

BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE



MAILINGLIST

Art
INCONVERSATION

October 3rd, 2018

ALI BANISADR with Phong Bui

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One of the most poignant responses to the perpetual condition of being in exile is credited to Jonas Mekas, the legendary Godfather of American Avant-garde cinema, when he was asked, “Where are you from?” he offered, “I was born and raised in Lithuania, I live in New York, and now my country is culture.” Although the critical issue of how artists respond to the ongoing crises and challenges of the constant pressure to assimilate to their immediate and new environment has been with us since the beginning of time, it has become increasingly acute and urgent in regard to mass migration, especially from the Middle East and Africa. Ali Banisadr is one exemplar of this feat, following many of his fellow artists from a generation earlier, including Nicky Nodjoumi, Shirin Neshat, Shoja Azari, Y.Z. Kami, among others. Banisadr left Iran at the tail end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, moving first to Turkey, then to the U.S. where he participated in the Mission School of graffiti in San Francisco, and attended SVA (School of Visual Arts) for his BFA, before earning an MFA from New York Academy of Art while also performing as a DJ in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Above all else, Banisadr is a devoted student of art history and the culture of painting specifically. On the occasion of the artist’s first solo exhibition in Germany, Banisadr paid a visit to the Rail HQ for a long conversation with Phong Bui, *Rail* Publisher, about his life and work.



Ali Banisadr, *Language of the Birds*, 2018. Oil on linen, 66 × 88 inches. Courtesy the artist and Blain|Southern, London and Berlin.

Phong Bui (Rail): In '86 I was on a traveling grant to Italy, and had the privilege of being introduced to and spent the weekend with [Roberto] Matta with my late teacher Nicolas Carone, in his lavish

studio/living quarters in Tarquinia, which previously had been a convent. I remember asking him why the entire studio floor was covered with beautiful canvases as though they were house painting drop cloths. His response was “That’s because all of the paint drips, all sort of stains, the dirt from my own and other people’s footprints would create a patina. All of which breed images. And each of those drop cloths would end up being the next painting on the wall.” He then went on to paraphrase Leonardo [da Vinci], “When you look at a stain on the wall, you will see at once the emergence of horses, soldiers in combat, or you will see intimation of landscape with trees, mountains, rivers, ruins and so on. As an artist, your task is to bring out these ghost-like images in fuller visibility, well, depending on the degrees that each may call out for.” This is, of course, usually referred to part of the Surrealist pure psychic automatism, being dictated by thought, not reason, and activated outside of the aesthetic concerns. There are endless ways of channeling different kinds of images. There exists first the Freudian sequences of dreams that can be rendered, embraced with traditional technique and with illusionistic space, as we see in the works of (Giorgio) de Chirico, even in aspects of [Max] Ernst, [Yves] Tanguy, [Salvador] Dalí for sure. Then there are ways in which automatic writing can be populated with greater abstraction along with over-all treatment of space, like in the paintings of [André] Masson, [Joan] Miró, and, for example, where certain levels of flatness and actual writings are permissible. Your work seems to be in between these two tendencies, utilizing traditional modeling, assimilating the all-over energy of Abstract Expressionism, yet at the same time, there seems to be a part of fluid references to endless images of past art as well as art of the present, not to mention digital technology, among other things. Which came first, or did both come simultaneously?

Ali Banisadr: It was neither, actually. It began with looking at the Old Masters paintings that I gradually saw traces of Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism in them. Say you look at a close up of [Diego] Velázquez’s paintings, for instance, you would see traces of details of [Willem] de Kooning’s painterly and abstract gestures. You look at [Martin] Schongauer or [Hieronymus] Bosch and you would see aspects of Surrealist visions of the world. For me, looking at Old Master paintings have been an endless source of inspiration in that it allows me to see them in the lineage, be it from early Christian art, art of the Renaissance, Baroque, to Impressionism, Modern, and Contemporary art. I tend to not really be attracted to things that are only one or the other. So if it is an Old Master painting, it should address certain issues that are still relevant in our time. Say looking at Titian, [Francisco] Goya, [Édouard] Manet, and [Pablo] Picasso, just to name a few, you could activate the sentiment in each of



Portrait of Ali Banisadr, pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

their works, be it love, the destruction of war, or jealousy, etc., through the paint and see the similar relationship to contemporary life somehow. It still speaks to our time. Likewise, something that is made today evokes something ancient.

