

## Charles Harper

Designer/Illustrator/Painter/Printmaker  
American

Born	August 24, 1922	Frenchton, West Virginia
Died	June 10, 2007	Cincinnati, Ohio

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Charley Harper provided us with a unique view of animals and other aspects of the natural world - not through realistic paintings, but by means of stylized drawings and paintings that capture the essence of his subjects using the fewest elements. He described his style as minimal realism. In his art, the parts of the creature or ecological system are all there and are recognizable, but distilled in a manner that enhances our appreciation for their unique combinations of shapes and colors (i.e., less is more). He liked to joke that he doesn't count the feathers of the birds he paints, just the wings. His different perspective on the world always included a little humor and mystery.

Although trained as a realistic painter (Cincinnati Art Academy 1947), Charley soon realized that realism would "reveal nothing about the subject that nature had not done better." Combining the skills and drafting tools of the architect with the aesthetic sense of the painter, he began to develop his distinctive style that aims to help us want to preserve the natural treasures that remain. In addition to his many acrylic paintings on canvas, Charley has designed over 50 "bio" posters for non-profit conservation groups, nature centers and zoos, United States national parks and monuments, and international wildlife sanctuaries and biosphere preserves. One of the first federally commissioned posters was the ecology of Glacier Bay National Park in the 1960s. As a free-lance designer/illustrator, Harper did extensive work in advertising. He contributed over 300 paintings to Ford Motor Company publications and illustrated books for Rand McNally, Field Enterprises and the Golden Press.

Other works include the design of ceramic tile murals for the Federal Building and Convention Center in Cincinnati, as well as the Biology Building at Miami University in Ohio. He has also illustrated interpretive displays for Everglades National Park in Florida. In addition, Charley has created over 100 limited-edition silk-screen prints and many lithographed open edition prints. Charley has produced two books of his prints and paintings, *Charley Harper's Birds & Words* (1968, out-of-print) and *Beguiled by the Wild: The Art of Charley Harper* (1994, Flower Valley Press). Before those books, he also illustrated two books for a younger audience through the Golden Press, *The Golden Book of Biology* and *The Animal Kingdom*.

The designer Todd Oldham has been greatly influenced by Harper's work and published a book with, and about, the artist titled *Charley Harper: An Illustrated Life*. In June of the same year Charles Harper died from complications from pneumonia at age 84.