprisingly realistic, like this study for the *Insect World* poster for the Cincinnati Zoo.

6

Edie Harper (American, 1922–2010)

Charley with cat, 1980

photography contact sheet

7

**Harper's remarks at the 10th Anniversary of the
Cincinnati Nature Center**, June 22, 1976

Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives, Cincinnati
Art Museum

Bluebirds in the Bluegrass

1975

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

“‘The sun shines bright in the old Kentucky home. . . . While the birds make music all the day.’ And a box of nesting bluebirds banishes the blues and hoists happiness high, even if it’s in somebody else’s backyard. *Cheury, cheury, cheury*: don’t give up, don’t give in, don’t give out. Life can still be beautiful if you look for the silver lining somewhere over the rainbow, the six o’clock news notwithstanding. Three *cheureys* for the bluebirds of happiness.”

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Birds of a Feather

1974

acrylic on canvas

Springfield Museum of Art, Ohio; Gift of the Estate of Perry Halley

"Flocking together as summer wanes, a brigade of bachelor red-winged blackbirds swings into the southbound lane, where traffic is backed up to the Arctic Circle. But where are the brownish females? Flocking apart. Red-wing congregations are strictly his and hers, except in spring when they sing, 'I'm *ok-a-lee*, you're *ok-a-lee*,' and consort among the cattails long enough to make sure there will always be red-winged blackbirds. Then it's back to separate dorms—flocking together apart."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Skimmerscape

1976

color screen print on paper

Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of Donna Herwarth in
memory of Carl J. Herwarth

2003.178

"Behold how black skimmers fish for their finny food. As the tide falls and the moon rises, a squadron of skimmers shimmers over the glassy cove, shallow-plowing the shallows with their razor-thin lower mandibles, scooping up minnows by the many from the mini furrows. It's a little like seining with a string, and you have to wonder if they don't come up with a lot of flotsam and jetsam. Isn't there an easier way to make a living? Not if you're a black skimmer."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Loon Rise

1986

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Betsy Clarisse

"It's the loonliest sound on earth. It's one of nature's musical treasures. Once you hear it, the uncommon cry of the common loon will become *your* wilderness theme song, engaging all your senses in evocation of moonrise in the vast solitude of the Great North Country. But how would you ever describe it? Loonguists have called it 'unearthly, primeval, maniacal'—the melody of madness, the lyrics of loonacy. Yet it is haunting, tremulous, sorrowful. The Loonlight Sonata."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Skippping School

1977

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

"A school of minnows clears the classroom as a menacing monster swirls up from the depths. It's the largemouth bass, out to grab a bite. The subject for today and every day: Pond Life and How to Prolong It When It's Yours. They learn fast, but many a minnow flunks the final. Multiple-choice question: Who will live the longest?

(a) Little fish in a big pond; (b) Little fish in a little pond; (c) Big fish in a big pond; (d) Big fish in a little pond? Answer: snapping turtle."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Diving Pelican

1972

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

It may not be a coincidence that Harper's gangly pelican resembles origami, the Japanese art of paper folding. Here, Harper has abstracted a brown pelican, the only pelican species that dives into the ocean. From a height of 65 to 70 feet, these birds plunge to the water to scoop up stunned fish in their roomy throat pouches. Although smaller than their white cousins, brown pelicans nevertheless have a wingspan of about six and a half feet. Harper's pinstripes suggest the bird's shimmering silver streaks.

Harper may have made this painting to draw attention to the brown pelican, whose survival was imperiled in the 1970s by pesticides and sport shooting. Due to conservation efforts, the species made a remarkable comeback, but warming of coastal waters threatens them anew.

Passel of Possums

2002

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

"The mother opossum is one very maternal marsupial. She takes parenting so seriously, in fact, that she feels duty-bound to carry four or more babies on her back while swimming across a river. This natural nurturer has no need for a stroller, backpack, or Mr. Opossum when it comes to hauling her brood about.

—Harper, undated

Musk Line
(*variant of Arctic Circle*)
1990

acrylic on canvas
Collection of Brett Harper

Cottontail in a Cottonfield

1986

color screen print on paper

Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

"Hiding is hard to do if you have a cotton boll for a tail. Pity poor Peter Rabbit, pursued as food by every fang and claw from Canada to the Land of Cotton. Providing protein for predatory species while perpetuating one's own pre-supposes a prodigality of procreation that has procured for the cottontail a reputation for a perpetually proliferating population. So without predators, we'd be up to our ears in rabbits. Without rabbits, we'd be living in a jungle of lettuce. Let us, therefore, give thanks for the balance of nature."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Pfwhoooooooooooo!

