

# Navigating the Familiar: Unravelling the Artistic Language of Handiwirman Inspired from the Ordinary Things

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## Abstract

The concept of familiarity can be understood as an aesthetic approach and an art method. Although many visual artists in Indonesia use the idea of familiarity in terms of aesthetics and method, it is yet to receive attention of the art critics. Handiwirman Saputra, can be seen as a perfect case who consistently uses the concept of familiarity in terms of both aesthetic purpose and art method. Drawing inspiration from commonplace items such as plastic, rubber, mirrors, and trees, he transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary, prompting a fresh perspective on daily life. This shift resonates with the aesthetic of familiarity, where making ordinary objects unfamiliar affects the viewer's perceptions, creating a sense of alienation and encouraging a reflective engagement with everyday items.

This research employs a combination of phenomenology and formalism. It explores Handiwirman's personal experiences and the sensory perceptions evoked by rubber, identifying how they influence his artistic choices. Formalism is applied to analyze the aesthetic properties of rubber and its role in the composition and structure of Handiwirman's artworks. Data is gathered from reviews and personal interviews with curators, the gallery general manager, the artist, and his artisan. They were also supported by other types of data, including art catalogs.

It concludes that Handiwirman employs rubber in his art through scale manipulation. His affinity for rubber is multifaceted, encompassing not only personal and aesthetic considerations but also the concept of movement inherent in the material. It plays a crucial role in his creative process, altering the perceptions of viewers and exposing them to novel sensations of the material. The study unravels Handiwirman's distinctive artistic approach, which merges the mundane with the extraordinary, urging audiences to re-evaluate their interactions with familiar objects.

**Keywords:** Handiwirman Saputra, Creative Process, the Aesthetic of Familiarity, visual art, Artistic language.

## Introduction

Handiwirman is one of Indonesia's most prominent visual artists in the 21st century. His salience in the visual arts landscape is marked by his achievements in Indonesia as well as globally. As a visual artist, his works encompass painting, sculpture, and installations. Born in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, Indonesia, in 1975, Handiwirman began his career with fine art, despite graduating in crafts from the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Influenced by his educational background, he developed a unique perspective on ordinary things, which defined his artistic language.

His artistic career began with the Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela (Window Fine Arts Group), of which he was a co-founder and member. Formed in 1996, the group consisted of artists from West Sumatra who migrated to Yogyakarta to study at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (Budiman & Eva, 2022). It included six artists with diverse backgrounds, such as Jumadi Alfi and Yunizar in painting, Rudi Mantofani and Yusra Martunus in sculpture, and Handiwirman Saputra and Muhammad Irfan in crafts (Muhammad Irfan has left this group). Handiwirman and his colleagues in the Jendela group and 20 other Indonesian artists were listed among the top 500 best-selling painters according to Artprice 2008/2009 (Artprice, 2009). He has also held group and solo exhibitions in various countries, including Japan, Singapore, Cuba, Germany, China, France, and the Netherlands (Ooi, 2012; Santoso & Supriyanto, 2011; Supriyanto, 2009).

According to curators, what is unique about Handiwirman's artistic language is his artworks, which have been created from ordinary objects. La Biennale di Venezia describes Handiwirman Saputra's work as "a series of enigmatic sculptures and paintings entitled No Roots and No Shoots, triggered by random objects found in everyday life" (Biennale Arte, 2024). Santoso & Supriyanto, who has worked as Handiwirman's curators, notes his interest in everyday and ordinary things (Santoso & Supriyanto, 2011). The Art World Database also describes him as renowned for transforming ordinary materials into vehicles for artistic discovery, subverting conventional expectations by turning the mundane into something magnificent (Gajah Gallery, 2024). However, art critics still need to fully explore why Handiwirman is drawn to familiar objects, why he chooses specific objects, and how he applies the aesthetic of familiarity in his artwork.

In terms of the aesthetic of familiarity as a creative approach, it is a branch of the aesthetics of everyday life, aiming to challenge the perceptions of everyday things. According to Saito, the aesthetic of familiarity does not seek to express the meaning of things; instead, it aims to make mundane things appear strange or unfamiliar. This technique, known as de-familiarization, has been coined by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky (Gunn, 1984; Shklovsky, 2016). It is a literary and artistic technique designed to make the familiar appear new, disrupting automatic recognition and compelling the audience to see and think about them in a fresh, critical way. De-familiarization focuses on the nature of our experience and perception rather than on types of events, meanings, and occurrences (Saito, 2017; Shklovsky, 2016; Eva et al., 2022).

In this context, this research delves into Handiwirman's concept of familiarity, examining how it shapes his approach to art and influences his choice of materials and subjects. This study aims to bridge the gap in our understanding of Handiwirman's creative process and his engagement with the every day, examining how he employs the technique of familiarity in his art and the rationale behind his selection of specific objects, with a focus on rubber due to its recurrent presence in his projects and its symbolic linkage to his broader body of work. By exploring his use of everyday objects and their transformations into art, it uncovers the nuances of his interpretations of familiarity and its impact on his creative process throughout his career. It also aims to answer the questions regarding Handiwirman's artistic language.

