

# Artistic Research in the Process of Documentary Filmmaking

## *Semua Pasti Bertuan*

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### ABSTRACT

*Documentary filmmaking serves as a potent medium for both social advocacy and artistic expression, particularly when highlighting environmental urgencies. This study investigates the implementation of artistic research in the creation process of the documentary film Semua Pasti Bertuan, which addresses the critical issue of plastic waste management. Artistic research provides a systematic framework ensuring that every cinematic element is constructed based on deep findings and critical reflections conducted throughout the production process. This comprehensive approach effectively bridges the gap between conceptual theory and practical execution across all production phases. In the pre-production phase, ideas were developed through rigorous direct observation of the environment and by scouting subjects suitable for the theme to ensure strong narrative relevance. The production phase executed a participatory documentary approach, significantly employing the Informal Conversational Interview Method using Direct Recording Techniques on Subjects Engaged in Activities, alongside planned camera movement techniques to maintain visual authenticity. This specific interview technique was essential for capturing spontaneous, genuine responses without disrupting the subjects' daily routines. Furthermore, in the post-production phase, background music selection, Lower Third Placement Strategy, and the utilization of project documentation served as strategic narrative tools to strengthen the film's message delivery and emotional impact. The results indicate that artistic research plays a pivotal role in enriching the filmmaker's understanding before making creative decisions. Ultimately, this study concludes that integrating a structured artistic research methodology enables a more profound exploration of complex subject matter, resulting in a documentary that is both aesthetically compelling and socially resonant.*

### KEYWORDS

Artistic Research  
Documentary Film  
Waste Management  
LIDM

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### INTRODUCTION

The plastic waste crisis in Indonesia shows a significant increase every year. The high consumption of disposable products and the lack of awareness of waste management lead to the accumulation of waste that pollutes the environment. Data from the National Waste Management Information System (SIPSN) in 2024 recorded that more than 14 million tons of waste had not been managed optimally (SIPSN, 2024). Plastic waste has a very low biodegradability and takes hundreds of years to decompose naturally. Unfortunately, the process of burning plastic waste can pollute the air, while landfilling plastic waste risks damaging environmental quality (Putra et al., 2024).

Visual media such as documentary films have great potential in conveying environmental issues in a reflective and communicative way. The documentary format allows creators to represent reality directly while evoking the emotions of the audience. One

of the main strengths of documentary films is their ability to visually present real-life stories with depth and detail that cannot be achieved by other media (Madani et al., 2024).

Documentary films play an important role in raising public awareness on issues such as climate change and plastic waste. The combination of visuals, narrative, and emotional appeal in documentary films is effective in motivating action on environmental issues by building audience confidence to participate in change (Bieniek-Tobasco et al., 2019). Therefore, documentary films are often used as a medium to convey messages due to their ability to be effective advocacy tools, including in waste management issues.

The documentary work titled *Semua Pasti Bertuan* is a response to the issue, especially in relation to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 13, which addresses climate change and its impacts. This film highlights the relationship between individuals and the waste they produce, focusing on the main subject, Guh S Mana, an artist who creates art from plastic waste. The film was created to participate in the 2024 Digital Innovation Student Competition (LIDM) and won first place in the Digital Education Video Division. In addition to being a competition piece, the film is also the result of a creative process based on an artistic research approach.

The artistic research approach in the arts has evolved as a method that supports the practice of creating art, particularly in the field of media arts/film. Artistic thinking is crucial in filmmaking because it enables the artist or producer to explore the message they wish to convey and the best way to express it through strong visual elements and narrative (Nafsika & Huda, 2021).

The lack of studies exploring artistic research in the context of documentary filmmaking indicates a gap in the development of media arts literature. Research by Nafsika et al. (2023) confirms that the artistic research method holds significant potential to assist in the development of film concepts by creating a deeper understanding of themes, characters, settings, and other visual elements. However, most documentary studies still focus on narrative aspects, visual style, or production structure. For example, Safitri (2024) highlight the important role of designing artistic and visual elements in creating a deep atmosphere that evokes emotions in the audience. This situation underscores the urgency of presenting research that explores the process of artistic research in documentary filmmaking.

