

# ALTMAN SIEGEL

GALLERY S/F

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For Immediate Release:

## Charley Harper

September 24<sup>th</sup> – October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009

Opening reception: September 24<sup>th</sup>, 6-8pm

Altman Siegel Gallery is pleased to present a special exhibition of the work of the late illustrator Charley Harper. This exhibition will include original, unique drawings and paintings from the 1960-70s from the artist's personal and commercial oeuvres.

Charley Harper (1922 – 2007) is best known for his modernist illustrations of animals in the *Golden Book of Biology* (1961, Golden Press), and *The Animal Kingdom* (1968, Golden Press), and his lifestyle illustrations for the *Ford Times Magazine*, to which he contributed for over 30 years. This exhibition presents the original drawings and paintings that Harper created for these publications. Several of the drawings bear the marks from their original photo shoots. They are pasted on illustration board and their boundaries are indicated with registration marks. The exhibition also includes original paintings on canvas from the artist's personal collection that have never been exhibited before.

Charley Harper's great skill lies in his ability to reduce complex forms down to their most basic structures without losing the animated dynamism of his subjects. His efficient use of form and color produced stylish and vibrant depictions of birds, animals and scenes from contemporary life. Harper intuitively espoused the clean line aesthetics of mid-century modernism. He describes his work as "Minimal Realism" and explains his methods as such: "I don't try to put everything in, I try to leave everything out. I think flat, simple, hard-edge and funny... eliminating perspective and shading and recording only what I felt to be the essence." The timeliness and influence of this work can't be understated. It's no coincidence that the aesthetics of digital imagery so closely resembles what Harper originally painted by hand. His use of geometric designs to describe natural patterns such as scales and feathers predates the styles taken for granted and mass-produced in contemporary graphic design. His unique aesthetic has created an influential archetype that continues to look fresh and modern today.

A retrospective of the artist's career was presented shortly before his death in 2007 at the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati. Charley Harper's work was recently documented in a catalogue called *An Illustrated Life* edited by Todd Oldham and published by Ammo Books.

For more information please contact the gallery at 415-576-9300 or [info@altmansiegel.com](mailto:info@altmansiegel.com).