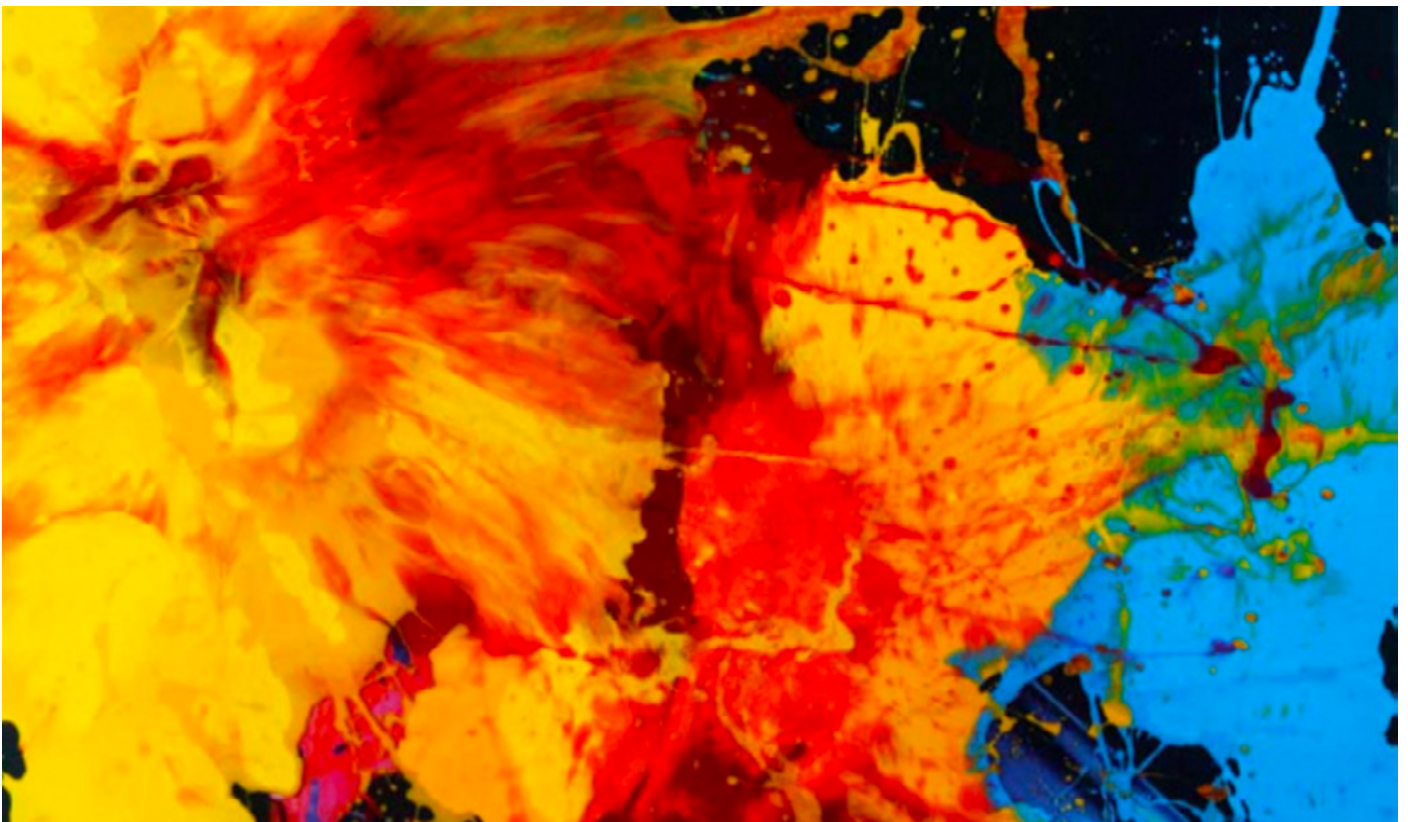




# Giving Up Control

## Arin Dwihartanto Sunaryo



Text: CoBo Editorial Force; Images: Courtesy of Artist

The abstract art of Indonesian artist Arin Dwihartanto Sunaryo is pushing the boundaries of what paintings can be. Mainly working with resins, Arin's process is a continuous adjusting to the unknown, the unexpected, the uncontrolled. Can this ethos perhaps be the new direction in which young conceptual Bandung artists are heading?

“Have you seen Jurassic Park?” asks Bandung-based artist Arin Dwihartanto Sunaryo. “Fossil resin can preserve insects for millions of years.” As the artist throws at me this question, I wonder if it was perhaps this childlike fascination that led Arin to his methodical study of resin for his art.

Forget Jurassic Park's amber – the resin that Arin uses is of a different kind: “I live in the industrial era, so I use synthetic resin. For me it is a representation of modern times. It is a very common product, easy to get, but the real reason I am using it, is because I can get synthetic colours, neon colour, shiny like jewellery, like toys.” Arin's canvases are indeed magnetic; part abstraction, part action painting, these are realized with a method borrowed from Jackson Pollock and Morris Louis.

