

September 4, 2025

Ali Banisadr: Noble/Savage

Olney Gleason is pleased to announce our first exhibition, ***Ali Banisadr: Noble/Savage***, in our 509 West 27th Street gallery. Presenting new paintings, bronze sculptures, and works on paper, the exhibition explores Banisadr's singular vision as iterated through a range of media.

Noble/Savage includes a series of paintings that exemplify Banisadr's ability to both mine and mirror the collective unconscious. His compositions, complexly layered and resisting a single focal point, allude to both the cycles of history and the vortex of images in our contemporary information age. Banisadr uses archetypal imagery to evoke the perpetual tension between nature and civilization in energetic abstractions including ***Ministry of Truth, Omen, Pandemonium of the Sun, Sky Woman, The Forest***, and ***Blood Meridian***. In ***Omen***, a constellation of recurring "O" forms was inspired by the infinity-looped logo of Meta AI – an emblem encountered daily on social media. This subtle intervention of technology, a constant theme in Banisadr's work, points to the ways in which the digital realm encroaches on visual culture and reshapes perception. In ***Pandemonium of the Sun***, a dialogue unfolds between the triangle and the circle – geometries of conflict and reconciliation – while alluding to John Milton's ***Paradise Lost***, where Pandemonium names the capital of Hell and the theatre of rebellion.

Banisadr follows an instinctual approach to color and brushwork, informed by visionary representations of inner and outer landscapes by artists including Bruegel, Goya, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Charles Burchfield, and Jackson Pollock. Having recently established a studio in the forests of Hudson Valley New York, several paintings in the exhibition bear the influence of the environment's density and green palette. For Banisadr, the forest is both a force of nature and a site of metamorphosis. It lies just beyond the boundaries of consciousness, a place one stumbles into as into a daydream, where bearings are lost and instincts surface. Yet it is also the reservoir of civilization itself, supplying the very materials from which human worlds are built.

The exhibition's title critiques the archetype of the "noble savage" as a mythology that continues to underpin modern thought. Informed by Banisadr's close study of the writings of Edward Said, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Cormac McCarthy and George Orwell, and American anthropologist David Graeber, among others, it points to the layers of misconception that have continued to obscure our relationship to nature. Instead, Banisadr's work represents the natural world as a site of metamorphosis where history, memory, and imagination converge.

Critic John Yau describes Banisadr's intangible scenes as "simultaneously inviting and unsettling, visceral and remote. By inviting us to ponder his paintings and all the many associations they evoke, from catastrophic natural events to miraculous occurrences, Banisadr directs us back to the world we inhabit, full of inexplicable mysteries."

These themes of convergence and simultaneity are reflected in the artist's process. Banisadr is a synesthete who engages multiple senses while at work, resulting in dynamic compositions influenced by the conflation of sound, color and form. The artist's preliminary layers of action painting guide the placement of figurative elements – human bodies, hybrid creatures, and emblems – as exquisite details that develop both pictorial and narrative depth. Banisadr has observed, "As contemporary artists, we live in a storm of images. The speed, saturation, and manipulation of visual culture today functions as a kind of social control—our senses constantly bombarded, our capacity for quiet perception eroded. As a painter, I feel this pressure daily. My studio becomes both a shelter and a decoding space, a place where I can try to make sense of the onslaught."

The artist often frames his work through transformative encounters from literary epics and other texts – Gilgamesh meeting Enkidu, Rumi meeting Shams, Apollo and Dionysus, or the rational self meeting the wild inner other in Jung's archetype of Anima and Animus. These encounters destabilize one world and open a passage into another. They embody what W. B. Yeats once called a "terrible beauty" – moments of rupture that generate new realities.

Banisadr also cites Surrealism as a key influence on his visual language. In a recent text for ***The Brooklyn Rail***, the artist writes: "The essence of Surrealism lies in how we perceive the world. It harnesses imagination to interpret a reality that seems increasingly nonsensical. In the 19th century, utopian ideals were fueled by technological advancements like locomotives and steam power. Yet, the rise of totalitarian regimes and the subsequent world wars shattered these ideals. Realism, in the wake of such devastation, seemed inadequate, and this remains true today." For Banisadr, Surrealism's commitment to imagination offers a way to confront today's fractured image-world, where perception itself is under siege.

Noble/Savage presents Banisadr's bronze sculpture for the first time in a gallery and in New York City. With titles such as ***Gilgamesh***, ***The Alchemist***, ***Cyclopes***, ***Animus***, and ***Anima***, these works extend the mythic vocabulary of his paintings into three dimensions. Cast from natural materials, their visceral forms feel both primeval and futuristic – simultaneously reaching backward into myth and forward into speculative possibility.

Also on view are ink, pastel and charcoal works on paper that reflect Banisadr's daily practice of spontaneous drawing, raising subliminal images ready for translation in final compositions or other media. Michelle Yun Mapplethorpe, Director and Chief Curator at the Katonah Museum of Art, has written, "The harnessing of memory, both individual and collective, is essential to the construction of Banisadr's paintings and his role as a scribe and witness."

Noble/Savage bridges recent and forthcoming institutional solo exhibitions by the artist, including Banisadr's forthcoming solo exhibition at the Buffalo AKG Art Museum (2026) and ***Ali Banisadr: The Alchemist***, the artist's 20-year survey exhibition organized by the Katonah Museum of Art, which will travel to Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (2026) and Rose Art Museum (2027).

Ali Banisadr: Noble/Savage is on view at 509 West 27th Street from October 30 to December 20, 2025, Tuesday through Saturday, from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

Exhibition Details

Ali Banisadr: Noble/Savage

October 30 to December 20, 2025

Opening Reception: Thursday, October 30, 6:00 to 8:00PM

509 West 27th Street

About Ali Banisadr

Ali Banisadr (b. 1976, Tehran) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He received an MFA from New York Academy of Art (2007) and a BFA from School of Visual Arts, New York (2005). He has staged solo exhibitions at the Katonah Museum of Art (2025), Museo Stefano Bardini and Palazzo Vecchio, Florence (2021), Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford (2020), Benaki Museum, Athens (2020), Gemäldegalerie, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna (2019) and Het Noordbrabants Museum, Netherlands (2019), among other venues. He has participated in group exhibitions at Philadelphia Museum of Art (2025), Royal Academy of Arts, London (2023), Victoria & Albert Museum, London (2021), Asia Society, New York (2021), the 55th Venice Biennale (2013), and elsewhere. His work resides in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo, NY; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, British Museum, London, UK; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France among other museums.

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Pandemonium of the Sun, 2025

oil on linen

82 x 120 inches

208.3 x 304.8 cm

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