

## More is More - The Whimsical World of Hunt Slonem Understanding a Multi-faceted Genius

By Ava Roosevelt

*“I would say my whole life could be summed up by one word, 'exotica'!”*  
-Hunt Slonem

As a young girl growing up in Poland, instead of playing with dolls, I was encouraged by my father to visit museums to learn from and appreciate art, furnishings, architectural details, their origins and diversities.

I inherited his fascination for the finer things in life and was ready to put it to good use when I visited three loft-size floors of Hunt Slonem’s studio in New York. Painted in old Louisiana plantation-house colors and furrowed with paintings and sculptures, it brought up an avalanche of feelings and emotions.

Hunt’s paintings of butterflies, tortoises and rabbits were coupled with live parrots and birds in their own aviary. Surrounded by Victorian, Gothic Revival, and Louis the XVI style furnishings, the ambiance of my surroundings evoked a sense of visual whimsy and brought sheer joy to my heart. Stacks upon stacks of books and framed photographs, curated around the exquisitely appointed art, made me feel right at home.

Yet, I knew instantly, I was in a different world, Hunt’s world. It is unique and complex, yet visually pristine. Dubbed ‘a painter’s painter with an enormous bag of technical skills,’ Hunt’s genius was revealed almost all at once. As my eyes danced around absorbing and feasting on such diversity of artistic creation, I couldn’t wait to meet the man causing such an inner stir. Of course, every artist dreams of causing this reaction.

And there he was. With the phone glued to his ear, Hunt’s booming voice broke the otherwise-silent studio when I approached. With paint brush in hand and surrounded by multiple easels with art in various stages of completion, he was conducting a serious business conversation with an important collector. Multi-tasking, Hunt opened his arms to greet me. As his jacket was spotted with multicolored drying paint, and I was in Pucci, we cautiously hugged. I was told Hunt is kind, but I never expected him to be this considerate.



Paintings by Hunt Slonem

**Ava:**

I understand you wanted to be a painter from first grade onwards. Do you recall your first painting? Who or what was the subject? Do you still have it?

**Hunt:**

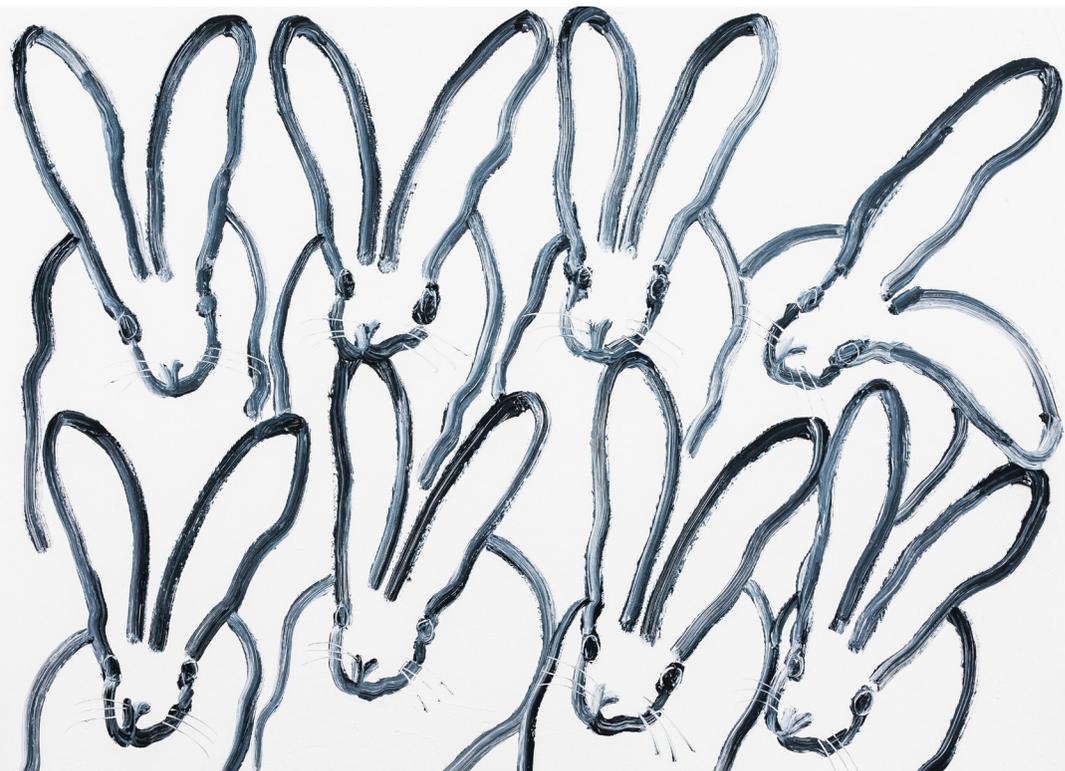
I remember my first work, one that I got an award for. It was a Christmas nativity scene that I did in 1st grade. I had it for many years but with so many moves, it was lost or destroyed.

