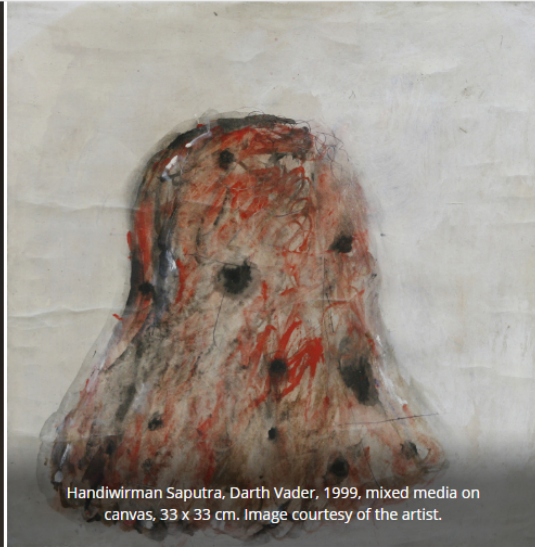


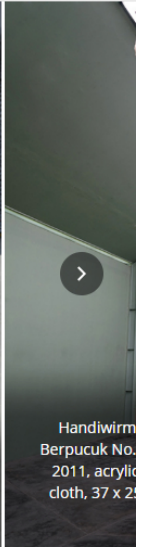
Trash or abstraction? Handiwirman Saputra makes beauty out of debris



Handiwirman Saputra, Darth Vader, 1999, mixed media on canvas, 33 x 33 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.



Handiwirman Saputra, Letakkan Di Ujung, 2014. Installation view at the artist's studio. Image courtesy of the artist.



Handiwirman Saputra, Berpucuk No. 2011, acrylic cloth, 37 x 23 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

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Naima Morelli
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Naima Morelli is an art writer

From dirty riverbanks to the shores of Venice, Yogyakarta-based artist Handiwirman Saputra tells us the story of our objects.

TEXT: Naima Morelli

Indonesian artist Handiwirman Saputra believes that inspiration and clarity doesn't arise from thought alone, but rather from engagement. "Most of my inspiration is obtained when I get down to work," he says. "This is why I try to show up at the studio every day."

Currently working on a new series called "Sentimentil Project" (Sentimental Project) for his upcoming solo exhibition at Nadi Gallery, Jakarta, he explains how all the processes to make his artworks are carried out in his studio. Here, he has a large range of equipment at his disposal, and works with a team of four people. "We learn and operate together to solve technical problems for what concerns the production of three-dimensional works," says the artist. "As for the two-dimensional works, the paintings, I always do them myself."





Handiwirman Saputra, Darth Vader, 1999, mixed media on canvas, 33 x 33 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.



Handiwirman Saputra, Letakkan Di Ujung, 2014. Installation view at the artist's studio. Image courtesy of the artist.

His studio—or “Balaikeseharian” as he calls it—is located in southern Yogyakarta, in the suburb of Kalipakis. The area, which is home to several artist studios and art spaces, still retains a countryside feel to it, even though it is not far from the central hub of the city.

The rural location of the studio itself was the impetus behind a work he created for the 2019 Venice Biennale, which was exhibited at the Arsenale. Called “No Roots, No Shoots” (“Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk”), it consisted of a series of enigmatic, abstract sculptures and paintings. Inspired by the garbage on the riverbanks in front of his studio brought on by a flood, he became curious about the objects and its origin, and how alien they looked in the natural landscape.





Handiwirman Saputra, Tak Berakar Tak Berpucuk No. 8 (No Roots, No Shoots No. 8), 2011, acrylic, fiberglass, resin and sarong cloth, 37 x 25 x 497 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

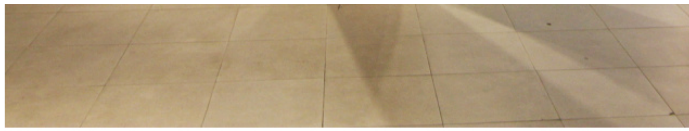
“Some were stuck in the tree roots, some were squeezed under the rocks, and others were floating on the puddle at the edge of the river. Some could still be recognized but others couldn’t. Some were wrapped around one another, overlapped, dangling and covered in mud. This weird spectacle was quite amazing to me,” he says. “I was compelled to start taking pictures of the landscape. And I re-arranged the photograph in the studio as observational materials.”

