

Charles Harper

One of my fellow artists, Ray Podesta, suggested that my work was well suited to silk-screen printing, a process with which he was experienced, and he helped me with the reproduction of many of my designs. 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, is a stencil process in which the printing ink is forced through openings in a stencil that is adhered to a sheet of silk 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 intricate contact between 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.

I start the design with thumbnail sketches, progress to full size roughs on tracing paper, and make the final design with a combination of cut-out paper for the larger shapes (the paper makes it easy to think flat, try different placements of shapes, and make changes) and designer's color for the lines and smaller shapes.

I am now freelancing as a designer-illustrator and teaching design and illustration at the Cincinnati Art Academy. I have done advertising art for many companies locally and nationally but find my greatest satisfaction in illustrating nature books and articles and creating prints of wildlife designs. I have illustrated the Golden Book of Biology and The Animal Kingdom, both for Golden Press in New York. I have illustrated nature subjects for Childcraft and World Book Encyclopedia.

I have designed two ceramic murals: one based on American wildlife, in the lobby of the Federal Building in Cincinnati, the other, called Space Walk, in the new Convention Center in Cincinnati. I decorated walls in the cafeteria and lounge of the Ford General Staff Office Building in Dearborn with Michigan wildlife subjects. My mural on transportation around the world was destroyed when the Ford Rotunda in Dearborn burned a few years ago.

My wife and our son Brett are my most respected critics. Her wide-ranging talent encompasses painting, photography, weaving, stitchery, ceramics, enameling, and jewelry-making, not to mention home-making. Brett is, for his fourteen years, widely read in the field of nature and an ardent conservationist. We share an enthusiasm for canoeing and have spent many good hours running white water in the midwest and Canada. Since much of my work is intended for children's books, I check all illustrations with him to make sure they will be understood. He helps me in making silk-screen prints and is a careful and conscientious craftsman.

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