1975

acrylic on canvas

Collection of James Buchsbaum

"How do you like your skunk steak? Rare? Rarely? Not this great horned owl—he's taking his on the hoof, for a midnight snack. It's plenty smelly, but it fills his belly. Sure it's stink, stank, stunk when he confiscates a skunk—he'll even end up with a skunky bunk. But when it comes down to stink or starve, it's better to be fed than dead. The skunk was planning to eat in when the owl dropped by—it's only once in a lifetime he gets taken out for dinner."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Raccpack

1975

acrylic and possibly ink on canvas

mounted on plywood

Cincinnati Art Museum;

Bequest of Virginia W. Brooks

2021.143

"Trick 'r treat! Better have some table scraps and a few marked-down loaves of bread on hand when this lovable gang of raccoteers appears on your patio—or you'll end up serving tomorrow morning's coffee cake. The masked ball in the backyard is a nightly event in suburbs across the land, and if you're having friends over for the evening, it's good for an hour of prime time with no commercials. You are

emcee, the resident authority on animal behavior, and ranking raccoonteur."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Raccoonaissance

1984

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Carol Law

"Skunks have The Bomb. Long ago they won the animal arms race, glands down. Now they walk among us in peace, using their terrible weapon only as a deterrent. Raccoons have the brain. High in IQ, cutes, cunning, and caution, they move into the suburbs with their upwardly mobile lifestyle. Raccoons will scatter your garbage, trash your property, and charm you right out of your tree. Their mechanical aptitude is legendary. Heaven help us if raccoons ever get The Bomb!"

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Posters and Public Projects

Harper was often asked to design art for public spaces. Impressed with his illustration work for *Ford Times*, the Ford Motor Company hired him for two projects in the 1950s for its Dearborn, Michigan, headquarters: a series of panels representing Michigan wildlife for the staff lounge and a public mural celebrating the Model T Ford in transportation history for the Ford Rotunda Building (neither exists today). Soon, Harper's popularity earned him three commissions for mosaic tile murals, the first in 1964 for the John Weld Peck Federal Building in Cincinnati.

In 1969, Marc Sagan, an administrator for the National Park Service, shared his vision for an educational installation at Everglades National Park. This initiated a fruitful partnership lasting nearly two decades. Harper not only created displays for the Everglades site but completed 10 posters devoted to the National Parks. Over the years, Harper completed countless posters, book covers, brochures, and maps for parks, zoos, and other nature-focused entities, sometimes working pro bono as a form of support. From the imagery to typography, he expertly designed every aspect.

***Study for Energy: Use It
When You Need It, Save as Much as You
Can***

1982

Poster for Knoxville International Energy Exposition
(World's Fair)

mixed media and cut paper
on illustration board

Collection of Brett Harper

Study for A Century of Caring

1983

Cover illustration for book by Richard Compton,
*A Century of Caring: One Hundred Years of
Organized Veterinary Medicine in Ohio,
1883–1983*

mixed media and cut paper
on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

Spy & Identify

Spy as many different animals as you can identify.
Which one was trickiest to find?

Find & Combine

Find the different colors, shapes, and textures.
How did Harper combine them to build this
creature-filled collage?

Mosaic Murals

Among the artist's first large-scale public commissions was a mosaic mural, later titled *Space for All Species*, made in 1964 for the lobby of the new federal building in downtown Cincinnati (later named the John Weld Peck Federal Building). Drawing on his work for *The Golden Book of Biology*, the two-panel composition features dozens of animals and insects. More familiar with ink and paint, the artist found in ceramic tile mosaic a new medium—one that pushed his pursuit of geometric simplicity to its limits.



Space for All Species (left and right panels), 1964, John Weld Peck Federal Building, Cincinnati, Ohio, ceramic tile, Courtesy of Brett Harper; Ross Van Pelt (RVP Photography)

In 1967, Harper unveiled a second project, titled *Space Walk*, in Cincinnati's convention center. The entirely abstract composition, unusual for the artist, referenced American advances in space exploration with cascading, colorful one-inch-square tiles. While

the work was covered up in the mid-1980s, public interest and funding led to its restoration in 2015.

Finally, in 1986, Harper designed *Web of Life* for Miami University's biological sciences building in Oxford, Ohio. Like *Space for All Species* in its array of natural specimens on a light-colored field, the densely packed tile inhabitants of *Web of Life* coil around one another in a teeming illustration of the interconnectedness of all living things.



