

Metaforms: Indonesian Artist Handiwirman Saputra

Our friends at Art Republik look at the works of Indonesian artist Handiwirman Saputra from a different approach.

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“What does it mean?” These days, we often still encounter this question when facing an artwork. In Handiwirman Saputra’s artistic practice, the question has no answer. As a visual artist, Handiwirman is sure that what he presents is a kind of a vision, a manifestation, a form; not a meaning. One of the ways to avoid being trapped in the need for meaning, intention, sense and so on, is to change this cliché question.

“What is it?” The answer might be simple, or perhaps not. The object is the object itself. It’s a painting, a sculpture, an object, an installation, a photograph and so on. What is certain is that it is a work of art – along with all the values that accompany it.

Handiwirman’s work is not the answer to any kind of issue; neither is it a question about anything at all. Handiwirman’s work is something to be seen and experienced. The viewer has the right to give their experience of looking its own meaning. The viewer has the right to build whatever relationship they want with the object that the artist presents. If they so desire, the viewer of course has the right to bestow meaning on the work they are observing.

To quote ST Sunardi, “In essence, the artwork asks to be seen.”

Thus, in front of an artwork, just look. After you’ve looked, what do you like? Or do you see something that piques your curiosity? How do you interpret that visual experience? Are you interested in opening a dialogue with what you have seen? Thus, the viewer is not merely shifting into the position of the audience, but is becoming part of the whole arrangement: presented. They experience the work and thus they become part of the work.

The artist’s aspirations are simple: Present forms, manifestations, visions, that invite experience. What kind of experience does he expect? Whatever. It could be an experience of formation, it could be beauty, or it could even be a tool for discussion that is external to the manifestation itself.

The key words in Handiwirman’s artistic practice are: experiencing, experienced, experience, treatment, behaviour, objects, manifestations, visions. For him, it is impossible to talk, communicate or connect with anyone without shared – or at least similar – experiences. He imagines the process of making the work, and how a person enjoys the work, to be the same thing.

“If there is something that can be called pure expression, then only a mad man possesses it. He has no purpose. He draws just to draw. Like Suyar, the mad man who likes to draw near campus. I liked to watch the way that he drew. Then, I decided that to achieve something that could be called pure expression, you had to be like Suyar.”

Handiwirman had discovered several substantial ways of thinking within his creative process, especially concerning the mimetic intentions of realistic paintings. According to him, the tradition of realistic painting has a strong basis in aesthetic interests that are completely non-objective. When an artist claims to shift a ‘still life’ onto canvas, in fact, consciously or unconsciously they are following the logic of two dimensional picturing, which is always limited by the scale and characteristics of painting. Because of this, the beauty that a landscape painting radiates never actually reflects the beauty of nature itself.

“Then I started thinking about painting again. What kind of expression could be seen as pure?”

Handiwirman’s solo exhibition ‘Material Matters’, curated by Enin Supriyanto and commissioned by Fumio Nanjo, showed at TOLOT/heuristic SHINONOME in Tokyo, Japan, in 2015.

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By Grace Samboh