

ALI BANISADR LIKE NEVER BEFORE

THE PAINTER'S FIRST INSTITUTIONAL SURVEY AT WESTCHESTER COUNTY'S KATONAH MUSEUM OF ART REVEALS HIS DEFT TRANSCENDENCE OF CATEGORIZATION.



Ali Banisadr, *Animus*, 2025.

By John Vincler

"I'm very much interested in our collective memory," the painter Ali Banisadr explained to me as we stood before a series of paintings that were about to be packed away for his first solo show at Perrotin's Shanghai outpost late last year. I had been voicing my skepticism about the art-critic cliché of describing his work, along with that of a rising generation of painters like Maja Ruznic and Nengi Omuku, as existing between figuration and abstraction. The longer you look at the Tehran-born, Brooklyn-based artist's paintings, the more concrete details accrue, with those breadcrumbs quickly compiling into stories. The canvases aren't stuck *in between*; they act like portals collapsing past, present, and future.

Banisadr and I met again more recently to chat about his first institutional survey, which was about to open at the Katonah Museum of Art in Westchester County, New York. It's about an hour's ride from Grand Central Station, but that won't stop New Yorkers from



characterizing their visit to the lower Hudson Valley with the phrase "going upstate." Time also collapses in the exhibition, with nearly 20 years of work—including paintings, works on paper, prints, and (debuting for the first time) five sculptures in bronze—on view.

The gathering of nearly 50 works allows for an aerial perspective of the scope and accomplishment of Banisadr's art, including major works like *These fragments I have shored against my ruins*, 2023. Massive at approximately 7-by-15 feet, it's one of his best paintings to date, the centerpiece of a knockout Victoria Miro solo show in London that year.

One of the earliest works, *The Waste Land*, 2006, an oil on panel of only 9-by-12 inches (with another titular nod to T.S. Eliot), seems to show an explosion and a crater. The work recalls Banisadr's childhood experience of witnessing the bombing of his schoolyard during the Iran-Iraq War, before he left Tehran with his family for Turkey and eventually arrived in California at the age of 12. Another

large painting here, *It's in the Air*, 2012, borrowed from the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, looks like an elaborate Hieronymus Bosch composition, the brushstrokes becoming untangled and poised to levitate off its surface.

Banisadr is among my favorite people to talk with about art. We've done it studio-visit style in his light-filled Brooklyn space, surrounded by his paintings and numerous reference materials arrayed on tables and workbenches (a selection of these will also be on view at Katonah). We've passed in and out of downtown galleries together in conversation, and we've met to look at Martin Schongauer and Dürer prints, Blake drawings, and Persian miniatures in the reading room of the Morgan Library. Banisadr's art is as infused with intellectual record as it is with art history. He looks, he reads, and he has a seemingly infinite curiosity that informs and compels him in his own work. His show at Katonah welcomes everybody into the conversation.