

Le Monde

CULTURE • ARTS

Ali Banisadr and Gustave Moreau, two painters outside the mainstream

The Iranian artist, who lives in New York, is exhibiting his works in Paris at the Musée Gustave-Moreau, alongside paintings by the 19th-century artist, and at the Thaddaeus Ropac gallery.

By Philippe Dagen

Published on September 13, 2026 at 10:00 AM, updated at 10:02 AM ·  Reading time: 2 min.



« Cyclopes » (2025), d'Ali Banisadr. GENEVIEVE HANSON/ALI BANISADR/THADDAEUS ROPAC

Ali Banisadr comes and goes in the house that was once Gustave Moreau's (1826-1898) studio, now his museum, on rue Catherine de La Rochefoucauld in Paris's 9th arrondissement. What is the painter, born in Tehran in 1976, living in New York since 2000, and whose studio is in Brooklyn, doing in these rooms from another era ? He is checking the presentation of his works, which he has chosen to show alongside those of Moreau: paintings, pastels, drawings, and, a new addition to his work, sculptures. The museum invited him to participate in this project while simultaneously exhibiting at the Thaddaeus Ropac gallery in the 3rd arrondissement of Paris.

The two presentations are grouped under the same title, "Talisman," which is also the title of one of the canvases. It draws the eye from afar, yet it defies description. A being, human or divine, appears at the center, head down, surrounded by a white and green halo. There are other anthropomorphic creatures, in the form of specters or fragments, still others reminiscent of birds, and also all sorts of signs, curves, and vividly colored patches. The same is true for *Smoke and Mirrors*, another of the large canvases, but also for smaller ones, *Terrible Beauty* or *Residue*. The bronzes are named *Cyclops*, *The Alchemist*, or *Gilgamesh*, the legendary king of Mesopotamia whose epic is one of Banisadr's favorite readings. Many other mythologies are present, sometimes barely perceptible.

"I wouldn't say he inspires me, but I see myself in him," Ali Banisadr continues. Aside from a clear penchant for the proliferation of interlaced or superimposed forms, and for intense, sometimes raw, colors, their paintings have nothing in common stylistically. *"What interests me is seeing how he orchestrates the work. It's made up of fragments that come from everywhere, because he looks in all directions, without limits: Mughal paintings, Persian miniatures, symbols from other cultures, far removed from what he's supposed to be looking at. Of course, he knows the tradition of European painting, but he's also curious about all other cultures."*



« Talisman » (2026), d'Ali Banisadr. GENEVIEVE HANSON/ALI BANISADR/THADDAEUS ROPAC

Banisadr defines Moreau's canvases as vases. *"The work is a container that holds many things. There is no hierarchy, but many figures, many different symbols. Together, they function. The question is: what does it communicate? How? Does it operate visually? Are the figures and symbols recharged?"*

When it is pointed out to him that this notion of charge is central to the theories and practices of the magical arts, he agrees and cites one of his more recent readings, André Breton's * *L'Art magique* *, published in 1957 but only translated into English in 2024. In it, the poet had gathered works from all civilizations, from prehistoric to modern, Western and non-Western, drawn or sculpted, which, in his view, shared the power of psychic suggestion, the capacity to evoke dreams. Moreau, whom Breton's contemporaries were unaware of, held an important place. Banisadr justifies this with a single sentence: *"Moreau, like Gauguin, has a magical eye."* The same could be said of him.

¶ Gustave Moreau Museum, 14 rue Catherine-de-La
 Rochefoucauld, Paris 9th ^{arrondissement}. Wednesday to
 Monday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission €6 to €8. Until
 December 7. Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery, 7 rue Debelleye,
 Paris 3rd ^{arrondissement}. Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 7
 p.m. Until October 10.

Philippe Dagen