

BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE



MAILINGLIST

ArtSeen

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Ali Banisadr

by Greg Lindquist

LESLIE TONKONOW ARTWORKS + PROJECTS | OCTOBER 30 - DECEMBER 20, 2008

Ali Banisadr has described his painting as a translation of sound into imagery, an attempt to synthesize the visual and auditory aspects of memory. For Banisadr, these memories are derived from the first twelve years of his life spent in Tehran, where he experienced the bombings of the Iran-Iraq war. His all-over compositions are populated by distinctive, distant figures reminiscent of those found in Persian miniatures and Hieronymous Bosch's landscapes, but they are rendered in Abstract Expressionist slashes and gestures that, when viewed up close, dissolve into lushly abstracted, layered surfaces and anonymous shapes. Often the only recognizable objects are rifles and missiles.



Ali Banisadr, "Untitled (Black 2)," 2008. 22 × 32 inches, oil on linen. Courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York.

Banisadr's blurring of details through surface and scale supports the material possibilities of painting. A similar result is achieved in the cryptic sexual imagery beneath Cecily Brown's impastoed surfaces or in Daniel Richter's more resolved figures from blots and blobs. Banisadr's landscapes such as *Black and Exxon* (both 2007) also recall the swirling compositions and ambiguous pictorial space of Matthew Richie, Julie Mehretu and Inka Essenhigh's earlier enamels. Banisadr's paintings are medium-sized in contrast to Brown, Richter, Richie and Mehretu's mural-scaled work; yet they accomplish remarkable shifts in scale through a miniaturist structure. These works also suggest Banisadr is at his best when he evokes the visual and auditory sensations of violence through the restlessness of his mark-making and surfaces rather than by relying on historical narratives, as he does in *The Hashasins* (2008).

If the sanguine sky in *Amen* (2008) emphasizes the violence in the landscape, then the placid blue-and-

white checkered sky and orange terrain in *Land of Black Gold* (2008) is a move away from it. These bright, geometric abstractions leave one feeling ironically cheery and at ease. While forms such as the banner-like patterns draped in the sky of *In the Name of* (2008) may nod to Banisadr's earlier associations with San Francisco graffiti culture, they risk being read as decorative.

Although the landscape paintings of Joan Miró bear little visual resemblance to Banisadr's, their shapes also never give way to complete recognition, creating a similar tension between figuration and abstraction. Produced in the 1920s, the sense of malaise in Miró's work reflects the political tensions that led to World War II. The instability, disorder and panic in Banisadr's paintings, on the other hand, saliently and poignantly highlight this pivotal time in our country's history, its staggering economic crises and foreign policy disasters.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Lindquist is an artist who makes paintings, sculpture, and installations that mostly deal with all things architectural entropy/decay/construction. He also writes regularly for the *Brooklyn Rail*. Not very many people know (until now) that he plays in a Brooklyn-based band called Nite Flights.

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