

ACCORDING TO ALBUQUERQUE ARTIST Evelyn Edelson-Rosenberg, "There's no such thing as a bad artist. Either you are an artist or you aren't."

She recognized that she was an artist after wending her way through the '60s, beginning with her junior year at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She recalls that first visit wistfully: "I fell in love with Israel. I felt I belonged there. W. Somerset Maugham once wrote that some are born out of their place. It was like that for me."

After graduation from the University of Maryland, she returned to Hebrew University for graduate study in comparative religion and meanwhile enrolled for a drawing course at Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts. Soon she was drawing on her own.

Hoping to find a clear sense of direction in her life, the artist left Israel for an around-the-world adventure in 1965 that took her to Hong Kong, the Philippines, and finally India, where she remained for two months visiting ashrams and supporting herself as a commercial artist. The trip made her aware of an art in harmony with its cultural heritage. She says, "The Indians' use of art to express philosophy without words but with strong feelings—stronger than you can read or talk about—impressed me deeply."

Back in Israel in April 1966 and finding herself completely broke, she shared a part-time job as a typist at the zoo with her roommate. The job was comically unsuitable to her temperament, but it put her near a wide variety of animals to study and draw. She was fascinated by animals and sympathetic to their special natures. Her preference for animal subjects began then.

The artist spent her days mostly painting and drawing, although she still attended religion courses at the university in pursuit of the intriguing link between Eastern religious beliefs and the mystical cabalistic tradition of Judaism. But she felt vaguely torn between her artistic progress and her graduate studies. She left Israel in 1967 without completing her master's degree.

On her return to her family home in Washington, D.C., she married Dr. Gary Rosenberg in a formal wedding ceremony and moved to New York City where her new husband completed his residency. Edelson-Rosenberg seriously applied herself to a study of art at Columbia University as a special non-matriculated student. A course with Seong Moy was her first experience with print-making.

After a brief stay in Tel Aviv, the couple spent the next year in Rochester, New York, where both

Evelyn Edelson-Rosenberg

AN ARTIST'S CHRONICLE

BY MARY CARROLL NELSON



Photo: Bill Boyson

continued their studies. She earned an associate degree in Applied Science from the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), where she was exposed to many media, including lithography and etching, while developing disciplined work habits. At RIT she wrote and illustrated a children's book—limited to an edition of two—that is filled with delightfully whimsical etchings of animals.

During the Vietnam War, her husband was drafted by the army for two years and was stationed at the Sandia Base Hospital in Albuquerque, New Mexico. While in Albuquerque, Edelson-Rosenberg enrolled in a master's program in lithography and painting at the University of New Mexico. Garo Antreasian, who took part in the transfer of the famed Tamarind Institute from Los Angeles to Albuquerque, was her instructor in lithography. During the course of her studies, she continued to portray animals in large oils and richly detailed prints. "I liked to paint hippos, rhinos, and elephants, because they are ugly and fundamentally useless to man. I never used them to be cutesy or merely appealing," she says. In her paintings at that time, the animals were monumental in scale and naturalistic in style.

Just as Edelson-Rosenberg graduated with a master of art degree, Dr. Rosenberg's army service

ended and they left for Haifa, Israel, where he had an appointment to the hospital staff. Three days a week she taught art at Haifa University and at a kibbutz college. Teaching responsive students, who were eager, talented, and serious, appealed her. The rest of the week, she worked intensely, with an assistant, printing editions of etchings. Recognition came with shows in Jerusalem and Haifa. She was included in the Tel Aviv show "Twenty-five Years of Graphics." "I was making a very good living from art," she says. "Life was nice. I had what I wanted: a great husband and plenty of money." Edelson-Rosenberg believed she had found her goal in Haifa as a full-time professional artist—but she did not remain there.

Gary Rosenberg needed to return to New York for advanced study in his special field of neurology. Their next home was a converted loft in Soho, an ample, tasteful space that accommodated an apartment and studio as well as a nursery for their son Oren, who was born on the first day of a six-week, mid-winter break from Edelson-Rosenberg's job as adjunct professor of lithography and design at Montclair State College in New Jersey. With the help of an able housekeeper, she held the job until 1976 when the family resettled in Albuquerque.



Hawk, 1978, embossed etching, 20 x 27. Courtesy Hanson Gallery, New York. Here Edelson-Rosenberg used two deeply embossed plates, which she surface-rolled to achieve the desired effect. "There is a strong hieroglyphic element in this print, both pre-Columbian and Egyptian," she comments. "Part of a search for the nature of 'hawkness.'"