Harper and his *Web of Life* mosaic mural, Pearson Hall, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, 1986, Collection of Brett Harper

Possum

circa 1964

Sketch for *Space for All Species* mosaic,
John Weld Peck Federal Building, Cincinnati

pencil and gouache on grid paper

Collection of Brett Harper

Ladybug and Cardinal

circa 1964

Sketch for *Space for All Species* mosaic,
John Weld Peck Federal Building, Cincinnati

pencil on grid paper
Collection of Brett Harper

Harlequin Bug

1964

Maquette for *Space for All Species* mosaic, John
Weld Peck Federal Building, Cincinnati

ceramic tile

Collection of Brett Harper

Everglades National Park

From the start, Marc Sagan envisioned Harper as the artist for the Everglades visitor center:

"I had an idea for a room designed to interpret the ecology of an Everglades slough at the head of the Anhinga Trail. Visitors would see . . . Charley Harper drawings of alligators after garfish after smaller fish, etc. Herons and egrets looking down on soft-shelled turtles, and catfish looking up. There might be paramecia and other microorganisms supporting the whole food chain. Visitors would learn that they are both fascinated observers and unwitting contributors to its destruction."

The artist completed eight final, preparatory paintings for an immersive environment (now disassembled and relocated) and designed additional works for placement around the trails. He visited the park with Edie, his collaborator, who shot photographic field studies for her husband's use in the studio when back home in Cincinnati. In Charley's intricate works, he revealed for parkgoers the unique ecosystems of the Everglades and the interdependent flora and fauna that live above and below the water in complex and fragile equilibrium.

Looking at Terrestrial and Concentrated Underground Life at Water Level During Dry Season

1978

Maquette for mixed media installation
commissioned by the National Park Service
for Royal Palm Visitor Center,
Everglades National Park

acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the National Park Service, Everglades
National Park

Harper revels in the diversity and profusion of wildlife in the extraordinary Everglades ecosystem. The top, above-the-water register of this painting focuses primarily on large aquatic birds: a snowy egret with lacy feathers at the center, a purple gallinule at the right, a heron at left, and others. Harper introduces a humorous note at the surface with a gallinule dipping into the water, its feet straight up in the air. At the bottom, devouring a turtle, is a massive predatory alligator in classic Harper frontal view.

Sharing the Water

1978

Variant for mixed media installation commissioned by the National Park Service for Royal Palm Visitor Center, Everglades National Park

acrylic on canvas

Cincinnati Museum Center;

Gift of Charley Harper

If you compare this painting to the one to your left, you may notice that it features a different color scheme. It also departs in other regards: the composition has significantly fewer animals and greater clarity. Although highly finished, this painting was likely a step along the way to arriving at the work on the left, which he sent to the National Park Service to complete the commission. He kept this painting and donated it to the Cincinnati Museum Center for its natural history displays. Which do you prefer?

Rainy Season Looking Up from Underwater

1978

Maquette for mixed media installation
commissioned by the National Park Service
for Royal Palm Visitor Center,
Everglades National Park

acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the National Park Service, Everglades
National Park

Science is at the root of Harper's Everglades paintings but they are also highly inventive. In this brilliantly clever portrayal of the marshy freshwater habitat during rainy season, the raindrops hitting the water appear as small bullseyes tightly arranged in rows. A few larger concentric circles balance the composition.

Even in a wetsuit, we are unlikely to experience this point of view; we are positioned underwater looking up at the bellies of an alligator, turtles, a frog, fish, and other creatures swimming above and below one another. Harper also reveals the bottom of a waterfowl paddling on the surface and the reflection of a seabird flying in the sky above.

The Florida Keys

1990

Folding map brochure for The Wilderness Society
of The Nature Conservancy, Florida
Collection of Brett Harper

Study for Monteverde: The Cloud Forest

1999

Poster for Centro de Educación Creativa
(Cloud Forest School), Puntarenas Province,
Monteverde, Costa Rica

mixed media with cut paper and
Mylar on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

This extraordinary full-size study for the Montverde poster is a pile-up of layer upon layer of collaged elements made from paper and transparent plastic film. The additive process of creating this study helped the artist to visualize the final design, a dense, complex composition in which dozens of pictorial elements fit tightly together or overlap.

Gaze & Maze

Gaze through Harper's watery maze. Which animal is the trickiest to find? Which shapes guide you from one animal to the next?

See & Agree

See how the creatures overlap. Do you agree the artwork captures the energy of a rainy environment? Why or why not?

The Florida Keys

1990

Maquette for folding map brochure
for The Wilderness Society of
The Nature Conservancy, Florida

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

Each creature represented in this colorful design on a white field is treated as a separate individual, fitted together neatly like puzzle pieces. This arrangement is due to the printed fold-out map's educational use, intended to help visitors identify species found in the Florida Keys. Harper organized the elements along a central diagonal axis intersected by the large stoplight parrotfish. The key deer in the foreground looks out at us, drawing us into Harper's world.

