

We are Ultraviolla

ULTRAVIOLLA is a series of vivid photographic portraits characterised by its radiant fluorescent hues and luminescence. This distinct feature of the artworks is a result of using ultraviolet (UV) spectrum as sole lighting source in its photo-taking process. The artist, Rony 'Rebellionik' Rahardian, or Onik as he is more commonly known among his peers, has gone through a journey of discoveries by way of trial and error, often by chance, in perfecting his own language using the technique more specifically called UV-induced fluorescence photography.

UV-induced visible fluorescence refers to the emission of visible light from a substance being irradiated by ultraviolet radiation. In its photography, no filter is used to absorb violet visible light. UV induced visible fluorescence photography must take place in a darkened room, preferably with a black background. Fluorescence itself is dependent upon the wavelength of radiation and the electronic structure of the material. When a piece of clothing illuminates as it gets exposed to UV light, in nightclubs or theme parks for example, the fluorescence is likely caused by the addition of optical brightening agent to many commercial fabrics. A material may show no fluorescence using one kind of UV, but strong fluorescence using another.

Even though natural UV rays found in sunlight is known for its damaging affect on artworks, observation of UV-induced visible fluorescence, documented through photography, has been widely used in art conservation as a non-destructive examination. Its use appeared in the conservation field as early as 1925 and since then has been developed and adopted by many conservators as a standard examination procedure for art and cultural objects.

The earliest UV-induced fluorescence photography for visual aesthetics purposes found as far back as late 19th century in a form of floral photography, since some parts of certain flowers illuminate under UV light naturally. This was done with careful considerations of the wavelengths of the UV light source and the emitted light. In fine art photography, which is gaining popularity since 1970s in the western art world and within the last decade in the east, not many artworks recorded that were created using this technique. It is perhaps due to its unpredictable and experimental nature, where the trend is now toward careful staging and lighting. In this aspect, I found a hint of similarity with Angki Purbandono's scanography, which is also a technique not widely known or practiced in art photography.

Introduced to UV light during his final year of Architecture degree at University Parahyangan, Bandung in 2003, Onik became fascinated with this element that later became the key to his art. "There is a great character in UV. When you turn off the lights, a whole new world turns on," he explained. From 2008-2010, he studied under Anton Ismael, one of Indonesia's top commercial and later art photographers, and honed his photography skills before opening his own multi-disciplinary design house in 2009. Born in 1979, Onik found UV lights represent much of himself who rather not conform to normal conventions.

In the creative process, Onik experimented with many kinds of paper, thread, wire, plastic, paint, to ready-made objects ... any substance he could find that are 'responsive' to UV lighting. At first, his focus was in creating a compelling composition and visual structure in the attempt to capture what his imagination desired. While his symmetrical composition that forms visible and invisible lines within his canvas is evidently a trait from Onik's architectural background. It was during his preparation for a group exhibition organized by NYLON magazine in 2011 that the motion effect (of the fluorescent materials) started to appear in his artworks. This created stroke-like effects like you would see in paintings.

In mid 2013, he then developed his techniques further and created a series of photographic canvases focusing on capturing movement for a month-long exhibition at Plaza Indonesia. At this time, Onik has gained more confidence, which is also shown from his body of work – his lines were bolder, the colours more vibrant, and the composition more abstract. Another notable development during this period was his success in achieving three-dimensional depth of his subject by treating the black lights (UV lamp tubes) similar to photographic lighting in a general photography setting. One of the challenges for Onik as he admits, is in convincing people that his artwork is a one-shot photographic artwork with little or no digital imaging process, except for very minor contrast adjustment.

When observing ULTRAVIOLLA artworks as a unity, it is undoubtedly a series of portraits - each with a unique persona. With its Warhol inspired neon bright colours and edgy artistic style, Onik's artwork is a representation of today's urban generation. Quoted from an article on the artist, "We live where the space is undefined and the time is indefinite; a space where the line between digital and analogue is no longer exist. We are a species who live under the sky of trembling radio waves, walk on a field of lush bandwidth and speak language of data encryption. We are [essentially] Ultraviolla."

At the end of 2013 a sad occasion marked Onik's life with the passing of his mother. The event gave him inspiration for his latest series, the 'Noir' series. Stripped bare of his usual colourful palette, the Noir series exude a more reflective and spiritual tone. With maturity in technique at grasp, this series illustrate deep and private dialogues between the artist and His Creator. Before God humans are naked from anything worldly and materially, but our conscience and deeds. In total darkness is when we tend to see the light clearer.

Presenting you ULTRAVIOLLA as his debut exhibition, Rebellionik is showcasing his years of in-depth creative explorations of using UV light in the language of art photography. The result is not only a fresh alternative to create photographic art, but also a new dimension of seeing that offers at the very least a feast of visual experience for the viewer.

- Aisha Habir