**Ava:**

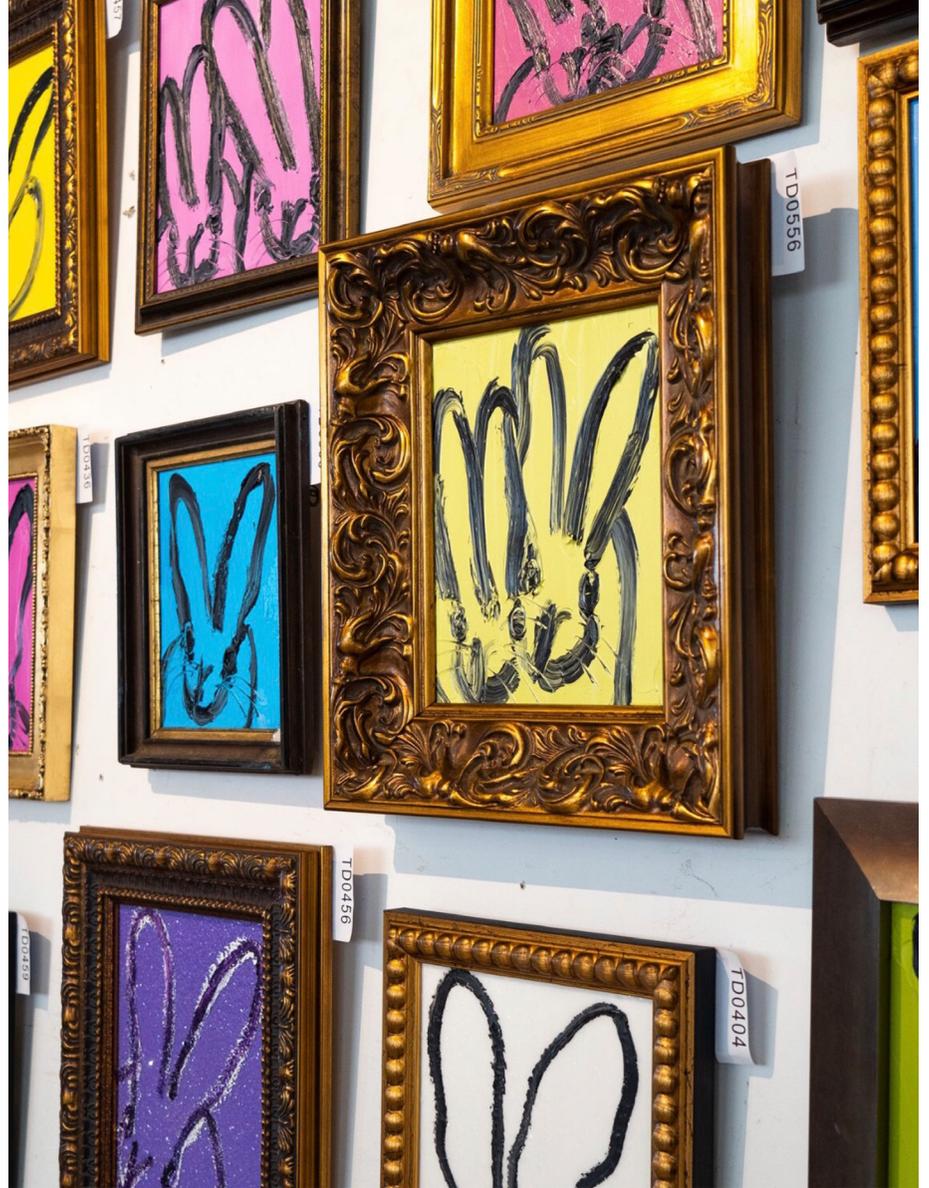
Legend has it that when Paul Gauguin went to Tahiti, 'he never came back.' I've read you are the child of a military officer, and as such, lived a nomadic life, globetrotting. In your early life, you've spent some time in Hawaii. Do you feel that being stationed in paradise influenced your art?

