

# RC<sub>2</sub> GALLERY

## HUNT SLONEM

Bringing a freewheeling sense of awe, wonder and detail to his wild array of paintings and sculptures and peaceful, mystical living and working spaces, artist and lifestyle trendsetter Hunt Slonem is considered one of the great colorists of his time.

A painter, sculptor and decorator (known for his keen eye for refurbishing homes and pairing vintage furniture with contemporary art), the Maine-born creative force of nature is renowned for his neo-expressionist works of butterflies, rabbits and tropical birds, the latter often inspired by the 30 to 100 exotic feathered friends he houses at any given time in an aviary in his 30,000-square-foot studio. Slonem has had over 300 one-man shows in galleries and museums internationally. His work is also in the permanent collections of 250 museums including the Guggenheim, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney and the Moreau Foundation, and is part of private collections world-wide, including those of many celebrities.

Just over 37 years since his first solo show at the Harold Reed Gallery, the ever-entrepreneurial Slonem continues in whirlwind mode. He has 36 exhibitions of his works throughout the U.S. and Europe planned for this year alone, a licensing deal for a new line of Lee Jofa wallpaper and rugs and an upcoming collaboration of scarves and totes with Echo design. He is also playing himself in an independent film called *Stealing Chanel*.

2014 was an exciting year for Slonem on the publishing front. He released, in association with luxury-book publisher Assouline, *When Art Meets Design*, an extraordinary 300-page, photography-based volume that offers a dynamic view into his fantastically decorated and meticulously restored homes. These include three historic houses that he rescued and refurbished, including his "first child," the Cordts Mansion in Upstate New York, and his two Southern mansions in Louisiana: Albania and Lakeside. Beyond its majestic beauty, The Lakeside Plantation captured Slonem's fascination for history. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in Louisiana, it was once owned by Marquis de La Fayette whose close relationship with lifelong friends such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, James Monroe, John Adams, and Robert Livingston played a pivotal role in the Louisiana Purchase. In a show of gratitude, the United States gave La Fayette the land which is now known as Lakeside Plantation.

Enhancing them with his transcendent, light-infused décor, he pairs vintage furniture with contemporary art, including many of his own works, in addition to pieces by Alex Katz and Andy Warhol. A truly magical showcase of Slonem's ability to create spectacular spaces, the book features vivid and expansive interior photography that reveals how he combines antiques, fabrics and artworks. *House Beautiful* ran seven pages of this remarkable window into his artistic soul and unique world, including his legendary Oz-like studio in Hell's Kitchen. *Architectural Digest* also featured the fabric, wallpaper and rugs he is licensing to Lee Jofa. *When Art Meets Design* includes a descriptive essay by Emily Eerdmans, an instructor in design history at the New York School of Interior Design and the interior design department at the Fashion Institute of Technology and contributing editor for *House Beautiful*, who has previously written books on Mario Buatta and Madeleine Castang.

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As a founding element of his process, Slonem likes to say, “Repetition is very important.” He starts each day painting, treating each moment as one of profound meditation and channeling of God or a higher consciousness. Included in this ritual are his famous bunny paintings—the result of a daily morning warm-up that was sparked during a late-night revelation at a Chinese restaurant: that he was born in the Year of the Rabbit. His famous Bunny Wall combines his art with his passion for collecting, as the paintings are exhibited in Victorian-era portrait frames picked up from his travels across the country.

In March 2014, Slonem published, just in time for Easter, *Bunnies*, a luxurious, finely designed and crafted first collection of “bunny art”—an exciting, unexpected, impressionistic mega-collection for adults and children alike. A treasury filled with enchanting full-color and black-and-white paintings, *Bunnies* features a foreword by bestselling author John Berendt (*Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*) and an essay by artist and gallerist Bruce Helander. Berendt beautifully captures the magical springing to life of these rabbit figures when he writes: “Every morning, upon rising—even before he’s had his first cup of coffee—Hunt Slonem performs his daily warm-ups. He approaches his worktable where a stack of small rectangular panels awaits. Some of the panels are made of wood, some of masonite. In the course of the next half hour he will have populated all the panels with rabbits. These paintings are what he calls his warm-ups.”

Slonem has long attributed much of his prolific output to his work with channels and psychics. A spiritual sojourner his whole life who is always on a quest for soul freedom and the dispensing fear, his earliest paintings were of Catholic and Hindu saints surrounding animals. He has used his art to raise money for numerous charities (including cancer research) and wallpaper he has created in conjunction with the Lee Jofa product line has been installed at the Ronald McDonald House. Slonem combines his passions for the spiritual and historical in his sessions with a medium in which he felt the spirit of Abraham Lincoln—who regularly consulted with mediums himself—told him to paint doves for a series of works Slonem dubbed “Abraham’s Peace Plan.” Another recurring theme in the artist’s pictorial work is portrait painting, and of the 16th President in particular. Slonem has said that his portraits of Lincoln feel personal, and in surprising ways, he’s close to the long-deceased.

As the son of a Navy officer, Slonem spent his childhood on military bases: growing orchids in Hawaii, collecting stamps in Louisiana and chasing those butterflies in Nicaragua—the place that inspired him most. The tropical landscape informed not only his process but also his need to be surrounded by the nature he paints; he often works with a bird or two perched on his shoulder. Hundreds of birds also fill the surface of one of his largest ever projects—a 6-foot x 86-foot mural he painted for the iconic Bryant Park Grill Restaurant in New York City. His renowned sculptures include *Tocos*, an 18-foot acrylic and aluminum tower of toucans installed in Metairie, Louisiana. A graduate in painting and art history from Tulane University in New Orleans, Slonem has also done large sculpture commissions of rabbits, butterflies and toucans in various spots in Southern Louisiana.

“One of my recent focuses has been doing installations in various places that recreate my studio, including hanging some of my works and replicating my furniture and feather-walls with molted feathers,” says Slonem. “In many ways, I

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see my whole life as an installation itself, an ever-unfolding play of consciousness that is always fascinating me somehow. I'm always after that wow factor, those magical moments where I create a work and look at it in amazement, as if angels or gnomes had entered my space and created the whole thing. When I was young, I learned that Picasso collected chateaus, and I dreamed of doing something like that my whole life. Having reached that goal with these historic homes, I would like them to become part of my legacy, where people use them as study centers that can educate and inspire new generations of artists."