Untitled, *from the Hidden World of the Hammock series*

1978

acrylic on five canvases
Cincinnati Museum Center;
Gift of Charley Harper

Hammocks are unique and diverse habitats in the marshy southeastern United States, particularly in Florida, featuring dense stands of hardwood trees on small, minutely elevated islands. While conceptualizing his designs for Everglades National Park, Harper developed this series of works that reflect his study and understanding of the natural science. The five sequential paintings start with a hammock seen from above and move in closer to nature with each successive canvas. In the second and third paintings, we see that a cardinal air plant has taken up residence in a host tree. The fourth and largest painting brings us near the air plant, which is teeming with life—birds, insects, a lizard, frogs, a snake—all taking advantage of its wet interior and each other's presence in the food chain. The final canvas is a magnified view of microscopic organisms.

Looking into the Forest at Gumbo Limbo Trail

1978

Maquette for mixed media installation
commissioned by the National Park Service
for Royal Palm Visitor Center,
Everglades National Park

acrylic on canvas with illustration board collage
Courtesy of the National Park Service, Everglades
National Park

The leaves in this composition represent those of the gumbo limbo, the common name for a semi-evergreen tree native to tropical southern Florida and South America. Harper depicts a view into the forest from the so-named trail, an almost half-mile paved walking path, and immerses us amid these trees, palms, ferns, and air plants. Among the denizens of this thick wood are a pileated woodpecker and an opossum. See if you can find the Zebra-longwing butterfly, the official state butterfly of Florida.

Monteverde: The Cloud Forest

1999

Maquette for poster for Centro de Educación Creativa (Cloud Forest School), Puntarenas Province, Monteverde, Costa Rica

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

Harper's vibrant painting visualizes the biodiversity of the tropics; it is jam-packed with 17 identifiable bird species, seven insects, seven animals, and eight plants—all arrayed around a resplendent quetzal known for its dramatically long tail feathers. Yet, Harper's painting shows only a tiny fraction of the species found in Costa Rica's Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve. A cloud forest is a phenomenon that occurs when tropical air cools and condenses into mist, which then further condenses on mountain slopes providing constant moisture. This thereby gives rise to a super-abundance of interdependent life forms. The preserve is a long-standing living laboratory for the study of tropical ecosystems and climate science.

Monteverde: The Cloud Forest

1999

Poster for Centro de Educación Creativa (Cloud Forest School), Puntarenas Province, Monteverde, Costa Rica

offset lithograph on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

Harper made this poster to raise support for the Centro de Educación Creativa in Monteverde, Costa Rica, an elementary school dedicated to fostering "a new generation of bilingual people with the skills and motivation to make environmentally sound decisions and create positive change." Children from the school provided a tour for Charley and Edie when they visited in 1999.

The Edge of Appalachia Preserve

2004

Poster for Cincinnati Museum Center and
The Nature Conservancy

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Brett Harper

The Edge of Appalachia Preserve, familiarly known as "The Edge," is comprised of 21,000 acres of protected land in Adams County in southern Ohio. It is "one of the most biologically diverse natural systems in the midwestern United States, encompassing rugged woodland, prairie openings, waterfalls, giant promontories, and clear streams." Harper's poster features a title graphic panel above a stack of four individual images, each dedicated to an ecologically distinctive site along the preserve's 27 miles of hiking trails. Harper depicted each location in a different season to highlight The Edge's environmental transformations and its natural beauty year-round. Included here are the lush original acrylic paintings Harper made for the poster, each of which can stand on its own as a fully realized, independent composition.

The Edge of Appalachia Preserve

2004

Maquette for poster for Cincinnati Museum Center
and The Nature Conservancy

gouache and cut paper on illustration board
Collection of Patrick Miller and Amy Plotkin

The Edge of Appalachia Preserve: Monarch and Vultures

2004

Maquette for poster for Cincinnati Museum Center
and The Nature Conservancy

acrylic on illustration board

Collection of Patrick Miller and Amy Plotkin

The Edge of Appalachia Preserve: Cedar Falls

2004

Maquette for poster for Cincinnati Museum Center
and The Nature Conservancy

acrylic on illustration board

Collection of Patrick Miller and Amy Plotkin

The Edge of Appalachia Preserve: Lynx Prairie

2004

Maquette for poster for Cincinnati Museum Center
and The Nature Conservancy

acrylic on illustration board

Collection of Patrick Miller and Amy Plotkin

The Edge of Appalachia Preserve: Buzzard Roost

2004

Maquette for poster for Cincinnati Museum Center
and The Nature Conservancy

acrylic on illustration board

Collection of Patrick Miller and Amy Plotkin

The Edge of Appalachia Preserve: Ohio Brush Creek

2004

Maquette for poster for Cincinnati Museum Center
and The Nature Conservancy

acrylic on illustration board

Collection of Patrick Miller and Amy Plotkin

National Parks Posters

Between 1976 and 1990, Harper designed and illustrated 10 iconic posters for the National Park Service, each celebrating the distinctive wildlife and unique features of a region and ecosystem. The interconnection of species and special qualities of place were his overarching themes. Harper made site visits for field sketching and photography and composed innumerable studies, summarizing his process:

“Well, I start by making thumbnail sketches with my pencil; I try this and try that. And when it reaches a certain point, I believe that it is ready to be finalized. So then I’ll draw it on tracing paper and lay more tracing on that and then refine it. And finally it reaches the point that it is ready to paint. So I make a big drawing the right size on tracing paper and trace it down and start painting, starting with the background over the whole picture, and then on top of that with the foreground images.”