## **How did your process for art making evolved?**

When I first travelled to France, Germany and Switzerland to see art I became more aware of what I was doing as a painter. Why this medium, why it has to be on canvas, why I use oil colours. Very basic questions. So when I finally moved to London to study, I decided to start from scratch. I just wanted to learn from the very basics. I started negotiating with the material I used, trying to have a discussion with this liquid which is oil paint. So, I threw away all of my brushes and I directly poured the oil paint on the canvas. I took advantage of gravity and shook the canvas on the floor, playing around with the movements of the liquid oil.

## **When did you first start using resin, your trademark material?**

In 2008 I borrowed some resin from my father's sculpting studio and clumsily started experimenting with it on the canvas. I made a mess and the resin spilt all over the place. The next day, when the resin dried up, I realized it created interesting shapes. It was similar to what I did in London, playing around with the fluidity of the oil. From that moment on, I started experimenting with resin. That opened up a new dimension for painting, for art making. I saw how much I could learn from this material.

## **A series of paintings was inspired by the 2010 eruption of Mount Merapi; how did you integrated that event into abstraction?**

I splashed resin combining it with the volcanic ash. The look of the work reminded me of the eruption, or an explosion. I didn't want to specifically talk about the event or the tragedy. It was more about preserving the moment or representing the event. You can see the particle of ashes as a pigment in the painting and it is the story of our nation. Abstract work is not just composition of colour or emotion, but it can also tell a story about identity and history. It is very flexible, very open.



## **You usually don't take any image as point of departure to start the work, but I guess having accumulated experience over the years, you know that if you pull the resin in a certain way, you can get a given result. How much of the image-making process is controlled?**

This has always been a challenge for me, because in my art I really have to negotiate with nature. I cannot control it. Resin might take 50 minutes to dry, and in that time the colour is still moving. So, even though I try to control it, I can't. Another example of giving up control in my art is in my collaborations with other people who don't have any art background, like my mother. I did my Mother and child series, and my Mum splashed the resin on the canvas together with me.

**How do you choose colour? Your previous work seems to be more bright and vibrant, and the most recent series with the volcanic ash is darker and subtler.**

I use synthetic resin from a factory, so it is a chemical industrial material. I chose from a CMYK colour chart, which creates millions of possibilities. For the Volcanic Ash series, I had to be more monochromatic because it reminded me of an eruption. The whole city was greyish and had a monochromatic atmosphere. Then, in the recent works I have used metal powder, like brass and copper, mixed with volcanic ash. The relationship between volcanic ashes, minerals and metal powder was explained to me by a professor of geology. He said that all the minerals come from the earth, so every single grain of volcanic ash contains gold, silver, copper, all minerals in small amounts. You can see how every experience working with resin, turns out to be exciting and inspiring. That is why resin is for me a door to possibilities. I still have accidents, but I like accidents, as they can open up potential for the work.

**Your father Sunaryo Soetono is also a celebrated artist. Does he give you feedback on your work?**

Yes. We have a lot of discussions. Sometimes he wants to hear my opinion about his own work too. He is like a friend, a sparring partner. It is really fun to hear his generation's perspective because he has a different view about art. Bandung used to be known like the abstraction laboratory of Indonesia, more western-oriented, more about abstract formalism. I am definitely doing this type of work. Perhaps Bandung abstraction is today moving towards something new and different. This is the kind of discussions I have with my dad.

**Even if your art is very different from the one of your father, have you been influenced by him?**

Of course, my earlier works. I used to steal his paint and his charcoals. In the beginning, living at my dad's and being exposed to his work, I unconsciously imitated his technique and his brush strokes. When I went to London, however, I got rid of that. I wanted to create a distance with my dad artistically and see what I actually had to say myself. It was a formative period; I was trying to find my own identity. London represented a very important shift for me to actually level up my thinking, my technique, my method and my views about art. About life ultimately.

**Did he encourage you to become an artist?**

Actually, my Dad wanted me to be an architect or a product designer, but when I told him I wanted to study at the university here in Bandung – where he was teaching design and fine art – he got mad. At the time art in Indonesia was not as exciting as it is today, and he thought there was no future in it. After two days he finally gave up and told me: “Okay Arin, becoming an artist is not easy, so you have to work very hard and I hope you can survive as an artist”.

**How did you find the art scene when you came back to Bandung from London in 2009? Did you notice any changes?**

Yes. I missed the boom, because when I left Indonesia in 2003/2004 it was still relatively quiet. The boom happened in 2006 and the prices went crazy. It slowed down in 2008 and 2009. In London at the time the economy was not that great, so it was a blessing for me to come home. It was also good timing because the art scene was concentrating on Southeast Asia and China, so there were possibilities of having commissions or agents for Indonesian artists.

## **How would you describe the artists of your generation?**

Because of the gap period when I was in the UK, once back in Indonesia I bonded more with the younger emerging artists rather than the one from my generation. And in general Bandung is more individualistic and artists stay in their studios and work alone. That is why in Bandung you can't identify a distinctive style. I might do abstraction and my artist neighbour might make video art. I think this kind of freedom is exciting. Even though Bandung used to be quieter compared to Yogyakarta, I am very confident that in the next couple of years it will become increasingly dynamic.