

Arts Education and Visual Communication in Character Design of the Nusa Five Serial Comic Character by Sweta Kartika

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Abstract

Comics have become one of the most influential media in popular culture in Indonesia. The comic Nusa Five by Sweta Kartika is a prominent example of this, incorporating elements of Indonesian culture into its character designs. This research aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the design of the main characters in the comic Nusa Five to understand how arts education and visual communication play a role in creating characters that reflect the diversity of Indonesian culture. Character design analysis was carried out using a qualitative approach which involved observing the shapes, colors, textures and expressions of the characters in the comic Nusa Five. Data were analyzed to identify ways in which arts education and visual communication influence character formation. The results of the analysis show that art education provides a strong understanding of the use of visual elements to create unique and interesting characters. Meanwhile, visual communication strengthens visual narratives and conveys deep messages to readers. Even though there are some weaknesses in character design, arts education and visual communication remain an important foundation in creating strong and cohesive characters that reflect Indonesian culture. With a better understanding of the principles of visual art and design, Indonesian artists and designers can continue to produce work that respects and well represents the archipelago's cultural diversity.

Keywords: Arts Education, Character Design, Comics, Culture, Visual Communication

1. INTRODUCTION

Comics which were originally considered light entertainment, have now gained wider recognition as a powerful and versatile medium. His ability to convey stories through images and words makes him a very effective communication tool, able to touch on a wide range of topics from comedy to serious social issues (Angga et al., 2020). With this unique format, comics can reach a wider audience, including those who may not be interested in traditional forms of literature.

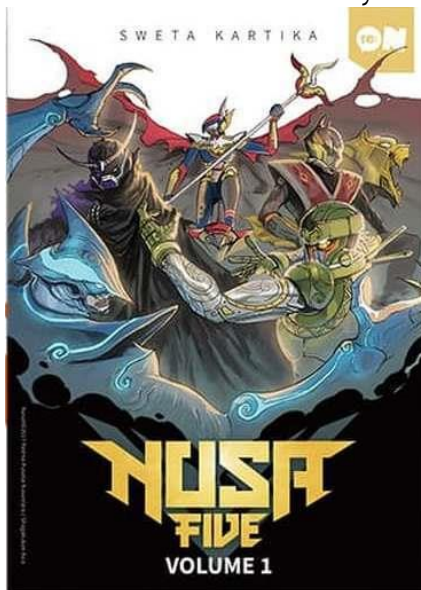
As a form of artistic expression, comics give creators the freedom to experiment with visual style, narrative, and story structure (Rosala, 2016). It has produced innovative works and influenced popular culture, as well as paving the way for new genres and subcultures. Additionally, comics have also become a valuable educational tool, used in schools and educational institutions to help clarify complex concepts and enrich learning experiences (Arifianto, 2019).

As more and more comics are adapted into films and television series, their influence in the entertainment industry is becoming more visible (Mahsan, 2021). This not only increased the popularity of comics themselves, but also expanded their reach and impact as a medium of communication and artistic expression. Comics have proven that they are not just entertainment, but also a dynamic and important medium in modern society (Aditia & Prabawa, 2020).

In Indonesia, comics are not only considered as entertainment but also as a powerful medium for reflecting and influencing culture and society (Hasian & Utami, 2018). Sweta Kartika, as one of the leading comic artists, has succeeded in creating works that resonate with readers from various backgrounds.

Nusa Five, by Sweta Kartika, is a perfect example of how comics can be more than just stories; it is a blend of art and culture. By combining traditional Indonesian elements such as batik motifs, wayang and local legends into his character designs, Sweta not only enriches the visual world of comics but also introduces Indonesia's cultural heritage to a wider audience.

Nusa Five is published by a well-known comic publisher in Indonesia, re:ON Comics. The first printing of this comic was published in December 2018 and is circulating on the market until now (Shofi & Denafri, 2021). The first volume of this comic tells the story of an evil force called Asura whose aim is to awaken Kelana, an evil creature who will bring disaster to the earth. In carrying out their plan, Sandekala's troops succeeded in finding and resurrecting their leader, Garaka. To fight this evil force, four young men who inherited the power of the archipelago work together under the name Ksatria Nusantara. Despite this, they were still overwhelmed until the last Ksatria Nusantara appeared and the rise of Pandita, one of the entities guarding the gate of the energy dimension who became Kelana's mortal enemy who then gave the Ksatria Nusantara new powers to fight Asura and the Sandekala troops. The story of this comic has only reached the second volume when this article was written.