Rail: What you say is generally true. There is a lineage of art historical continuity, though it may be applied to most artists, but not all since some are driven to be liberated by irony and paradox in order to fulfill their ambition. Anyway, it's quite evident in your work, the open-endedness to open sources. One can see representational forms infused with abstract shapes, all sorts of painterly gestures in the subtle and not-so-subtle references to the paintings of your favorite painters such as Tintoretto, Bosch, [Pieter] Bruegel, Velázquez, Goya, to Impressionist brushstrokes, [Jackson] Pollock and de Kooning, and whatnot. It also refers to Persian miniature painting, specifically in a treatment of flat space and the narrative that speaks of the worldview of Persian culture, specifically from period of the 14th to 17th centuries.

Banisadr: Which was influenced by Chinese painting traditions, right after the Mongol invasion (1219 – 1221) of the Islamic States. I'd say the space opened up more, and images seem to be less constricted to the flat backgrounds. They are more free in the distribution of images. There is no emphasis of one image being more important than another.

Rail: Which makes sense since the similar treatment is inherently viewed in Chinese landscape painting, particularly scroll painting of late Imperial China, say the Ming Dynasty.

Banisadr: Exactly!

Rail: Yet, coming back to your painting, despite the all-over energy carried across the canvas, there seems to be only the foreground with a certain event happening below, and then the less defined, less compressed, suggesting a sky above as a background. There is no middle ground, so it's structured like a stage proscenium. How did such a space come into being?

Banisadr: A small painting I made in 2006 called *The Waste Land* opened up the floodgate for me. It came strictly from my memory. I was thinking, "How do I paint something from memory, from a vibration or a sound that I heard when I was a kid growing up in Tehran during the Iran-Iraq War (1980 – 1988)"? And the way it came out it was so real to me, partly because the way in which a crater in the foreground appeared so suddenly that immediately connected to my early memory of hearing bombs blasting and seeing craters in the ground. I remember it came out so fast that I just used whatever was around, rags, palette knives, twigs, or whatever just to convey the sensation I was experiencing a past memory, which I thought was so thrilling. It was like an out-of-body experience.

Rail: Or in the least it's an epiphany.

Banisadr: Yes. It was from that epiphany that I discovered my own voice. It was exciting because several questions were racing in my head, yet the body was connected to what was going on: how do you store things in your memory, how do you remember or see things from this memory, and because the image in your memory is always changing, it's like you're trying to capture something that's ungraspable. It became a challenge: how do you capture the intangible in paint without making it like an illustration? My feeling was it was urgent and real because my hands were working with the paint materials very fast. I just trusted the whole process.



Ali Banisadr, *The Waste Land*, 2006. Oil on Panel, 11 × 14 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: And your use of the palette knife seems to be a perfect tool to physically manipulate the space, dividing it into different segments.

Banisadr: And subtracting, setting up the rhythm of the painting as well.

Rail: True. One other thing I found when looking at your paintings is that from afar the endless gestures and textures provide a sense of painterly quality, but when I come close up it is in fact economically painted. There are unpainted white areas of the linens showing through, which allows the air to circulate throughout the painting in an otherwise action-packed and condensed space. I was surprised how relatively thin the paint was applied, and of the mixtures between wet-on-wet and more built-up segments in the painting. Do you think the sound of the palette knife troweling the paint onto the linen's surface may propel the mood or sentiment of the painting from the beginning?

