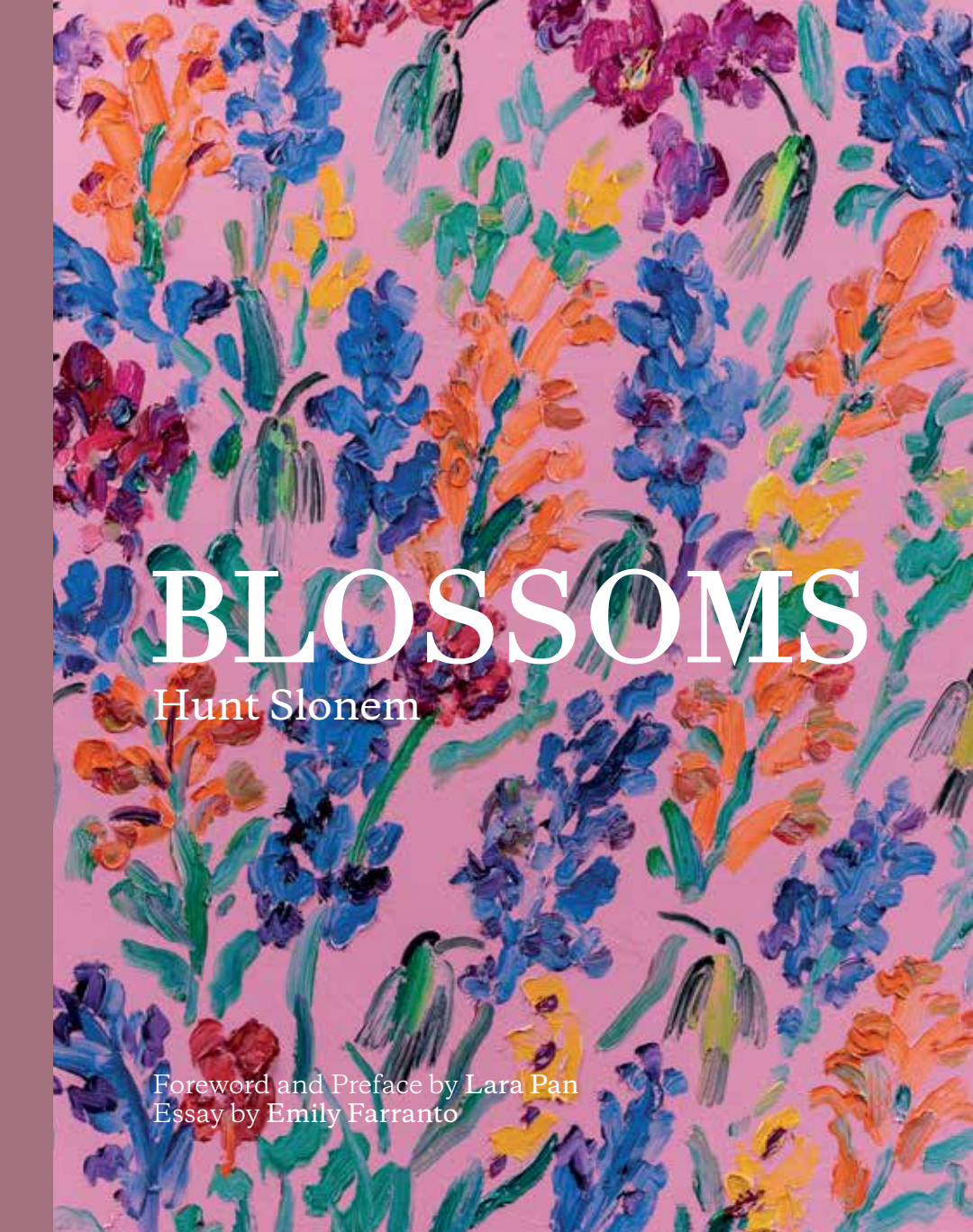