Gambar 1. Cover Komik Nusa Five Volume 1

Sweta Kartika is a comic artist from Central Java and known for works such as *Gray & Jingga* and *Wanara*, bringing her unique skills and vision to every page of *Nusa Five* (Danar, 2020). The main characters are Ksatria Nusantara Taring, Ksatria Nusantara Merah, Ksatria Nusantara Barunadwipa, Ksatria Nusantara Hitam, and Ksatria Nusantara Ombak such as Rangga, Naya, Rimba, Rena, and Oji not only represent the power to fight crime but also the diversity and richness of Indonesia. Through this work, Sweta challenges the boundaries of traditional comics aesthetics and shows how local comic artists can contribute to broader cultural dialogue, while remaining true to their roots and promoting national identity.

Arts education and visual communication play a crucial role in the creative process of comic character design, as seen in *Nusa Five*. Visual communication is a way of conveying messages or ideas through visual elements (Yeo, 2014). In the context of comic character design, visual communication plays an important role in various aspects, including:

- 1) **Character Development:** Designers use visual elements such as shape, color, and texture to create unique and interesting characters. For example, a strong, bold character might be depicted with bold lines and bright colors, while a soft, shy character might have rounder shapes and softer colors.
- 2) **Visual Storytelling:** Visual communication helps in conveying the storyline and emotions of the characters (Yulius, 2016). For example, color and lighting can be used to show the mood or atmosphere of a scene, while composition and perspective can be used to show the relationship between characters and their environment.
- 3) **Symbolism:** Designers often use symbolism in character designs to add depth and meaning to the story. For example, a character might wear clothing with a particular motif that symbolizes their background or personality.
- 4) **Interaction with the Reader:** Visual communication is also important in building a relationship between the character and the reader. Designers must consider how visual elements will be interpreted by the reader, and how they can be used to guide the reader's eye through the page and the storyline (Zuiker, 2014).

In arts education, the Nusa Five comics serve as an invaluable resource for teaching fundamental concepts. Through the vibrant characters and intricate settings depicted in the comics, students can explore the intricate interplay of color, shape, and symbolism (Wibowo, 2020). According to Rahayu (2018), By analyzing how these elements are utilized within the comic's visual storytelling, students gain a deeper understanding of how artistic choices influence perception and convey nuanced messages. Moreover, studying the cultural symbolism embedded in the characters and their environments fosters a greater appreciation for the richness of Indonesian art and culture (Astuti et al., 2014). As students engage with Nusa Five, they not only develop their analytical and creative abilities but also cultivate a broader cultural literacy that extends beyond the confines of the classroom. This holistic approach to arts education not only enriches students' artistic skills but also nurtures their understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural expressions.

Based on a focus on applying the principles of arts education and visual communication in comic character design, this research aims to explore the influence of these elements on reader perception and engagement. In this context, the analysis of Nusa Five, by Sweta Kartika, is considered relevant because it is able to integrate elements of Indonesian culture into its characters. The aim of this research is to reveal how the use of these cultural elements not only enriches visual aesthetics, but also enhances the identity and message conveyed through the work. Therefore, the research question that will be answered in this research is how to integrate Indonesian cultural elements in the design of comic characters, especially in the work Nusa Five by Sweta Kartika, influence readers' perception and engagement, as well as its contribution to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage?

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The research method considered most relevant for exploring the complexity and depth of subjects such as the application of the principles of art education and visual communication in comic character design is a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach allows researchers to understand the social, cultural and historical context surrounding works of art, as well as providing space for broader and deeper interpretations of observed phenomena (Arifianto, 2022). In the context of research on the Nusa Five comic and how Sweta Kartika integrates elements of Indonesian culture into her characters, a qualitative approach allows researchers to investigate the creative process and motives behind the character designs. Through in-depth analysis of the creative process and interpretation of meaning in works of art, this research can reveal the contribution of comics as a dynamic medium in promoting and preserving cultural heritage, as well as highlighting the important role of artists in shaping identity and cultural dialogue.

