

The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg Announces Major Survey of Artist Ali Banisadr

Showcasing two decades of turbulent, chimerical paintings by Banisadr, The Alchemist marks a major milestone for one of contemporary painting's most distinctive voices



Ali Banisadr. *These fragments I have shored against my ruins*, 2023. Oil on linen. 86 x 180 in. (218.4 x 457.2 cm). Mohammed Afkhami Foundation. Photography by Genevieve Hanson. © Ali Banisadr

St. Petersburg, FL – This spring, the **Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg** (MFA) presents ***Ali Banisadr: The Alchemist***, a landmark exhibition celebrating one of the most visionary artists working today. On view from April 11 through July 12, 2026, this presentation marks the second major U.S. museum survey devoted to Ali Banisadr's singular practice. The exhibition brings together 34 works, including 22 oil paintings and 12 works on paper, spanning nearly twenty years of the artist's career, from 2006 to the present. *Ali Banisadr: The Alchemist* is organized by the Katonah Museum of Art.

Born in Tehran and now based in New York, Banisadr is renowned for densely populated compositions that shimmer with energy. His synesthesia—experiencing sound as color, movement, and textures—directly informs the vibrational, orchestral quality of his surfaces. Drawing on formative childhood memories of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88), where explosions and aural disruptions were part of daily life, Banisadr painstakingly constructs worlds that feel at once turbulent and celebratory.

*“Ali Banisadr’s work is a powerful testament to the vitality of contemporary art,” says **Klaudio Rodriguez, Executive Director & CEO of the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg.** “By bringing together two decades of his career, we invite our visitors into a world where global history and personal memory collide. It is a privilege to host an artist whose work so masterfully captures the complex rhythm and sensory depth of our time.”*

The exhibition illuminates Banisadr’s practice as a constant negotiation between chaos and composure, abstraction and representation. His images demonstrate a dazzling command of art history, philosophy, and world events, offering nuanced reflections on human nature. These works are rich with figurative illusions and anchored in autobiographical narrative, sonic recollection, invented storylines, collective memory, and mythology.

Rather than drawing on any one source, Banisadr synthesizes influences as varied as German Expressionism, late Medieval painting, Renaissance art, Mesopotamian antiquities, and Persian miniatures, transforming them into pictorial environments attuned to the instability and intensity of today’s world. Across these works, Banisadr reflects on cycles of conflict, instability, and renewal—offering a painterly response to a world shaped by displacement, political upheaval, and sensory overload.

*“Banisadr’s works are profoundly alive,” says **Dr. Stanton Thomas,** Hazel and William Hough **Chief Curator at the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg.** “He is an alchemist in the truest sense—transmuting memory, trauma, story, and sensation into visual worlds that pulse with immediacy. His work reminds us how contemporary painting can still astonish, challenge, and expand the ways we see ourselves.”*

The exhibition unfolds across the MFA galleries as a series of environments where memory, time, and perception collide and meaning unfurls slowly, like a story being told and retold across centuries.

Ali Banisadr: The Alchemist is organized by the Katonah Museum of Art.



Curated by Michelle Yun Mapplethorpe, Director and Chief Curator, Katonah Museum of Art.

Generous support provided by Art Bridges.



About Ali Banisadr

Born in Tehran, Iran in 1976, the artist grew up amidst the turmoil of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88). In 1988, Banisadr left Iran with his family at the age of twelve, first reaching Turkey and then San Diego, California. While living in San Francisco as a young adult, he became involved with the local graffiti art community while studying psychology. He later moved to New York City

where he earned a BFA at the School of Visual Arts (2005) and an MFA at the New York Academy of Art (2007). The artist currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Banisadr has been the subject of international solo museum exhibitions at the Museo Stefano Bardini and Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, (2021); Benaki Museum, Athens, (2020); Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, (2020); Gemäldegalerie, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, (2019); and the Het Noordbrabants Museum, Den Bosch, (2019).

His work has also been included in major group exhibitions including the Venice Biennale (2013) and Prague Biennale (2013). Banisadr's work is included in significant public collections including the Benaki Museum, Athens; British Museum, London; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Het Noordbrabants Museum, Den Bosch; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum der Moderne, Salzburg; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; and the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT, among others.

About the Museum of Fine Arts St. Petersburg

The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg (MFA) has an encyclopedic collection of art from around the globe and across the centuries, with almost 5,000 years of civilization represented in thousands of objects extending from antiquity to the present. The collection includes works by Georgia O'Keefe, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Auguste Rodin, Kehinde Wiley, Jacob Lawrence, and many others, as well as ancient Greek and Roman, Asian, African, Art of the Americas, and Native American art. The museum's photographic collection is one of the largest and most well-respected in the Southeast. The museum's rotating exhibition galleries feature a diverse selection of temporary exhibitions from all over the world, as well as exhibitions curated from the museum's extensive collection. In addition to its robust exhibition program, the MFA engages the community through exciting public programs and events and serves students through youth programs and a partnership with the Pinellas County School System.

About Art Bridges Foundation

Art Bridges Foundation is the vision of philanthropist and arts patron Alice Walton. Founded in 2017, Art Bridges creates and supports projects that share works of American art with communities across the United States and its territories. Art Bridges partners with a growing network of over 300 museums—impacting 25 million people nationwide—to provide financial and strategic support for exhibitions, collection loans, and programs designed to educate, inspire, and deepen engagement with local communities. The Art Bridges Collection represents an expanding vision of American art from the 19th century to present day and encompasses multiple media and voices. For more information, visit artbridgesfoundation.org.

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