

FAVORITE

FRANK DiLELLA

*Host of On Stage
Photo: Robb Sapp*



Abe Lincoln
HUNT SLONEM (b. 1951)
2017, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 in.
Collection of the artist

Frank DiLella knows famous faces. As host of the New York-based *On Stage* television show, the charismatic and handsome DiLella has a face that's become famous to his viewers, as well as to the Broadway actors, directors, and choreographers he interviews on air. "If that's true, that I'm recognized, to some degree, then I should say also that I completely, honestly, truly love what I do, being a voice for the performing arts community. I'm humbled by the talent I encounter."

While some people post their favorite faces on Facebook or Instagram, DiLella displays many of his choices on what he calls the "gallery wall" in his Manhattan apartment. Hanging there are photos of stars he has befriended and interviewed, including Vanessa Redgrave and Tommy Tune, along with 1940s images of his grandparents and sheet music signed by the composers. Also prominently positioned there is a colorful canvas filled with images of bunnies by Hunt Slonem (b. 1951), one of the most prolific artists working today. The one face DiLella wishes to add to his collection, though, is that of Abraham Lincoln, specifically a painting by Slonem, whose portraits of famous sitters such as the 16th president and Queen Elizabeth II are often likened to Pop Art, with their bold colors and photographic quality. Given the frequency with which he depicts Lincoln, Slonem seems as smitten with the man as Warhol was with Marilyn Monroe.

DiLella first encountered the work of Slonem while strolling a street in Boston and seeing the artist's bunnies and birds, his most popular motifs, in a gallery window. Since his visit to Slonem's Brooklyn studio, where this Lincoln portrait resides, DiLella has yet to forget the work, notable for its jewel-red background, void of any details or sense of setting, and the contemplative face-forward gaze of Lincoln.

"Not only was Lincoln one of our greatest leaders," says DiLella, "but he was also a huge patron of the arts, notably of Shakespeare.



To have this amazing American artist be so inspired by Lincoln is inspiring. I just think the work is beautiful." Given that portraits by Slonem typically sell for more than \$20,000, DiLella is saving his pennies and five-dollar bills with their images of Lincoln.

Now that Slonem and DiLella have become friends, the artist has spoken about his special fondness for Lincoln and Mary Todd, herself the subject of several Slonem portraits. As for the prevailing hue of this Lincoln work, DiLella admits that red is his favorite color — he spends a lot of time, after all, on the red carpet at Broadway and West End openings. "Red is sexy, it's passionate; it's love, after all."

As an entertainment journalist, DiLella is frequently on the road, and wherever he is, theater is the first priority. But when the stage curtains are down, he visits art museums. "I particularly love seeing in the flesh the famous, iconic works you know from textbooks and film," he says. "It's super inspiring for me to see the real thing in its setting."

As for the sheer effect of Slonem's works, DiLella admires the way the paintings "stand out." DiLella is passionate about the world of theater and recognizes a similar degree of commitment in the artist. "I admire Slonem because he is committed to what he knows he can do best. He knows what inspires him and responds to that."