Banisadr: Not really. It's more like the sound of the image I'm looking at, which only occurs when the composition is being created, especially with movements of larger shapes that correspond to the smaller fragments, figures, objects, etc. that move forward or recede. It's as though your eyes are connecting the dots between these fragmentations and hearing different sounds of these living things that could come into existence or not—often times they get painted over or scraped away. It's a challenge when I hear too many sounds, I have to figure out which one makes sense for them to come alive and which one needs to disappear, and which one should stay in between the two stages. As far as you mentioned automatism, which doesn't require too much editing, I may unconsciously adopt a similar method, but I do so much analyzing, editing, and constant reworking that in the end it feels like a well-rehearsed orchestra.

Rail: Ready to perform! [*Laughter*] How do you know when a certain painting needs to stay monochromatic, as opposed to others that are immersed in a sea of colors?

Banisadr: I don't always know in advance. It all depends on how strong the mood at the beginning conveys to me whether the painting is a definitive monochrome of brown, which there's no need to add any color to it. And there are times where the mood is really not as strong, so I bring in colors to enliven the painting. For example, in the cases of *The Building of Icarus*, *Homo Deus*, or *The Game of Taming* (all 2018), they're paintings that demand revisions, additions, fine-tunings, which happens every day, over time. Whereas, *Language of the Birds* (2018) doesn't need to bring in anything else, except for occasional accents that heighten the images in the key spectrum of blue.

Rail: The monochromes in general seem to have more open gestures and broader space than the color paintings, which brings me to my next question: How does the issue of scale relate to one as opposed to another?

Banisadr: I think color makes separations, so when you look at a figure that has a dominant red uniform, your eyes automatically start to follow similar colors, which soon turns into a random search for patterns.

Rail: Or some kind of a rhythm!

Banisadr: Rhythm—which I think is my own sense of scale—is so important. If you have too many, as some call them “traps,” the eyes never leave the painting. The idea is to lead the eyes with a certain rhythm that allows slow discoveries in the painting, and yet, at the same time, encourages second or multiple viewings.

Rail: Those “trapping” devices can also be very subtle.

Banisadr: Yes, like a hidden or invisible geometry, the opposite of Cubist geometry, which is very visible. I feel the structures in my paintings need to be invisible. It's internalized, and I always know where to situate different figures and things in different places throughout the painting.

Rail: As we've just spoken of the issue of rhythm, you're a conductor of an orchestra so to speak, where the various textures of sound are dependent on specific compositions.

Banisadr: I like that analogy.



Ali Banisadr, *World Upside Down 5*, 2018. Ink on paper, 30 × 24 1/8 inches. Courtesy the artist and Blain|Southern, London and Berlin.

Rail: Let's visit your early upbringing in California where you lived for twelve years. You and your family moved from Iran to San Diego when you were twelve, then moved to Modesto, and San Francisco eventually. And it was in San Francisco that you were exposed to graffiti culture, what was called Mission School of San Francisco, or sometimes called "New Folk" or "Urban Rustic."

Banisadr: What made it so interesting was that it was folk art, such as sign painting and homemade objects, mixed in with comics, cartoons, and of course mural and graffiti! A real collective grew out of a real community.

What happened was William Brown, the mayor of San Francisco, who was an opponent of graffiti culture, made a compromise by giving us warehouses, and it sure was a lively scene. I met Barry McGee and many artists from the community, including many from Europe. I quickly realized two things about myself: one, I wasn't so enthusiastic about painting on walls; and, two, I tended to lean more towards doing work in my studio alone. I realized couldn't make what I make around noise and people. It takes me a while to get to a place where I even know what I need to make. So even though I was always around the graffiti artists and a part of it, I wasn't really out there doing my graffiti in public. I'd rather make my own graffiti in a sketchbook or the studio. And there were other artists in the Mission who also leaned towards making art in the studio.

Rail: Like Chris Johnson, Ruby Neri, Alicia McCarthy?

Banisadr: Yeah.

Rail: Have you kept your sketchbooks from that time?

Banisadr: I've kept some of them.

