

Design with a wild side

Birds, butterflies, rabbits, tropical leaves and orchids are all utilized in creating dynamic patterns in this art-meets-design collection



Bunny Wall, a tromp l'oeil wallpaper that recreates the walls of Slonem's studio, where his paintings hang salon-style, framed in authentic 19th century portrait frames which are hand selected by Slonem. (Photo: Kravet/Lee Jofa/special to news-press.com)

It's whimsical and exotic with a touch of eclectic.

With vibrant and varied species of birds, butterflies, rabbits, tropical leaves and orchids are all utilized in creating dynamic patterns in this art-meets-design collection. In Lee Jofa's first artist collaboration with Groundworks, they introduced vibrantly colored and stunning fabrics, wallpapers, and carpets designed by Hunt Slonem, a world-renowned artist best known for his Neo-Expressionist paintings of exotic animals and tropical plant life.

And it's exciting because it puts some fun into interior design. It almost says, "yes I am gorgeous, but I don't take myself too seriously."

The result: spectacular.

Slonem's paintings are layered with thick brushstrokes of vivid color, and are often cut into in a cross-hatched pattern, adding texture to the overall surface of the painting. This technique has been replicated in the fabric collection through intricate jacquard weaving and digital printing techniques, resulting in a look that is graphically stunning. For the Groundworks' collection, several of his most popular themes and iconic works have been translated into decor for the home.

As a celebrated painter, sculptor and printmaker with more than 350 exhibitions at prestigious galleries and museums internationally, Slonem has traveled all over the world but it was his childhood spent in Hawaii, and a year studying in Nicaragua, that have had the most profound impact on his life's work. The vivid color combinations and exotic wildlife he encountered there inspire him to this day.

The motifs he explored in his early works, tropical birds, butterflies, bunnies and portraits, have been reduced to their essence and have become reoccurring themes in his extraordinary art. His spiritual connection to the concept of metamorphosis led him to include the butterfly as one of the recurring themes in his work.



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And there are those bunnies.

Fascination with the rabbit occurred when he realized was born in the year of the rabbit, according to the Chinese calendar. In his New York City studio, the bunny wall consists of salon-style groupings of his small bunny paintings, some hung while wet. These signature paintings are now collector's items. And Bunny Wall is a wallpaper that mimics the effect of the framed paintings against different colored backgrounds.

Slonem's spiritual connection to his recurring themes elevates the simple paintings to something more significant. To Slonem, repetition is divinity. Just like the act of repeating a phrase creates a mantra, the object is elevated and the act of repeating these forms becomes an act of worship. The process of painting is sacred to Slonem, and as a result, his body of work represents so much more than what's painted on the canvas.

And just how do we incorporate some of this exotic whimsy into our southwest homes? My suggestions:

» The beautiful fabric is an elegant touch for upholstery and draperies. My favorite is to take a chair or sofa piece that has become dated or an antique and reupholster to give it a totally new look. And the fabric makes beautiful window panels.

» Who can resist the Bunny Wall as an accent wall covering in an office or dining room and for the entire powder room?

» Pillows for accents add a bright, eclectic touch to a solid color, traditional sofa.



Star of India, describes a type of tortoise that was a former pet of the artist. The fabric is digitally printed on linen with a combination of viscose velvet applique and viscose embroidered shells. (Photo: Kravet/Lee Jofa/special to news-press.com)

» The bunny wall coverings, Hutch, are available in pink or yellow and would be a great touch for a nursery.

» Want just a touch of these fabulous creations in your home? Stretch a piece of the fabric on canvas for a wall or frame a section of one of the wallpapers.

To see the entire collection, visit the Kravet/Lee Jofa showroom at the Miromr Design Center in Estero or visit www.leejofa.com/groundworks_wallcoverings.htm.

Hunt Slonem will sign his new book, *When Art Meets Design* Tuesday from 4 to 6:30 p.m. at Harmon-Meek in Naples. For more information call 239-262-2699.

— Wrenda Goodwyn is a Southwest Florida interior decorator. *Home Inspirations* appears the first Saturday of each month. Visit her website at spectacularspaces.com. Call her at 949-1808 or e-mail wrenda@spectacularspaces.com. For more decorating tips and photos, visit spectacularspaces.com/blog