

# The Balancing Act

Iranian-American artist Ali Banisadr's layered art emerges out of his delving into the world of myth, history and invented narratives.

Ali Banisadr isn't the easiest of artists to box within labels. He is an American, but also an Iranian. To anyone who knows contemporary world history and politics, these two identities are seemingly in conflict with each other. The New York-based artist often questions and explores both these identities in new and experimental ways.

Banisadr was part of a group exhibition, *Between Worlds*, at Mumbai's Galerie Isa, a space that exhibits international artists who have left large footprints across the art world globally. "Jane Neal (who curated the exhibition) and Ashwin Thadani (the man behind Galerie Isa) are good friends of mine and we had talked about the concept of the



Ali Banisadr; (below)  
*Insufferable Naturalist*,  
Oil on Linen, 2014

show for some time," says Banisadr. "I have sent two of my works — *Insufferable Naturalist* and *The Impostors*."

His art is abstract. Yet, look closer, and the narrative begins to unspool. What first appear to be abstract lines on canvas, have narrative creeping in as you continue to meditate over it. Critics have defined his work as part Pieter Bruegel (Flemish Renaissance painter) landscapes, part Wassily Kandinsky (Russian painter and art theorist) cubism. Banisadr likes to define them as works "hovering between abstraction and representation, since I like the eye to keep moving around when viewing my work. Motion is always present within my paintings, creating an atmosphere poised between these two worlds".

While his Iranian background looms in the subconscious, he also draws from books, art, politics, historical events and mythology. He calls it an attempt to explore a "visual philosophy". "I paint from memory. I left Iran in 1988, when I was 12 years old. I was born four years before the Iran-Iraq war. So I do remember the experience of the eight years and the revolution that took place. I remember the air raids and the sounds of explosions; I used to draw based on these sounds in an attempt to make sense of my surroundings."

Banisadr believes that there has always been connect between Old Masters and literary greats. "When I read good novels they create visual elements in my imagination, which thus informs my painting. I enjoy reading authors whose writings are encyclopedic and visual, such as Umberto Eco, Salman Rushdie and (Jorge Luis) Borges."

He is also influenced by various visual elements be it "Bosch, Bruegel, Persian and Mughal miniatures, Japanese prints, 15th century Venetian old masters, comic books, films and theatre. I think there are certainly elements of graffiti art present in my work because it has informed my practice."

Banisadr's art, like the influences that drive it, is layered and complex. To appreciate his art, you need to let it slowly unravel. ■



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*Between Worlds* will show at Galerie Isa, Mumbai, till September 20, 2014. • [galerieisa.com](http://galerieisa.com)