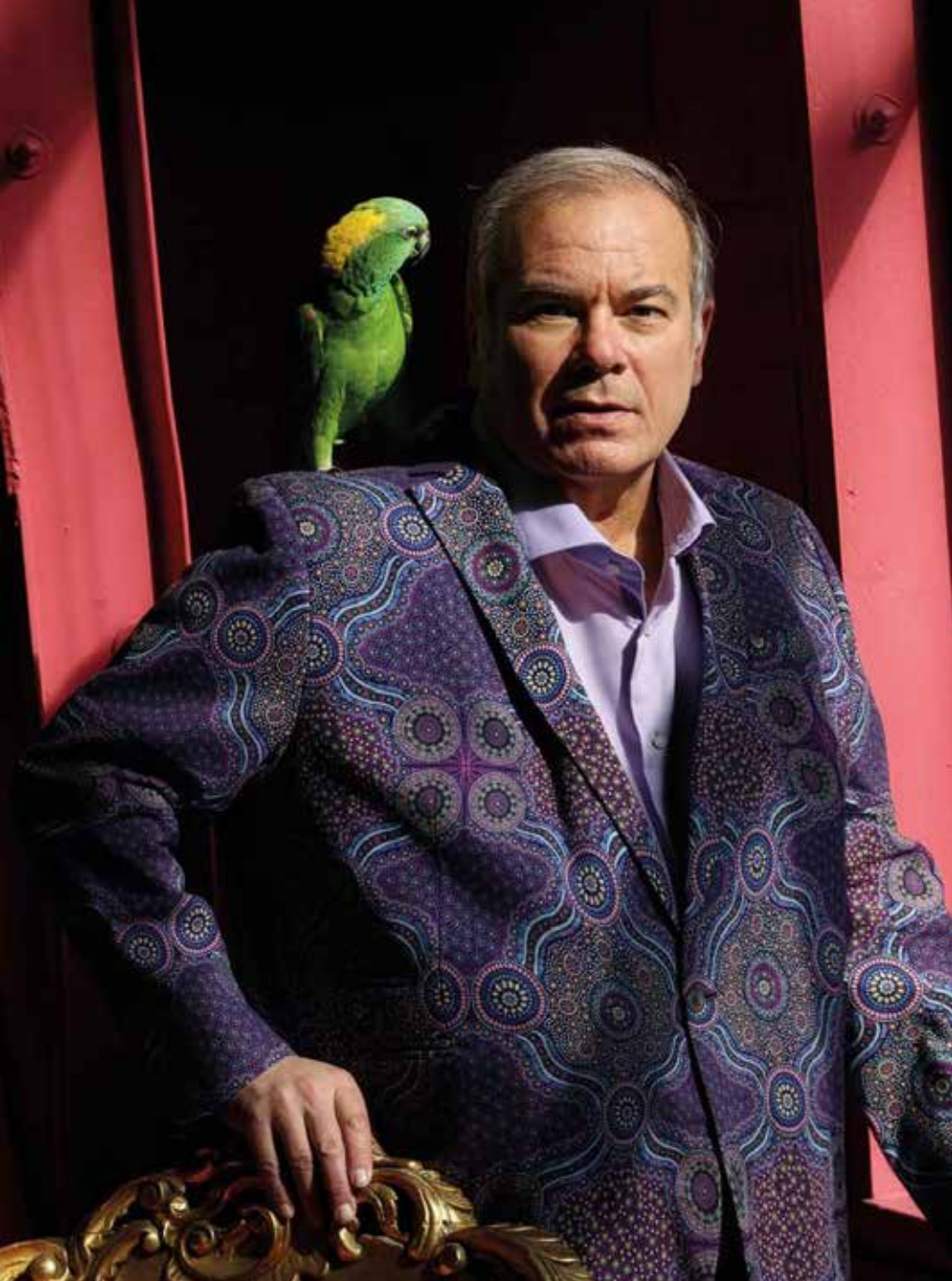




