

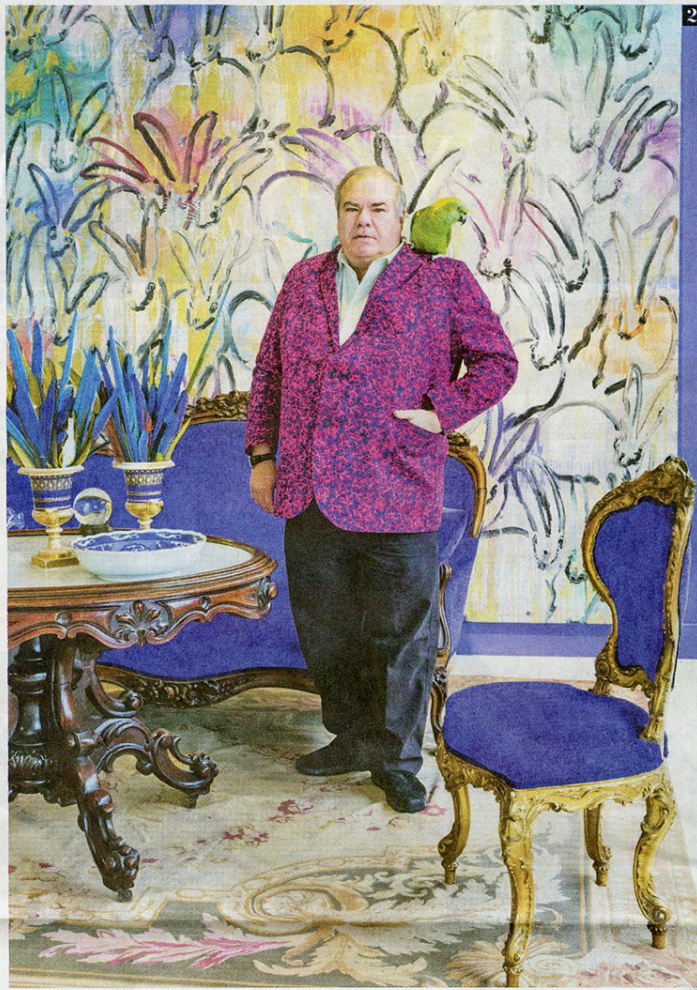


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TASTEMAKER

*Eccentric artist
Hunt Slonem
oversees a circus
of paintings,
parrots and
precious
antiques in
his wild new
Brooklyn studio*

THE



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THE KINGMASTER

By RAQUEL LANERI

HUNT Slonem has ridden camels in the Middle East, grown orchids in Nicaragua, and bought an entire armory in Scranton, Pa. He's explored palaces in India, visited bird sanctuaries in the Philippines, and shown his exuberant, neo-expressionist paintings everywhere from NYC's Metropolitan Museum of Art to galleries in St. Petersburg, Russia, and even the Judy Garland Museum in Grand Rapids, Minn. Yet until a couple years ago, the roving artist—who's called New York home for more than 40 years—had barely set foot in Brooklyn. "I never had any desire not to be in Manhattan," the 64-year-old tells Alexa, while perched on a neo-gothic throne in his new 30,000-square-foot painting studio—labeled "far out" Sunset Park, Brooklyn. "But when I came and saw [this space], it just made my jaw drop. It was so beautiful." Slonem's artfully cluttered kingdom is indeed gorgeous, and despite enviable views of the East River and the Statue of Liberty, it feels far removed from the rest of the world. He's as known for his *wunderkammer*-like work spaces as for his colorful paintings of rabbits and tropical birds, which are collected by institutions like the Met as well as celebs like Kate Hudson and Julianne Moore. At his new atelier, framed oil paintings—including hundreds of his famed Bunnies and Abraham Lincolns (whom Slonem insists he's spoken with through mediums) cover every purple or green or carmine wall; tables overflow with vintage top hats and tasseled fezzes; orchids and greens bloom from antique pots; and some 50 or 60 (Slonem can't remember) parrots—with names like Gogo and Paolo and Josetta—sing from resplendent ceiling cages. "My friend Janet has always



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1. Hunt Slonem has painted a series of Abraham Lincoln portraits, and claims he's spoken to the former president via mediums. 2. The artist holds court in his new 30,000-square-foot studio in Brooklyn, brimming with his paintings, antiques and "50 or 60" parrots. 3. The vibrant space houses his collections of chandeliers and vintage furniture, including a three-sided couch he found in a palace in India. 4. Behind his array of ornate harps—and on every colorful wall in the place—hang Slonem's oil paintings. His works are owned by museums like the Met as well as A-list collectors. 5. Slonem's eccentric displays include tableaux of tasseled fezzes, vintage top hats and sculptures. "Whoever has the most stuff when they die wins," the artist jokes, quoting a friend.

said, "Whoever has the most stuff when they die wins," Slonem laughs. The artist—sporting a paint-splattered work shirt and a chatty bird on his shoulder—has clearly taken the mantra to heart. "It's just my passion," he says of collecting. "I love saving things: endangered pieces and houses, animals."

Slonem was born in Kittery, Maine, the oldest of four children. His father's Naval career meant he grew up roaming the Americas, moving from Virginia to Hawaii to Nicaragua. As a kid, he was obsessed with art and nature, entranced by the butterfly collection at a museum in Duluth, Minn.; orchids in Florida; and piranhas and exotic fishes in Honolulu. He painted it all. "When I was in first grade, I drew a picture of myself standing at an easel, painting," he recalls. "I was never conflicted. I couldn't do anything else."

