

Hunt Slonem inspired by birds, butterflies and bunnies

By Anita Katz



Hunt Slonem's oil-on-canvas "Whisper Louder" is among his new paintings on view at Serge Sorokko Gallery in San Francisco.

Birds, butterflies and bunnies fill the canvases in an exhibit of recent works by Hunt Slonem, a neoexpressionist who inserts aspects of pop art into his pictures and paints creatures both exotic and cuddlesome.

More than three dozen oil paintings are in view in the show, which runs through June 14 at Serge Sorokko Gallery in The City. In the style of the abstract expressionists, Slonem – who has exhibited in galleries and museums worldwide – applies his paint in thick, emotionally charged strokes. His work, however, also contains recognizable subjects and image repetition. (He has cited Andy Warhol as an influence.)

Just as Deborah Butterfield sculpts horses and William Wegman photographs dogs, Slonem paints tropical birds. The artist, in fact, rescues birds, and these have become his art models of sorts.



"Jack" by Hunt Slonem

The paintings contain sets of colorful birds, with Slonem's liberal brushwork and gradations of hue suggesting feathers, wings and other features. Hatch lines, a defining feature of the artist's work, sometimes scratch through the imagery, creating tonal complexity.

In "Whisper Louder" (48- by 48-inches), three rows of perched and coupled parrots with blue feathers and black beaks and eyes make for a fetching picture against a hatched yellow background. In "Cinnamon Spice Finch" (48- by 34-inches), about 50 birds on a background of green, each consisting of smears of color, are tiny life forces. Slonem, who lived in Hawaii as a child but now works and lives in New York and Louisiana, paints tropical butterflies as well.

In "Tiger Swallowtail" (48- by 48-inches), semitransparent warm- and neutral-colored butterflies are dramatic presences on a hatched red and gold background. In "Castle Fields 2" (28- by 28-inches), pink and white butterflies float in a pink-dominated cross-hatched space. The work demonstrates how Slonem, unlike the pop artists, is interested in the meditative, not the impersonal, facets of replicated imagery.

Slonem's paintings of bunnies (the artist's preferred term) contain simpler renderings that often involve fluidly outlined, cartoonlike images. Slonem paints these animals every morning as a warm-up activity; his bunny pictures have a less-demanding, lighter-hearted look.

In "Jack" (76- by 56-inches), drips of paint in birthday-party colors, along with bouncy-looking dots, add a playful tone to a group of about 20 bunnies. In "Garnet" (20- by 16- inches), a bunny with a white and red contour inhabits a field of darker red made sparkly by Slonem's mixing of diamond dust into the paint. In "Pixie" (24 by 24 inches), this material, in a midnight-sky-colored background, gives a blue bunny a cosmic quality.

IF YOU GO

Hunt Slonem: New Paintings

Where: Serge Sorokko Gallery, 55 Geary St., S.F.

When: Daily, through June 14

Admission: Free

Contact: (415) 421-7770