

HUNT SLONEM'S WORSHIP OF COLORFUL REPETITION



Above: Hunt Slonem's studio on the top floor of the Whale Industrial Terminal Building, Brooklyn. It has huge, open floors, large windows, 17-foot ceilings and 360-degree views. Far right: Hunt Slonem at work. Below: the view from his studio.



text and photos: Hans Fonk

"My work is wonderful to live with, and I love to live with it. Unlike a lot of contemporary art which is political or shocking or jarring, mine is non-judgmental, like an eternal witness that watches without judging.

I'm exhilarated by nature, including birds, plants and butterfly forms that most people don't even know exist," Hunt Slonem.

OBJEKT USA/Canada met the artist in his new 35,000 square foot studio in Brooklyn overlooking the New York Bay, the Statue of Liberty and Manhattan.

*My whole life could
be summed up by
the word exotica.*





As vibrant a dresser, favoring bright jackets and ties, and decorator, known for refurbishing homes and pairing vintage furniture with contemporary art, he is a painter and sculptor. He is best known for his Neo-Expressionist paintings of tropical birds, often based on a personal aviary in which he has been keeping from 30 to over 100 live birds. His Brooklyn studio is an artwork in itself. It is a transcendent, light infused décor, where he pairs vintage furniture with contemporary art as well as the fabrics, wallpapers and rugs he is licensing to Lee Jofa. He collaborated with fashion accessories company Echo Design Group for a limited edition scarf and handbag collection. In 2008, German automaker Audi enlisted Hunt Slonem to create an exclusive design for its sleek new A5 coupe, and he created a one-of-a-kind design based on one of his oil painting for the car's exterior.

At the top floor of the Whale Industrial Terminal Building, Brooklyn, he paints, surrounded by his feathered friends. In 2015 he released, in association with publisher Assouline, *When Art Meets Design*, a book that says it all. It 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 History 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.

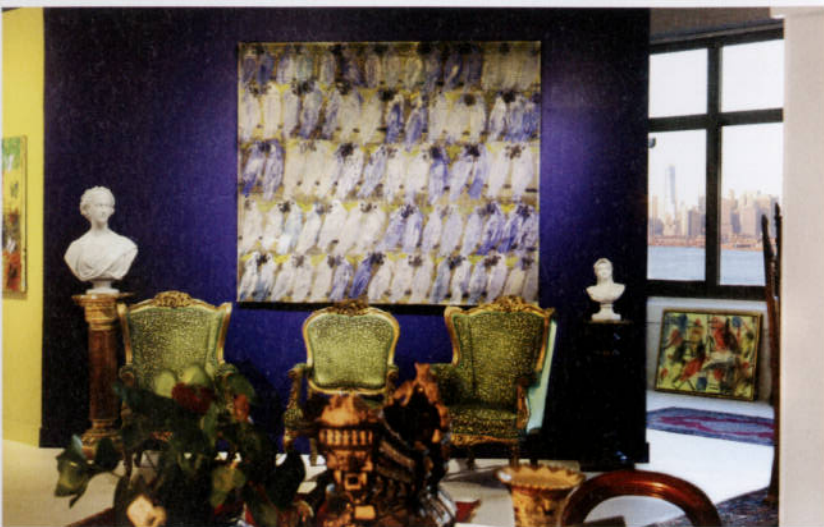
Recently he acquired the Woolworth Mansion in Scranton Pennsylvania, built in 1909 by Lansing Holden for Sum and his family. Charles Summer 'Sum' and his brother Frank were the brainchild of the Woolworth Brothers Store, that opened on 18 July, 1879 in Harrisburg PA.

Hunt Slonem was born in Maine, 1951. "I grew up around painting, and my parents dabbled in painting themselves. I

Above: part of Slonem's studio floor in Brooklyn with a 360° view at the New York Bay.

His exotic artworks are scattered around mixed with his decorative objects and his ever-expanding quirky collections, from Neo-Gothic chairs to top hats, to marble busts of Marie Antoinette, to various objects mined from flea markets and antique fairs.





These pages: Hunt Slonem's Brooklyn studio is an artwork in itself. It is a transcendent, light infused décor, where he pairs vintage furniture with contemporary art as well as the fabrics, wallpapers and rugs he created. Here he is surrounded by his feathered friends. For him, objects are friends; the more there are, the more he is inspired. "I have to have a certain amount of stuff in place before I can function and paint," Hunt said.

was given paints as a child, and I wanted to be a painter from first grade onwards. It was my grandfather who always encouraged me to paint. His artistic career began when he came to Manhattan, in 1973. After a short period in Amsterdam, he returned and was introduced to people like Andy Warhol, Liza Minnelli, Sylvia Miles, and Truman Capote. He soon became a habitu  of New York's trendiest hot spots and an active participant in the city's burgeoning art scene. According to the New York Times, he fell in love with "a very particular kind of New York life, one most people can only fantasize about. But people this determinedly unusual do exist here, and that is one of the city's surest charms. They feed off the city and the city feeds off them." Slonem remained true to his fascination with exotica, which he had developed as a youth in Hawaii and during his time as a foreign exchange student in Managua, Nicaragua, especially the various species of exotic butterflies and tropical birds. His oil paintings are pivoting between the fantastic and the natural. He expresses himself in large brightly colored paintings and constructed sculptures. His paintings are layered with thick brushstrokes of vivid color, often cut into in a cross-hatched pattern that adds texture to the overall surface of the painting. Besides the birds, Slonem also paints repetitions of flowers, bunnies, butterflies, as well as portraits, particularly of Abraham Lincoln. "I was influenced by Warhol's repetition of soup cans and

Marilyn. But I'm more interested in doing it in the sense of prayer, with repetition a founding element of the creative process. It's really a form of worship" according to Slonem. 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. "I am not interested in realism or, unlike Warhol, in advertising or media. My paintings are neither narrative nor specific in detail but are deeply rooted in the act of painting. The color choices, the spontaneous mark making, and scratched hatch marks are the result of an ongoing fascination with the manipulation and implementation of paint. Cross-hatching gives a feeling of a tapestry, it's like weaving. I'm making colors bleed into each other, I'm revealing the under-painting. I'm making these marks to allow the light to come through, basically. So you're seeing about five levels of paint, instead of one." Hunt Slonem's works are represented in important museum including the Guggenheim, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney, and the Moreau Foundation, and private collections all over the world. His work is collected by many Hollywood stars like Sharon Stone, Gina Gershon, Brooke Shields, Julianne Moore, Mandy Moore, Kate Hudson, and J.Lo, among others.