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**Ali Banisadr / MATRIX 185 at the Wadsworth Marks Artist's
First Solo Museum Exhibition in the U.S.**

Hartford, Conn. (September 15, 2020)—Ali Banisadr draws freely from an encyclopedic knowledge of the history of painting to create a distinctive visual language, resulting in works that explore a “between space,” like those of hallucinations and dreams. *Ali Banisadr / MATRIX 185* at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is the artist’s first solo museum exhibition in the U.S. Ten paintings and two prints by Banisadr join a selection of works from the Wadsworth collection chosen by the artist, as well as a video collage that Banisadr created to show additional inspiration works from the museum’s collection. The exhibition opens October 22, 2020 and will be on view through February 14, 2021.

“Banisadr’s depictions of abstracted masses feel especially relevant right now,” says Patricia Hickson, Emily Hall Tremain Curator of Contemporary Art at the Wadsworth. “His compositions echo the disquiet we are witnessing across the world today, including political rallies, protest marches, and street riots. And yet, as timely as they are, they are equally timeless.”

Banisadr’s process has been related to synesthesia as sounds instruct the energy and rhythm in his painterly compositions. His perception of sound as inextricably linked to color and form began in his native Tehran, Iran during the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988)—the artist recalls drawing while sheltering at home. Living since in Turkey, California, and currently in New York, Banisadr’s life experiences have fueled his interest in different cultures.

Using both monochromatic and multicolor palettes, Banisadr heightens the drama of veiled masses in motion. While figures in the works are not quite human, individuals are differentiated by pattern and style. Like an all-seeing eye, Banisadr observes and considers societies past, present, and future, positioning his work as a critique on the human condition. His lively compositions explore intangible worlds that balance figuration and abstraction, order and disorder, energy and entropy.

As a complement to the exhibition, Ali Banisadr surveyed the Wadsworth's collection online and selected over 40 works from a variety of cultures—including prints, drawings, paintings, and sculpture dating from the sixteenth through twentieth century—to which he feels a connection. Whether abstract or representational, Banisadr finds a kinship in their subject matter: strangely vivid worlds often animated with disturbing creatures. A selection of these works join Banisadr's in the MATRIX gallery, including a panel painting after Hieronymus Bosch, etchings by Francisco Goya from his series *Los Caprichos*, woodblock prints by Utagawa Hiroshige, and a Joseph Cornell sculpture. Other works chosen by Banisadr remain on view elsewhere in the museum and are presented in a video collage created by the artist, available to view both online and in the museum. These include Surrealist masterpieces by Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, and Roberto Matta Echaurren in the Wadsworth's Avery Court; a painting of an angel by Fra Angelico in a gallery adjacent Morgan Great Hall; and a large Abstract Expressionist painting by Willem de Kooning in Huntington Gallery. A playlist curated by Banisadr is also available online, and expresses the integral role sound plays in his art making. Access the playlist and video collage via thewadsworth.org.

Related Programs

Virtual Gallery Talk: Ali Banisadr / MATRIX 185

Friday, October 23; 5pm

Artist Ali Banisadr leads a virtual tour of his MATRIX exhibition centered on his monumental abstract paintings. As part of his installation, Banisadr has mined the collections of the Wadsworth to share a selection of formal expressions and visual motifs that inform his own process.

Online Discussion: Ali Banisadr & Robert Hobbs

Friday, November 20; 5pm

Ali Banisadr composes abstract dreamscapes that describe his impressions of the trauma of war and conflict that he experienced as a child in his native Tehran. Banisadr will consider his MATRIX installation, his relationship to the history of art, and his perception of visual representations of sound in discussion with distinguished critic and professor emeritus of art history, Robert Hobbs.

Art Basel Online Viewing Room: Ali Banisadr in Conversation with Patricia Hickson Available via thewadsworth.org

Ali Banisadr discussed his new painting, *Red*, with curator Patricia Hickson plus select works by Max Ernst, and the artist's forthcoming MATRIX exhibition on June 20, 2020. Courtesy of Kasmin Gallery.

About the Artist

Banisadr is the subject of upcoming solo exhibitions at the Benaki Museum, Athens; and Museo Stefano Bardini & Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. He was recently the subject of solo and two-person museum exhibitions at Gemäldegalerie, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna; Het Noordbrabants Museum, Den Bosch, Netherlands; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville, FL. In 2013, his work was included in *Love Me/Love Me Not, Contemporary Art from Azerbaijan and its Neighbors*, The 55th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale; and *Expanded Painting*, Prague Biennale 6. Banisadr's work is included in significant public collections worldwide, including the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; the British Museum, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum der Moderne, Salzburg; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Banisadr is the subject of a forthcoming monograph, published by Rizzoli, to be released Spring 2021 to coincide with his upcoming exhibition at Kasmin Gallery.

About MATRIX

Inaugurated in 1975, MATRIX is the Wadsworth's groundbreaking contemporary art exhibition series featuring works by artists from around the world. From its inception, MATRIX has been a forum for art that is challenging, current, and sometimes controversial. Through clear explanation and thoughtful engagement with the viewer, MATRIX exhibitions call into question preconceptions about art and increase understanding of its possibilities. Many MATRIX artists, such as Christo, Byron Kim, Sol LeWitt, Glenn Ligon, Gerhard Richter, Cindy Sherman, Andy Warhol, and Carrie Mae Weems are now considered seminal figures in contemporary art.

Exhibition and Program Support

The MATRIX program is supported by the Wadsworth Atheneum's Contemporary Coalition. Sustaining support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided by Newman's Own Foundation and the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign.

Welcome Back

In line with the state's Reopen Connecticut guidelines the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is operating at limited capacity with timed entry. Hours in September are noon–5pm Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, closing from 2–3pm each day for cleaning. Visit thewadsworth.org for current hours and admission. To enter the museum, advance reservations are required and can be made online via thewadsworth.org. All visitors must enter and exit via the museum's Avery Memorial entrance, located at 29 Atheneum Square North. Visitors are required to wear a face mask and observe a safe social distance of 6 feet from others while on the grounds of the Wadsworth and inside the museum.

About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Founded in 1842 with a vision for infusing art into the American experience, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is home to a collection of nearly 50,000 works of art spanning 5,000 years and encompassing European art from antiquity through contemporary as well as American art from the 1600s to today. The Wadsworth Atheneum's five connected buildings—representing architectural styles including

Gothic Revival, modern International Style, and 1960s Brutalism—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Conn. Hours: noon–5pm on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Admission: free through November 26, 2020; \$15 adults; \$12 seniors; \$5 students; free for members, Hartford residents, and youth (age 17 and under). Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.

Image captions (left; right): Ali Banisadr, *The Prophet*, 2020. Oil on linen; *Red*, 2020. Oil on linen. Courtesy of the artist and Kasmin Gallery, New York.

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