**Hunt:**

Yes, being stationed in Hawaii for four years of my early life was very formative. All the vegetation, the flora and fauna of the Hawaiian Islands, Heliconia plants and the orchids made a huge impact on my creativity. I kept birds as a child and collected great tropical fish that I would see and capture on my daily beach walks. It totally mesmerized me as did the great Bishop Museum, which displays the Hawaiian King's royal cloaks made from sacred mambo feathers. I also loved Hawaiian historic Gothic Revival, including mid-19th century furnishings. So, between the exotic mystical and spiritual blending of so many oriental and Hawaiian cultures, it all really awakened me at an early age.



Paintings by Hunt Slonem



**Ava:**

You were born in 1951, the year of the Rabbit. It inspired your acclaimed series. Do you credit other instances, places or individuals with impacting your personal and artistic accent to the greatness and fame you enjoy today?

**Hunt:**

Well, being in New York has been another great source of inspiration. The idea of becoming an artist in the greatest city in the greatest country in the world presented limitless possibilities. Combined with all of New York's museums, to view and be inspired by the energy of New York is simply tremendous. It is a great place to work. I've been here since 1973, when I graduated from school in the South, which I still visit. My grandfather was a strong influence in my life. He painted and sent me paintings and drawings and cocoons of great moths such as Luna and Cecropia. They would emerge in my room, and I've painted moths and butterflies all my life, among other things of course. Also, I would say, the inspiration of New York and the achievement of so many brilliant artists here keeps me going. I am constantly exhilarated and looking

to do more and achieve more.

**Ava:**

You painted Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II and many colorful likenesses of Abraham Lincoln which are displayed in your private collection. Yet, you are mostly identified with neo-Expressionist paintings of butterflies, bunnies and tropical birds. Do you favor these species over human beings? I would not blame you if this was the case!

**Hunt:**

I don't really favor anything. I just do what I'm inspired by. I've painted people my whole life. I recently saw paintings that I did in Nicaragua at the age of 16, when I was an exchange student. I've been pretty consistent with my view of life and what interests me to paint. I have created a large series of Saints' portraits which I started in the late 70's and have continued to the present. For the last fifty/sixty years of my life, I find nature spills over into my art world, but I never forget the face.