BLOSSOMS

Hunt Slonem

Foreword and Preface by Lara Pan
Essay by Emily Farranto



Preface

Flowers, Myth, and Perception

Lara Pan

"The poetry of Earth is never dead."

John Keats, *On the Grasshopper and the Cricket*

The enduring presence of flowers in art matters because it speaks to our intrinsic connection to nature. Flowers symbolize both the beauty and the fragility of life, reminding us to remain attentive to the world around us. This bond with nature is deeply embedded in our psyche, shaping not only artistic expression but also the rhythms of our daily lives.

Few artists, like Hunt Slonem, capture the enduring spirit of nature while inviting us to find solace and joy in the presence of a painting. His work celebrates the contagious beauty of the natural world, yet there is always more beneath the surface. Every color choice and every subject carries a story and a hidden meaning. My early research into Slonem's "hidden garden" encourages viewers to rediscover his universe, revealing layers that extend far beyond immediate visual pleasure.

In his process, nothing is accidental. Within the universe of his flower paintings, Slonem's choice of subjects is never arbitrary. Each flower seems to respond to a call, an inner spirit, a quiet summons. Life moves in continuity, and choice emerges from this ongoing flow. These selections belong to a stillness where the spirit remains alive, suspended between meditation and dream. It is from this liminal space that the flowers appear, carrying traces of an unseen order, guided not by chance but by attentive listening.

Slonem's focus on the *Cattleya Oahu*, often called the Queen of Orchids, is far from incidental. Cattleyas became iconic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for their sculptural beauty and cultivated elegance. "Oahu" refers not to a wild species but to a hybrid cultivar, shaped by human intention rather than natural evolution. Its name evokes Hawaii, conjuring warmth, volcanic vitality, and island mysticism, an imagined geography layered onto a carefully cultivated plant.

Orchids have fascinated humanity since ancient times. From Ancient Greece to the Aztec civilization, they inspired myths and legends, accumulating rich layers of meaning and symbolism across cultures. They have long been associated with desire, transformation, rarity, and the invisible forces that shape life.

Cattleyas are often linked to liminal states, existing between the wild and the cultivated, between nature and artifice. As a hybrid, *Cattleya Oahu* deepens this symbolism: it is a being born of care, desire, and human imagination. Mystically, it occupies a threshold between worlds—a moment in which something hidden becomes visible.

This sense of revelation resonates strongly in Slonem's orchid paintings. His work carries a quiet, contemplative power that presents the flower not as an object of permanence, but as an event of appearance. The orchid does not insist; it arrives. It emerges briefly, almost ceremonially, inviting the viewer into a space where time slows and perception shifts. His Cattleys appear as bursts of color, arranged in repeated patterns and textures that celebrate both intensity and rhythm.

Slonem's selection of flowers becomes a journey into magical thinking. In Greek mythology, water lilies were born from nymphs—beings suspended between worlds. In art history, they persist as afterimages: flowers without bodies, surfaces without horizons, forms floating between myth, memory, and perception. Claude Monet's *Water Lilies* are not botanical studies, they are mythological without myth, dissolving narrative into pure sensation. Within this lineage, Slonem's water lily paintings resonate with a mystical stillness, where repetition becomes ritual and time seems to slow, allowing the visible world to quietly open toward the unseen.

His water lilies often shift toward the blue water lily, sacred in ancient Egypt, known for closing at night and opening at dawn in a rhythm mirroring the daily rebirth of the sun god Ra. This cyclical gesture of disappearance and return illuminates the recurring golden touches in Slonem's paintings. These golden rays, like sunlight at the golden hour, suggest not decoration but a quiet invocation of renewal, presence, and cosmic continuity.

Sunflowers, like Ra, follow the sun through heliotropic movement, mirroring the human act of reverence and devotion to the solar deity. While there is no historical evidence of a direct connection between the Egyptian sun god and the sunflower, the flower may be read as a living metaphor for Ra's worship. By turning toward the sun, it reminds us to orient ourselves toward light, knowledge, and higher consciousness. In Slonem's paintings, golden hues and luminous textures manifest a sense of divine light, growth, and spiritual illumination that bridges myth, nature, and artistic expression.

Those paintings guide us somewhere. They present recognizable elements, flowers or animals that allow us to enter his interior worlds. Slonem's familiar figures beckon us to explore our own psychic depths. They produce dreamlike states because what they reveal is not fantasy, but the place where reality itself may be found.

In modern and contemporary art, the hummingbird often appears as a symbol of ephemerality, speed, and heightened perception. Feeding exclusively on nectar, hummingbirds belong naturally to a sacred ecology: they do not kill to survive but sustain themselves on sweetness and light. This made them ideal inhabitants of paradise-like realms, where nourishment is spiritual rather than violent. In Aztec cosmology, the afterlife was imagined as a luminous garden of movement and color, where souls returned as hummingbirds, endlessly circling flowers near the sun.



In Maya thought, sacred gardens were living systems in which gods, humans, animals, and plants continuously exchanged energy. The hummingbird, as a messenger between realms, moved effortlessly through this living paradise. Slonem's hummingbirds are never static. He highlights a lesser-known trait: their ability to hover in stillness while moving in multiple directions at once, defying linear motion. This oscillation between suspension and velocity mirrors the nature of perception itself.