After months of thought and labor, Harper composed these grand-scale, entirely handmade acrylic paintings in glorious detail and color. Produced from these painted “maquettes,”

the printed posters consummated his unique position as the modern wildlife artist and remain in production today, a tribute to their enduring relevance and appeal.

Glacier Bay, Alaska

1977

Poster commissioned by the
National Park Service

offset lithograph on paper
Collection of Brett Harper

It is hard to imagine that the 10 large, stunning paintings on view in this section, including the one to your right, are work products. They each represent the final design stage for an offset lithograph poster, of which this is a characteristic example. The paintings were photographed for reproduction on the posters, then stored away. The design is consistent from one poster to the next, except for the placement of the text bar. While on some, as here, it appears at the left, on others it is at the bottom. *Glacier Bay, Alaska* was the first of the 10 posters Harper designed and is one of three to commemorate a specific national park.

Glacier Bay, Alaska

circa 1976

Maquette for poster commissioned by the
National Park Service

acrylic on canvas mounted on board
Courtesy of the National Park Service,
Harpers Ferry Center,
Commissioned Art Collection

From the mid-1970s forward, Harper, in his poster designs, often maximized his minimal realism. It is as though to suggest the wondrous amplitude of nature, he felt the need to include as many animals and distinctive features as possible. The compositions are complex, some action-packed.

Harper organized most of these around a large central element typical of the region, in this case a diving whale's massive tail. A row of sea lions is like a chorus in the background, and a bald eagle and a puffin are birds you would hope to see on a visit. Inspired by the places represented, Harper selected a different palette for each, *Glacier Bay* predominantly blue.

Study for Glacier Bay, Alaska **circa 1976**

Poster commissioned by the
National Park Service

mixed media on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

This loose sketch represents an early phase of this poster's design, before the whale's tail became the focal motif. It combines underwater imagery—including a swimming whale—with landscape elements. This was only one of dozens of sketches in different sizes and media Harper made as he conceptualized his design.

The Coral Reef

circa 1977

Maquette for poster commissioned by the National
Park Service

acrylic on canvas mounted on board
Courtesy of the National Park Service,
Harpers Ferry Center,
Commissioned Art Collection

Unlike the other poster compositions, this vibrant painting lacks a dominant focal point. Harper preferred an intricate all-over design to represent the spectacular profusion of ocean life nourished by the coral reef. Forty different types of fish and sea creatures mesmerizingly move through the water in various directions. A large fish at top center looks out at us directly, Charley style.

Studies for The Desert

1979–80

Poster commissioned by the
National Park Service

mixed media and cut paper
on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

The Desert

1979–80

Maquette for poster commissioned by the National
Park Service

acrylic on canvas mounted on board
Courtesy of the National Park Service,
Harpers Ferry Center,
Commissioned Art Collection

Harper had an exhaustive trial-and-error design process. Comparing the final painted version of *The Desert* and these two small studies, we see him changing the shape of the saguaro cactus and the arrangement and poses of the various birds. He also considerably reduced the number of ornamental cactus flowers. Look closely at the background of

the painting to see the bold shapes of other cacti and desert-dwelling animals hidden in the darkness.

Study for Atlantic Barrier Islands

circa 1980–82

Poster commissioned by the
National Park Service

mixed media and cut paper
on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

Atlantic Barrier Islands

circa 1980–82

Maquette for poster (issued 1986) commissioned by the National Park Service

acrylic on canvas mounted on board
Courtesy of the National Park Service,
Harpers Ferry Center,
Commissioned Art Collection

The small study nearby is very close to the poster's final design, as recorded in this meticulous acrylic painting. Harper reduced the texture of what may be a large piece of driftwood at the center to make the flying gulls stand out more strikingly. The clarity of this work's design and a notably delicate touch, in the shells for example, distinguish this painting from the others. He divided the composition into horizontal zones, relying on the diagonal thrust up the middle and seabirds facing opposite directions to create tension and movement.

Spy & Identify

Look high, low, and all along the coast. How many feathered, finned, or clawed creatures can you spy and identify?

Dare & Compare

Take the dare: look closely at the large painting here and the little study nearby and compare. What is the same? What is different? Why do you think he made the changes he did?