The aim of this article is to examine how the artistic research approach was applied in the filmmaking process of the documentary film *Semua Pasti Bertuan*. The discussion focuses on the integration of artistic research in pre-production, production, and post-production. The results of this study are expected to enrich the understanding of artistic research as a method in media arts.

## METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach with artistic research methodology. Artistic research is a practice-based research approach where the creative process not only results in a work of art but also serves as a means of exploring, reflecting, and generating new knowledge (Guntur, 2016). In this method, the filmmaker consciously and systematically examines their own creative process, allowing each creative decision made in the work to be analyzed as part of the research outcomes.

Artistic research can be applied in the process of creating an artwork, including documentary films. According to Hannula et al. (2014), artistic research is a combination of artistic processes (actions in art practice) with conceptual argumentation, which includes contextual, interpretative, conceptual, and narrative work. Through artistic research, the process documentary filmmaking is not only oriented toward the final result but also serves

as a medium for exploring each decision-making process at every stage. In this study, the artistic research method was implemented throughout the entire filmmaking process of the documentary film *Semua Pasti Bertuan*.

The process of documentary filmmaking requires an appropriate method according to the stages of production. Referring to the concept proposed by Gerzon R. Ayawaila in his book *Dokumenter: Dari Ide Hingga Produksi*, the documentary filmmaking generally consists of three main stages: pre-production, production, and post-production. The pre-production stage is the preparation process, which includes field research, data collection, initial interviews, as well as determining and developing the idea into a production script. Once the production script is systematically completed, the production process begins by recording visuals and audio according to the previously designed concept. Finally, the post-production stage includes editing the visuals and audio to ensure that the final result is suitable for public viewing (Ayawaila, 2008).

Data collection was conducted from the beginning of the filmmaking process through to post-production. Data was gathered through production notes, field research findings, as well as visual and audio documentation throughout the production process. All of this data served as the primary source to trace the work processes that occurred in the field and provided the foundation for the writing.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Artistic Research in the Pre-production Stage

#### 1. Finding the Idea

The process of finding an idea for the documentary film *Semua Pasti Bertuan* began with the desire to participate in the 2024 Digital Innovation Student Competition (LIDM) in Division 3: Digital Education Video. One of the main requirements of the competition is that the produced work must address an issue relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This requirement serves as the starting point for raising social and environmental issues, with a primary focus on waste and its impact on climate change (SDG Goal 13).

Next, the conceptual work begins with observations, paying attention to daily activities in Surakarta. One interesting discovery was the subject Listiyanto, commonly known as "Mas Sulis," a household waste collector. Every day, Sulis collects waste from house to house and takes it to the Putri Cempo Temporary Disposal Site (TPS). Through direct interaction and observation, it became clear that waste, especially plastic waste, is a significant issue that needed to be addressed in this documentary. Plastic waste not only causes environmental problems but also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, accelerating climate change. The conceptual work played a key role in formulating the main idea of the film, which focuses on individual responsibility in waste management and how this can lead to creative solutions in the form of a documentary film.

#### 2. Discovering the Main Subject

After identifying the main issue, the next step was to develop a narrative framework focused on individual responsibility for the plastic waste. However, as the idea progressed, it became clear that Sulis alone was not enough to be the only center as the strong story. Further exploration led to the discovery of additional narratives that enriched the concept of the film. Another subject that drew attention was a local artist named Guh S. Mana, known for his ability to transform personal waste into valuable works of art. This process demonstrates an interpretative work, where the filmmaker recognize that waste can be transformed into something creative and artistic. The filmmaker began to broaden their

understanding of how waste, often regarded as useless, can be turned into something valuable by shifting the focus to the subject Guh S Mana.