Analysis of visual elements in comics, such as character, color, texture, and symbolism, provides in-depth insight into how these elements influence the reader's experience and convey the message the work conveys (Benić, 2020).

- a. **Character Form:** Character form in comics includes their physical appearance and expressions. Each character has their own characteristics, be it in body shape, face, or the attributes they have. Not only does this character shape influence how readers identify and relate to the character, but it can also strengthen characterization and illustrate their personality and role in the story.

- b. **Use of Color:** The use of color in comics is an important element that can create atmosphere, trigger emotions, and highlight important elements in the story. Choosing the right color can increase visual appeal and help convey the atmosphere or feeling that the author wants to convey. Additionally, color can also be used to differentiate between scenes, characters, or even to highlight certain themes or concepts in comics.
- c. **Texture:** Texture in comics refers to visual details that show the diversity of a surface or material, such as the texture of skin, fabric, or background. Proper use of texture can give visual depth to an image and help bring elements in a comic to life. Texture can also be used to add a sense of realism or highlight important elements in the story.
- d. **Symbolism:** Symbolism in comics refers to the use of images, symbols, or motifs that have a special meaning beyond their literal meaning. Symbolism is used to convey implied messages, themes, or deeper concepts in the story. Clever use of symbolism can enrich the reader's interpretation and provide additional dimensions to the visual narrative.

By understanding and analyzing these visual elements in depth, we can explore how the use of character, color, texture, and symbolism in comics, such as in the work of Nusa Five, can influence readers' perceptions, increase their involvement in the story, and contribute to the experience. rich and memorable reading. This analysis will require the use of careful and systematic visual observation methods. The goal is to identify how these elements interact and convey the message to the reader. For example, how color and texture are used to highlight certain characteristics of a character, or how symbolism is used to add depth and meaning to a story.

This research will involve a literature review on theories of art education and visual communication, as well as related research in the field of comic character design (Rina et al., 2020). By understanding the conceptual and theoretical foundations behind the creative process in comic character design, this research can obtain a strong foundation for analyzing and interpreting the visual elements in Nusa Five's work. This will help in understanding how the principles of arts education and visual communication are applied in character design.

This research method will also involve interviews with Sweta Kartika or other experts in the field of comic art and character design. This interview will provide direct insight into the creative process and considerations involved in creating the characters in the comic. This will provide an understanding of how visual elements are selected and arranged to convey certain messages to readers. For example, how characters are created and developed, how colors and symbols are chosen and used, and how all of these elements work together to create a cohesive and interesting work of art.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Art Education in the Nusa Lima Series Design by Sweta Kartika

Arts education is a field of education that aims to develop understanding, appreciation, skills and artistic expression in individuals which includes an introduction to various forms of art such as fine art, music, dance, theater and literature, as well as the development of technical skills in creating works of art. Art education also involves an understanding of art concepts, art history, and the cultural context in which works of art

are created. More than just training technical skills, arts education also teaches individuals to think creatively, develop their imagination, and express themselves in unique and meaningful ways. Through arts education, individuals can learn to appreciate beauty, respond to the world aesthetically, and contribute to the enrichment of culture and community life.

This research examines the influence of art education and visual communication in character design in the Nusa Lima comic series by Sweta Kartika. This research highlights how Sweta Kartika through her work adopts and adapts elements from popular superhero series such as Power Rangers, to create narratives that are unique and relevant to the Indonesian cultural context. In her creative process, Sweta Kartika does not just imitate foreign concepts, but combines them with local elements, namely Indonesian endemic fauna. This can be seen from the design of the Ksatria Nusantara characters, each of which represents a typical animal from the five large islands in Indonesia: Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Papua. This design not only shows Indonesia's rich biodiversity, but also conveys a message about the importance of preserving the environment and species diversity.