Rail: I know you came to New York to attend SVA to study painting specifically, but then you took classes in illustration. Why?

Banisadr: It's funny. I came to SVA as an older student—twenty-five years old—so I was really hungry for knowledge. As much as I was enjoying other classes such as film, printmaking, and so on, it was in my third year that I realized there were classes in illustration that I was interested in. I was like,



Ali Banisadr, *Page from Sketchbook*, c. 1996. Courtesy the artist.

“Alright, I now want to learn from others what I don’t know.” The first year was a boot camp. You were basically just internalizing everything, from anatomy to painting techniques to art history to theory, just everything. And then the second years was more “what are you going to do with what you have learned?” You were encouraged to bring in your own subject and you went with whatever! I took as much as I could from different teachers. There wasn’t one that was more influential than another. They all had something to offer.

Rail: You then extended this thirst of knowledge to graduate school at New York Academy of Art in Tribeca.

Banisadr: Yeah, I was committed to furthering that knowledge, knowing it was good for my growth somehow.

Rail: And when exactly did you make your first abstraction with this knowledge of traditional techniques and materials, given your formative years being a graffiti artist?

Banisadr: Well, it was in my third year of fellowship, which you basically get a studio in school and you can make whatever, and you’re no longer required to go to class, yet still have access to everything at the school, like lectures, visiting artists, critiques, etc. So it was during this period that I began to make abstractions. Well, it was and always is a synthesis of both abstraction and figuration. Anyway, I thought everyone was going to hate it. [*Laughter.*]

Rail: Because you’re rebelling against what you were taught?

Banisadr: Yeah. To my great surprise, they all embraced it! Even one of the toughest faculty teachers, Martha Erlebacher, who was known for her steadfast advocacy of realism.

Rail: Yeah, Thomas Eakins and anything before was cool in her book. I had her as a visiting critic as an undergrad at PCA [Philadelphia College of Art, now called University of the Arts] so I know. Anyway, what was your memory of the first time you felt you’d discovered your voice? Can you recall the sensation?

Banisadr: You know going back to the whole thing of making work based on memory, sounds, sensation, and letting go, I think it started at the end of my post-graduate research fellowship in painting at New York Academy. I felt a freedom that I’d never felt before. I mean your voice always changes but that’s when I had the feeling, okay, this is me, this is my voice, this is what makes sense, this is what speaks to me.

Rail: Was it a painting or a drawing?

Banisadr: It was actually several charcoal drawings I made based on sound explosions and vibrations, then I made a small painting, then a medium-sized painting that I worked on for maybe a month and a half or two months. It was called *What the Thunder Said*. I didn't show it to anybody, and then I showed it in my class and the reaction was pretty good, as I'd just mentioned. It was a surprise.

Rail: And this reassured a sense of confidence in what you were doing.

Banisadr: Yes, it did.

Rail: What was the next consequential step?

Banisadr: I continued working on a body of work based on this new discovery about a year, which led to my first solo show at Leslie Tonkonow gallery.

Rail: Are there particular artists whose works you feel strong affinities towards in terms of how they mediate their own walks between abstractions and figuration, energy, a sense of invention, and so on in the work?

Banisadr: I admire Neo Rauch, Dana Schutz, and my friend Amy Cutler, who I've known since New York Academy. The way each invents their own worlds is just incredible. I mean Neo Rauch with his invention of these places, or these spaces that lie between dreams and hallucinations, I feel there's always this good balance between his imagination and the material of the paint, and what the paint is capable of creating. There's a fluidity of the two, plus his treatment of scale. They seem incredibly uneven, unreal, whether it's a bigger figure next to a smaller one, yet they somehow seem to belong to that one specific space. Something similar applies to Dana Schutz, except her work has a louder sound. Amy Cutler's magic realism is amazing. Her work is both a quiet nightmare and a magical world. I should add that my connection with these artists is that: one, they have great craftsmanship, second, they work from their imaginations—so they create things that didn't exist before— and third, they're very aware of art history. And as far as narrative goes, they create their own narratives. They all have interesting heads, and they really know how to paint. *[Laughter]* You know it's like if I go and visit the Prado, for example, there's Velázquez, there's Titian, there's Goya, there's Bosch, and endless other great painters, so you know you have a long long long way to go. You might not even get close, but at least you have a bar that you can work towards. Some kind of a model to strive after.

