

artnet Asks: Painter Hunt Slonem

Lorraine Rubio, Sunday, September 14, 2014



Hunt Slonem Photo: courtesy of theselby.com.

Hunt Slonem grew up in a military family, living in Hawaii, Virginia, and Connecticut throughout his childhood. His time spent in Hawaii would leave a forever lasting impression as his neo-Expressionist impastoed oeuvre depicts birds, exotic flowers, rabbits, butterflies, leopards, and a many more colorful specimens. The animals have become an alphabet to which he discusses life, whether it be stacked and divided bunnies as a stand-in self-portrait or crowded birds flurrying through the canvas, a metaphor to the New York art scene in the early 1980s alongside the likes of Andy Warhol and Truman Capote. Slonem has exhibited internationally and has been an active participant in the Art in Embassies Program sponsored by the United States Department of State, where he received the first ever Medal of Arts from the Department of State for his “outstanding commitment” to the program.

When did you know you wanted to be an artist?

When I was really little. My grandfather painted and sent us paintings and paintings by other artists and it's the only thing in my childhood that really resonated with me. My father was a naval officer. I grew up with models of submarines and missiles on the coffee table. But the paintings really got me going. We had to draw a picture of what we wanted to do when we grew up in first grade and I drew a picture of myself standing next to an easel painting and I've never swayed from that desire. So about the age of two or three, I'd say.



Hunt Slonem, *Catelayas* (2013)

Oil on panel 28.5 x 24 in.

Photo: Courtesy of artist and DTR Modern Galleries.

What inspires you?

Nature, spirituality, other art. I like the word *exotica*, meaning anything that's not familiar. I grew up with interest in tropical things. We moved to Hawaii when I was a child and I raised orchids and lived with birds. I was an exchange student in Nicaragua in high school. I also went to school in Mexico for a year. So it was a big hit, the tropics, early on in life. I just came back from Belize last week where I was blown away by the varieties of heliconia that are native to that part of Central America. So it's an ongoing fascination with rarefied plant, animal, and insect forms.

If you could own any work of modern or contemporary art, what would it be?

One of my favorite works of art is part of modernism, it's called *The City Rises* (1910) by [Umberto Boccioni](#), the Italian Futurist painter. I've always loved that work. The city is such a fascinating thing and how it functions and rises, builds, and gets torn down and all the lights... [*The City Rises*] captures that divine manner of existence so beautifully. That's always fascinated me. There's artists I love and adore. I love Kiefer and a million artists. Picasso is my favorite, but as a single work [*The City Rises*] leads to an end as a single inspiration for me.



Hunt Slonem, *Channel Bill (Toucans)* (2008)

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Jean Albano Gallery.

What are you working on at the moment?

I'm currently working on a number of things: rabbit, butterflies, and bird paintings and a new group of flora and fauna that I saw in Belize. I'm working on some large museums in museums that will have large installations. I'm doing some ceramics. I have a new book coming out on my homes and interiors. I just had the bunny book come out. Then I have lines of fabrics, wallpapers, and rugs coming out.



Hunt Slonem, *Yellow Stacked Bunnies* (2013)
Photo: Courtesy of artist and DTR Modern Galleries.

When not making art, what do you like to do?

I'm a big collector of 19th-century furniture and houses. I restore old national landmark houses that need my loving care. I have two plantations in Louisiana and a mansion in upstate New York. I'm looking at some other large properties, so we'll see what happens. I just collect a lot of stuff, so I need houses.