

## ALI BANISADR

*At Once*

Blain | Southern  
4 Hanover Square  
London, W1S 1BP

11 February – 21 March 2015  
Private view: Tuesday 10 February  
6–8pm

*'People are always afraid of what they don't understand, but artists have to step into the void – the unknown. The unknown territory is where it's worth exploring.'*  
Ali Banisadr



*The Lesser Lights* (detail), 2014, Oil on linen, 208 x 259 cm

The directors of Blain | Southern are delighted to present *At Once*, an exhibition of oil paintings created over the last two years by the celebrated New York-based artist Ali Banisadr. This is his first-ever solo show in the UK and includes a 7-metre long triptych, his largest work to date.

Oscillating between the abstract and the figurative, Banisadr's paintings feature fantastical landscapes populated with grotesque hybrids in a perpetual state of frenzy. These characters – confluences of animal, god, machine and human – are deftly captured in whirling, exuberant brushstrokes. Frequently there is a sense of a heaven and earth; in the lower half, we witness temporal struggles, physical conflict and angst, while above the characters seem more at peace as if they have surrendered themselves to the ether.

Take *The Lesser Lights*, 2014, in which Banisadr's hybrids are seen engaged in some chaotic communion. What is actually taking place is ambivalent – it could be a battle, or a place of pilgrimage or simply a bacchanal – its title, an allusion drawn from the Book of Genesis and other writings, suggests the setting is hell, which is reinforced by the dripping, lilac pink sky descending on the figures. Another work, *The Lower Depths*, 2014, features a lake of acidic yellows, greens and blues, from which a giant animal struggles to escape. In the foreground a gaited human leg is smothered by what appears to be a prehistoric bird, while a female figure, naked from the midriff, flies above a beast's head. As with much of Banisadr's work, the viewer is left feeling that the scene before them may dissolve at any point; the luscious brushstrokes and layered washes conveying a strong sense of movement and instability suggestive of a world in flux.

Banisadr's art-historical inspirations are extensive; Persian miniaturists, Kandinsky, Marinetti, Veronese, Richter, Abstract Expressionism and the nightmarish visions of Bosch and Brueghel. Alongside these are a range of literary influences, as well as contemporary motifs drawn from comic books, films and music. Sound is integral to Banisadr's practice; indeed, the power of his work is attributable to the synaesthesia he experiences while painting. This began when he was a child growing up in Tehran during the Iran-Iraq war, where he drew the sounds of bombing and air-raids to make sense of what was happening. He says: *'When I begin a painting, it is always based on an internal sound. As soon as I apply the brush, the sound begins, and I am able to compose the work based on the sounds I hear as I'm painting. It is the force that drives the whole painting and helps me compose the work and pull everything together.'*

For Banisadr, painting is evidently not just painting, but a means to reflect visually on his thoughts, memories and imagination. While intensely personal, it is a line of enquiry that allows him to chip away at artistic, political, cultural and religious shibboleths. It is significant that he invariably eschews the Western tradition of including a central focal point or protagonist. In doing so he allows the beholder to commune with a bigger idea of humanity itself and imbues his work with a universal quality, offering an invitation to the viewer to renew not just their own visual and psychological references, but also to question larger conventional orthodoxies.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue, including colour plates of more than one hundred Banisadr paintings, along with an essay by art historian and curator Dr Robert Hobbs and an interview between the artist and philosopher, critic and media theorist, Dr Boris Groys.

For further information on the exhibition, please contact Mark Inglefield  
T: +44 758 419 9500 | E: [mark@blainsouthern.com](mailto:mark@blainsouthern.com)

#### Notes to Editors:

Born in Tehran in 1976, Banisadr's family left Iran in 1988, moving first to Turkey and then to California. He studied psychology and was involved with graffiti art while living in San Francisco. In 2000 Banisadr moved to New York, where he still lives and works, obtaining his BFA from the School of Visual Arts in 2005 and MFA from New York Academy of Art in 2007. The artist's work has featured in many group shows, including *Expanded Painting*, Prague Biennale 6, Prague (2013); *Love Me/Love Me Not, Contemporary Art from Azerbaijan and its Neighbors*, The 55th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, Venice (2013); *Frauen Liebe und Leben* (The Klöcker collection), Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg (2013); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2013), The Moving Museum, Dubai (2013) *Contemporary Iranian art in the Permanent Collection*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, (2012), and *Hareng Saur: Ensor and Contemporary Art*, Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK), Ghent (2010). Banisadr's works are in important public collections including Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York; The British Museum, London; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and Museum der Moderne, Salzburg.