

“Biopic: Ali Banisadr.” *Modern Painters*, June/July 2017, p. 32.

BIOPIC



Trust in the Future, 2017.
Oil on linen,
82 x 120 in.

ALI BANISADR

How synesthesia taught the artist to paint by sound

I grew up in Iran during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. Hearing the sounds of exploding bombs and feeling the vibrations caused by the air raids first activated the desire to transform these sensations into visuals, both shapes and colors. I started making drawings to try to make sense out of what was happening around me. Looking back, those were my first encounters with synesthesia. Later on, I discovered that some artworks I saw made sounds to me, and those were the works that spoke to me. In reverse, a certain kind of music transforms into visuals.

When I paint, I listen to the sounds that emanate from each brushstroke or color. It’s not like music; my paintings have their own sounds, like singular notes. This helps me compose the work and gives me a direction. As soon as I put the brush down,

the sound begins. Different marks or colors have different sounds, so it becomes about creating harmonies and varieties within the painting. Different parts of the painting activate different sounds, different voices.

I did not know what synesthesia was until recently. I was always obsessed with the things I saw in my imagination and with the sounds I heard. It made me look into psychology because I wanted to know more about it. When I found out that there is an actual name for the phenomenon, and that Wassily Kandinsky had written about it in relation to his own art, I was so intrigued. All my works are composed based on this sound, this sensation, this feeling that I could never explain. The only way I can truly understand it is by painting—when I’m able to communicate

the sounds to myself and, on some level, to others.

I always wanted to create a scene like the one in my painting pictured here, *Trust in the Future*, but had never felt successful before. For me, it has the sound and feeling of snow: the quiet calm of being out in a vast landscape covered in white flakes and ice, and with wind that can feel like a sharp sword cutting into your body. It sounds like what you hear when you step on fresh snow, the crunch that echoes underneath your feet. To me, this painting is like mist and the figures are like clouds—not solid or tangible. It is loud and silent at the same time. MP

Ali Banisadr’s solo exhibition “Trust in the Future” is on view at Sperone Westwater through June 24.