



Hunt Slonem's *Bunny Wall* consists of dozens of bunny drawings displayed in Victorian-era frames.



Wonder Wall

BELOVED ARTIST HUNT SLONEM BRINGS HIS VIBRANT BUNNY PAINTINGS AND RECENT COMPANION BOOK TO ART SOUTHAMPTON. BY ERIN RILEY

Hunt Slonem's neo-Expressionist paintings of tropical birds, butterflies, and Abraham Lincoln—all affectionately painted in the same informed yet childlike style—catapulted him to wide acclaim in the late 1970s. Since, the artist has achieved the status of an art world icon, with works in the permanent collections of over 100 museums worldwide. Slonem will exhibit a selection of his most beloved pieces—including the widely popular *Bunny Wall*—at Gallery Valentine's booth at Art Southampton through July 28. The artist will also host a lecture and book signing on July 26 for his recently released book, *Bunnies* (Glitterati Incorporated), with close friend and gallerist Bruce Helander.

"Repetition is very important," says the artist, who starts each day painting, treating the creative process as "a kind of meditation," he says. Included in this ritual are his famous bunny paintings—the result of a daily morning warm-up that was sparked during a late-night revelation at a Chinese restaurant: that he was born in the Year of the Rabbit. His famous *Bunny Wall* combines his art with his passion for collecting, as the paintings are exhibited in Victorian-era portrait frames picked up from his travels across the country.

As the son of a Navy officer, he spent his childhood on military bases: growing orchids in Hawaii, collecting stamps in Louisiana, and chasing

butterflies in Nicaragua—the place that inspired him most. The tropical landscape informed not only his process, but also his need to be surrounded by the nature he paints (his 30,000-square-foot Manhattan studio is home to over 60 tropical birds). His signature style of cross-hatching surfaces with thousands of textured lines suggests the cages through which he views his birds. "I was trying to be a realist," says Slonem. "I was looking at everything through a grid, and I wanted to paint what I was seeing." The materials used by sculptor Joseph Cornell also proved important: "His use of chicken wire and hardware cloth with his bird boxes created this vibrant texture," he adds. It's an influence Slonem realized much later in his career.

With 36 exhibitions of his works planned for this year alone, a book of his famously restored homes (*When Art Meets Design* from Assouline) out in September, a line of Lee Jofa rugs to launch this fall, and an upcoming collaboration of scarves and totes with New York-based Echo Design, Slonem manages to dabble in myriad mediums without ever stepping out of his peaceful, mystical world. *Hunt Slonem's paintings are on exhibit through July 28 at the Gallery Valentine booth at Art Southampton and he will host a lecture and book signing for his recently released book, Bunnies, on July 26. Art Southampton, Southampton Elks Lodge, 605 County Road 39, Southampton, 305-515-8573; art-southampton.com* **H**