Therefore, the objectives of this paper are:

- 1). To analyze the visual techniques Handiwirman employs in his creative process.
- 2). To identify the implementation of the aesthetic of familiarity in Handiwirman's artwork.

3). To identify the implementation of novelty illustration as a medium of reflection.

### **Theoretical Background**

This research connects three fundamental concepts in its analysis: familiarity, unfamiliar, and the creative process. Familiarity is understood in two terms: firstly, as an aesthetic approach and secondly, as an art method. In terms of aesthetics, familiarity is a branch of the aesthetics of everyday life. Familiarity is enjoying and appreciating the ordinary and routine aspects of everyday life (Saito, 2017). It is characterized by qualities such as comfort, stability and security, which provide a quiet calm and respite from the intensity of extraordinary experiences. Familiarity with aesthetics is often associated with hominess and the functional use of objects of daily life, which can be appreciated in their own right for their comfort and stability.

Secondly, familiarity with art methods was coined by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky in his work 'Art as Technique' (Shklovsky, 2016). He discusses how artists employ this technique to render everyday objects strange or defamiliarized. To explain this technique, he stated that to make something familiar become unfamiliar is to describe something without naming it. He gave many examples in literature of how authors use this technique in creating an aesthetic experience by presenting familiar objects in a new and unfamiliar way, inviting the viewers to engage more deeply with them and appreciate their beauty and value in a different light.

In the virtual realm, as conceived by Deleuze, reality consists of actual entities and virtual potentials (Deleuze, 2004a; Deleuze & Parnet, 2006). The virtual refers to indeterminate potential and possibility that coexist with the actual world. It is not opposed to the real but is as accurate as the actual, though it has yet to be actualized. Therefore, the realm of the virtual in the creative process is present when the artist experiments, methods, preconditions, and contemplates their familiar objects before transforming them into artworks (Bogue, 2014).

In terms of the virtual realm in the creative process, people see all familiar objects based on their possibilities and potentialities. Deleuze describes this experience as the gaze. In Deleuze's perspective, distinct from that of Foucault and Lacan, the gaze in painting compositions serve as the space between figures, exemplified in concepts like perspective. Secondly, in terms of actualization, particularly in the visual field, Deleuze uses the term 'facialization.' Any object may or may not be facialized; whether it is a piece of cloth, rubber, a spoon or a house, they capture our attention to be actualized or facialized (Bogue, 2014). For example, when selecting clothes for a seminar, the choice is influenced by the clothes that align with our image, suggesting that clothes are not merely items to wear but also expressions of identity. In this case, we choose clothes based on our identity or background, which clothes 'look at us' or 'appear to be seen' (Bogue, 2014). Therefore, the relationship between the artist and the objects is not passive but somewhat active.

Based on such conceptual relationships, Handiwirman's creative process can be understood from an aesthetic approach and an art method. As an aesthetic approach, it is about the relationship between Handiwirman and selected familiar objects related to his intimate relationship with them. Then, as a method, it is about how Handiwirman applies it in his creative process. Different from Shklovsky's explanation of the technique of familiarity in literature, for visual art, especially sculpture or installation, Handiwirman uses scale manipulation, which makes a massive scale of familiar objects.

Therefore, this paper analyzes every step in Handiwirman's creative process, from his relationship with the objects, ideas, experimentation, and exploration to how they appear in his artwork. The relationship between the ordinary object and the artist involves personal experiences, interests, educational background and external factors that come from the potential and possibility of the object itself. Therefore, it is not possible to choose all objects for artwork; instead, a selective process is based on the artist's background and the object's potential. It is what Deleuze said about the realm of the virtual (Deleuze, 2004a).

### **Literature Review**

Although it is not well known as an art method, familiarity is acknowledged chiefly in aesthetics and as a source of inspiration for the artists. Most visual artists in Indonesia commonly deploy familiarity as an aesthetic approach and gain inspiration from the ordinary things. Yangny (2008) has shown how artists such as Rudi Mantofani gain inspiration from ordinary things and apply it to his artworks. According to Yangny, Rudi exposes the simplicity of ordinary things such as needles, guitars, floors, and so on, approaching them with minimalism (Yangny, 2008). However, using familiarity as an art method was initiated by Shklovsky (2016), who gave many examples from literature. As Shklovsky has pointed out in Tolstoy's book titled 'Shame,' the idea of flogging is introduced, describing the act of flogging in a way that is unusual and unfamiliar to the reader: 'to strip people who have broken the law, to hurl them to the floor, and to rap on their bottoms with switches,' and, after a few lines, 'to lash about on the naked buttocks.' Thus, according to Shklovsky, this detailed and explicit description forces the reader to see the act of flogging from a new perspective, making it seem strange and unfamiliar (Shklovsky, 2016). This technique, which Shklovsky argues is defamiliarization, gives a new impression and representation of ordinary objects.

