

Representation of “I’m a Strong Child” in Canvas Shoe Embroidery Art

(Representasi “I’m A Strong Child” Dalam Karya Seni Sulam Media Sepatu Kanvas)

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Abstract. Eldest children tend to be conservative, power-oriented, and capable of leadership. Often entrusted with the responsibility of looking after their younger siblings, they grow into caring individuals who are more inclined toward parenthood and taking initiative. This significant life event—and the resulting shift in perspective—is represented on canvas shoes using manual embroidery techniques, honoring a practical gift once received from the artist's parents. The use of manual embroidery serves as an act of preservation in an era dominated by machine embroidery. The study employs a qualitative approach and is grounded in Artistic Research, wherein the artist and the researcher are the same person. The research culminates in a pair of canvas shoes featuring manual embroidery designs: 1) a fox motif, serving as a metaphor for the artist's own character as a firstborn—resilient and adaptable; 2) a sunflower motif, symbolizing spirit and cheerfulness; 3) a heart motif, representing the artist's father, who suffers from heart disease; 4) a rose motif, representing the artist's mother, for whom the rose has long been a favorite flower; 5) a book motif, representing the artist's education, reflecting a lifelong emphasis on learning instilled by both parents; and 6) abstract motifs. These designs are executed as embroidered patches using the satin stitch technique, incorporating embroidery floss, fine knitting yarn, and plush textured yarn. The project utilizes four pairs of canvas shoes in both low-cut and high-cut styles.

Keywords: Eldest Children, Strong, Canvas Shoes, Hand Embroidery Technique.

Abstrak. Anak sulung cenderung konservatif, mereka berorientasi pada kekuasaan, dan mampu memimpin. Mereka kerap diberi tanggung jawab untuk menangani adik-adik mereka, anak sulung tumbuh menjadi orang yang peduli, lebih bersedia menjadi orangtua, dan cenderung mengambil inisiatif. Peristiwa ini dramatis ubah situasi dan cara pandang di representasikan di sepatu kanvas teknik sulam manual karena barang bermanfaat pemberian orang tua pertama kali. Teknik sulam manual upaya pelestarian mengingat terciptanya mesin sulam. Pendekatan metode kualitatif dan jenis riset adalah Artistic Research di mana pembuat seni sama dengan peneliti. Hasil penelitian ini yaitu sebuah karya sepatu kanvas teknik sulam manual menggunakan: 1) motif rubah merupakan metafora karakter perupa jadi anak pertama, karena rubah tidak mudah menyerah, dan pandai menyesuaikan diri; 2) motif bunga matahari menggambarkan semangat dan keceriaan; 3) motif jantung representasi ayah perupa karena mempunyai sakit jantung; 4) motif bunga mawar representasi dari ibu perupa. Bunga mawar adalah salah satu bunga kesukaan ibunya sejak dahulu. 5) motif buku representasi dari pendidikan perupa dari kecil hingga saat ini perupa diharuskan belajar, belajar, dan belajar oleh kedua orang tuanya; 6) motif abstrak. Semua motif

tersebut karya sepatu kanvas teknik sulam manual bentuk tambalan atau patch dibuat dengan teknik satin stich. Menggunakan benang sulam, benang rajut halus, dan benang bulu mewah. Sepatu kanvas yang dipakai ada 4 buah dengan model Low-cut, dan model High-cut.

Kata kunci: Anak Sulung, Strong, Sepatu Kanvas, Teknik Sulam Manual.

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Introduction

A family consists of members such as the father, mother, and children; regarding the children, there is also the factor of birth order—distinguishing between older and younger siblings (Viranda et al., 2023). Alfred Adler, a scholar and former colleague of Sigmund Freud, proposed a theory of birth order that he began researching in the late 1920s. Adler (1990) believed that an individual's birth order within the family inherently influences their personality. Regarding the firstborn (eldest) child: according to Adler, eldest children tend to be conservative, power-oriented, and capable of leadership. Because they are often entrusted with the responsibility of looking after their younger siblings, firstborns grow into caring individuals who are more inclined toward parenthood and prone to taking the initiative.

Research by Wahid and Ridfah (2020) reveals that birth order—whether one is the eldest, middle, youngest, or only child—reflects a tendency that typically persists and becomes a defining characteristic of an individual's personality. In contrast, abilities and skills—as a system of competence—can be enhanced through intensive and targeted training. Firstborns are highly likely to exhibit a strong sense of power and superiority, high levels of anxiety, and a tendency toward overprotectiveness (Subroto et al., 2017). Firstborns occupy a unique position, having experienced life as an only child for a period before facing a shift in status upon the arrival of a younger sibling. This event dramatically alters the firstborn's situation and their perspective on the world. Anggraini (2015) also notes that firstborns tend to possess positive traits, such as a propensity for caring for and protecting others, as well as strong organizational skills.