The results of an interview with Sweta Kartika, the creator of the Nusa Five comic, confirmed that choosing an endemic animal as a symbol for the main character was not only an aesthetic choice but also had a deep educational purpose. As stated by Sweta Kartika:

“The use of these symbols has a dual purpose (Sugiarto, 2015); firstly, as a means to enrich the narrative with typical and authentic elements from Indonesia, and secondly, to build an emotional connection between readers and the natural heritage of the country. The use of endemic animals in this comic effectively communicates Indonesia's extraordinary biodiversity, which often receives little attention. Helping readers, especially the younger generation, to recognize and appreciate unique species that only exist in the Indonesian archipelago. More than that, these representations trigger curiosity and a desire to know more about the surrounding environment.” (03/01/2024)

The use of symbols in the form of endemic animals certainly has a positive impact on the Nusa Five comic. As stated by (Sugiarto, 2015) this symbol has various uses; firstly, as a means to enrich the narrative with typical and authentic elements from Indonesia, and secondly, to build an emotional connection between readers and the natural heritage of the country.

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The results of an interview with Sweta Kartika, creator of the Nusa Five comic, confirmed that choosing an endemic animal as a symbol for the main character is not only an aesthetic choice but also has a deep educational purpose. The use of these symbols serves a dual purpose (Sugiarto, 2015); first, as a means to enrich the narrative with elements that are typical and authentic from Indonesia, and second, to build an emotional connection between readers and the country's natural heritage.

The use of endemic animals in this comic effectively communicates the extraordinary biodiversity of Indonesia, which often does not receive enough attention. It helps readers, especially the younger generation, to recognize and appreciate the unique species that can only be found in the Indonesian archipelago. More than that, these representations trigger curiosity and a desire to learn more about the surrounding environment.

Apart from that, Sweta Kartika also succeeded in integrating the conservation message into the storyline, so that readers are not only entertained but also educated about the importance of environmental conservation. This shows how art and literature can be a powerful tool for increasing social and environmental awareness, as well as increasing national pride through appreciation of Indonesia's natural wealth.

Based on researchers' observations, the Nusa Five comic features five main characters who represent the diversity and richness of Indonesian culture. These characters are:

- a. Ksatria Nusantara Taring: Representing tenacity and courage, this character is inspired by the Sumatran tiger, a symbol of the island of Sumatra which is famous for its wild and beautiful nature.
- b. Ksatria Nusantara Merah: Depicting enthusiasm and energy, this character is taken from the image of the bird of paradise which reflects the natural beauty of Papua Island.
- c. Ksatria Nusantara Barunadwipa: Symbolizing wisdom and calm, this character is inspired by the Javan rhinoceros, a rare animal that is an icon of the island of Java.
- d. Ksatria Nusantara Hitam: Representing strength and toughness, this character is based on the Komodo dragon, an ancient animal that is characteristic of Komodo Island in Nusa Tenggara.
- e. Ksatria Nusantara Ombak: Symbolizing freedom and adaptability, this character is inspired by dolphins which symbolize marine life around the island of Sulawesi.

Based on the research results, researchers assess that the educational value in the Nusa Five comic art by Swita Kartika can be found in various aspects, including:

- Respect for Local Culture
Sweta Kartika uses this comic as a means to celebrate and promote the richness of Indonesian culture. In character design and storyline, Kartika presents local cultural

elements, such as folklore, mythology and historical heritage, which enrich the reading experience and strengthen cultural identity.

- Creative Expression Through Visual Arts
Through visual arts in this comic, Kartika shows her ability to depict strong and interesting characters. The use of color, composition and visual details produces work that is aesthetic and engaging, while also enhancing the narrative and atmosphere of the story.
- Moral and Educational Message
The comic Nusa Five also contains educational values and moral messages conveyed through the story and its characters. Kartika uses the comic medium to convey messages about kindness, justice, friendship and courage, which can be useful learning for readers, especially children and teenagers.
- Inspiration and Development of Artistic Talent
Through works such as Nusa Five, Kartika can also inspire the younger generation to explore and develop their own artistic talents. By seeing Kartika's achievements in the world of comics, readers, especially those interested in visual art and narrative, can feel motivated to explore their own creative potential.

Thus, the value of artistic education in the comic Nusa Five lies not only in the aesthetic and visual arts aspects, but also in respect for local culture, conveying moral and educational messages, as well as inspiring readers to explore their own artistic talents.

3.2. Visual Communication in Character Design for the Nusa Lima Comic Series by Sweta Kartika

In discussing visual communication in the character design of the comic series Nusa Five by Sweta Kartika, there is a wide opportunity to understand how visual art is not only a medium for entertaining, but also a powerful tool in conveying messages, building identity, and strengthening engagement reader.