Shklovsky suggests that avoiding naming familiar objects and instead providing descriptions that challenge our usual perceptions is the initial step in creating a sense of defamiliarization (Shklovsky, 2016). Supporting this statement, Gunn explores in 'Gulliver's Travels' novel how Gulliver describes a hat without naming it, prompting readers to ponder its identity (Gunn, 1984). Gunn's argument has similarities with Miyashita, Stolnitz, and Lehtinen in the area of advertisement, concluding that this defamiliarization effect is a strategy artists use to offer unique perspectives, deliberately avoiding the assignment of pre-conceived meanings to objects (Gunn, 1984; Lehtinen et al., 2020; Miyashita, 2019; Stolnitz, 1956).

Differing from this, Flavell (2006), Saussy (2006) and Song (2021) delve into aesthetic perceptions and argue that both de-familiar and unfamiliar elements can be traced in familiar figures (Flavell et al., 2017; Song et al., 2021). Flavell has experimented on illusory contours, assessing participants' aesthetic and liking perceptions. According to Flavell, the illusory contours influence the aesthetic preferences of the participants. They compared symmetric and asymmetric Kanizsa figures, finding that the illusory contour influences the aesthetic preference of the participants and that illusory contour perception is influenced by other factors such as symmetry, familiarity, prototypicality, and nameability of the perceived shape (Flavell et al., 2017). Meanwhile, Song (2021) uses behavioral and eye-tracking measures to investigate the effect of familiarity-novelty on aesthetic preference, whether independent or dependent on artwork properties (painting content, visual complexity) and viewer characteristics (experience in art). Song argues that behavior demonstrates an interactive influence of painting content and complexity on familiarity-novelty preference, especially in representational paintings, while abstract paintings mainly depend on the viewer characteristics (Song et al., 2021).

The aesthetics of familiarity have received little attention from the Indonesian art critics, though many visual artists, including Eko Nugroho, Rudi Mantofani, Handiwirman Saputra, Yusra Martunus, and others, use these techniques. Take Rudi Mantofani, for example. According to Yangny (2008), using a minimalist approach, several of Rudi's artworks are inspired by ordinary things. One of his famous installation art pieces titled '*Melihat Isi Bumi*' ('Seeing the Earth') displays a folded floor in a gallery. Thus, Yangny argues that Rudi's works are 'simple, charming, but leave a deep impression' (Yangny, 2008). On the other hand, Handiwirman is an artist who consistently employs familiarity as an artistic method and for aesthetic purposes, according to Santoso & Supriyanto (2011).

In the project called '*Handiwirman dan Benda-Benda In Situ, Tak Berakar Tak Berpucuk*' ('Handiwirman and Objects In Situ, No Roots No Shoots'), Supriyanto argues that Handiwirman's artwork comes 'from the trivial, debris, and waste' (Santoso & Supriyanto, 2011). Handiwirman initiates his artwork from photographs of a river with waste, plastic, and trees along the river, transforming them into sculptures, including trees, plastic bags, rubber, etc. Supriyanto relates Handiwirman's technique to the history of fine art known as 'ready-made,' coined by Duchamp through his artwork titled 'Fountain.' According to Supriyanto, what Handiwirman wants to achieve through his artwork has similarities with Duchamp's

'encouragement to continue to question his own artistic practice, both epistemologically and ontologically' (Supriyanto, 2009; Santoso & Supriyanto, 2011).

Furthermore, Oii (2012) praises Handiwirman's sensitivity towards mundane objects and shapes, stating that he '...possesses an innate gift to see beauty in the most mundane, overlooked objects and materials in our everyday surroundings' (Oii, 2012). However, these studies have not provided further explanations about familiarity as an art method and an aesthetic approach. Indeed, Handiwirman gains inspiration from mundane objects, but he does not choose all of those objects for artistic expression. Therefore, to understand the concept of familiarity in terms of aesthetics and method, it is necessary to consider the relationship and appreciation between Handiwirman and the ordinary objects found in everyday life (Mandoki, 2007; Saito, 2017).

## Research Method

This study seeks to expose Handiwirman's 'world' through his artwork. The concept of 'world,' as described by Husserl (1999), comes from phenomenology. He describes the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) as the world as lived and experienced in everyday life, the pre-reflective, pre-scientific foundation for all knowledge and meaning. A central concept in Husserl's philosophy is intentionality – consciousness is always the consciousness of something. Thus, the world is constituted through the intentional acts of consciousness, through which objects are endowed with meaning (Creswell, 2013; Dwi Maryanto et al., 2023).

The study uses a qualitative method derived from art studies research; it merges two approaches: phenomenology and formalism. Phenomenology collects data on internal factors, such as experiences, perceptions, motivations, and interests.

Data were collected through unstructured interviews with Handiwirman and those close to him, several curators in Indonesia, and a review of Handiwirman's exhibited art. Several informants have been chosen based on their expertise, experience, and understanding of Handiwirman's career in visual art.

