



Former artisan Handiwirman offers freshness

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Amid the many art exhibitions in the capital, Handiwirman's solo exhibition at the Nadi Gallery opened without the usual luster, yet the mixed-media paintings of the onetime artisan are a refreshing break from the banalities currently seeping into the art scene.

Fresh in their pastel hues, his paintings well deserve the term decorative, and while his abstract shapes are sometimes puzzling, they are nonetheless soothing.

For the artist, however, this is just a way to show the fallacy of appearances, the illusion of sight.

"Don't believe that what you see is what it is, for whatever image you think you see comes from an inner perception," said Handiwirman.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder?

Handiwirman, a young artist from Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, was schooled at the Indonesian Art Institute in Yogyakarta and is known for his three-dimensional work, in which his ingenious craftsmanship came to full fruition. Led by an incessant quest for the "why" burning in his mind, he came to the conclusion that every single object has a life of its own and evokes changing perceptions in the viewer.

Handi, as he is called, continued to paint as he continued with his three-dimensional creations.

Now he has come to the point where he wishes to portray his objects on canvas. Flat and without volume, but riddling and finely executed with soothing color themes, they are appealing, perhaps more so than his three-dimensional pieces.

In the series *Pose*, Handi presents a rather abstract style blended with realism. Paintings of sofas with changing, sleek abstract figures, of objects wrought from cotton wool, unfired clay or synthetic hair may induce a viewer to seek the meaning behind the images.

One would be inclined to give meaning to the changing positions of the sleek, almost amorphous entity on the couch, but the artist insists it was only to test the viewer's awareness of the changing positions on the couch, or the illusion thereof.

The same idea is found in a painting that looks like the skull of an animal with gaping eye sockets -- the result of Handi's squeezing the back of a doll's head, painted in gray on pastel green.

Handi is also working with synthetic hair, evoking the object's symbolic relevance in various cultures and traditions.

Just think of the Old Testament and Samson's hair, or the Chinese Tang the Victorious, who offered his hair as a surrogate of himself, or the Sulawesi and Sumatra beliefs that a child's hair must be allowed to grow to avoid the danger of destroying the soul within it.

In contemporary art, Nindityo Adipurnomo has used the traditional hair attachment, or *konde*, as a symbol of the Javanese women's burden, even using his own pubic hair in installations, while renowned Gu Wenda has used hair to represent the Chinese Diaspora.

For Handi, however, none of these were in his vocabulary -- he did not even know such beliefs existed. For him, hair was important simply because of its linear shape. "I have drawn thousands of lines," he said, and hair was exactly like a line, straight and continuous.

He experiments with hair and his idea of illusion, pulling together a

bundle of hair with cotton wool and a sheet of plastic and painting this against a light-blue background in *Object No. 3: Mental Series*. Taking his experiments a step further, he adds neon lighting.

On a piece of blue-gray painted plywood measuring 140 by 140 cm, bars of neon light spread horizontally across hair arranged to render an illusion of looking at the back of a man's or a woman's headdress.

In this piece, Handi explores the impact of light and succeeds in eliminating shadow as an effect of light. Shadow is also eliminated in a three-dimensional work consisting of a ball suspended on a string and surrounded by bars of neon light.

Although Handiwirman has had to plan out the theory behind these complex experiments, for the beholder the creative process is not important, nor is it of interest to understand the title of the exhibition, taken from an old Indonesian hit song. Instead, they can just sit back and enjoy Handi's large acrylic paintings.

Apa-apanya dong?, solo exhibition by Handiwirman, runs from Sept. 16 to Sept. 30 at the Nadi Gallery, Jl. Kedoya Raya 53, Jakarta 11520. The gallery may be contacted at Tel. 5818129.

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