



COLLECTION

# Hunt Slonem

Collection Arrives  
at Customs House,  
Clarksville, Tennessee

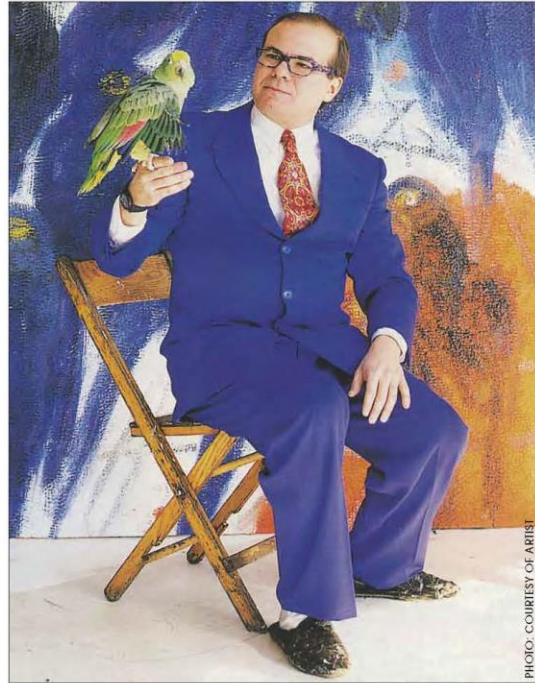


PHOTO: COURTESY OF ARTIST



*October 14th, Callas*, 2003, Oil on canvas 40" x 30"

by Karen Parr-Moody

**N**ew York City is, for Hunt Slonem, a city where he is not only a painter but a *bon vivant* in the mold of Andy Warhol and James McNeill Whistler. His elbows are the sort that society types would love to rub. "I'm hardly the first," he says of his status. "I enjoy it enormously."

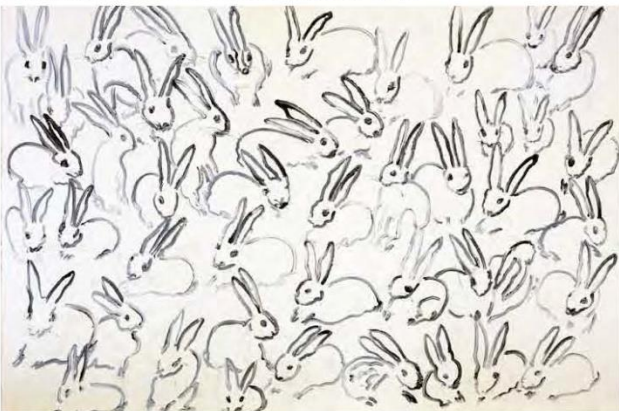
Slonem, however, has yet to rub elbows in his cocktail attire in Clarksville, Tennessee. But that hasn't stopped the renowned artist from gifting his paintings to the city. His depiction of birds, called *Picul*, is currently on view at the Customs House Museum and Cultural Center there, a mere forty-five minutes from Nashville. And he has now given the museum three more paintings—*Hutch*, *October 14th*, *Callas*, and *Blue Hairstreak*—to go on display this month.

Slonem has Tennessee connections: A grandmother is from Chattanooga, and he studied at Vanderbilt University. His work has also been on exhibit at the Tennessee State Museum and in private collections throughout the state.

At the Customs House Museum, Slonem's work meets the eyes of a broad spectrum of society, as it is the second largest general museum in Tennessee. The bold rabbits of *Hutch*, the vivid blooms of *October 14th*, *Callas*, and the hazy butterflies of *Blue Hairstreak* will, in particular, be viewed by the many children who frequent the space. This is wholly appropriate, as Slonem's work is charmingly childlike, depicting the natural world with a sense of the naïve and mystical.



*Blue Hairstreak*, 1998, Oil on canvas 72" x 84"



*Hutch*, 2011, Oil on canvas 93" x 133"


His famous birds, with their crosshatched brushstrokes to indicate wire cages, are in the vein of Joseph Cornell's shadow boxes containing cockatoos. Tying back into childhood, Cornell himself was inspired by children's penny arcades of the Victorian era.

"My work is a positive, uplifting spiritual message," Slonem says. "And children are not, hopefully, jaded by the world." Slonem, who traveled throughout his childhood due to his father's career as a Navy officer, was affected by visiting museums. "It's wonderful to have children exposed to everything, to have that venue for them," he says.

Slonem is an inveterate collector—he is known for having scads of top hats, Neo-Gothic chairs, and exotic birds.

His childhood collections included the rabbits, butterflies, and orchids that now translate into his paintings. *Blue Hairstreak* is a butterfly with a name that "always stuck in my head," he says of the painting.

Slonem has even collected homes—two plantations in Louisiana and a historic mansion overlooking New York's Hudson Valley. "I was always inspired by Picasso, who just bought chateau after chateau and then shut them up and locked the door," he said.

"Basically we don't change," Slonem said of his lifelong love of collection. "We just get more things." And now, like Slonem, the Customs House is assembling a collection of the collector's collections—on canvas. 

For more information visit [www.huntslonem.com](http://www.huntslonem.com) and [www.customshousemuseum.org](http://www.customshousemuseum.org).