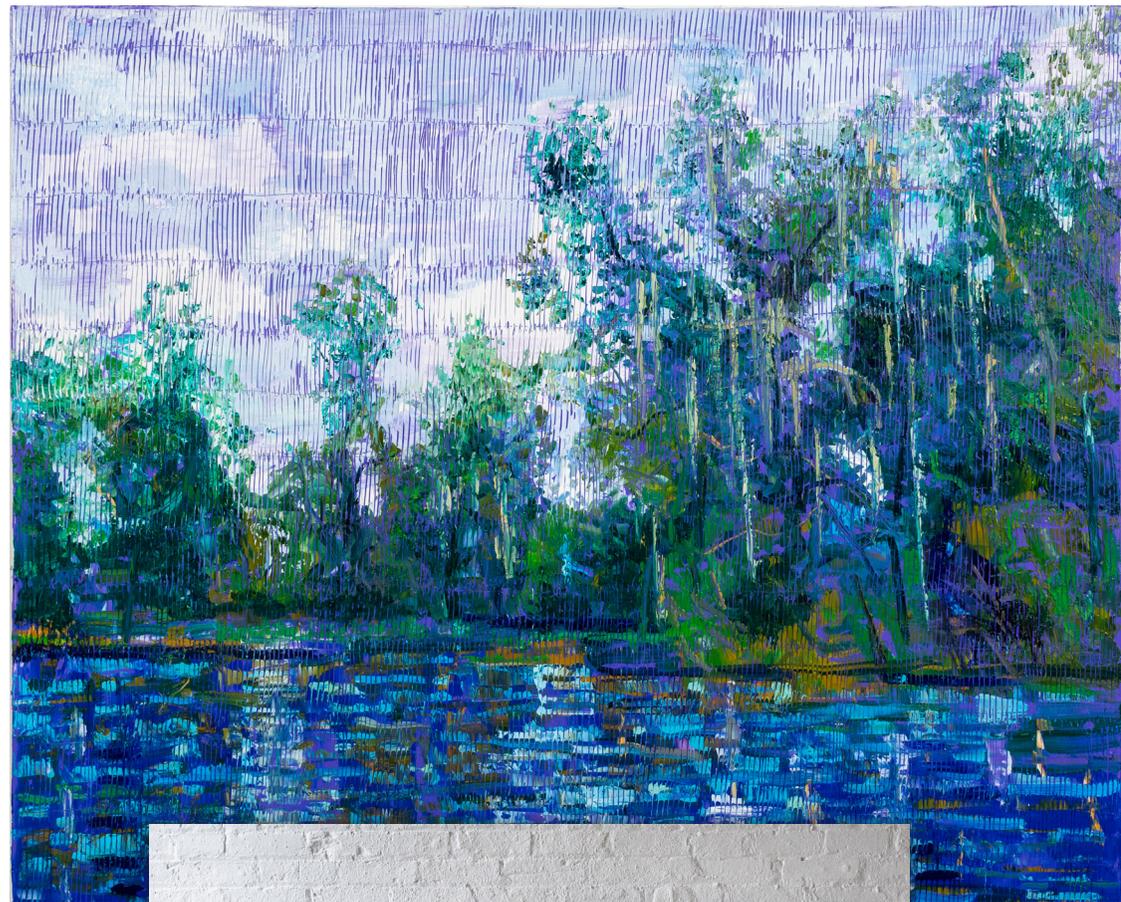
**Ava:**

As I leaf through pages upon pages of Hunt's published books and articles, my fascination with the historic Louisiana plantation Hunt owns, peeks. Apart from the studio, Hunt owns six important homes: the Stanford White designed Searles Castle, Belle Terre, Watres Armory, Madewood, Cordts Mansion and Lakeside Mansion. With near gospel-like worship to historical significance and period accuracy, these unique residences are exquisitely renovated, appointed and furnished by Hunt. These artistic creations exhibit yet another layer of his insatiable quest for perfection, sophisticated elegance and whimsical symmetry. But above all, Hunt's homes transport us back to another time. You said, "my homes are my life's work, making old houses into a new form of art." Please tell us about your first acquisition.

**Hunt:**

The first home I owned was called Cordts Mansion. A lot of friends were moving to upstate New York, and I had no interest in being there or going to the country. I was fully entrenched in New York City. But I was coerced into taking a trip to look at places. I didn't like anything I saw except one house. It's a Second Empire style with a tower. I said if anything like that ever turned up, I might consider purchasing it.

I had dinner that night with friends. I'd heard they were looking at a great Neo-Gothic House. I asked them what happened. They said they didn't want it, but they had a great realtor and gave me his number. I called him the next day. He sent me a picture of the Empire house. It took a long time to acquire it and make it my home. But I have owned it now for about 22 years. It was a great expansion of my artistic freedom. I played with color on the walls, upholstered furniture and collected mid-19th century art for the most part. That was my first acquisition and it all happened by a confluence of luck.



Paintings by Hunt Slonem

**Ava:**

You visit each of your six houses on different weekends. Which one is your favorite and why?

