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07 Charley Harper, *Jonah in the Whale*, 1949. 08 Edie Harper, *Color Wheel*, 1947. 09 Charley and Edie Harper demonstrating serigraphy at a retail gallery, ca. 1968.

He was more withdrawn and would stand in the corner and smile. They completed each other; what one lacked, the other one had.”

It's hard to see either one separate from the other. This blurry line between their personas could also be said of their art. As much as Edie jumped between mediums—from gouache and oil painting to enameling to jewelry to weaving to photography—she continued to dip in and out of screen printing, creating pieces that could be easily mistaken for Charley's. Some of the confusion has to do with the screen-printing medium, which is more mechanical than the handheld gesture of a brush. But Edie and Charley also found charm and wonder in many of the same subjects. In Edie's oil painting *Woodland Fauna* (p. 73), which belongs to the First Unitarian Church of Cincinnati, you can spot a tiny ladybug. “She painted a horizontal ladybug first, in the early 1960s, and people will often think that it's Charley's,” says their son Brett. The ladybug is just one small detail in a larger scene, but it became a recurring motif for both the Harpers, eventually winding up as a mural on the side of their Finneytown house.

Many Harper pieces over the years appear to be in conversation with one another. Edie loved cats (the Harpers always had a pet cat), and from the 1970s through the 1990s, she often rendered her favorite feline creatures in flat, geometric forms. Her print *Nine Tails* (p. 95) is a skinny vertical image featuring a tabby cat prowling through the tall grass. The scene is completely flat and technically absent of any horizon line, but the animal appears to be approaching the viewer, with its head toward the bottom of the frame. Charley reverses the trick in his two prints *Along Came a Spider* (p. 97) and *Tree'd* (p. 94), in which cats appear to be inching upward, away from the viewer. In other pieces, you see the Harpers borrowing organizing principles, if not subject matter, from one another. In the 1970s Edie worked on a fascinating series of abstract prints that turn Biblical scenes into totemic, coin-like faces and calligraphic lines. In many of these pieces, such as *The Last Supper* (p. 63) and *Net Prophet* (p. 77), the characters are neatly arranged in one long row. Charley also sometimes arranges his characters in this way. In *Full House* (p. 76), for instance, he lines up a row of owls. The effect is similarly eerie—like having an audience of eyes on you.



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10 Edie Harper feeding a raccoon in the 1980s. 11 Edie Harper, *The Last Supper*, mid-1960s. 12 Edie Harper, *Jacob's Ladder*, ca. 1970. 13 Edie and Charley Harper, 1967. 14 Edie Harper, *The Owl and the Pussycat*, n. d.

But the tone of each belongs to its maker. Even with the Christian overtones, Edie's pieces read as more fanciful, while Charley's are grounded in the natural world. (Charley didn't practice religion; he said the war made it hard for him to believe in God.) You can see this in other works: Charley's *Fossils* print (p. 89) is filled with earthy browns and grays and looks almost archaeological, while Edie's orange-and-pink print of fossils evokes a sunny Floridian beach and includes a feline face in one corner.

It's impossible to know if this kind of call and response happened on purpose. It is likely that it occurred through something akin to osmosis, as well as affection. “Edie Harper—painter, printmaker, photographer, weaver, homemaker, mother, wife, best friend—is also my most respected critic,” wrote Charley in the introduction to his book of prints, *Beguiled by the Wild*. “Our minds work in parallel; we delight in absurdities, ironies, incongruities, oxymorons, puns. When either of us is stuck on a project, the other can usually suggest a way to get on with it.” Charley also dedicated the book to his wife: “To Edie, the most beguiling creature I know.”



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