From these first “visual notes” he ended up creating the guidelines for an ecological direction of his work, building metaphors to discuss consumerism and accumulation in contemporary society. His participation in the Arsénale provided him just the right platform.

At the latest Venice Biennale we have seen how the object is yet again the focus of your work. In the Arsénale you not only represented it on canvas, but also transformed it into installations. What first drew you to start experimenting with installation art and ready-made objects?

I always felt objects and materials represent relics, directly correlated with the usage that people make of them during their lifetime. By bringing these objects into the context of fine arts, “misplacing them,” I can lead viewers into their own memories. The object has the power to spark intense conversation in assessing and interpreting life.





Handiwirman Saputra, Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk No. 5 (No Roots, No Shoots No.5), 2011, resin fibre, screen print puff ink, cloth, plastic, corrugated roof, wire, acrylic paint, 339 x 255 x 119 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.



Handiwirman Saputra, Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk No. 7 (No Roots, No Shoots No.7), 2011, plywood, cloth, corrugated roof sheet, screen print puff ink, steel, acrylic paint, 183 x 118 cm each. Image courtesy of the artist.

You didn't come from the typical path into becoming an artist, and you always took an interest in many different fields beyond visual arts. Do you think this informed your approach to the objects?

It is true that I didn't start off wanting to become an artist. My interest in the beginning was in engineering and design. However, since I did not fulfill the requirements to enroll in the engineering department, I took on a woodworking major at Indonesian Institute of the Arts, Yogyakarta (ISI Jogja). After studying woodcraft and mingling with the Society of Fine Art campus for a while, I developed an interest in fine arts and wanted to learn more about it. What attracted me was first and foremost the novelty that art would bring to my life.

Another element, which I see as having been part of your practice since the beginning, is a willingness to discuss the most pertinent issues of our time. Did the liberal atmosphere at ISI Jogja, which is historically known for welcoming socio-political artistic explorations, have an influence on this?

Yes, most students did their most activities on campus, and so meetings with friends felt quite intense and fruitful. In a few occasions, this led to spontaneous ideas to be executed together. Back then, access to the Internet was few and far between; fine art books were also very limited in libraries. Our knowledge was mostly acquired from lectures during the classes and we listened to the experiences of the seniors, who, at that time still often came to hang out on campus. It was all about shared knowledge. For my first work, I created puddles to reflect the flagpoles for the commemoration of human rights day at ISI Jogja.

This is also the time you co-founded the Jendela Art Group. Can you tell us how you guys came

together to form a collective?

Again, the lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure for the art in 1995 resulted in us coming closer together. The six of us—Jumaldi Alfi, Muhammad Irfan, Rudimantovani, Yunizar, Yusra Martunus and I—decided to form a group; hoping to pave the way to explore different possibilities of art practices. We wanted to do something different to what was fashionable at the time. Indeed, we marked our presence with an exhibition called “Membuka Kemungkinan,” which translated as “Opening Possibilities.”

How did being part of the Jendela Art Group contribute to the evolution of your own individual work?

As an individual who has no background in the field of fine arts, the opportunity to make friends and be part of the Jendela group provided a great place to learn and explore artistic possibilities. Being a part of the group allowed me the freedom to learn, research, and build a strong foundation; for me as an individual, but also for the group itself. This is something to carry into the future.



Handi Wirman Saputra, *Setelah Membesar*, 2008, mixed media, 270 x 45 x 15cm (when open), front. Image courtesy of the artist.

Looking at your trajectory with painting, in the mid-2000s you surprised the art audience by presenting paintings displaying a strong realism—still having the object as your “muse.” What inspired you to do such a bold move from your initial anti-aesthetic approach?