**Figure 1.** Direct observation photo of Subject's residence.

Next, the conceptual work also carried out to begin developing a broader concept for the film, illustrating how individual actions can lead to creative solutions through the subject of Guh S. Mana. A direct visit to the residence of Guh S. Mana was made for a more in-depth observation of his artworks. From the observation, it was found that Guh S. Mana takes great responsibility for the waste he produces. Over the years, he has collected various types of waste, such as plastic bottle caps, coffee, soap and milk packaging, and used plastic sacks, which he then transforms into art. One of his works includes a door decoration made from flattened crop bottle caps and an art costume made from used plastic sacks. Through his works, Guh S. Mana offers a new perspective on how waste, often considered useless, can be processed into something meaningful and of high artistic value.

### **3. Creating the Storyline and Narrative Concept**

The observation and interview process with the subject conducted in the previous stages resulted in data and information that formed the foundation for developing and structuring the documentary film's narrative. The conceptual work at this stage is marked by a series of processes, starting from the selection of the main subject to the discovery of a clear and structured idea. Thus, the central concept of the documentary film that emerged is "plastic waste management through individual responsibility for personal waste".

The narrative begins with a depiction of the massive accumulation of community waste that ends up in the Final Disposal Site (TPA), then focuses on the main character, Guh S Mana, as a representation of an individual who creatively manages his plastic waste through art. The narrative is structured to illustrate the connection between personal waste and the responsibility of its management, starting with the social realities in the surrounding environment, and then shifting to the personal space that serves as the primary source of this waste. Therefore, emphasizing the personal aspect becomes crucial in raising awareness of each individual's responsibility for their waste.

To ensure this idea is fully realized in an audio-visual format, narrative work is necessary, involving the development of a storyline in the form of treatment. This stage aims to map the narrative in a structured way, so that the entire creative team understands the direction of the story and can consistently realize it during the production process.

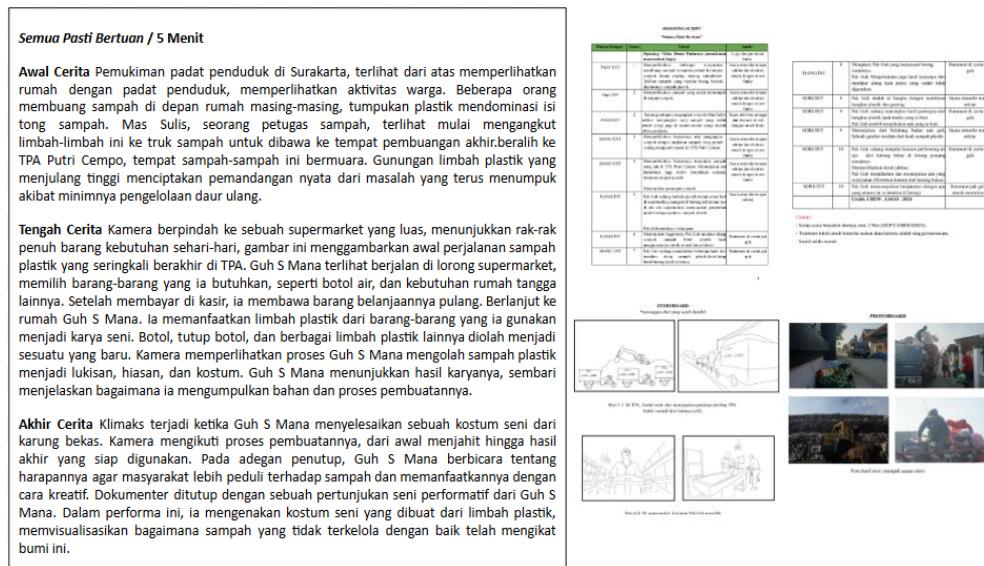


Figure 2. The treatment and filmmaking documents of documentary film *Semua Pasti Bertuan*.