1. Handiwirman's artisan, Topan, had worked with him for over ten years.
2. Arsita Pinandita represents visual art curators in Yogyakarta who has observed and has researched Handiwirman's exhibition in Yogyakarta.
3. Octalya Puspa Wardany, the General Manager of Lorong Gallery in Yogyakarta.

Interviews were conducted between December 2023 and continued in January 2024. They were conducted in several locations, such as at the gallery, Handiwirman's house, or studio. Using open-ended interviews and oral history, Handiwirman was allowed to construct his life and career history, personal story, inspiration, exploration and experimentation, technique, and stories uninterrupted, as well as allowing other informants to express their opinions about Handiwirman (Creswell, 2013).

Data analysis used three steps.

1. Data was coded, labeled, organized, and categorized based on 1) the type, which includes visual, audio recording, verbatim or interview transcriptions, and art catalogs; 2) the topic (based on interview data with informants), which covers aesthetic purpose, creative process, Handiwirman's career history, and art method.
2. Data was grouped based on the research topic and theme of familiarity.
3. This employed the formalism method in analyzing Handiwirman's artwork, especially in the case of the rubber series titled '*Toleran Intoleran*' (Tolerant Intolerant) and '*Tutur Karena*' (Said Because), which reveals a unique approach to artistic expression.

## Finding and the Discussion

It is revealed that Handiwirman's artwork employs scale manipulation, which is evident in his famous artworks and recurring in his projects, such as using rubber on a massive scale (fig 1). This scaling challenges and renews our perception of rubber, as the enormous scale occupies space significantly, contrasting with the scale of rubber people encounter in daily life. For Deleuze, artistic techniques such as blurring, scaling, and sketching contribute to a sense

of becoming the other (Deleuze, 2004b). The change in scale, for instance, alters our perception, potentially causing confusion or a sense of vertigo as we redefine our understanding of the object (Bogue, 2014; Deleuze, 2004b). Massumi suggests that our body mediates our interaction with the world, and changes in scale prompt a displacement of our body, leading to a sense of becoming other as described by Deleuze and Guattari (Bogue, 2014; Deleuze & Guattari, 1986; Massumi, 2002).



**Fig. 1:** Comparison of Handiwirman's Rubber Artwork (left) with dimensions 97 x 66 and an Actual Rubber Object (right).  
Source: IndoArtNow, 2010

The selection process of objects in Handiwirman's work is pivotal to the aesthetic of the everyday. Contrary to the assumption that his choices are random (Biennale Arte, 2024; Santoso & Supriyanto, 2011), there is a deliberate process of reflection and selection.

### The Problems of Appearance

Initially, it all seemed the same, whether artwork or things. According to Handiwirman Saputra, the essence of being an artist lies in nurturing these entities until their value and meaning are enhanced, thereby distinguishing art from mere objects (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024). Intriguingly, Handiwirman is more captivated by the emergence of things rather than the things themselves. His observation of farmers or cattlemen using grass to tie their animal feed sparked his interest not in the grass itself but in the inventive process of utilizing available materials in the field as makeshift ropes, such as roots, dried leaves, and interwoven grass. As Handiwirman says, the essence lies in the problem-solving approach and the resultant visual blend of roots, dried leaves and grass, which inadvertently takes on an artistic form. However, it was never intended for creativity (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024).

Furthermore, Handiwirman's perspective on problem-solving aligns with Deleuze's philosophy, where every appearance emerges as a solution to an underlying problem. Deleuze suggests that problems are virtual entities that can be addressed in numerous ways, each harboring its potential and possibilities. The choice of materials like roots, dried leaves, and grass by farmers reflects their inherent potential and availability in their immediate environment, such as fields, rice fields, or meadows. Deleuze posits this ontology of appearance as a plane of immanence or consistency, where solutions are not mere logical or empirical outcomes of problems but the actualization or expression of the problematic field across different domains (Deleuze, 2004a). Handiwirman, however, prefers to term this phenomenon "condition," focusing on the visual behaviors arising from specific circumstances (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024).



**Fig 2:** Handiwirman Saputra  
Source: [www.artworlddatabase.com](http://www.artworlddatabase.com)

Handiwirman's exploration into the concept of conditions, which he deems as the ontology of his arts, revolves around the behavior of objects under certain conditions. His curiosity extends beyond the pragmatic choices of farmers to the broader implications of conditions on artistic expression. As he says, observing the dominance and unique creative flair of Balinese painters in Jogjakarta during the 90s, he attributed their exceptional ability to their cultural, community, and personal conditions, which starkly contrasted with his own and others' artistic expressions, including those of madmen (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024). The unburdened, straightforward lines drawn by madmen, free from any societal judgements, fascinated him, embodying a sense of absolute freedom and lack of accountability. Emulating the lifestyle of a madman, such as avoiding baths and sleeping randomly, he delves deeper into understanding how life conditions influence artistic expressions, concluding that conditions are pivotal in transforming possibilities into tangible appearances (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024).