The realistic method of painting I chose allowed me to produce works that change time after time along with the objects that catch my attention. I adopted the tradition of natural object painting by combining observations on the surface with observations on materials into the form of objects. That’s why I don’t see a sharp distinction between my painting work and my installation work. For me two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks go hand in hand.

One last question. What is for you the relationship you see between simplicity and beauty?

To me, simplicity is but one of several ways to find beauty.

About the artist

Handi Wirman Saputra was born 1975 Bukittinggi, Sumatra, Indonesia and currently lives and works in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. In his practice, Saputra creates ambitious sculptural works that investigate material and form. His largely non-objective practice explores the inner and outer shapes of structures while referring obliquely to the body. He combines synthetic and natural materials, such as resins.

textiles, steel, polyurethane, foam and paper, and occasionally incorporates moving and interactive components. Meandering between playful and absurd, the sculptures vary from small wall-hanging objects to freestanding works that are often several metres tall. Saputra is a co-founder and member of Jendela Art Group, an artist collective hailing from West Sumatra who are also graduates of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts, Yogyakarta. The group deliberately eschews the figurative and socio-political character that has dominated the country's art in recent decades. In his organic, expressive abstraction, Saputra has developed a style that is strikingly different from other forms of contemporary art in Indonesia.

Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia, Art to Part of Culture and Escape Magazine, among others, and she is the author of "Arte Contemporanea in Indonesia, un'introduzione" a book focused on the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As a curator, her practice revolves around creating meaningful connections between Asia, Europe and Australia.

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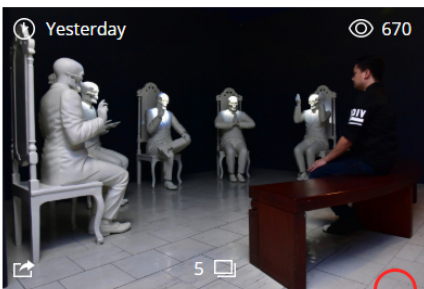
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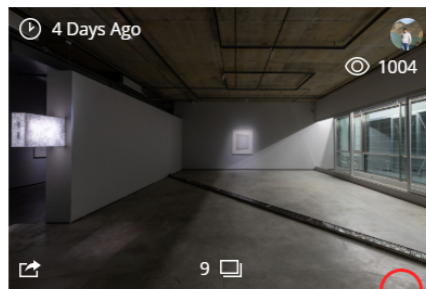


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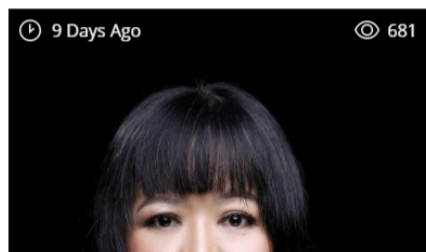
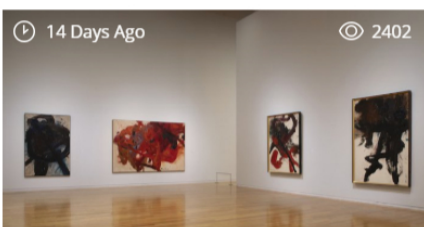


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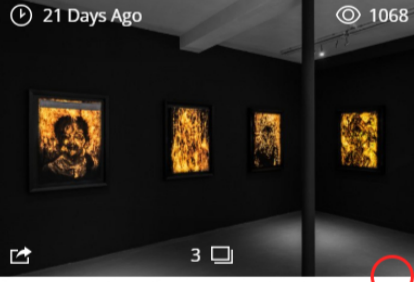
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
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


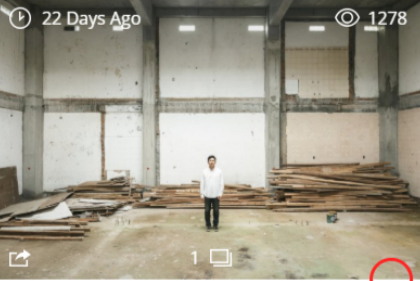
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
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