

# Orchestra of Colours

*The work of New York-based artist **Ali Banisadr** is an evocative symphony of sounds intertwined with vibrant colours, giving rise to worlds which blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality, writes Ayesha Shehmir*

**F**or American-Iranian painter Ali Banisadr, creating art is beyond a pure hobby or a choice, it's a necessity. Growing up amidst the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war during a time of upheaval, art became not only a coping mechanism, but a way to understand the world around him and organise his thoughts. "At a young age, the only way I could process that chaos was in a visual manner," Banisadr says. "That same habit continued throughout my life. There are so many abstract thoughts that for me, can only be expressed visually."

As Banisadr grew older and reflected on his youth, he started believing more and more that there was a reason he experienced what he did, a deeper meaning behind it all. "This idea of what lies beyond the story on the surface is very interesting to me," he says. For Banisadr, art now served another purpose than to understand his environment: to show others his vision of the world.

Gifted with synaesthesia, a trait which the late Russian painter and art theorist Wassily Kandinsky is also believed to have had, where colours and sounds are linked, the movement of the artist's brushstrokes is guided by the sounds he hears. "As soon as I apply the brush, the sound begins," he says. "It is the force that drives the whole painting and helps me compose the work and pull everything together." When his brush meets the canvas, there are vibrations which shape the lines, colours and

Right: Ali Banisadr, *Fields of energy*, 2019. Oil on linen. 167x223cm







PHOTOS BY JEFFREY STURGES. IMAGES COURTESY OF GALERIE THADDAEUS ROPAC, LONDON





Ali  
Banisadr





textures seen in his sensorial works. “If I listen to good music, I can see a parallel visual world or if I read a novel, there will be a very intense feeling of a place, the characters, smells and colours,” he explains. “This also works for when I view art that speaks to me – it has a particular sound, which is not to be confused with music, but more like notes, or even the sound of something that is heavy or light, falling or rising, sharp or soft.”

Banisadr’s works are housed within numerous public and private collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Saatchi Gallery in London and Los Angeles County Museum of Art in Los Angeles. Ordered Disorders, a recent exhibition held at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in Paris, unveiled a new body of work by the artist. The hybrid abstract-figurative figures which render themselves through the evocative paintings, as seen for instance in *The Builder* (2019) and *Thought Police* (2019), allude to the conflicts in art history and reference the rising state of unrest in the world. The hidden lyrical forms which appear on canvas act as humans, gods, goddesses, monsters, animals or a relic from the ancient past. “The figures, first of all, are about trying to stay true to my own memory of things, almost like a dream that is constantly shifting and just out of my grasp, a metamorphosis of transforming into some other element,” expresses Banisadr. “I see my canvases as playgrounds for things from different times to dwell in; a sort of time machine where these figures can meet and exchange ideas.”



From top: Ali Banisadr. *The Builder*. 2019. Oil on Linen. 167x223cm; *The Serpent and the Key*. 2019. Oil on linen. 40.6x50.8cm



An installation view of *Ordered Disorders* at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac Paris



The mythological creatures are intended to speak to the viewer, to share stories of a hidden past or an unknown future. “They embody a secret, they hold within themselves a certain magic that can be made contemporary over and over again based on the viewer who is able to create a dialogue with it,” says Banisadr. “They have a message, we just have to listen.”

Growing up, the artist was always sceptical about the history of art he was taught at school. “I think things are improving a bit now but even a few years ago, we had a very narrow way of looking at art history, at least in the western civilisations as they did not consider other parallel art histories,” he shares. “But once we look at these histories closer, one can see the influence of other cultures on artists and how much of an impact that had on this linear cannon.” Through his work, he hopes to create a space where these parallel worlds

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can coincide with each other, a space where there are no cultural limitations. He hopes to show, for example, the influence of Eastern cultures on the Venetian painters of the renaissance when colour was introduced in their

work; the influence of Japanese art on impressionists and post-impressionists and the influence of Persian Miniature on Henri Matisse. “I try to let the paintings move towards the direction they want to go, to help them develop naturally.”

There are multiple narratives within each painting; each one never the same when viewed twice. “I think about many things within my paintings, there is never a particular message; it’s a way of exploring and shining a light on things that are on my mind,” says Banisadr. “It is also a way of seeing the world, a chaotic place with many voices coming from different directions, being able to filter all this





information that we have access to now and to make sense out of them.”

The style in which Dutch painters Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel the Elder have shown their critiques of society has influenced Banisadr throughout his lifetime. His technique is inspired by Venetian masters of the renaissance such as Tintoretto and Paolo Veronese, as well as Spanish painters Diego Velázquez and Francisco Goya. Japanese prints and Persian Miniature paintings are also a perpetual inspiration and Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937) oil painting is another such work which deeply resonates with Banisadr.

Beauty and chaos meet simultaneously within the artist’s work; the ethereal figures flow freely with grace while other mysterious forms elicit an unsettling aura. “From my own experience, I believe that art makes the world a better place, can provide a clarity through the confusion and pollution of the world,” says Banisadr. “We are in a state of emergency and live in apocalyptic times – man-made and natural disasters, violence and conflict. I think we can heal, but we have to have the vision to see what lies beyond all the confusion and I think artists can play a part in this.”

*Thought Police* (2019), a highlight from *Ordered Disorders* challenges our perceptions of the mind, questioning, are we free to think for ourselves or are we being watched closely and steered in a certain direction through an outside force? “I have been thinking about the digital age, internet, algorithms, cyber-attacks, which are all part of this new parallel man-made world that we have created, which is shaping our minds for the future,” says Banisadr. Also of note is *The Builder* (2019). “I have been thinking a lot about workers and people that still build things with their hands like homes; something that we have been doing throughout human history. It’s such an ancient idea and to me, watching construction workers build homes makes me think of how ancient this is,” he shares. “It is about the artist, the creator, making something with your hands, or making a sound.”

The more time we spend with Banisadr’s evocative works, more questions arise than answers: are we really free to wander? Can parallel universes exist? Is there a meaning behind each adversity we are subjected to in life? The reality is in the eye of the beholder. ■ *Ordered Disorders* by Ali Banisadr was on show from 17 October until 16 November 2019 at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac Paris



Installation view  
of Ordered  
Disorders.  
Courtesy  
of Galerie  
Thaddaeus Ropac







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