**Hunt:**

I don't have a favorite. I like them all equally. I tend to go to the Belle Terre and Searles Castle the most, because they're the closest for me to get to and from New York. Searles Castle is the newest, so I'm still very entrenched and working on it and collecting for it.

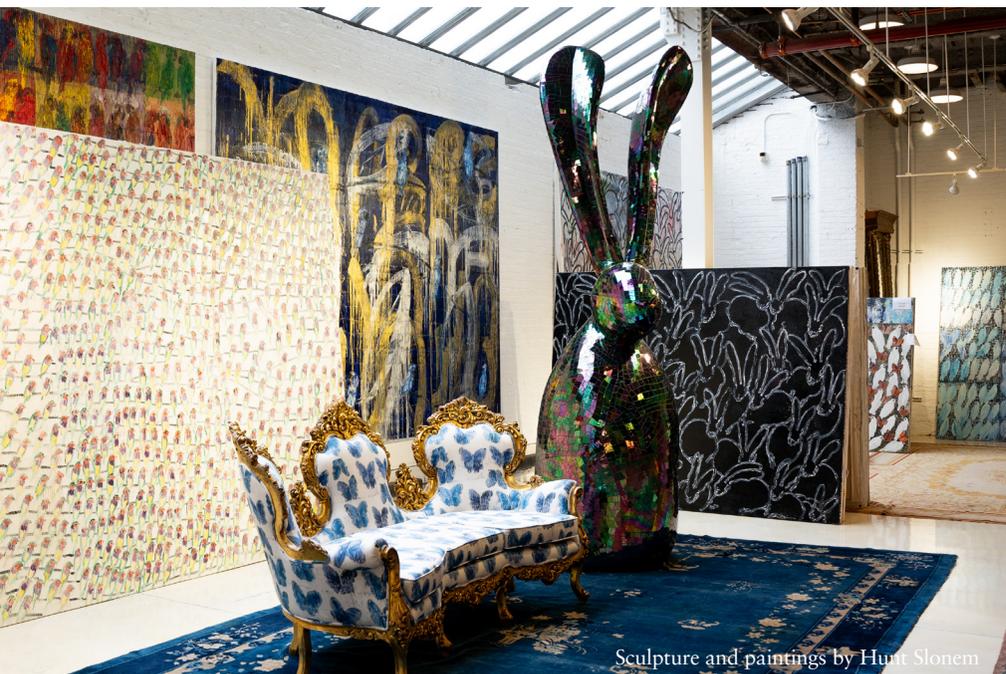
**Ava:**

You attest that your two main passions in life are painting and collecting. What and who inspired you and when did you start collecting?

**Hunt:**

Oh, I've been collecting since I was a kid. It started with shells and rocks and leaves and things that were at hand. I started collecting life birds in a big way when I made some money from prints in New York in the late 70's. All of this inspired my work even further. Then antiques and Gothic Revival chairs caught my full attention. At that time in New York, one could discover real treasures at some flea markets. The next step was to acquire more unique homes. Collecting marble busts to gilded furniture and Victorian Gothic scent bottles, became a passion. It's one of the great pleasures of my life. Most artists collect things. I'm not unique in that way.

Artist Hunt Slonem at work in his studio



Sculpture and paintings by Hunt Slonem

**Ava:**

The awe-inspiring list of your artistic accomplishments ranges wildly from paintings, sculptures, Hunt Slonem Audi A5, furnishings, fashion, and household accessories, including fabrics. Your art is exhibited in 250 of the most prestigious museums of the world and collected by renowned art connoisseurs. Are you satisfied today with whom you have become as an artist? If not, what do you still aspire to achieve?

**Hunt:**

Oh, the sky's the limit. I can't say that I'm completely happy with where I am. But I can tell you, that I am not going to rest as I continue to collect, to acquire properties that I love, and most importantly continue to grow as an artist and a man. No one knows what's going to happen next. I pray for more productive years and future opportunities.

**Hunt Slonem Studio**

*socialmedia@huntslonem.com*

Studio: +1.212.620.4835 | Mobile: +1.845.389.0469

595 11th Ave,

New York, NY 10036