Rail: What about Cecily Brown? Your treatment of the figure and abstraction holding equal weight as one pictorial synthesis seems to relate to her own.

Banisadr: I see how you'd see the similarities, but yes and no. I like how she treats everything equally, all the strokes of paint, be it a figure or a tree. I tend to focus on certain things and work on them more,

so there's a different percentage of development as opposed to leaving things in in-between spaces and having things be almost ghostlike. So I think there is a degree of shift between them, there is more variation, more characters. Also, the sound and temperature in our work are different: mine is abrupt, loud, and dry; hers is smooth, continuous, and wet.

Rail: That's a good observation. And you certainly embrace illusionistic space when necessary.

Banisadr: That's true, amidst lots of things that don't even have names. Our minds always want to categorize things, I like to leave things in a space where your mind is having a hard time categorizing what you're looking at—so it's constantly alert, not falling asleep.

Rail: Again, just to follow up on the difference in “mood” or “sentiment” that is being generated from either the monochrome or color paintings, we often question why we either dream in black and white or color. When Picasso painted *Guernica*, he understood the painting would have not been as effective if he'd painted in color. Black and white, or the monochrome in general, has a certain bearing in our memory that tends to associate with past events, perhaps due to black and white photographs, black and white television, black and white newspapers, and so on, as opposed to dreaming in color, which usually is referred to future events.

Banisadr: For me it's like seeing a play on stage. In one version you can see all the characters at the same time, because the light is lit evenly, which is the case of the monochrome. Whereas in another version, the light shines on different characters and in different ways so colors guide the viewer to concentrate on certain things in the painting.

Rail: In the monochrome painting there is far less mark making, gestures, or details than in the color paintings. Still, I remember we were often told in painting 101 class not to introduce too many different characters of brushstrokes or gestures because they would confuse and overwhelm the viewing experience. It was and still is considered a definite not-to-do thing whatsoever!

Banisadr: Not that I was intentionally trying to rebel, to do things I was told not to, but I feel that if I want to stay true to my own gut feeling, I just have to do whatever I need to follow that gut feeling. I should mention the painting starts very loud at the beginning, and then my job is to sort of make sense of these loud sounds, which cancel out and collide with each other, and create a composition that harmonizes them. The work is finished is when it's relatively calmed down. More importantly, I feel



Ali Banisadr, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 2018. Etching painting, 11 × 14 1/8 inches. Courtesy the artist and Blain|Southern, London and Berlin.

there's a wave of air, or energy, flowing through the painting that really ties everything together. It's hard to describe because I also feel it's capable of doing the opposite: blowing everything off.

Rail: Matta often refers to his paintings as “inscapes” like a landscape within, which relates to the mind, the imagination more than the physical body, how would you describe your relationship between the two?

Banisadr: When I start to hear the sound and see the images, I see them in my head first, as always. Once I begin to make the painting there's always movement because things are in flux. I can then hear and feel that movement within my own body. It's only then I know what I'm supposed to do with the figure. If one specific figure is leaning over, for example, and it's heavily on one leg, I feel it within in my own leg. If its head is heavy, I feel that weight in my own head. I sort of become that figure. The same goes even for something that's only like semi-representational, or a breeze of wind or a flow of energy or a sound wave or whatever, I feel it inside my body and then I'm able to project it, and create it.

Rail: What kind of music do you listen to in your studio? For example, Mondrian, between 1940 when he moved to New York City and died 4 years later in 1944, loved boogie-woogie music. He'd listen to Fats Waller, as one can imagine the pounding sound of the piano corresponds with the exciting and lively energy of NYC; Pollock loved Charlie Parker because of his improvisational nature and fast tempos because it relates to the making of his own painting.