Handiwirman's artworks, therefore, are the culmination of his extensive explorations, observations, and experiments. He manifests his ontology on two significant projects, "*saat kelakuan menjadi bentuk*" (When behavior becomes form) and "*saat bentuk menjadi kelakuan*" (When form becomes behavior), each with its unique implications and interpretations. In the former, behavior as a condition shapes the form, reflecting Handiwirman's emphasis on the visual or physical form of objects. He distinguishes between accepted conditions and those taken for granted within cultural settings and creates self-generated and unpredictable conditions (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024).

The latter project, "*saat bentuk menjadi kelakuan*," investigates how forms influence behaviors, suggesting a feedback loop where forms and behaviors mutually influence each other. Handiwirman uses everyday objects, like tables and chairs, to illustrate how shapes and designs can influence human interactions and behaviors, underscoring the profound impact of physical forms on our daily lives. Therefore, these two basic ontologies, "*saat kelakuan menjadi bentuk*" (When behavior becomes form) and "*saat bentuk menjadi kelakuan*" (When form becomes behavior), are the basis for Handiwirman in creating his art.

### **The Concept of Line and Relationship with Rubber**

Rubber can be found everywhere: at houses, in the offices, on the roads, or even in the oceans. When one thinks about rubber, our consciousness, what Husserl called intentionality, conjures up images of something used to tie things together or a material for making tires. However, what exactly is rubber, as Handiwirman Saputra has used it in his works?

Handiwirman says his relationship with rubber was formed in the junior high school. There is something special about this object. In the junior high school, he recalled conversations with his peers that he enjoyed. He didn't remember the topic of the conversation but only remembered playing with a rubber lying on the table while talking with friends. "I made a bracelet from that rubber after the conversation and played with it afterward," he said. Until

today, "Every time I make art inspired by rubber, I remember that experience; I just feel calm and delighted" (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024).

Rubber is the perfect medium to illustrate how Handiwirman tries to explain his ontology of art. Throughout his career, rubber has seldom been absent from his work. In 2019, for example, when invited to Artjog and La Biennale di Venezia exhibitions, he presented an installation art, and where rubber exists, though it was not the focus. Handiwirman has also explored objects such as glass, wood, trees, grass, plastic, and mirrors, but rubber is more frequent than the other materials. About rubber, he is still determining when he will stop, but he is trying to find another object in the future, which means exploration of rubber will be enough for a moment (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024).



**Fig 3:** Artjog Exhibition (Left) and La Biennale di Venezia exhibitions (Right)

Source: [www.indoartnow.com](http://www.indoartnow.com) & [www.labiennale.org](http://www.labiennale.org)

Handiwirman uses rubber and other materials to experiment, test, and explore his ideas. As he says, art results from his experiments (Personal Communication, January 15, 2024). If we consider why Handiwirman chooses that object, it comes from his personal experience. It is found that there is a visual potential in the realm of the virtual rubber that attracts his attention. Rubber possesses the dynamics or movement because most of his explorations and experimentations are derived from performing arts, especially theater, to find how the body connects with the world (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024). Then, performing arts influenced how he sees things in everyday life. Therefore, Handiwirman's artwork does not attempt to represent the world through rubber but seeks to find the connections between rubber and the world. This is why Handiwirman attempts to provide a new way of thinking about familiar objects.

It is a unique approach since, as we know, most of the visual art Handiwirman creates is based on static objects such as paintings, sculptures, and installation art. Indeed, in painting, there is a technique that gives an impression of movement. However, it is not literal but an illusion, such as what Van Gogh and Monet did with techniques like Suggestive Brushwork (Claude Monet, Fishing Boats on the Coast at Étretat, 1884; Joaquín Sorolla, Sea, and Rocks – Javea, 1900), Broken Color (Joaquín Sorolla, On the Rocks at Javea, 1905), Thick vs. Thin Texture (Dan Scott, Tasmania Seascape, 2018), Rhythm (Lev Feliksovich Lagorio, Lofoten Island, 1895), Using Line to Reiterate the Movement (Claude Monet, Stormy Sea, 1884), and Use of Scumbling (J.M.W. Turner, Snow Storm, 1842) (Scott, 2019).

One can consider how the concept of movement can occur within two aspects in Handiwirman's artwork: firstly, from the object itself (rubber), and second, from the technique Handiwirman used. Before one dives into the concept of movement or dynamics, one can see how Handiwirman 'finds' his idea during his creative process. According to Handiwirman, there is an intimate and intense relationship with rubber; "I can play with rubber for a long time before making an artwork" (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024). He needs to think about the concept and find the medium to explain it. Instead, he plays with the object, and something frequently appears in his mind during the play. He does not attempt to direct the concept into the artwork, but mostly, the object brings him to some



concepts. In short, in his words, the object serves the idea for him, "the unique communication with the object" (Personal Communication, January 15, 2024).

