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## Hunt Slonem – personifying exotica on canvas

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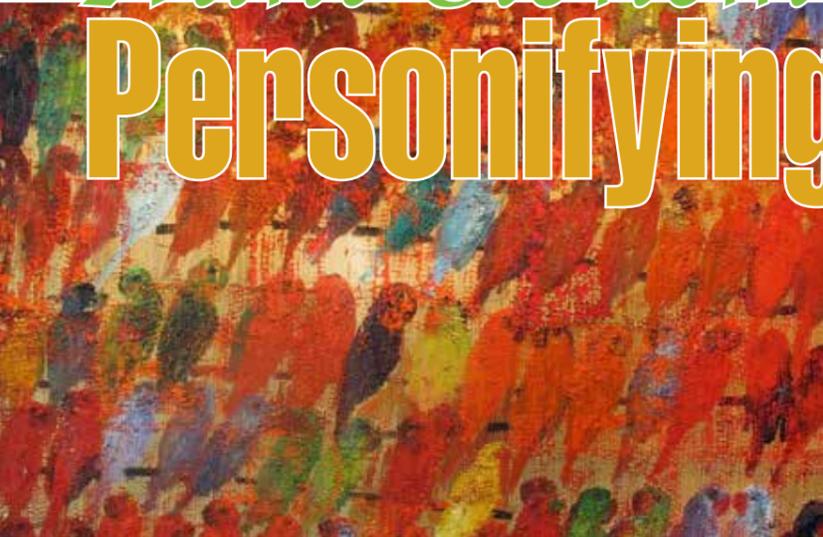
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By Madhuri Awale  
Staff Writer

During a recent visit to the Sultan Gallery, The Times Kuwait was intrigued by both, the artist's unique rendering of his paintings and his almost obsessive repeated depictions of birds and butterflies. Deciding to pursue the matter further, we held a Q&A session with the New-York based artist and got to learn more about the painter, his works and what gives 'flight' to his portrayals, other than birds of course.



"I've always wanted to be an artist, right from childhood, as I grew up around art and painting. My grandfather loved to paint and a little of his passion for art must have 'brushed off' on me as well," says Slonem in reply to what got him into art. He added, "My painting grew with me and has become an integral part of who I am; today, it is everything to me, it's my life-blood. You could say that without painting there is no Slonem."

Influenced by the likes of Andy Warhol and other contemporary visual artists, Slonem soon began exploring the issues of spatial complexity, compression and density, as well as relationship between artistic expression and nature. Stirred by Warhol's 1967 silkscreen diptych of actress Marilyn Monroe, Slonem began experimenting with repeated renderings of subjects in his paintings.

Inspired by his personal aviary, where he keeps hundreds of birds, butterflies and turtles, his pictures depict a reverence for exotic life forms. "My whole life could be summed up by the word 'exotica'. Although I grew up in Hawaii, I spent most of his time in Nicaragua, and there I always had exotic tropical birds at home; I am fascinated by birds and their companionship. Besides birds, turtles are my favorite animals and I have a few of them as pets in my home in addition to over 60 parrots. So, you can say that from early childhood I have had this interest in painting tropical birds."

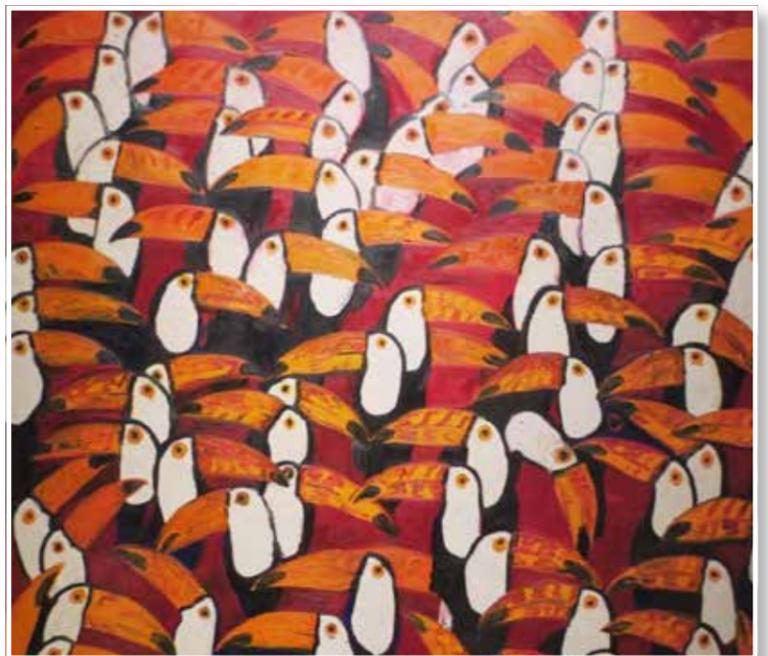
Once the visual story and composition of his paintings have been completed, Slonem then meshes the subjects into the picture plane, sometimes nearly obliterating them, with furiously cross-hatched mesh of brush strokes and lines. This shrouds his paintings in a dim, atmospheric light that gives them an abstract effect and a sensory spatial resonance. The use of intense colors and impulsive scratched markings on his canvases are a reflection of the

artist's ongoing fascination with the creative use of paint.

Giving his interpretation of art, Slonem noted, "I try to create a great environment, a tropical paradise that drives my painting and inspires me. But, I'm more interested in doing it in the sense of prayer, with repetition. It is really a form of worship for me."

He added, "The central message of my paintings is nature as an endless source of inspiration. Through my work I attempt to heal and uplift people, connecting them to a higher positive realm of consciousness."

Slonem, who was born in the northeastern state of Maine in the United States and studied painting at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, has held more than 250 solo-exhibitions at prestigious galleries around the world. His works are also exhibited at over 70 leading international museums, including at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and at the Guggenheim in Paris. Besides painting, the prolific



Speaking about a couple of his positive experiences the artist said, "I was once commissioned to do an 86-foot mural with a 30-day deadline for the Bryant Part Grill, an eatery located right behind the New York Public Library. There were viewers going by every day and commenting on the

this was completely destroyed by the 9/11 attack on the Towers.

Commenting on his latest solo-exhibition at the Sultan Gallery in Kuwait, the artist said, "I have met many Kuwaiti people in New York City and find them very special, memorable and passionate about art.



artist is also known to do sculpture, printmaking, ceramics, watercolors, drawing, and most recently monumental metal sculptures that have become landmarks on city landscapes.

work, miraculously, I managed to finish the work in time and it was accepted and appreciated by everyone. Another time, I had to do this 80-foot mural for the World Trade Center, which was also completed in record time. Sadly

I am thrilled to be able to display my work in Kuwait and I hope this is the beginning of an exciting partnership where through art I can draw more of the Kuwaiti population to art and painting."

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