Upon successfully meeting parental expectations regarding academics—such as consistently ranking in the top five of the class—the artist would be rewarded with items like a pair of shoes from a renowned brand, such as Converse All Star. Each semester, the artist was also required to maintain this ranking to serve as a role model for their two younger siblings and uphold their status as the family's pride; however, the artist found this burden heavy, as it deprived them of the freedom to simply be themselves. While fulfilling these responsibilities as the eldest child, the artist experienced anxiety

over the possibility of failing to achieve the milestones demanded by their parents. These experiences stem from the artist's position as the firstborn—or eldest—child in the family. The artist's role as the eldest requires them to be strong, a quality represented on canvas shoes through the medium of embroidery. Representation is defined as the process of depicting, illustrating, or symbolizing an object or concept to convey meaning (Childs, 2024). Drawing on this personal history, the artist chose to explore the experience of being the eldest child as the conceptual basis for an artwork titled *Representation of the "Strong Child": Creating Embroidered Art on Canvas Shoes*.

Shoes are essential items that offer numerous benefits, serving as footwear that provides optimal foot protection while enhancing one's appearance. Canvas shoes feature a thick, durable fabric weave and are comfortable to wear. Originally made from hemp—a material dating back to 13th-century Europe and named after the Latin *cannapaceus* (made of hemp)—canvas is now commonly produced as a blend of cotton and linen. Modern canvas materials are also frequently combined with synthetics like polyester.

The use of canvas for shoemaking began after World War I, around 1917. Canvas shoes are highly versatile, complementing styles ranging from casual to formal, and are suitable for outdoor activities as well as for school, university, or the workplace. Canvas shoes are generally easy to maintain, feature simple designs, and can even serve as a canvas for artistic painting. While the original inventor of the shoe remains unknown, a significant milestone occurred in 1892 when the rubber company Goodyear collaborated with the footwear manufacturer Plimsolls to create "Keds"—shoes featuring rubber soles and canvas uppers. By 1917, Keds had become the first athletic footwear to be mass-produced.

Based on the data above, the embroidery technique was chosen not only to represent the concept of "I'm A Strong Child" on canvas shoes but also to help preserve the craft of manual embroidery in Indonesia—especially given the advent of machine embroidery. Additionally, the technique serves to decorate the canvas shoes and enhance their market value. The artist selected canvas shoes as the creative medium because they serve as a metaphor for the artist's own identity as the eldest child in the family. Canvas shoes also hold personal significance as a favorite fashion item, having been gifts from the artist's parents to reward academic achievements each semester. Furthermore, canvas shoes offer a sturdy yet lightweight surface suitable for daily activities; the artist chose them specifically for this durability, which allows the material to withstand the embroidery process. Finally, canvas shoes remain a fashion staple today, appealing to people of all ages.

Embroidery is a decorative art form involving the arrangement of threads on the surface of fabric or other materials using basic tools such as sewing needles, embroidery needles, and thread (Boesra, 2005). It consists of a combination or collection of various decorative stitches, executed either by machine or by hand (Marlianti & Handayani, 2017). Types of decorative stitches used in embroidery include: straight stitch, stem stitch, satin stitch, long-and-short stitch, backstitch, running stitch, chain stitch,

herringbone stitch, French knot, Pekinese stitch, fly stitch, blanket stitch, cross-stitch, bullion knot, woven stitch, overcast stitch, couching, and pistil stitch (Zulkamen, 2006).

This research has several primary objectives related to the process of creating visual art. First, it aims to represent the artist's psychological experiences and inner turmoil as an eldest child through an embroidery artwork themed "I'm a Strong Child." Second, the creation of this artwork serves as an effort to preserve manual embroidery techniques in Indonesia and uphold their artistic value amidst the dominance of modern embroidery machines. Third, the research aims to utilize and explore canvas shoes—specifically low-cut and high-cut models—as the primary alternative medium for applying the embroidery art. Finally, employing an Artistic Research approach, the study aims to visualize the artist's internal empirical experiences through various symbolic motifs—both figurative and abstract—such as foxes, sunflowers, roses, hearts, and books.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach known as Artistic Research, wherein artistic practice and research are inseparable, and the artist acts directly as the researcher (Borgdorff et al., 2020). Data collection and idea exploration are derived internally from the artist's empirical experiences as an eldest child; consequently, this study does not require interview methods. Additionally, the artist utilizes a literature review method—consulting books, relevant journal articles, and online resources—alongside direct observation and field research at canvas shoe stores to determine the appropriate medium.

The primary medium for this artwork consists of four pairs of canvas shoes, comprising both low-cut and high-cut models. Materials used to create the visual elements include canvas fabric, embroidery thread, fine knitting yarn, and plush textured yarn, offering a variety of smooth and coarse textures. During the creation process, the artist utilizes tools such as embroidery needles and circular embroidery hoops (*widangan*) of varying diameters. These hoops serve to stretch and tauten the canvas fabric, facilitating the embroidery process and ensuring a neater finish.