## Artistic Research in the Production Stage

### 1. Determining the Documentary Approach Used

The determination of the documentary approach in the film *Semua Pasti Bertuan* reflects both conceptual and interpretative work in artistic research. This process began reflectively from the development of the treatment and observations of the subject's characteristics. The filmmaker considered the most appropriate method of delivery based on their initial approach to the main character, Guh S Mana. This decision did not arise instantly, but as a result of contemplation on the relationship between the artistic form and the unique character of the subject, which became part of the interpretative work in understanding the personal dynamics between the subject and the filmmaker.

The contextual work in this film is evident from the portrayal of the daily reality of community, where people dispose of their waste in front of their houses, which is then collected by a worker named Sulis and transported to the Putri Cempo Final Disposal Site (TPA) in Surakarta. The presentation of this reality serves as the foundation for the formation of the documentary narrative, grounded in actual social and environmental conditions. Sulis, the subject, who is active, expressive in storytelling, yet calm in his daily life, strengthens the belief that a visual approach is more effective than exploring dialogue. This marks the conceptual work in choosing the cinematic method that best conveys the film's message in an honest and powerful manner.

Several scenes of people discarding waste are reconstructed based on real activities that are routinely carried out. Despite technical direction from the director, interpretative work is shown through the decision to preserve the naturalness of events and the authenticity of the visuals. Thus, the filmmaker presence in the development of the visual narrative does not distort reality but rather strengthens the representation of existing reality, as part of the narrative work that composes the story based on real experiences and field observations.



**Figure 3.** Production process of the documentary film *Semua Pasti Bertuan*

The approach to the main subject, Guh S Mana, is also shaped through strong interpretative work. After conducting observations, interviews, and personal approaches, the filmmaker realized that the subject could not be directed through rigid verbal or narrative means. He expresses himself more freely and powerfully when engaged in his activities, particularly when immersed in his art. Conceptual was also present when the filmmaker developed a documentary style that allows space for the subject's natural expression, framing his activities in a visual narrative that tells a story without disrupting the rhythm of daily life.

The narrative concept is developed based on observations of the subject's routine. Several scenes are reconstructed based on real activities, with direction limited to time, space, and the sequence of events to avoid disturbing the subject's daily life. The narrative and interpretative work emerge when the filmmaker act as visual facilitators, framing reality in a way that allows the audience to understand it, without recreating reality. The agreement between the filmmaker and the subject to present authentic activities is a true form of collaborative and reflective artistic work.

The spaces in Guh S Mana's house, such as the living room, corridor, sewing room, and exhibition space for his works, become the main visual areas explored conceptually. All these elements are used without manipulation, while the filmmaker select the most impactful perspectives and moments to support the story. This demonstrates narrative work in constructing the storytelling structure based on real spaces and activities, while also showing conceptual work in visual decision-making based on aesthetic value and narrative function.

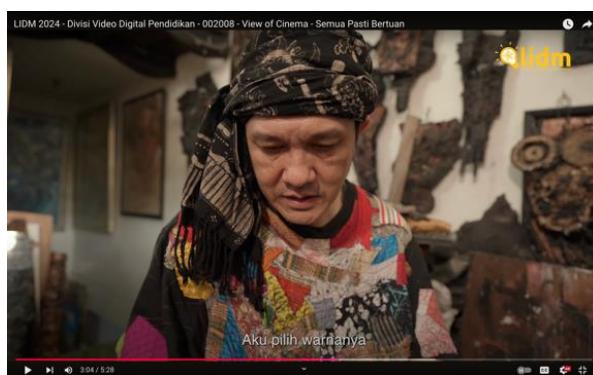
Considering all these factors, the participatory documentary approach is chosen because it reflects both interpretative and narrative work in artistic research. This approach allows filmmaker to actively engage as creative directors, while still placing the subject at the center of narrative development. The director does not appear in the film, but the presence is felt through visual direction and story structure. This approach maintains a balance between the authenticity of reality and artistic needs, showcasing a collaborative process between the filmmaker and the subject in building an honest representation, which is the core essence of the artistic research itself.