Banisadr: It all depends. If the sound that comes out of the painting is too loud, I don't listen to any music at all. But there are definitely times when I am listening to music while painting or working on works on paper. My taste in music is very eclectic, mostly because of my past experience as a DJ. I liked to play music that was not supposed to go together but I would make it work somehow. It could go from rare groove, from soul music from the '80s, to '90s hip hop, to electronic music, to jazz to some random sound, and back and forth . . .

Rail: What was the urge to become a DJ? How long did you do it as a job?

Banisadr: I did it for fun when I first moved to New York. I used to DJ in Williamsburg in various cool little clubs when it wasn't what it is now. It soon became a paid gig, and I did that for a good six years. I really enjoyed the experience because there were constant surprises. You know how sometimes you hear music and you already know what's going to come next?

Rail: You mean the predictability of a familiar rhythm?

Banisadr: I wanted to play a mixture of things that surprised people, even if they may barely recognize it, like “I know that song or that music but where does it come from exactly?” For example, there's this

great album by a French DJ (named Uncle O) called *Shaolin Soul*. What they did was they took all the music that RZA sampled to make Wu-Tang Clan albums, but they're so good. There's Al Green, Ann Peebles, Willie Mitchell, Booker T & The MG's, Barry White in the compilation, but you only get a hint, and you'd say to yourself "Who is that?" or "What was that?" This is why I love sampling. You can create your own music out of taking one part of a song like a rhythm break, which can be used to build the beat for another song. Every club I'd DJ, people would just come up to me, and ask, "Who are you, what is this, where'd you get this?"

Rail: So each time you DJ, you can't replicate what you did previously?

Banisadr: That's right, because it's not a planned thing. You just go with the flow and feel the energy of the crowd. Whatever you end up playing is an immediate response to those factors. It all makes sense somehow, which is the thrill of the experience.

Rail: I'm glad you mentioned your experience as a DJ. This seems plausible when recalling your memory growing up in Tehran with the air raids, bombs, and explosions during the Iran-Iraq War, which were the roots of your own synesthesia. I could only imagine it'd be impossible to isolate one episode from the others to deal with or address one at a time.

Banisadr: I feel like I'm patching all of these different things, places, and times into one large thing, and all these little variations and glimpses are productive in my case.

Rail: I wonder whether your interest in music sampling and your experience as a DJ has had an influence on how you bring together different sources in your work?

Banisadr: That's a good question. I never thought of it in this context. It's an internal thing where I just somehow know where I am supposed to go with what, and, again, thinking about the underlying core structure that connects all these different elements has always been my desire or my own way of dealing with my complex background as an immigrant. I guess I don't want to miss out on everything that has happened in my life.

Rail: Another way of saying it would be "You have no control over the matter." [*Laughter*] The fact that you don't censor yourself from what you love in art history and everything else that you love in contemporary culture ...

Banisadr: There's no separation between one memory from another. I also feel in our time there's this level of distraction, and a speed of things moving at such a fast rate, which makes it impossible to concentrate—or to meditate—on anything. We're in the digital world, and there are always multiple things coming at you at once and there's this level of feeling overwhelmed. So I feel like more than ever

painting is one of a few media where you could find refuge, because it slows down time and that's one of the most important things about painting. It slows down time and therefore slows you down in your viewing experience.

Rail: Even though each time one looks at the details of your painting, one feels they're at constant threat of disappearing.

Banisadr: It's like you're trying to hold onto things that are moving.

Rail: A fleeting dream, or fleeting moment of seeing a carnival of half-men, half-animals or creatures at times, other times I see humanoids, cyborgs, which remind me of the Dada artists of Berlin. They created the Dada cyborg as a mixture of hope, fantasies, and anxiety about what lies in between the unknown abyss of human creation and destruction. Hannah Höch, John Hartfield, Otto Dix, George Grosz, for example, created these hybrids which can be very disturbing because they're filled with jump cuts, dissonance, fragmentations, and so on. I know it's far-fetched as a reference, but I do see in your paintings a similar urge. Is that a fair observation?