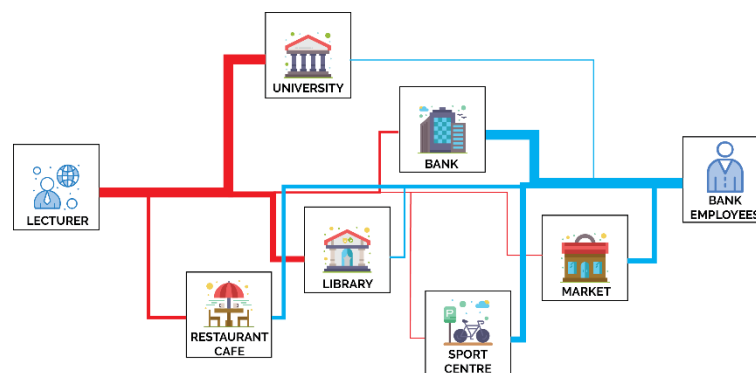
Take, for example, his project titled "Tolerant Intolerant" (Fig 5). Even though rubber has flexibility, it has a limit; every time we pull it too far, it will break, meaning our tolerance is also like rubber, having a limit. Sometimes, the limit is interpreted as intolerance (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024). Therefore, the relationship between tolerance and intolerance is all about the limit. Even people who we consider intolerant are tolerant based on their beliefs. We call them intolerant because they have reached their limit. "I came to this idea while playing with rubber" and considered the phenomena of tolerance and intolerance in Indonesia through the 'eye' of rubber (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024).

In terms of movement through his work titled "Tolerant Intolerant," one can analyze it from the concept of line since, in this artwork, one sees lines everywhere with different lengths and thicknesses. As mentioned, Handiwirman attempts to find the connection between art and the world. A line connects from one point to another, forming figures, directions, and lengths. However, to understand what Handiwirman wants to explain about Tolerant Intolerant, one needs to see the line in general or from a bigger picture.

In our daily conversation, we describe lines in many ways, such as heredity (lineage) and bloodline in biology, routes in transportation, telephone lines in communication, melody lines in music, and so on. Therefore, Deleuze says, "We are made of lines" (Bogue, 2003). Lines are never similar in biology, transportation, communication, or art because they have different lengths, tightness, directions, dimensions, distances, and limits.

Take, for example, the visualization of routine activities from two other people (Fig 4), a lecturer and a bank employee. We see the line between the lecturer and the bank employee having different thicknesses and directions because of their routine activities based on their occupation, or "condition," in Handiwirman's terms. Thicker lines and colors represent places frequently visited; in contrast, thin lines show that places are rarely visited. This character of lines is also applied in other contexts like fraternity (lineage), transportation, or organization, representing the type of line such as thickness, thin, and dotted lines refer to distance and responsibility as close and distant relatives, for instance.

On the one hand, lines are interpreted as routes, directions, or trajectories connecting points and places. On the other hand, lines, in this case, can be interpreted as processes, becoming, or growth because we see the differences in thickness, breadth, and length resulting from some activities that repeat themselves gradually.



**Fig 4:** Visualization of routine activities from two different people  
Source: Author

Accordingly, to interpret Handiwirman's work "Tolerant Intolerant," it should be seen from the line in terms of becoming rather than a route of connections between points. In the case of the lecturer and the bank employee, a thick line is built from each person's repetition or

daily activities. It is like hatching or shading techniques in painting, giving depth and dimension to the object through repetition.



**Media**

Fiber resin, acrylic sheet, duco paint, iron

**Exhibition**

ARTJOG 2018 ENLIGHTENMENT

**Fig 5:** *Toleran Intoleran* (Tolerant Intolerant).

Source: [www.indoartnow.com](http://www.indoartnow.com)

Furthermore, in "Tolerant Intolerant," Handiwirman wanted to capture the movement of ideology or belief within the language of lines. Although Handiwirman did not specify ideology, it is found that he tried to explain the mental state of the ideology as acceptable and unacceptable (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024).

Take, for example, conservatism and liberalism in Indonesia. Most conservatism has strict values, norms, and rules, rejecting ideas about gender equality, abortion, and sexual preference. In contrast, liberalism tends to accept values that conservatism rejects. Then, let's make an analogy of social discourses such as gender equality, abortion, and sexual preference as a "place," and acceptable or unacceptable as the "line." When one attempts to illustrate, one will be faced with the picture that the ideology or belief with strict rules tends to limit its line, making a short line because they cannot pass the social discourse (place).

Conversely, the ideology that accepts more values will make a more extended line until their tolerance limit. Since Handiwirman did not specify, it is not always about ideology or belief, so it can also be applied to another field, such as the extrovert and introvert characters. These two characters will make a different type of line in terms of length, distance, and direction because they have a condition that limits their line. Therefore, Handiwirman expresses it in his artwork with rubber having different lengths, dimensions, thicknesses and directions.

However, not all of Handiwirman's artwork about rubber can be approached with a similar concept. Each project has a different approach because the rubber gives Handiwirman different directions. For example, his work titled "*tutur karena*" (Fig 6) means "said because." In this piece, Handiwirman said that "*tutur*" (said) is an action because of some conditions, such as "*karena*" (because). Thus, "*karena*" (because) is the condition that triggers some actions "*tutur*" (said). In short, we say something because of something.

