



ART + AUCTIONS

A Favorite Artist of Kris Jenner, Whoopi Goldberg, and Jimmy Fallon Has a Wild New Project

Hunt Slonem is gearing up to expand his cult following with the release of his gorgeous new tome

TEXT BY [DAVID FOXLEY](#) · Posted February 16, 2017



Weighing nearly three pounds and measuring over 11 by 14 inches, *Birds* (Glitterati Incorporated, \$95), [Hunt Slonem](#)'s new book, is a serious piece of work by any standard. Fortunately for established fans of Slonem's work—and also for newcomers to his rainbow-hued oeuvre—its physical magnitude is matched by the lush, eye-catching quality of painting on its 272 silver-gilt-edged pages. Coming out tomorrow, *Birds*, a follow-up to 2014's *Bunnies*, marks the first time the New York artist has brought together his ornithological, neo-Expressionist compositions in one place. Slonem—an internationally recognized painter, sculptor, and printmaker—spoke with *AD* about the labor of love on the eve of its debut.

Architectural Digest: Why birds?

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Hunt Slonem: I've lived with birds since I was a child in Hawaii. Over the years that I've lived in New York, my collections have grown. I've lived with as many as 60 birds in my studio and have learned more about the huge variety of species of birds than I ever dreamed there were on this planet. I'm fascinated by them more than other creatures. In the mystical sense, the bird represents the human soul. They are seen as the messenger of the gods, which is a function that birds seem to have in most religions; the hoopoe, in particular, is referred to in the Old Testament. I am also completely mesmerized by their colors and forms.



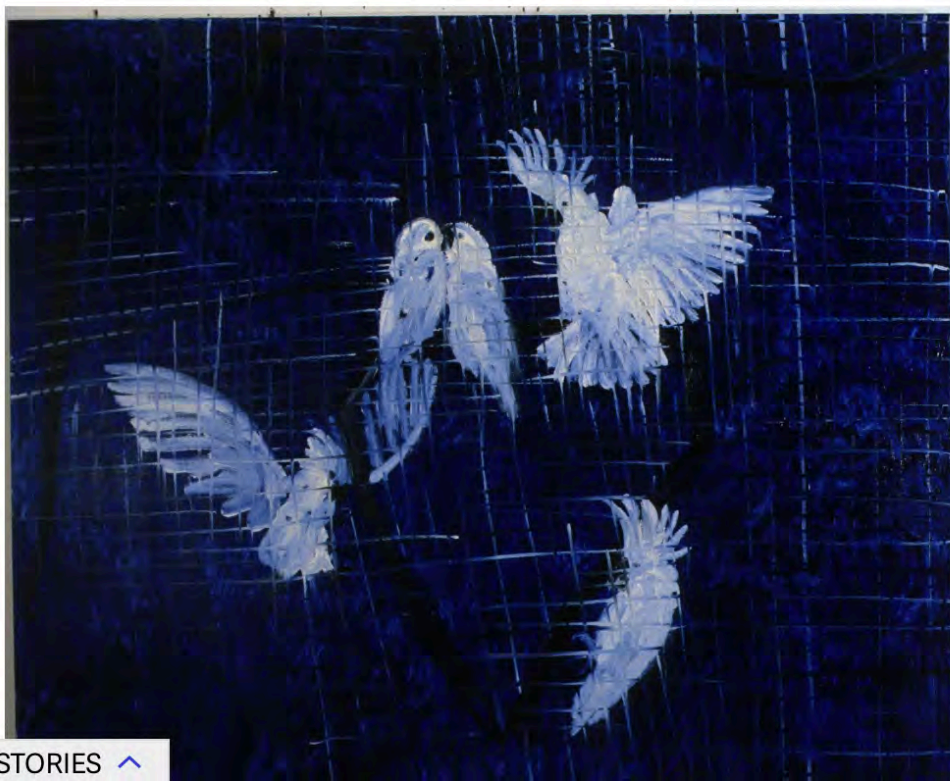


Tocos 1.

Photo: From *Birds* by Hunt Slonem, copyright © 2017, published by Glitterati Incorporated

AD: How have your bird paintings evolved over the past 40 years?

HS: My early work was much less gestural. There have been several phases in the evolution of how I paint birds. One is painting wet into wet. After my trips to India in the 1980s, I was inspired to begin painting into wet paint, which is a technique that's really like drawing in paint. Second would be the increased use of metallic pigments, which really impart an ethereal quality as they catch the light so differently. Then there's crosshatching, for which, using the end of a paintbrush that I sharpen to a fine point, I make the markings of a cage over a wet painting. I literally carve into the paint. My most recent phase is painting over diamond-dusted surfaces. It's a new experiment and medium, in which the painting looks like a glistening diamond.



AD: How do you like to work?

HS: I really only paint in my primary studio, which is currently by the water in Brooklyn. I also do sculpture in Louisiana, which I paint on-site. I try to start painting as early in the morning as I can. Since I don't live in my studio, I have a bit of a drive, so I'm usually there by 9. I spend the day painting, and people will come and meet with me, and often I continue to paint while we're talking. Then, depending on the evening, if I don't go out, I paint until late into the night. There really is no end to it. The biggest problem is that I travel so much, but I still devote a great number of hours to my work. I never put the brush down or take a break, really. Because I paint wet into wet, I'm under pressure to complete things within four days, but the larger works I do in sections, so I can take a lot more time. I'm constantly setting goals for myself.



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HS: I choose to paint within close proximity to my birds because they're very good company. Birds are highly intelligent, have enormous personalities, and are incredibly amusing. The noise level can be deafening at times, but at this point I'm used to it! The birds also provide an endless source of inspiration. I paint from them, so they are working animals in my subject matters. I also often ask them what they think of things, and I get responses of sorts.

I have always been a collector and a designer of my own spaces. I'm currently restoring the historic Woolworth house in Pennsylvania and spend the other half of my life taking great houses that need tremendous help and to be saved for posterity, and I breathe new life into them. I create period interiors, which sometimes includes my fabric and wallpapers, but I am a tremendous collector of mid-19th-century objects, furniture, and sculpture. To me, the studio and the interiors are an extension of my paintings.



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Herb's Cardinals.

Photo: From *Birds* by Hunt Slonem, copyright © 2017, published by Glitterati Incorporated

AD: What else inspires you?

HS: I find inspiration everywhere, but nothing sparks more ideas than travel. New concepts for my work emerge every time I go away. These new experiences influence my perspective on everything from color and technique to subject matter and scale. A trip to Scandinavia led to my "Picul" series, along with the use of solid white ground as a background. *Picul* is part of the scientific name of a species of woodpecker. My trips to Spain led to a red series that I called "Madrid." In Haiti I brought back hemp rope for the birds to play with, which inspired a series called "Haitian Rope." A visit to India inspired my "Monsoon" series, whereas the Philippines led to a cobalt-blue series of works with Spix's macaws, which are beautiful, small blue birds. On that trip, I had the privilege of visiting the world's largest private collector of birds outside of Manila.