## **2. Informal Conversational Interview Method using Direct Recording Techniques on Subjects Engaged in Activities.**

The use of interview techniques in the documentary *Semua Pasti Bertuan* is part of both interpretative and conceptual work in artistic research. The choice of interview method was adapted to the character and communication style of the main subject, Guh S Mana. Based on the results of observations and initial approaches, the filmmaker understood that Guh S Mana was not comfortable being formally interviewed in front of the camera. He was more expressive while engaged in activities, especially when creating his works. This awareness

indicates a creative response to the subject's character, which formed the artistic basis for selecting the most appropriate interview method.

Based on this understanding, the filmmaker decided to use the in-action interview technique, which is a form of conceptual work in determining visual communication strategies. This technique allows the subject to answer questions or express his thoughts while performing his daily activities. In the context of this documentary, interviews were conducted while Guh S Mana was cutting bottles, arranging his works, or demonstrating specific parts of his creative process. In this way, the subject not only explains what he is doing but also simultaneously shows the process visually to the audience.



**Figure 4.** Scene snapshot showing the application of the Informal Conversational Interview Method using direct recording of subjects engaged in activities.

This choice of technique is also closely related to the narrative work in artistic research, as it successfully maintains continuity between verbal explanations and the visual storytelling flow. The interview is not presented as a separate insert, but rather integrated into the main narrative. This provides two advantages: first, it creates a comfortable space for the subject to speak naturally, and second, it enriches the viewing experience by harmoniously combining verbal and visual information. The audience not only hears but also sees directly the process being explained, leading to a more comprehensive understanding.

Thus, the implementation of the Informal Conversational Interview Method using Direct Recording Techniques on Subjects Engaged in Activities in this film represents the outcome of a deliberate consideration that integrates narrative requirements, subject comfort, and visual strength as a conceptual strategy. This decision constitutes a part of artistic research that considers not only the final output but also responds reflectively and creatively to the dynamics of the production process and the subjects' characteristics.

### 3. The Use of Camera Movement Techniques

The use of camera movement techniques in the documentary *Semua Pasti Bertuan* reflects both conceptual and interpretative work in artistic research. From the pre-production stage, this technique has been deliberately designed as an essential part of the visual messaging strategy of the film. The choice of using static or still cameras was not made just for technical reasons, but rather as a result of creative discussions between the director and the director of photography (DOP), based on aesthetic and narrative considerations. In this context, visual decisions are positioned as part of the conceptual work, as they serve to shape how the audience understands the subject's reality without excessive visual distractions.

The use of a static camera provides space for the subject to move naturally within the frame, allowing the audience's attention to focus on the subject's activities and their

surrounding environment. Through this approach, the filmmaker create a viewing experience that is honest and uncontrived, emphasizing the natural feel of the subject's daily life. This becomes part of the narrative work, framing reality in a structured and systematic way without losing the essence of the everyday life that is meant to be displayed.

At certain moments, interpretative work is evident in the flexibility of artistic decision-making, such as when filming a scene of Guh S Mana walking through the corridor of his house while explaining his artworks. The director consciously chooses to use handheld techniques to follow the subject's movement. This decision is based on Guh S Mana's active character in showcasing his artworks, requiring a more dynamic visual approach to maintain the closeness between the subject and the audience. The handheld technique allows the camera to follow the subject closely, creating an experience as though the audience is directly accompanying the subject on a tour. This is an interpretative strategy that aligns emotional needs with visual needs.



**Figure 5.** A snapshot of a scene showing the implementation of the handheld camera technique.

The use of camera techniques, both static and handheld, is not arbitrary but the result of planned artistic consideration. This choice reflects the filmmaker's effort to maintain a balance between visual stability and emotional closeness, while supporting the narrative being conveyed. Thus, the conceptual, interpretative, and narrative aspects of artistic research combined in conscious and meaningful cinematic decisions throughout the filmmaking process.

