

Ali Banisadr

Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects

Ali Banisadr's paintings sometimes coalesce into dense figurative groupings; other times they explode in whirligig patterns. What is most compelling about them is not the intricacy of their detailing so much as the way they generate a palpable sense of atmosphere.

This exhibition, "It Happened and It Never Did," takes its name from Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, and literary references abound in the titles of works. The names may provide intellectual points of entry, but the works themselves excite through their evocations of grandly symbolic vistas and epic melodramas, at once calling to mind Hieronymus Bosch and filmmaker Akira Kurosawa.

Green was this show's prevailing hue, skewing toward unnatural tones and away from the pastoral. *Telluric Current* (2010), which was perhaps the most all-over composition in this exhibition, is a misty gray-green jungle punctuated by what appear to be sentinels carved out of slashes of ochre, blue, or red. When Banisadr opts for dramatic color contrasts, as in the acrid red sky of *The Marvels of the East* (2011), it is to mark a counterpoint to the black-gray splotches that dominate an indeterminate horizon. The diptych *It Happened and It Never Did* (2011) is animated not by the cast of apparitions in the foreground, but by slashing whitish vertical strokes intimating an approaching deluge.

Banisadr is as skilled at removing paint as he is at applying it—combining scraping, stippling, calligraphy, and sfumato to create hyperactive surfaces. Many of his painterly gestures seem derived from cartooning, which enables him to telegraph movement. This tension between depiction, implied motion, and atmospheric abstraction transforms traditional landscape, with its receding foreground, distant horizon line, and upper-level atmosphere, into an ambiguous terrain equally suggestive of a battle royal or the controlled chaos of a beehive.

—**Christopher French**



Ali Banisadr, *It Happened and It Never Did* (detail), 2011, oil on linen, 72" x 108" overall. Leslie Tonkonow.