The creative process begins with an initial exploration phase, during which the artist does not immediately embroider onto the canvas shoes but instead manually explores embroidery techniques on separate sheets of canvas fabric. Subsequently, the work is executed using manual embroidery techniques applied in two ways: stitching directly onto the shoe's surface and creating patches that are then attached. To form various figurative and abstract motifs, the artist explores a wide range of stitch variations, including satin stitch, back stitch, running stitch, straight stitch, French knot, stem stitch, chain stitch, long and short stitch, detached chain stitch, woven wheel stitch, split stitch, feather stitch, blanket stitch, fly stitch, and creative stitches.

Result And Discussion

Result

Through various exploratory processes in creating visual artworks, four pairs of shoes were produced featuring figurative and non-figurative embroidery designs created using manual techniques. Each piece incorporates unique motifs, colors, textures, and sizes. During the initial exploration phase—centered on the theme "I'm A Strong Child"—the artist did not embroider directly onto the canvas shoes; instead, the work was executed on separate canvas fabric using an embroidery hoop (known variously in Indonesian as **widangan**, **bentang**, **midangan**, **pemandangan**, **pembidangan**, or **bidangan**).

This hoop—consisting of two circular rings of different diameters—was used to facilitate the embroidery process, ensuring a neater and higher-quality finish. Its function is to stretch and tauten the canvas fabric during embroidery.

Shoe media embroidery works 1



Fig 1. Embroidered Shoe Creation 1

The embroidery on the canvas shoes features abstract patterns created using both fine and coarse yarns, alongside sunflower motifs—rendered as semicircles—stitched with embroidery thread. The right shoe displays an abstract design in pink, yellow, blue, orange, and dark green. The left shoe features a similar abstract design but incorporates a sunflower semicircle motif. The embroidery employs various manual techniques, including backstitch, running stitch, straight stitch, French knot, stem stitch, chain stitch, long and short stitch, detached chain stitch, and creative stitches. This first piece represents the artist's experience as an only child; the artist felt like the ruler of the household, enjoying a time of freedom filled solely with learning and play. The bright colors of the thread represent the joyful moments of that period.

Shoe media embroidery works 2



Fig 2. Embroidered Shoe Creation 2

The embroidery on the canvas shoes features abstract linear patterns, sunflower motifs, and fox motifs. The right shoe displays half a fox's face and a sunflower semi-circle, alongside abstract linear patterns in pink. Meanwhile, the left shoe features half a fox's face and a sunflower semi-circle, accompanied by abstract linear patterns stitched in blue thread. These designs were created using manual embroidery techniques such as backstitch, running stitch, straight stitch, woven wheel stitch, split stitch, and creative stitches.

The artwork represents the artist's dual roles: acting as an older sibling to two younger ones and serving as the pride of the extended family. The artist feels compelled to fulfill these roles perfectly; any misstep—such as failing to meet the family's expectations—invites criticism, leading to a sense of failure in their role as the eldest child. The artist faces family pressure to embody the ideal example of a firstborn. The fox figure represents the artist's character: cunning, steadfast in pursuing desires, assertive, and deeply affectionate toward family. The sun figure represents the artist's extroverted personality, characterized by adaptability and a sense of humor.

Shoe media embroidery works 3



Fig 3. Embroidered Shoe Creation 3

This canvas shoe embroidery features a mix of non-figurative patterns (using coarse, fuzzy yarn and standard embroidery thread), sunflowers, a fox, and various patch-style motifs. The right shoe displays two sunflower patches (one large, one small), a smiling fox embroidered directly onto the canvas, non-figurative blue and red straight lines, a dark green abstract design, and a circular non-figurative motif. The left shoe features a laughing fox embroidered directly onto the surface, blue and red abstract line patterns, a raised abstract design, and several patches depicting a shouting fox, a quiet fox, a sunflower, and a large book. The work employs various manual embroidery techniques, including backstitch, running stitch, straight stitch, French knot, feather stitch, woven wheel stitch, split stitch, blanket stitch, fly stitch, and creative decorative stitches.

This third artwork reflects a period of turmoil and instability in the artist's life, marking a phase of personal maturation during which their mindset and character began to shift. As the eldest child, the artist had successfully met their family's expectations—achieving top-five academic rankings, gaining admission to public schools and a state university, and helping a younger sibling get into a public school. Initially, the artist took pride in fulfilling these demands, but over time, they felt that the appreciation received was not commensurate with the effort invested. This realization sparked a desire to live independently once they had graduated and started working.

