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Patton, Charlie. "The big picture: New MOCA exhibit looks at large, small artworks."
www.jacksonville.com (The Florida Times-Union), 9 February 2019.

The Florida Times-Union
jacksonville.com



New York artist Andrew Sendor and Ali Banisadr gave a tour of their exhibit Micro-Macro to museum staff at MOCA Jacksonville as the show was in the final stages of being hung last week. [All Photos: Bob Self/Florida Times Union]

At first glance it's not obvious why the Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville has created a new exhibit, "Micro-Macro," which pairs paintings by Andrew Sendor and Ali Banisadr, two New York-based painters with very different styles.

Sendor's work consists primarily of small-scale photorealistic paintings. Banisadr's work consists mostly of large-scale, predominantly abstract paintings.

What connects them and made Caitlin Doherty, MOCA's director and acting curator, want to put work together is that both men are storytellers.

"The ability to weave narrative and the theatrical allow both Sendor and Banisadr to operate individually as storytellers," Doherty said.

Sendor's paintings begin as written stories about a fictional world he has created. He then gets performance artists to act out the stories. He takes pictures of those performances.



Ali Banisadr and MOCA Jacksonville director Caitlin Doherty look at Banisadr's painting 'All The Hemispheres' as the final touches were put on the new exhibit last week.

Many of his recent paintings feature Saturday, a professional horse trainer who has worked with a horse named Bhaya. His 2017 painting "Saturday's Ascent" portrays a mountain-climbing expedition to Greenland which Saturday joins and from which she does not return when expected. A sequel painting, "Saturday's Descent," is "very detailed," Sendor said.

Banisadr said he was initially surprised to be paired with Sendor.

"We're so different," he said.

But as he thought about the pairing, he recognized "we have a lot in common," he said.

Banisadr's approach to storytelling is less involved than Sendor's. But like Sendor, he said, "there is a performance aspect in the studio. We have these worlds in our heads."

The difference, he said, is that Sendor "is like a movie director and I'm more like a theater director." "Ali's work has so much energy" Sendor said. "My work is so slow."

Doherty got to know Sendor during his 2015-16 exhibit at The Eli and Edyth Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, where she was chief curator and deputy director of curatorial affairs before being hired by MOCA last year.

She said it was Sendor who introduced her to Banisadr.

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Andrew Sendor looks at the hanging of one of his artworks.

“I saw his work and was blown away by it,” she said.

So she decided to have them do a joint exhibit at MOCA.

“The question is what will viewers see, and perhaps even hear in their mind’s eye, when given a glimpse into these painters’ imaginary world,” Doherty said.

Banisadr was born in 1976 in Tehran, Iran. His childhood was marked by the Iranian Revolution and the Iran and Iraq war before his family emigrated in 1988, first to Turkey, then to California.

He moved to New York City in 2000. He currently lives in Brooklyn. He earned a bachelor’s degree from the School of Visual Arts in 2005 and a master’s in fine arts from the New York Academy of Art in 2007. His work is in public collections at the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo, N.Y, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.



Artist Ali Banisadr talks about his work during a tour of the new exhibit at MOCA Jacksonville.

Sendor, born in 1977, lives in New York City. He received a bachelor’s of fine art from the Pratt Institute in 2000. His work is in public collections at the Broad Art Museum at Michigan State and The Morgan Library and Museum in New York City.

“Micro-Macro: Andrew Sendor and Ali Banisadr” will run through July 28 at MOCA Jacksonville, 333 N. Laura St.

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MOCA Jacksonville educator Lindsay Bower gets a closer look at Ali Banisadr's painting 'Trust in the Future' as Andrew Sendor's painting 'Lafayette with Bhaya on the southwest wall of Saturday's living room' hangs on the adjacent wall of the gallery.



Ali Banisadr's large triptych 'Fravashi' hangs on the wall of MOCA Jacksonville.

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Andrew Sendor's tiny oil painting 'Walitha with a found arm at Death Butter Lake, Wednesday, November 16th (Included in Saturday's Altar on Monday, December 5th)'.



MOCA Jacksonville director Caitlin Doherty points out figures in the swirl of brush strokes and color in Ali Banisadr's painting 'Aleph.'

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Artist Andrew Sendor talks about his work as MOCA Jacksonville director Caitlin Doherty looks on.