

This Brooklyn-based artist uses ancient symbolism to express modern ideas in MFA St. Pete's exhibition "Ali Banisadr: The Alchemist". (Spectrum Bay News 9)

ART EXHIBITION

Artist Ali Banisadr studies ancient symbols to inform his modern works

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ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — For an artist whose work is being featured at the Museum of Fine Arts St. Petersburg, he explains how a step back in time is influencing his modern work.

"And that's the thing that I'm fascinated by — like tracing images from popular culture all the way back to ancient times," said artist Ali Banisadr at the opening of his exhibition "Ali Banisadr: The Alchemist" at the Museum of Fine Arts St. Petersburg through July 12, 2026.

There are two decades of his work there, and there are repeating figures throughout his pieces — one from an ancient Egyptian tarot card, the symbol of a retired king.

"He really makes those paintings come alive. And he delves into the painting, into the literature behind it to the symbolism to the history," said MFA Sr. Pete Curator Stanton Thomas.

For Thomas, who is hosting Banisadr for an opening preview, he offered a unique opportunity.

'It is such a joy to be able to communicate with the artist; normally I work with Old Masters who've been dead for centuries," said Thomas.

For Banisadr, his work is a chance to bring his study of ancient cultural archetypes to life.

He's got references for Artificial Intelligence in his work.

Also, look for this artist with a dinosaur head in his different pieces. That's a self-portrait.

"And for me, it was like a symbolic way to talk about me as a painter who is using this old ancient traditional technique to say something about our present time," said Banisadr.

It may be a modern world, but the ancient images remain the same.