Dr. Rosenberg is on the faculty of the University of New Mexico Medical School. Edelson-Rosenberg, now also the mother of infant daughter Mica, has once again set up her studio in a high-ceilinged, separate building behind their contemporary home. The studio is on two levels. Below is her press, which bears the serial number .001 on a brass plate. It was the first etching press made by Takach and Garfield Press Company of Albuquerque and was built exactly to her specifications. She has rack space, an acid sink, counters, shelves, and a darkroom on the ground floor. A loft, reached by ladder, houses her easel and painting equipment. There is an immaculate order and professionalism in her studio where she works every day. She has found both a housekeeper and a printing assistant—both essential to help her meet her commitments.

"You should make a living at art," says the artist. "That side is very important to me. The trouble with art schools is that they never discuss marketing, but it matters. I'm willing to sacrifice in order to do what I want. To buy paper, I'll give up buying clothes."

"I've been called a feminist. I'm not a combative one, but I'm aggressive. I'm going to do what I have to do. You have to challenge yourself. My travel was like that."

To pay for improvements in her studio and her

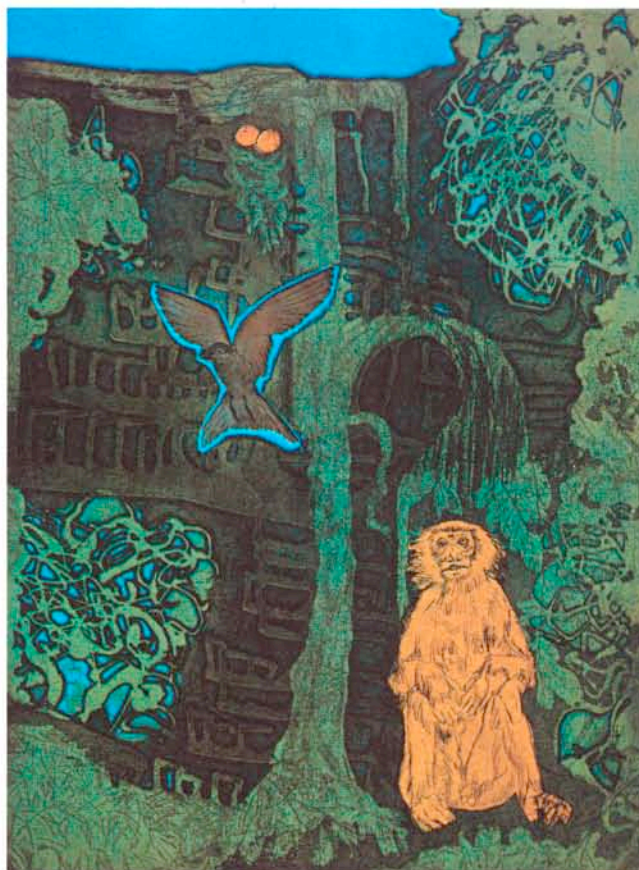
new press, Edelson-Rosenberg served two years as artist-in-residence in the public schools on a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Impressive murals were created under her guidance at an elementary school, a junior high, and three high schools. To carry out these murals, she learned about new plastics, welding, and casting, and also developed a lasting interest in working on a large scale for public view. In 1977, the city of Albuquerque commissioned her to paint a mural for the Giraffe House of the Rio Grande Zoo. Her work received attention from the local media and she became recognized for it.

Edelson-Rosenberg comments: "I would like to touch more people. The murals I have designed make an aesthetic, not a social comment. Really good art should be accessible to everyone without qualification or special understanding. Successful murals by Diego Rivera, [José Clemente] Orozco, and others were, first of all, good paintings."

"The public is the ultimate judge, and the public likes a lot of junk. But if they hate it, that is a valid judgment. Likewise, if the public responds, that means a piece has value."

Edelson-Rosenberg's mural designs have had an effect on her printmaking. A charming elaboration of detail in her early work has given way to sophisticated technique and design, marked by clarity and simplification. Most of her prints are still de-

Right: *It's Been a Long Time Since I Learned to Fly*, 1977, etching, 24 x 16. Courtesy IFA Galleries, Washington, D.C. This print is Edelson-Rosenberg's comment on biological evolution and the strange directions it sometimes takes. "It's a complicated piece to print," she acknowledges. "The first plate contains the background blue with a hole cut out for the monkey. The second is wiped in black, then washed out and rolled in orange. The bird is a small cutout plate which is printed last."