Isle Royale

circa 1977–80

Maquette for poster commissioned by the National Park Service

acrylic on canvas mounted on board
Courtesy of the National Park Service,
Harpers Ferry Center,
Commissioned Art Collection

The main elements of this autumnal composition are so hidden that some viewers may need an interpreter. Do you see the two bull moose facing off amid the birch trees, with their antlers clashing at the center? How many wolves are concealed in the thicket?

Isle Royale National Park is on an archipelago in northwest Lake Superior about 20 miles from Grand Portage, Minnesota. It was formerly called “Minong,” meaning “the good place” in the language of the Ojibwa People. Today, it is beloved by those who treasure a remote wilderness experience, though in the company of other hikers, boaters, and campers.

Study for The Sierra Range

circa 1985–90

Poster commissioned by the
National Park Service

mixed media and cut paper
on illustration board
Collection of Brett Harper

This tiny study combining cut-paper collage with other media is astoundingly intricate. Harper may have found that making his designs at small scale like this helped him envision the whole at a glance.

The Sierra Range

circa 1985–90

Maquette for poster (possibly issued 1990)
commissioned by the National Park Service

acrylic on canvas mounted on board
Courtesy of the National Park Service,
Harpers Ferry Center,
Commissioned Art Collection

Harper built this composition on a scaffold of horizontal elements, providing glimpses of the mountains and a waterfall through the trees. A diagonal row of birds, each of a different variety, creates a rhythm up the middle.

This painting beautifully exemplifies Harper's amplification of patterns found in nature, like the fawn's polka-dotted coat. His research would have told him that California mule deer are spotted at birth for camouflage (but lose their spots soon after). He also shows us the deer's rear view, front and center, to illustrate the species' characteristic white rump and white tail with black tip. Large ears resembling a mule's earned this deer its name.

The Alpine Northwest

circa 1988

Maquette for poster (issued 1988) commissioned by the National Park Service

acrylic on canvas mounted on board
Courtesy of the National Park Service,
Harpers Ferry Center,
Commissioned Art Collection

A bald eagle perched in a gnarled tree is the thematic center of Harper's dramatic visualization of the ecosystem of the rugged Pacific Northwest, home to Olympic and Mt. Rainier National Parks (the latter known as Tahoma, "the mother of waters," to the Puyallup Tribe indigenous to the area). The swirling white shapes suggest melting snow. In the corners are the frosty Cascade Range at upper left and a meadow alive with wildflowers at lower right. Harper reveled in the profusion of flora that blooms during the short summer season: among them star-shaped avalanche lilies, tiger lilies, mountain lupine, and what appear to be beargrass stylized to resemble ice cream cones. Hidden in the composition is the hoary marmot, a native mammal, not to mention the grizzly bear.

Hawaii Volcanoes

1981–83

Maquette for poster commissioned by the National Park Service

acrylic on canvas mounted on board
Courtesy of the National Park Service,
Harpers Ferry Center,
Commissioned Art Collection

Lava flows from an erupting volcanic column (at top) and surrounds the green kipuka [oasis of vegetation] sustaining abundant wildlife. In the kipuka, is the nēnē, or Hawaiian goose, the state's official bird. A Kamehameha butterfly cruises overhead.

Scrutinizing the design for accuracy, a Hawaiian specialist for the National Park Service gave this the thumbs-up even though some of the morning glories "may be exotic" rather than "native." He wrote, "I recognize a kipuka and a volcano when I see one—even in stylized form. I would rather go with the artist's first choice unless its flat wrong. And this is OK." In response to another inspector, Harper explained, "I think there are things I can do to make the kapuka [his spelling] less like a window into the mountain without compromising the idea."

The Rocky Mountains

circa 1983–84

Maquette for poster commissioned by the National Park Service

acrylic on canvas mounted on board
Courtesy of the National Park Service,
Harpers Ferry Center,
Commissioned Art Collection

Can you find the mountains in Harper's unexpected design for the Rocky Mountains poster? In a letter that speaks volumes about his time-consuming process, the artist wrote to administrator Marc Sagan, "I've had a real battle with the trees on the mountain, putting them in, taking them out, putting them in a new way, taking them out, putting them back in the first way with variations, etc.

I think the main hold up is that I am really enthused about it, as I am about all these posters, and am determined to be satisfied with it no matter how long it takes."

Canyon Country

circa 1985–90

Maquette for poster (issued 1990) commissioned by the National Park Service

acrylic on canvas mounted on board
Courtesy of the National Park Service,
Harpers Ferry Center,
Commissioned Art Collection

A site visit to Utah's Canyon Country—featuring Canyonlands, Zion, and Bryce Canyon National Parks—was first on Charley's (and Edie's) agenda when he undertook the commission for this bold poster. The resulting composition is arguably one of Harper's most dynamic. An intimidating red-tailed hawk, a snake in its talons, bursts out towards us from between tall, ruddy canyon walls. Characteristic wildlife of the region appears at the bottom: a jackrabbit, a ringtail, a mule deer, a mountain lion, and a golden-mantled ground squirrel. The bell-shaped blooms may be sego lilies, the Utah state flower.