## Artistic Research in the Post-Production Stage

### 1. The Selection of Background Music

The selection of background music in the documentary *Semua Pasti Bertuan* is designed based on narrative considerations and the emotional needs of the film, while maintaining the documentary character that showcases the raw atmosphere. From the beginning, the concept developed was that the background music would not dominate the entire film. Instead, the natural sounds recorded directly on-site remain the main element in building the atmosphere. Music is only used in certain parts to strengthen the narrative and emotion according to what is being conveyed. This strategy demonstrates conceptual work in artistic research, showing how the creator consciously considers the function of music not as decoration, but as an element in harmony with the values of visual and audio honesty in the documentary.

The opening section of the film is designed to highlight the irony of community's routine in producing waste. To enhance this atmosphere, upbeat funky music with a cheerful tone was chosen. The music contains humorous elements meant to build a satirical impression of the displayed condition. The light rhythm and relaxed tempo reinforce the visual irony shown

through the repetition of scenes where individuals dispose of their waste. This approach illustrates narrative and interpretative work, where the music does not merely serve as atmospheric background but also signals the film's attitude toward the reality presented, namely a subtle and humorous social critique.



**Figure 6.** Opening scene with funky, satirical background music.

Meanwhile, the film's ending requires a different emotional atmosphere. When the subject, Guh S Mana, expresses his hopes and reflective messages about the state of the earth, the background sound shifts to a slow-tempo instrumental. This music has a reflective character, with soft piano dominating and warm ambient layers. The choice of this music aims to create a reflective space for the audience, strengthening the message calling for behavioral change, while also fostering an emotional connection with the ideas being conveyed. Here, the interpretative work is clearly visible in managing the atmosphere and emotional response of the audience through the choice of tone, tempo, and sound texture that resonates deeply on a psychological level.



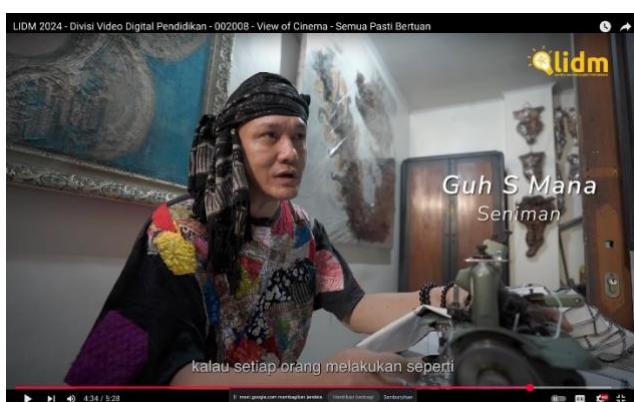
**Figure 7.** Closing scene with reflective music accompanies the subject's message.

This reflective music flows through to the closing credits, where visuals display Guh S Mana in a performative action representing the earth's condition entangled in plastic waste. The calm, slow-flowing music helps emphasize the final message of the film, evoking both sadness and hope, while closing the film's narrative journey with a deep impression. Thus, the use of music in the film not only functions as sound background but becomes an integral part of the narrative and conceptual work, contributing to the construction of meaning and the emotional engagement of the audience. Music is crafted as a cinematic element integrated into the film's dramatic structure, not just as an accessory and this is where its importance lies in the framework of artistic research.

## 2. The Lower Third Placement Strategy

The strategy of placing the lower third in the documentary *Semua Pasti Bertuan* is designed with an approach different from the common practice, as part of the conceptual and interpretative work in artistic research. Typically, lower thirds are introduced at the beginning of a subject's appearance to immediately introduce who the character is. However, in this film, the director consciously chose to delay the placement of the lower third until the end of the film. This decision is not just a technical shift, but a result of artistic consideration that responds to how the audience should first recognize the subject through actions, rather than formal identity.