Opposite page: *Robbery*, 1977, etching and lithograph, 22 x 30. Courtesy Sussman Gallery, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Here the artist comments on mankind's tendency to symbolize everything. The simple fish is being carried up to heaven by the angel to become a universal symbol, while the poor bear only wants it for dinner. This print was an experiment on the part of the artist: to combine in one print the impression from a lithographic stone with the impression from an etching plate. "Obviously," she comments, "the main problem in such a method was registration. The blue is from the litho; the rest is from three different etching plates."

voted to animal subjects. She uses them to convey ideas, and she makes her point with the impact of a mural. Speaking of animals, she says: "We expect animals to behave as animals; but for a human to become less than human is a particularly frightening idea. Animals act out their true natures. They don't impose philosophical justification for their actions, such as men have done for their horrible deeds in the name of religion. In the fables and myths of many countries, certain traits are associated with certain animals. So, too, in my work. By using specific animals to symbolize traits of human character, I can make a statement that is easily understood. How, for example, would you portray nobility in a human? In a lion, nobility is an accepted trait. With a human subject to express this same quality, you have to become literary or illustrative."

Edelson-Rosenberg is becoming less literary all the time. Metaphorically, she used to express a phrase such as "the arrogance of a hawk" in a print; today, she has compressed her purpose to a single word. *Hawk* is enough to describe a recent etching. Though recognizably accurate, it is also an abstract design. Its two heads on a single body are not symmetrical. They reduce the identity of the bird and deepen its symbolism. The wings are elaborately patterned in warm brown, contrasting with the white embossing. It is a superior bird, not

flapping, but hieratic, totemic, in a regal pose. *Hawk* is one of a related series of etchings.

Edelson-Rosenberg has developed suitable techniques to create her boldly designed etchings. At times, she makes a plate of well-sealed cardboard and prints a base color from it. Over that base color, she registers an etched metal plate for a second run through the press.

To deeply etch a zinc plate, she wraps the plate in contact paper several layers thick—front, back, and edges carefully mitered. She transfers her drawing to the contact paper and cuts the pattern for planned embossing just as a stencil would be cut, with a swivel blade X-ACTO knife. She then etches the plate for several hours to create one-eighth-inch depressions. She etches more delicate lines in a second process. She used this technique to print *Hawk*.

In another technique, she also uses contact paper. If she intends to separate an inner shape from the surrounding metal and does not choose to cut it with a saw, she will wrap the plate in contact paper and transfer the drawing as described. Then she will carefully outline the shape twice with a knife and remove a very narrow strip of contact paper. She exposes the plate to acid up to seven hours, after which the thin line of metal will be entirely eaten away, leaving not only a hole of the desired shape but also a slightly smaller matching



piece of metal that can be etched and inked separately, replaced in the hole, and run through the press.

Edelson-Rosenberg used this separation process to print *It's Been a Long Time Since I Learned to Fly*, in which the bird is a separated shape. She printed the base color in this print from a cardboard plate. Another technique used in the etching is worth noting. There is a fresh, inventive playfulness in the free form of the tree. To create the tree, she guided a stream of asphaltum down a tipped plate. Dribbled asphaltum made the rich Jackson Pollock-like patterns on the edges of the plate. The aquatinted areas of the plate were created with a spray of lacquer from a can held parallel and quite closely to the plate. (This method replaces the use of a rosin box, and it is good for artists who are allergic to rosin dust.) The artist deliberately added elaboration to this print (see page 66), giving the print a charm similar to the etchings she did for her children's book but technically richer.

In addition to publishing a steady succession of prints from her EBER Press, Edelson-Rosenberg is also designing for Artifax, a New Hampshire pub-

lisher. She is an art consultant and has designed pieces incorporated into a new hotel in Albuquerque; and she is currently a member of a state selection committee for awarding grants to artists' organizations. She has been a guest juror in several major regional shows.

Edelson-Rosenberg is a small woman with attractive features set boldly in a clear-skinned face, surrounded by a long sheen of dark hair, but it is her hands you notice—the blunt hands of a crafts-person, frequently ink-stained. When she says you either are an artist or you are not, she allows for a latitude of commitment in others, but not in herself. A recent series of her prints is based on the biblical stories of Joseph. With these prints, she has made a new synthesis between her ongoing religious studies and her art. She is currently turning more to her heritage of humanistic and mystical faith for inspiration.

With others of like mind, she and her family share celebrations and observe the stately progression of the Judaic calendar. This sharing adds a richness to her joys of family life and forms a secure background for an even greater commitment to her art. •



Saints, 1972, etching, 18 x 24. Courtesy Mission Gallery, Taos, New Mexico. "This is a traditional etching," explains Edelson-Rosenberg, "in which the red was added by means of a stencil after the plate had been inked and wiped. The print was inspired by the rows of saints in Byzantine cathedrals and the equally frontal, facing rows of animal-headed gods in Ancient Egyptian carving."