

INTERNATIONAL ARTS | SPECIAL REPORT: THE ART OF COLLECTING

# A Universal Story Told in Resin

## The Indonesian Painter Arin Dwihartanto Sunaryo Is Showing at the FIAC Art Fair in Paris

By RACHEL WILL OCT. 23, 2014

BANDUNG, Indonesia — Including the Indonesian painter Arin Dwihartanto Sunaryo in an exhibition of Southeast Asian artists makes sense — until the universal nature of his art comes over you.

At 36, Mr. Sunaryo has already gained international acclaim as one of the 22 artists chosen for the Guggenheim Museum’s “No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia” exhibition in 2013. His abstract compositions challenge painterly tradition through the use of industrial production methods and the inclusion of elements like photographic images and volcanic dust within large resin panels.

Visitors to the FIAC art fair in Paris will have a chance to see Mr. Sunaryo’s work on Friday at a pop-up show of Southeast Asian artists held by the Arndt gallery at the Association France-Amériques, opposite the fair’s headquarters in the Grand Palais. Mr. Sunaryo is showing two circular resin works: “Ashes to Ashes” and “Dust to Dust.”

“When I first came to his studio, nothing looked Asian to me,” Matthias Arndt, the founder of the Arndt gallery in Berlin, said by telephone. “His work was just contemporary statements about what art and painting is today, that were not to be located within Asia or the international sphere. It was about the universal language of art in Indonesia.”

Mr. Sunaryo grew up in the Indonesian arts hub of Bandung during a politically tumultuous period. Many of his artist peers were grappling with how to

navigate the fall of the Suharto authoritarian regime in 1998. Mr. Sunaryo grew bored with the overt politics of the resulting artworks and instead chose to infuse his paintings with themes from a different place entirely: Japanese manga and science fiction.

In 2006, while pursuing a graduate degree at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London, he threw away his paintbrushes in favor of using his hands and pouring oil paints directly on canvas. The change in technique also represented a move away from the influence of his father, Sunaryo Soetono, 71, a celebrated painter and founder of the Selasar Sunaryo gallery in Bandung.

“When I came to London this kind of awareness appeared about my Indonesian identity,” Mr. Sunaryo said during an interview at his CA 3A Studio in Bandung.

“I forced myself to learn about batik and Indonesian history, but somehow it seemed really unnatural,” he said. “I realized that identity doesn’t have to be wayang,” or puppets, “or batik. It can appear in many objects and images.”

During a 2008 visit to Bandung from London, Mr. Sunaryo began experimenting with pigmented resin. He poured liquid resin over a canvas, intending to create a glossy coating, but instead a sheath covered the surface where it dried. He continued to experiment with resin, alternating splashes and drips on flat surfaces, allowing what he calls the “natural character” of the liquid to emerge. By pressing glass against the still wet compositions during its fleeting 15-minute drying window, Mr. Sunaryo could capture the fluid’s unpredictable flow.

He returned home a year later and began working exclusively with resin. The resulting paintings are manifestations of chance and experimentation, a record of the unexpected.

Mr. Sunaryo has worked extensively with color. His 2012 “frozen | stratum” exhibition at Nadi Gallery in Jakarta features digital images printed directly on the resin panels. In his most famous series, he works exclusively in muted, natural colors and includes volcanic ash collected from the 2010 eruption of Indonesia’s Mount Merapi. The “Volcanic Ash Series” does not present an emotional or political statement about the event — in fact, Mr. Sunaryo did not

visit the site until a year after the eruption — but rather detachment from his subject.

“Before synthetic resin there was natural resin that came from pine trees and amber,” he said. “Microorganisms can be caught in natural resin for thousands of years. With the volcanic ash series, I am also preserving these materials, the event, the movement of the resin, the color and the ideas, so somehow they have this kind of mysterious relationship with each other.”

It was his 2012 painting, “Volcanic Ash Series #4,” that was acquired by the Guggenheim Museum as part of the “No Country” exhibition.

“Arin’s work, on one hand, is very painterly, very abstract, sort of gestural and it feels as if it is devoid of overt politics,” June Yap, curator of the exhibition, said by telephone. “But yet because of the material he has embedded in the resin you have that cataclysmic effect that you have his social engagement within the work as well.”

Mr. Sunaryo’s latest works reveal and take advantage of his awareness of the excesses of his process. The scrap resin from his paintings quickly hardens and become unusable. Layer upon layer of the multicolored byproduct collected in boxes in his studio until he realized them as sculptures. The dripping colors and seemingly melting scraps capture the timeline of earlier paintings on the bottom, rising to newer on top.

Like the microorganisms trapped in amber for thousands of years, Mr. Sunaryo has created a documentation of his works over time.

“My paintings don’t have to be slick or shiny,” he said. “The sculptures show that resin can also appear as something rough or raw.”

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