Discussion

Creating embroidered art on canvas shoes serves not only as a medium for aesthetic exploration but also transforms into a form of catharsis and a visual representation of the artist's psychological dynamics as an eldest child. Canvas shoes were chosen for their dual role as fashionable footwear and a potent metaphor for the artist's self; their sturdy surface represents the eldest child's imperative to remain strong while shouldering the weight of family expectations and responsibilities at every step of life's journey. The visual execution of the three shoe artworks aligns closely with Alfred

Adler's birth order theory—discussed earlier—which posits that eldest children often experience high anxiety and pressure to appear perfect, yet must simultaneously embody protective and adaptive traits. The artist's emotional evolution and inner turmoil are clearly captured in the visual transitions between the pieces. In *Shoe Artwork 1*, a period of freedom and happiness—reflecting the time when the artist still experienced life as an "only child"—is represented through vibrant colors and sunflower motifs. Conversely, the transition of roles is documented in *Shoe Artwork 2* through the emergence of a fox motif; this symbolizes the artist's need to be adaptive, assertive, and at times "cunning" in the struggle to meet the demands of being a perfect role model for younger siblings.

The culmination of this psychological dynamic is evident in *Shoe Artwork 3*. Phases of inner turmoil, anxiety, and personal maturation are skillfully visualized through the use of coarse, fuzzy yarn textures and diverse fox expressions—screaming, laughing, and silent—rendered as patches. This reflects the tendency of firstborn children to be susceptible to anxiety and mental exhaustion (Freisya & Maryam, 2026)—a state experienced by the artist upon realizing that successfully meeting family expectations was not met with commensurate appreciation, thereby sparking a desire to break free and live independently. Furthermore, from the perspective of art preservation, the choice of manual hand-embroidery demonstrates how traditional craftsmanship can harmonize with contemporary fashion media, such as canvas shoes. The embroidery process, which demands a high level of precision, indirectly represents the artist's patience in navigating life's demands while simultaneously serving as an effective strategy to enhance aesthetic value.

The creation of this canvas shoe artwork makes a significant cultural contribution, both through its chosen theme and its creative process. In terms of theme, the visual representation titled "I'm a Strong Child" addresses the psychological realities and social expectations inherent in the role of the eldest child. The dynamics of the eldest child's responsibilities represent a concept deeply rooted in family structures and culture (Fariyah et al., 2022; Dananjaya & Valentina, 2025). By transforming this personal narrative into a visual form applied to an everyday object, the artwork reconstructs cultural meaning, allowing the burdens and experiences of the eldest child to be openly communicated, rendered relevant, and appreciated within contemporary life.

Meanwhile, regarding the creative process, the consistent use of manual embroidery techniques represents a tangible effort to revitalize craftsmanship and preserve the culture of hand-wrought arts. Amidst a shift toward rapid production cultures dominated by automated machinery, this artistic practice restores appreciation for the human touch and skilled craftsmanship (Win, 2024). By applying traditional decorative stitches to popular fashion items such as canvas shoes, this process bridges the heritage of past techniques with contemporary lifestyles, demonstrating that the practice of craft preservation can endure and adapt within modern society (Saputra et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This practice-based research demonstrates that the artist's empirical experiences and psychological dynamics as a firstborn child can be profoundly transformed into a meaningful work of art centered on the theme "I'm A Strong Child." Employing an Artistic Research approach, the inner turmoil of the firstborn—characterized by the pressure to be a perfect role model and feelings of anxiety, alongside the demand for resilience—is successfully visualized through four pairs of low-cut and high-cut canvas shoes. The choice of canvas shoes serves not merely as functional footwear but as a physical metaphor for the resilience, strength, and arduous journey a firstborn must undertake to meet parental responsibilities and expectations.

The artist's emotional journey and role transitions are explicitly captured through a visual exploration that blends figurative and abstract motifs. The fox motif sharply represents the artist's need to be cunning, adaptable, and resilient in the face of family expectations, while the sunflower symbolizes an extroverted nature and cheerfulness. Other elements—such as hearts, roses, and books—symbolize personal bonds with parents and the burden of academic demands. Furthermore, phases of inner turmoil, a crisis of self-worth, and the process of maturing are skillfully visualized through abstract motifs, the use of 3D-textured yarn, and patch elements that display the fox's varied expressions.

Beyond its personal expressive value, the creation of this work makes a tangible contribution to the preservation of the archipelago's craft traditions. The artist's dedication to employing various manual embroidery stitches—in an era dominated by the convenience of automated embroidery machines—serves as a preservation effort to uphold the authenticity and aesthetic value of traditional craftsmanship. Ultimately, this work not only openly articulates the reality of psychological burdens within family structures but also successfully integrates the heritage of traditional embroidery skills into a contemporary pop-culture product that resonates with modern society.

Acknowledgements

This research stems from a visual art creation bachelor thesis at the Universitas Negeri Jakarta. This research did not receive any funding.

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