

Hunt Slonem ~ Birds, Butterflies and Bunnies

By Candice Russell, art critic

Hunt Slonem is bonkers for bunnies. He finds humor in their shapes as much as their justifiable reputation for multiplication. In “Birds, Butterflies and Bunnies,” which runs through April 24th, this Neo-Expressionist painter finds abundant inspiration in other creatures from the natural world as well and museum visitors are the richer for it.

Rather than put them in a context of a forest glen, a backyard or a cage, Slonem isolates his bunnies as objects in space, as ethereal creatures that seem to float as objects of his imagination. They are un-anchored even by grass in “Cuniculus” (2000), an oil on canvas with gray outlines of rabbits on a white ground. Elements stand out, like their lovely whiskers.

Using a self-described quick draw technique, Slonem creates “Bunnies” with black paint on white with the long-eared creatures facing every which way yet all bunched together. The artist also honors the singular attractions of this animal so beloved in American literature in portraits of one at a time as in “Madison” (2009), an oil on wood.

Did the artist ever visit Butterfly World or just observe in his garden? If only for their intense colors, there is a joyfulness in “Viceroy’s” (2008), an oil on pastel of orange butterflies with dark stripes set against a yellow background.

Pink birds flock together in “Rose Cutthroats” and “Pink Picul” (1992), both oils on canvas that rely on form and color rather than specificity of feathers and expression. By contrast with the edgy, nearly abstract freneticism of some paintings, the small, detailed “Bali Mynah” (1995), a beautifully framed oil on board of a single bird, exudes a welcome air of quietness.