This decision was made to maintain an emotional closeness between the audience and the subject of the film. By not directly revealing the subject's identity, the audience is invited to focus first on the subject's activities, behavior, and the messages conveyed, without any prejudice or social distance. This approach demonstrates interpretative work, where the filmmaker anticipate the possible experiences of the audience and choose to build an emotional connection gradually, before revealing identity information. The audience is given space to get to know the subject through his concern for plastic waste, rather than through his profession or social status, making the emotional involvement feel more natural.



**Figure 8.** The implementation of the Lower Third.

In this context, the revelation of Guh S Mana's identity as an artist occurs when he shares his hopes and reflective messages about the earth. The placement of the lower third at this moment serves not only as information but also as a reinforcement of meaning. This is where the narrative work in artistic research becomes clear when visual elements such as text and their timing are not treated as mere additions, but as dramatic elements that guide the audience's understanding of the film's core idea: that anyone, regardless of their profession, can take responsibility for the environment.

This strategy reinforces the film's message that change can start with anyone. The subject in this film is not merely portrayed as an "artist" but as an ordinary individual acting out of personal concern. Thus, the placement of the lower third becomes an essential part of artistic research, consciously considering how visual, informational, and emotional elements are gradually built to guide the audience toward a deeper message.

### 3. The Use of Artwork Documentation

The use of Artwork documentation in the documentary *Semua Pasti Bertuan* is part of the interpretative and narrative work in artistic research. In the section where the subject, Guh S Mana, is sewing used plastic sacks into an art costume, photos of the work are displayed as part of a visual strategy to strengthen the narrative. The director consciously decided to insert photographs of the artwork taken by Darwis Triadi, showing the final form of the costume. This decision is not merely a visual complement, but a way to bridge the gap between process and outcome, between direct activity and the artistic achievement of the subject.



Figure 9. The placement of the subject's artwork documentation in the film

The artwork documentation was discovered during the research process and direct information gathering from the subject. This finding was immediately responded to and creatively utilized to support the film's narrative. This response reflects interpretative work, where the creator not only collects material but also selects and positions it based on the meaning they wish to construct. The use of the artwork documentation becomes a form of visual intervention directly tied to the context of the activity being shown, without disrupting the continuity of the documentary reality.

This artwork documentation also serves to strengthen the connection between the creative process recorded directly and the tangible outcome of that activity. In the narrative framework, it helps the audience see the relationship between simple, everyday work and the meaningful artistic achievement. The artwork documentation does not only serve as visual evidence, but also as a marker of the continuity and consistency of the subject's ideas, as well as reinforcing the story structure that connects the present and the final result into a visual unity.

## CONCLUSIONS

The application of artistic research in the documentary filmmaking process of *Semua Pasti Bertuan* has proven to make a significant contribution to the artistic depth and narrative strength of the film. Each stage of filmmaking process, from idea selection, visual approach, narrative structure arrangement, to technical decisions such as lower third placement, background music use, and camera techniques, is based on reflective and exploratory considerations from every point of artistic research, including contextual, interpretative, conceptual, and narrative work. The filmmaking outcome shows that artistic research work is not only present in the early conceptualization stage but continues actively throughout the production and post-production processes.

The key findings of this process include: 1) the application of the Informal Conversational Interview Method using Direct Recording Techniques on Subjects Engaged

in Activities, which enabled subjects to appear more authentic and at ease; 2) the predominance of static camera shots as a form of narrative framing that remains faithful to reality; 3) the delayed lower third strategy, which establishes an emotional connection devoid of social prejudice; and 4) the background music selection, serving as a marker for both irony and emotional reflection. These decisions emerged as creative responses to field findings rather than being based solely on technical intuition.

Thus, artistic research in the documentary filmmaking is not just a supporting method, but the primary framework of thought that consciously and deeply guides the creative process. As a director, the filmmaker does not merely record reality but actively frames, interprets, and constructs the narrative based on interactions with the subject and its social context. This reinforces the understanding that artistic research can be used as a scientific approach in art practice, while also serving as a form of reflection on the filmmaker's responsibility in presenting meaningful and authentic representations.

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