In this project, Handiwirman tested his idea about conditions through a programming language, but he experimented with removing the condition and wanted to know about the

result. Ideally, according to Handiwirman, when we introduce the object about direction, for example, in a programming language, they will follow it. Then, when he tried to remove the condition, the object tried to find another condition based on gravitation, length, and mass (Personal Communication, January 15, 2024). He has experimented with learning about programming language and making his program (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024). Every instruction or language impacts the behavior of the rubber. This is a similar phenomenon in language; every language conditions our behavior or ideas or gives a stimulant that triggers certain behaviors. Handiwirman concludes that the difference between human beings and non-humans is the output of behavior from the instruction (*tutur*) that human beings cannot be predicted.

In contrast, non-humans can be estimated in output (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024). When we go back to Handiwirman's ontology of art, this concept shows two kinds of conditions according to him. First, it can be predicted in output, and second, it cannot be precisely predicted. Therefore, in this case, Handiwirman explores the condition to see the behavior of the rubber. Then, for this project, we should approach it in terms of movement, such as rhythm, time, force, harmony, and dynamics of the rubber instead of lines.



**Media**

Acrylic sheet, fiber resin, bolt, and polyurethane paint

**Dimension (cm)**

97 x 66

**Exhibition**

Nadi Gallery at ART STAGE Jakarta 2017 Edition, Jakarta

**Fig 6:** *Tutur Karena* (Said Because), 2017.

Source: [www.indoartnow.com](http://www.indoartnow.com)

### **The Aesthetic Purpose and the Method of Familiarity**

To actualize his ideas in artwork, Handiwirman uses scale manipulation or scaling, creating sculptures on a massive scale, primarily with rubber objects. According to Topan, a Handiwirman artisan, the difficulty of Handiwirman's artwork lies not in transferring the design or miniature into a sculpture but in finding the appropriate scale, material, detail of the rubber and rhythm. To achieve this, "Da Andi (Handiwirman) can spend 1 to 2 years finishing a sculpture" (Personal Communication with Topan, January 15, 2024). The art-making process is irregular; as Handiwirman says, he creates a miniature or sketch after experimenting. However, transforming a miniature into an artwork, whether a sculpture, painting, or installation, is a complex transfer from A to B. Studying the material influences the result, making the art piece differ from the miniature. As Topan explains, when transforming a miniature into a sculpture and scaling it to a larger size, Handiwirman focuses on detail and the material's potential to express his idea. However, at this stage, failure is quite common, such as the effect of the material not suiting Handiwirman's taste, correction of detail, or even the shape of the artwork itself (Personal Communication with Topan, January 15, 2024).

The impact of scale manipulation can be confusing and profound, as art curator Arsita Panindita stated (Personal Communication with Arsita Panindita, January 15, 2024). He continues that most of Handiwirman's artwork is always intriguing to follow; even though he uses the same object as a rubber, it constantly exceeds our expectations (Personal Communication with Arsita Panindita, January 15, 2024). It is also confirmed by Octalyna Puspa Wardany, General Manager of Lorong Gallery in Yogyakarta, who focused on the color of Handiwirman's artwork. Despite being beyond expectations, the color always aligns with the context of the gallery space. Handiwirman considers the color of his artwork carefully, adjusting it for each exhibition to match the gallery space (Personal Communication with Octalyna Puspa Wardany, January 15, 2024).

Furthermore, diving deeply into Handiwirman's artwork makes people feel confused; there are two possible answers: first, trying to find meaning in Handiwirman's artwork, second, the impact of scale manipulation. For the first stage, most audiences try to find meaning in every artwork, which can be done for some art by reading it through symbols, signs, or metaphors, then gaining meaning from it. However, since Handiwirman himself never creates his art as a vehicle for a message, he never thinks about other people's perceptions of his artwork; hence, according to Handiwirman, it is not his job to consider people's perceptions or the meaning of his artwork (Personal Communication with Handiwirman Saputra, January 15, 2024). For him, the artist's role is to add value to things, making them different from everyday life. As we saw beforehand, Handiwirman does not separate things in everyday life from artwork; essentially, they are still things. Thus, it is the artist's proper role to distinguish between things in everyday life and add value to them.

Based on his argument, therefore, understanding Handiwirman's artwork is not about trying to find meaning in it because there is no meaning there, only pure expression. Expression is not necessarily something that can be said because expression cannot be said. It is what Wittgenstein referred to as the mystical; in his words, "what can be shown cannot be said, whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent" (Wittgenstein & Barrett, 2007). Artwork is an effort to show something that cannot be said in regular language, meaning there is something beyond our language capacity to describe phenomena. Wittgenstein talks about this in terms of ethics and aesthetics, which he said can only be shown; hence, it is beyond the scope of language. Where language reaches its limit, art takes over to explain it. It is what Handiwirman is trying to do in his artwork, for example, through "Tolerant Intolerant," showing us the mental state of people who are tolerant and intolerant from the concept of the line. It is important to note that "Tolerant Intolerant" does not try to represent, symbolize, analogize, or make a metaphor of the mental state into a rubber or a line; we can see it literally. It is because we can prove it through empirical data; the different personalities between introverted and extroverted people, for example, are known mainly by many people, and their social circle is wider for extroverted people than for introverted people. Knowing many people is a concept that could be more abstract because we can calculate and measure it. Therefore, to understand

the art language of Handiwirman, we need to know about his art techniques, such as scale manipulation, because that is how he invites us to feel the expression of his artwork.