Banisadr: Living in our time and thinking about what's happening to us right now, the whole digital world, with cyber space, social media, etc. which is something we can't avoid. I've been thinking for a long time how I can bring those elements together in my work, knowing and accepting that they are part animal, part human, part machine, with this idea asking what will become of us as a species in the future. I feel like the space, the stage, or whatever in the painting is a place, it's like a time machine for me, where things from the past, the present, and the future can dwell at the same time. It's not based on a linear timeline, it could exist in different times at once, and then somehow you have these things from different times coming together and the viewer has to make sense of it all, or not. [*Laughter*]

Rail: A viewing pleasure I'm sure, or not. My last question: How do you feel about this new group of paintings? Is there a small or large degree of change, building on the previous body of work?

Banisadr: Of course, the current body of work is always based on the last one that I've made. It's work that comes out of work. For me, I've always moved slowly, step by step, even though the world I'm creating is a fleeting one. But to answer your question: I feel there is more space in the new paintings.

Rail: Especially in the monochromatic ones.

Banisadr: Yes. And some of the figures are more developed. There's more air in the paintings.

Rail: What about the mood of the work?

Banisadr: Since I started to become more conscious of different moods I've been mixing my own paints, so the color that I'm creating could convey the strong mood that I'm after. More and more the colors that I'm using are becoming personal because they trigger a sensation or a mood; and it's a color that I've created so I can't really call it anything. I label them by moods. So that's happened in the new works.

Rail: To go back to the issue of synesthesia, do you think you have to mix certain colors that would modify or assimilate the equivalence of the sound you hear in your head?

Banisadr: Yeah, once I mix a certain color, right away I feel it trigger a familiar place, a mood, a feeling, even a temperature, a sound—all those things at once. So it's based on memory, but it doesn't matter whether it happened twenty years ago or two years ago, or just yesterday. Deep within myself I always know that place, that feeling. And so I need to preserve this mood, this color I've just mixed, because from that color comes this whole new world.



Ali Banisadr, *The World Upside Down*. Oil on linen, 82 × 120 inches. Courtesy the artist and Blain|Southern, London and Berlin.

CONTRIBUTOR

Phong Bui

PHONG BUI is the Publisher and Artistic Director of the *Brooklyn Rail*.

RECOMMENDED ARTICLES



ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

by Joyce Beckenstein

SEPT 2017 | ARTSEEN

In 1945, Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner purchased an 1879 farmhouse in Easthampton, New York that is today the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center. Here, they created the iconic paintings that helped launch a distinctly American style of Abstract Expressionism.

INCONVERSATION



JOHN ELDERFIELD with Phong Bui

JUNE 2018 | ART

In order to experience a great work of art, one must assume that one will never understand it fully, but perhaps there are a few exceptions when one is completely alone with one's openness and vulnerability, ready to be a receptor to the hidden layers of minute subtleties. How does one ever come to understand the art of Paul Cézanne?



ALI BANISADR: *Trust in the Future*

by Jessica Holmes

JUL-AUG 2017 | ARTSEEN

A convergence of influences is at play across painter Ali Banisadr's body of work. In writing dedicated to his paintings a reader will find frequent reference to Northern Renaissance and Venetian art, Persian miniatures, as well as more modern touchstones like Francis Bacon and Willem de Kooning. Banisadr has acknowledged the effects of literature and cinema upon his thinking, and although these influences are apparent in his recent exhibition, *Trust in the Future*, certain paintings achieve something different—and more exciting.

INCONVERSATION



WOLFGANG LAIB with Phong Bui

MAY 2018 | ART

The clarity of thought and simplicity of execution in the work of Wolfgang Laib never fails to transpire feelings of lightness against life's awesome gravity.

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