Artists understand that inventing worlds is not a way to escape reality, but a means of entering it more deeply, revealing its fractures and unlocking its hidden limits. His densely layered works teem with movement and can be apprehended only gradually. After the first visual impression comes a progressive discovery, as if time were required to gain access to the truth of things. One cannot speak about Hunt Slonem's painting without acknowledging his extraordinary sensitivity as a colorist, which anchors and intensifies the compositional structure. Decorative form thus enters into a powerful dialogue with the subject, asserting its evocative strength rather than diminishing it.

Claude Monet painted *Field of Tulips in Holland* (1886) not as a botanical study, but as a celebration of light, color, and atmosphere, vast expanses of blooming fields saturated with pigment and shifting illumination, capturing the sensation of spring rather than the anatomy of the flower itself. In earlier art history, tulips often appeared alongside wilting flowers, insects, or broken stems, serving as reminders that beauty, wealth, and fortune are inherently temporary. The memory of "Tulip Mania" and its period of opulence lingers behind these images as a cautionary emblem of excess and desire.

What is fascinating in Hunt Slonem's tulips is their force and visual identity. Even within a small painting of a single flower, there is a sense of insistence and reclamation. His tulips become quiet yet powerful reminders of the human condition, reflecting the constant negotiations we make between ideal aspiration and lived contingency. Tulips are a form of beauty that exists briefly, intensely, and completely, and in this sense, they belong to the tradition of *vanitas*, where fragility is not a weakness, but a form of truth made visible through paint.

Slonem offers a compelling example of an artist's inimitable approach to floral subjects. His paintings invite us on a magical journey, one that follows an inner quest rather than a purely visual path. Therefore, Hunt Slonem's flowers are not merely motifs or decorative compositions, they function as conscious mediums. They do more than represent physical reality, operating instead—almost in a spiritist sense, as conduits toward heightened perception, emotional resonance, and a deeper flow of being.



PINK CATELAYA
2002
Oil on wood
9" x 7"



MORPHOS & CATELAYAS
2014
Oil on Wood
48" x 48"



CATELAYA MAUI
2023
Oil on Wood
10" x 8"



PURPLE CATELAYA
2023
Oil on Wood
10" x 8"



CATELAYA
2023
Oil on Wood
10" x 8"



AGAIN
2023
Oil on Wood
10" x 8"



CATELAYAS MINOR
KAYE
2023
Oil on Wood
37" x 31"



PURPLE LIP CATELAYA
2023
Oil on Wood
10" x 8"





TRUMPET HUMMING
BIRDS
2022
Oil on Wood
29.5" x 22"



HUMMINGBIRD
BOUGAINVILLEA
2022
Oil on Wood
33" x 27"



BLOOM
2023
Oil on Wood
10" x 8"



SPRING
THING TULIPS
2023
Oil on Canvas
72" x 42"



“Flowers are moments of grace. They remind us to slow down, to look closely, and to celebrate the fleeting beauty of being alive.”

— HUNT SLONEM

Lush, vibrant, meditative, joyful—the flower paintings of celebrated artist Hunt Slonem invite the viewer into a fantastical garden where color and texture bloom in thick impasto. From orchids to water lilies, sunflowers to tulips, Slonem’s flowers transcend the tradition of still life, pressing urgently toward the viewer with the presence of portraiture and the energy of abstraction. Presented here for the first time in a single lavish volume, *Blossoms* reveals a new dimension of one of the art world’s most beloved figures—and offers a visual feast for anyone drawn to beauty, nature, and the transformative power of paint.

“Slonem summons dazzling explosions of the variable life around us.”

—JOHN ASHBERY, POET AND ART CRITIC

“Slonem is a painter, a painter’s painter, with an enormous bag of technical tricks which become more apparent to the viewer the longer he stands before the work.”

—HENRY GELDZAHLER, ART CURATOR AND CRITIC

“Hunt Slonem’s oil paintings pivot between the fantastic and the natural....As an artist, he endeavors to explore the many expressive faculties of color.”

—BRENDAN GILL, *THE NEW YORKER MAGAZINE*

“Mr. Slonem is an artist whose portrayal of man and nature is one of peaceable, mystical communication.”

—KELLY CROW, *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

“Slonem’s ‘witty Formalism strategy meshes the creatures into the picture plane and sometimes nearly obliterates them as images, but it also suspends and shrouds them in a dim, atmospheric light that is quite beautiful. If Joseph Cornell had concentrated on painting, the results might have looked like this.”

—ROBERTA SMITH, *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

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