On the other hand, scaling is the technique that Handiwirman frequently uses in his artwork with the object of rubber. Technique contributes to how we feel about an artwork rather than to the meaning of the artwork. It happens because, as Deleuze & Guattari said about the effect of art. For Deleuze & Guattari, the logic of art is the logic of sensation, affecting us immediately through bodily sensation, the sensation of becoming other (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009). Therefore, Deleuze & Guattari said that sensation is different from perception. Perception refers to object-oriented experience; sensation is the immediate experience through an object or material. Affect, as Deleuze & Guattari stated, sometimes said, "being of sensation," is the essence of all art, and it is the intensity or force that passes from one body to another, which creates a change or becoming. Therefore, Deleuze & Guattari argue art is not the representation of reality but a production of new sensations that challenge our habitual thinking and feeling.

Furthermore, through scale manipulation, Handiwirman challenges our everyday perception of rubber. By changing the scale to a massive scale, he immediately gives us sensation; it is why most people who see his artwork feel confused or sometimes experience vertigo. This is because the relationship between our body and Handiwirman's artwork gains "correction" due to the impact of scale manipulation. As Massumi said, our body is not about subjectivity but the problem of perspectivism or positioning (Massumi, 2002). We are positioning ourselves daily, and our perception and subjectivity come from this positioning. In the case of Handiwirman's artwork, our experience and perception of rubber gained from everyday life are challenged by Handiwirman's massive rubber, affecting us constantly. The impact of this is that our positioning gains correction, bringing us to become other. Take, for example, our first experience of flying in an airplane; after take-off, we see the objects beneath us become smaller and smaller, looking like a miniature city. This gives us a new sensation, especially when it is our first experience, and we are familiar with that city. So, it also happens to the audience when they see Handiwirman's artwork; despite being familiar with rubber, scale manipulation corrects our perception of rubber, affecting them through bodily sensation. Sometimes, the sensation can be like creeps, amazement, wonder, majesty, or vertigo. These physical sensations are gained from the effect of Handiwirman's scale manipulation, detail, and rhythm that he considers in his artwork.

## Conclusion

This research demonstrates that Handiwirman's choice of familiar objects, especially rubber, helps him explore the relationship between art and the world. However, his choice of ordinary objects is not arbitrary; it is based on personal interest, experimentation, exploration, and visual attraction to the object. He considers rubber to be the perfect object for testing his ideas. In testing his ideas, he is interested in how things act under certain conditions. We see this as his ontology of art, which he represents under the concepts '*saat kelakuan menjadi bentuk*' (When behavior becomes form) and '*saat bentuk menjadi kelakuan*' (When form becomes behavior).

In terms of technique, he uses scale manipulation, which affects our perception when faced with his artwork. Feelings of confusion, wonder, and vertigo while viewing his artwork are impacted by this technique. It is because we are too familiar with rubber; then, when he changes the scale of the rubber to a massive scale, it brings us to a sense of becoming and a strange feeling. A change in scale also means correcting our body positioning; we no longer see regular rubber but something that profoundly affects our emotions. It is still rubber, but our relationship with the rubber changes with the change in scale.

The aim of employing the technique of familiarity in Handiwirman Saputra's art language is to bridge the gap between the ordinary and the extraordinary, thereby transforming viewers' perceptions of everyday objects. Handiwirman invites his audience to engage with the mundane in a new light by utilizing familiar materials such as rubber, plastic, and mirrors. This approach encourages a deeper contemplation of the objects surrounding us, challenging the

conventional boundaries between art and life. The familiarity technique in Handiwirman's art defamiliarizes the familiar, prompting viewers to question and re-evaluate their relationships with the objects they encounter daily. Handiwirman's artwork becomes a medium for exploring the intricacies of human experience, perception, and the fluidity of meaning in contemporary life through this method.

However, as this paper shows, applying the aesthetic of familiarity in Handiwirman's case serves only one approach. This is because, in Handiwirman's case, although he created various works of art inspired by rubber, we must approach them with different tools. For example, in the piece '*Toleran Intoleran*' (Tolerant Intolerant), one can approach this from the concept of line, which cannot be applied in his other work like '*Tutur Karena*' (Said Because). Therefore, the aesthetic of familiarity is a broad subject, with every artist, artwork, and technique using it differently, meaning we still need to find other concepts and techniques artists employ in terms of the aesthetic of familiarity.

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