Designtex Stories:
At Home with Charley Harper
circa 2006

Courtesy of Designtex
Copyright 2014, Designtex
Produced and Directed by Birdling Films
Interview Courtesy of Todd Oldham Studio

Environmental Activism

"If I was to be anything other than an artist, it would have been a conservationist."

—Harper for unknown publication, 1966

Harper hoped his depictions of nature would foster the desire to protect it. As early as 1957, he laid bare the terrible consequences of human actions in his *Ford Times* article, "America's Vanishing Birds" (which includes *Great Auk* and *Passenger Pigeon* in the adjacent gallery). His piercing texts contrast starkly with the lovely imagery, in which he imagines the exquisite creatures in their natural habitats before their extinction. As his visibility grew, Harper used his power to raise appreciation and awareness through his art. Pairing his pictures with words, he conveyed his deep concerns about the planet's future.

The American environmental movement began in earnest during the 1960s and gained traction in the '70s. Public education about conservation was (and is) central to the missions of the nature organizations with whom Harper collaborated on posters and other materials. Most of the art he

created for them highlights the wonders of nature to inspire caring. Some of his independent work, however, like the monumental *Backhoesaurus* in this exhibition, delivers a forceful critique. Although this large, complex print was expensive to produce and might appeal to few collectors, Harper felt compelled to make a statement.

Green Cuisine

1984

acrylic on canvas

Study for Green Cuisine

1984

mixed media on paper

Collection of David and Debra Hausrath

"A trip to the salad bar is the first course on the menu of Mother Nature's Fast Food Chain, and the harmless herbivores must make it, grazing to fulfill their destiny—protein for the predators. Then it's Mean Cuisine as the carnivores take over, and the name of the game is Eat Without Being Eaten. Enter man, the ultimate consumer, the predator with a conscience, who pauses while pigging out to ponder his perplexity: Can a nature lover ever find true happiness at the top of the food chain?"

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Pattern & Pasture

Pasture patterns spread out wide. What colors and shapes repeat from side to side?

Dare & Compare

Take the dare: look closely at the painting and the study and compare. What is the same? What is different? Why do you think Harper made these changes? What changes would you make?

Mystery of the Missing Migrants

1990

Published in Chris Wille, "Mystery of the Missing Migrants," *Audubon*, May 1990

acrylic on canvas mounted on board

Mass Audubon Collection; purchase, 1992

"For centuries, the neo-tropical migrants in this picture have shuttled between winter homes in the tropical rainforest and nesting sites in our woodlands. Now their populations are plummeting. Why? Habitat destruction Down There? Up Here? Is your favorite songster in this flock? Each April, I listen anxiously to the dawn chorus for the return of my favorite, that world-class flutist the wood thrush. Are silent springs forthcoming? Remember the canary in the coal mine?"

—Harper, text to accompany lithograph version

Backhoesaurus

2001

color screen print on paper

Collection of Brett Harper

"Dinosaurs ruled the earth before their extinction millions of years ago. I'm reminded of them when I pass yet another construction / destruction site dominated by ubiquitous long-necked, great jawed metal monsters—those monsters we have created for reconfiguring our landscapes to accommodate the uninhibited spread of ever more massive subdivisions, trophy homes, industrial parks, office complexes, shopping malls, stadiums, superhighways, interchanges, parking lots—all the unplanned out-of-control sprawl that fragments habitats and destroys ecosystems, evicting the plants and animals that depend on them. Are these mindless machines the new rulers of the earth?"

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Scary Scenario

2006

color screen print on paper
Collection of Brett Harper

"From a polar bear's perspective, icebergs are supposed to float always upon the ocean, stable islands of reprieve since the rise of the mammal's collective hard-wired memory. But, with the intensification of Industrial Revolution, global warming promises to compress ecozones and pair some previously unlikely partners. The northern cardinal was never intended to become *this* northern—however, on a planet beset by our role in accelerating climate change, strange new norms will appear. A Scary Scenario indeed."

—Harper, *Beguiled by the Wild*, 1994

Eagle Shafted by His Own Feather (or The Bottom Line)

circa 1976

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Michael Harris and
James Willis, DDS

This brutal subject was a sequel to another work by Harper, *Editorial Eagle*, in which the national bird is depicted alive but with a red, white, and blue target on its chest inscribed with a skull and crossbones. Rarely was Harper so conspicuously political.

**Let your imagination fly or racc
your brains!**

**Charley Harper found inspiration in nature. What
inspires you?**

Use the supplies provided to draw or write like
Charley: simplify, imagine, and get punny! When
you are done, hang it up to share with others or
take it home.

