

# ReadyMade

## BLOG: INSIDE, OUT

05/18/2011

### Channeling Miss Havisham

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By Martha Mulholland



When mired in melancholia, I often retreat into a self-created fantasy world to find magic and solace, and this world invariably involves an old house. Not just any house, but one chimerical, moody, expansive edifice that shows itself in my dreams, like a ghost, always

different yet somehow the same. I start each dream in an entirely different space and invariably wind up in this house. I know it so well that I can recount the rake of light across a room and the creak of each floorboard hours after waking. It is such a force in my latent life that it has begun to creep into my daytime activities. I doodle it absentmindedly when my mind wanders, I meditate on it when I imagine my future. I don't know where this house comes from, but my best guess is that it is an amalgam of many places I have visited, lived in, or been influenced by in my life, and is also representative of my phobias and obsessions—its rooms sometimes end in odd angles, as if they are collapsing inward, and its unruly hallways ramble endlessly only to end up on top of themselves.

Dream psychologists believe that houses are metaphors for self-exploration and expression—they represent the soul as domicile, and protect and illuminate its nooks and crannies. I find that when my life is tumultuous, the house is more forceful in my dreams—it is a vessel for me to explore dark spaces, but also a source of comfort and stability. As intimately as I know this place, I have never seen its exterior, so it exists as a sort of illusive Satis House on a hill—I look for it everywhere, and feel sure that one day, when the time is right, it will turn up and I'll have no choice but to move on in.



I know I am not alone in this strange engagement—many people dream obsessively about houses—but there is one such person I find particularly fascinating.  
**Hunt Slonem**

(<http://www.huntslonem.com/>) is a New York-based artist who owns FIVE such mythic properties. Slonem, an eccentric if there ever was one, **feels compelled to purchase his homes based on his dreams, the advice of psychics and mystics** (<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/31/garden/31hunt.html>), and occasionally, the dead. Slonem's paintings are colorful, exuberant, and obsessive renderings of animals, insects, historical figures, and dreamstuff; his properties are no less subdued, and every bit as strange and supernatural. Slonem's first purchase, the Cordt Mansion in Kingston New York, was purchased in 2001 on the advice of a psychic channeling Rudolph Valentino. Subsequent homes rest on more hallowed land—Albania Plantation on the Bayou Teche near Jeanerette, Louisiana, and Lakeside, in Batchelor, Louisiana, are the Slonem homes that I find especially compelling.





As a Southerner, I have an intrinsic love for swampy weather,

decaying porches, and cicada filled nights. The romance that infuses the earth south of the Mason Dixon line is intoxicating, and when home in Kentucky, I often find myself driving aimlessly into the country, peering around creek beds and fence rows for a glimpse of my dream house—I know it's there.



Slonem, who attended Tulane University and caught the Southern bug as a result, explains in a *New York Times* interview that he came to own his homes in Louisiana as a result of “rescue, mission, hopeless falling-in-love.” The homes, never over-restored, are resplendent in their shabbiness. They are filled with antiques, oriental rugs, Slonem’s own artwork, and the patina of time. In photos, they look exactly as I imagine

the house in my dreams—somewhat ramshackle, quietly opulent, and always mysterious. In the same article, Slonem purports finding voodoo dolls in the ceiling rafters and seeing the ghost of the former lady of the house drifting past doorways.



His reaction is to merely accept that these houses have chosen him as their caretaker. He refers to it as being



“metaphysically adopted” by the properties and their spirits—a sentiment I can understand. Whether compelled by the advice of the long dead, or by the content of dreamscapes, those individuals who see houses as sacred spaces beyond the paint and paper are a unique set, sure to inspire a little mystery and wanderlust even in the deepest of sleepers. To sneak a peak into the enchanted world of Hunt Slonem and understand a bit of what my dreams are made of, check out Vincent Katz’s book *Pleasure Palaces: The Art and Homes of Hunt Slonem* (<http://www.amazon.com/Pleasure-Palaces-Homes-Hunt-Slonem/dp/1576873676>), and get in touch with your inner Miss Havisham.

[Images via *The New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/>)]

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