After studying art in New Orleans, Mexico and Maine, Slonem moved to New York in the '70s. His Saints paintings (which mix Christian and Hindu art with the feverishness of Gauguin) quickly earned him plaudits in the art world. He also made a splash with eclectic, artfully rococo homes and work spaces, which he packed to the gills with 19th-century portraits, Marie Antoinette busts, antiques and live animals (including peacocks) from all over the globe—the belongings he couldn't indulge in as a Navy brat. He attributes his penchant for collecting to his Duluth-based grandparents.

"They had a lot of stuff: gilt frames and sculptures," he recalls. "It wasn't a monumental collection, but it was inspiring [to me] as a kid... I remember having pneumonia at the age of 3 and being deathly ill under a Robert Heimer painting."

"I have this internal mechanism," he continues, when asked how he keeps track of the millions of objects he's amassed over the years. "I'll sometimes get up in the middle of the night and switch two paintings. I'm conscious of every room in every



6. Slonem was inspired to collect antiques by his grandparents in Minnesota. "They had a lot of stuff: gilt frames and sculptures," he recalls. 7. Among the artist's most famous works are his framed Burries oil paintings. 8. Another favorite subject? Tropical birds, which he depicts and also adopts as feathered friends. 9. The artist now does all his painting in his Brooklyn studio, where the rooms are swathed



in cheery colors and adorned with antiques and paintings, all of which can be viewed and purchased by appointment at his studio. 10. A tropical garden in a glassy, sunlit corner of the atelier plays host to blooming orchids and citrus trees. "It really is just a magical realm," Slonem says.

PHOTOS BY BRETT BEYER

WHEN I WAS IN FIRST GRADE, I DREW A PICTURE OF MYSELF STANDING AT AN EASEL — I COULD NEVER DO ANYTHING ELSE."

— Hunt Slonem



house [I have] and can tell you where everything is. Some people are blessed with photographic memories for reading, and I'm pretty blessed with object recall." Compared with his previous 40,000-square-foot artist's studio in Hell's Kitchen, Slonem calls his current Brooklyn loft — which he's been using for a year now — "minimal."

He carted "about 450 truckloads" worth of treasures from Hell's Kitchen to his Beaux Arts armory in Scranton, which he purchased after learning his old building was being torn down to make room for the massive Hudson Yards development. In addition to his Sunset Park studio and Soho apartment, Slonem "guesses" he has five houses, including a plantation in Louisiana. "I was always impressed by Picasso buying chateau after chateau, filling [them] up, locking the door, going on to the next one," he says.

He says his properties are all funded by his prolific art sales (his paintings sell for up to \$150,000 each) and mural commissions, "thank goodness."

Slonem lives alone, but has been seeing someone for eight years — framed photos of the artist with his bumpy fellow riding camels in the desert, adorn antique tables in his studio.

That new Brooklyn lair also gives Slonem more walls for hanging artwork — "I've been unrolling stuff I didn't even know I still had!" — and the ample light means his plants are thriving.

The cavernous space features a tropical garden in one end, with citrus trees and orchids in bloom. And while he finds the trek back home to Manhattan every night a bit of a slog (he takes a car service, which only occasionally gets lost: "I was kidnapped recently. Don't ask. Anyway, 99 percent of the time it's a breeze"), he plans to stay in Sunset Park for a very long time.

"We have all kinds of wonderful energies here," Slonem enthuses. "The whole idea of the conservatory is really important to me: a place of stories and legends and hiding places. It really is just a magical realm."



BY THE NUMBERS



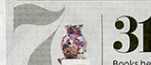
STEPHEN BURKS

By ANDREW SESSA

WHETHER Stephen Burks is designing pieces for his own Brooklyn-based studio, Stephen Burks Man Made, brands like B&B Italia, Estée Lauder, Opening Ceremony and Swarovski; or nonprofits including the Clinton Global Initiative, he packs a profound worldview into his work. Winner of a 2015 Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award, Burks, 47, creates carefully considered yet fanciful objects that exist at the intersection of traditional craft and contemporary aesthetics. Here, he gives us a glimpse at the digits that keep him designing.



1,100 Square footage of his two-floor studio (above) in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.



31 Books he's stacked beside his bed to create a nightstand. That's along with 1,600 design books ("at last count") in the self-described bibliophile's studio.



1,414 Feet of leather cord Burks wrapped around a metal frame to make his iconic "European Traveler" armchair (above) for French furniture company Roche Bobois.



8 Countries he's visited in the last year. A highlight was Dededo Island (above) in the Philippines, where he traveled to seek inspiration and surf with Bobby Deleyser, founder of the Dededo design brand.



3 Nonprofits he's been commissioned to design items for, including the Nature Conservancy, for which he created "Totem" (right), a tool set made from reclaimed Australian jamwood.



THREE times a year he goes back to his hometown, Chicago, where he always visits Heaven Gallery, his best friend's not-for-profit art exhibition space.

PHOTOS BY JENNIFER HOCH, NOAH KALIN, LUCY LUCIANO, ANDREW MANN, COURTESY OF STEPHEN BURKS, GETTY IMAGES