Please Touch.

The museum partnered with Clovernook Center for the Blind & Visually Impaired to provide tactile graphics of artworks in this exhibition.

Please enjoy exploring these works with your sense of touch.

Bee Inspired. Bee Vibrant. Bee Connected.

Just beyond the galleries, honeybees are hard at work. Did you know a honeybee can travel up to three miles from its hive? As they journey throughout Cincinnati in search of nectar and pollen these remarkable pollinators help plants bloom, gardens grow, and habitats flourish.

In partnership with the Queen City Pollinator Project, the Cincinnati Art Museum is home to two active beehives and a thriving pollinator garden that support local plant life and invite visitors to see conservation in action. Working alongside native pollinators, these bees contribute to a healthy ecosystem for people and wildlife alike.

Supported by the Women's Committee and the museum's Green Team, this initiative reflects the museum's commitment to community care and environmental responsibility. Like works of art, the hives ask us to look closely, notice connections, and imagine how even small actions can shape a more vibrant future.

Use this tablet to bee-come part of the hive:
adopt a bee for just \$5, give it a special name,
and help protect the pollinators that keep
Cincinnati blooming.

Bee Like Charley

Charley Harper was an animal and nature enthusiast whose work highlights the magnificent creatures and ecosystems on this planet. He frequently partnered with regional and national organizations, whose efforts focus on nature preservation and conservation, designing and creating works to support their causes. For example, he created logos for Cincinnati Nature Center and RAPTOR Inc. and posters for Cincinnati Parks and the Society for Ecological Restoration.

Here you will find ten organizations near and dear to Harper's heart and his environmental advocacy efforts. We encourage you to scan the QR codes to learn how you can become more involved with these organizations, create a more sustainable environment, and ultimately "bee like Charley" and his love for nature.

The Audubon Society of Ohio

Established in Cincinnati in 1897 as a local chapter of the National Audubon Society, the **Audubon Society of Ohio**'s mission "is to promote the conservation and appreciation of nature for environmental sustainability with a focus on birds, through habitat protection and education."

Get Involved



Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden

Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden is the second oldest zoo in the United States, placing conservation at the core of its mission by "creating adventure, conveying knowledge, conserving nature, and serving the community."

Get Involved



Cincinnati Nature Center

Cincinnati Nature Center's mission "is to inspire conservation through personal experiences, education, and care for the land," with over 1,800 acres for nature enthusiasts to explore.

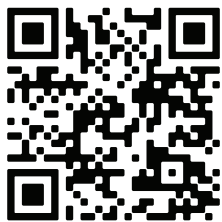
Get Involved



RAPTOR Inc.

RAPTOR Inc. "advances conservation education . . . using orphaned, injured, and sick birds of prey as powerful, real-world teaching tools that deepen scientific literacy and inspire lifelong environmental responsibility" by focusing on rescue, rehabilitation, and release.

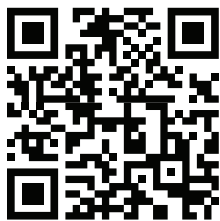
Get Involved



Cincinnati Parks

With 5,000 acres consisting of regional and neighborhood parks, hiking trails, nature centers, playgrounds, etc., the **Cincinnati Parks** mission is “to conserve, manage, sustain, and enhance parks’ natural and cultural resources and public greenspace for the enjoyment, enlightenment and enrichment of the Cincinnati community.”

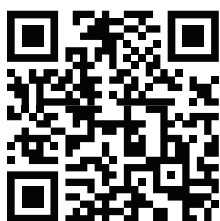
Get Involved



The Nature Conservancy

Founded as a grassroots effort in 1851 by citizens with a shared vision to protect and care for nature, **The Nature Conservancy's** mission is “to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.”

Get Involved



Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Part of Cornell University's world-class College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the **Cornell Lab of Ornithology**'s mission "is to interpret and conserve Earth's biological diversity through research, education, and participatory science focused on birds and nature."

Get Involved



Save the Animals Foundation

Founded in Cincinnati in 1988, **Save The Animals Foundation** (STAF) "is a volunteer-driven, no-kill shelter providing rescue and rehabilitation to alleviate the suffering of dogs and cats, while helping each animal find a loving home."

Get Involved



Cloud Forest School

The mission of the **Cloud Forest School**, located on over 100 acres in tropical Monteverde, Costa Rica, "is to graduate well-rounded, bilingual and environmentally conscious individuals with the tools to meet today's complex challenges."

Get Involved



Society for Ecological Restoration

Society for Ecological Restoration "advances the science, practice, and policy of ecological restoration to sustain biodiversity, improve resilience in a changing climate, and re-establish an ecologically healthy relationship between nature and culture."

Get Involved