Kanaya Meuthia, as the Ksatria Nusantara Taring who inherits Swarnadwipa's powers, is a perfect example of how arts education and visual communication can play a role in effective character design. Initially, Kanaya was depicted wearing a helmet with cat ears, a symbol of the cunning and agility associated with the tiger, the animal that inspired her strength. However, as the character and story progressed, the helmet evolved to feature tiger ears and fangs, reinforcing the character's visual identity as a representation of the tiger's strength and bravery.

This design evolution not only reflects the character's growth in the narrative but also shows how art and design elements can be used to communicate character change and development. This is evidence of a holistic approach in arts education, where the visual aspect serves not only as decoration but also as a powerful communication tool.

Furthermore, the use of colors and motifs on Kanaya's armor which resembles a shawl from traditional West Sumatran clothing not only adds aesthetic depth but also educates readers about the richness of Indonesian culture. The colors yellow and brown not only create visual harmony but also have deep symbolic meaning, connecting the character to the island of Sumatra, where his power originates.



Gambar 2. Kanaya Meuthia, Ksatria Nusantara Taring

Rangga Wira Prakoso, as Ksatria Nusantara Merah was originally depicted with a visor that resembles an eagle's beak, a visual metaphor for his sharp vision and ability to see the big picture, which corresponds to his ability to summon and ride an eagle. As the story and character develop, Rangga's design transforms, his helmet now resembles an eagle's head and his cloak spreads wide like wings, reinforcing the representation of the eagle as a symbol of freedom and strength. This transformation reflects his character's growth and increase in power, while also communicating the values associated with the island of Java, where his power originates.

The island of Java, known for its volcanoes, was the inspiration for Rangga's power to manipulate fire, depicting a powerful and unstoppable force of nature. It also ties the characters to local history and geography, providing an additional layer of education for the reader.

The Rangga armor motif which takes inspiration from Javanese royal clothing in the past not only adds visual beauty but also educates readers about Indonesia's cultural heritage. This shows how character design can be a means of teaching history and culture, while strengthening national identity through visual works of art.



Gambar 3. Rangga Wira Prakoso, Ksatria Nusantara Merah

Furthermore, the character design of Rimba Kala Mantana as Ksatria Nusantara Barunadwipa not only reflects physical strength and cultural heritage, but is also the result of in-depth arts education and visual communication. Art education played an important role in the development of these character designs, where an understanding of color theory, composition, and symbolism was used to create a strong visual identity. A helmet with a monkey face motif, for example, is not only an aesthetic choice, but also a means of visual communication that conveys the courage and strength associated with these primates.

In the context of visual communication, this character design uses symbols and accessories that are rich in meaning. The hoop earrings and feathers used not only add aesthetic detail but also serve as a visual code that communicates the origins and values of the Dayak tribe. It shows how arts education and visual communication can contribute to the formation of deeper and layered character identities, which are not only visually appealing but also rich in story and cultural background.

Furthermore, the character's energy source comes from trees underscoring the importance of nature in character design, reminding us of the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. It also emphasizes the message of environmental conservation, which is an important part of arts education and social awareness. In this way, the Rimba Kala Mantana design becomes more than just a physical representation; it becomes a medium that educates and communicates about the importance of harmony between culture, nature and society.



Gambar 4. Rimba Kalam Mantana, Ksatria Nusantara Barunadwipa

Renata Mokoginta's character design is one of Ksatria Nusantara Hitam. In the design process, an understanding of visual communication is essential. The animal muzzle-shaped mask and helmet with horns on Renata's character not only add a fantastic element but also function as communication tools that convey the character's mystical powers. The use of dark colors on the robes creates associations with the magical powers of the underworld, while the armor resembling Baju Bodo communicates the cultural identity of South Sulawesi.

Art education also teaches the importance of context and how design elements can be used to tell stories. Anoa, as an endemic animal to Sulawesi, was chosen not only because of its physical uniqueness but also because of its symbolic value in local culture. This shows how characters can be representative of a place and its traditions, giving greater depth and context to the story being told.

Overall, Renata Mokoginta's designs reflect the integration of art knowledge, visual communication, and cultural appreciation, all of which are important aspects of art education. This shows how characters can be used as a means of education and cultural preservation, as well as being a source of inspiration and admiration for readers



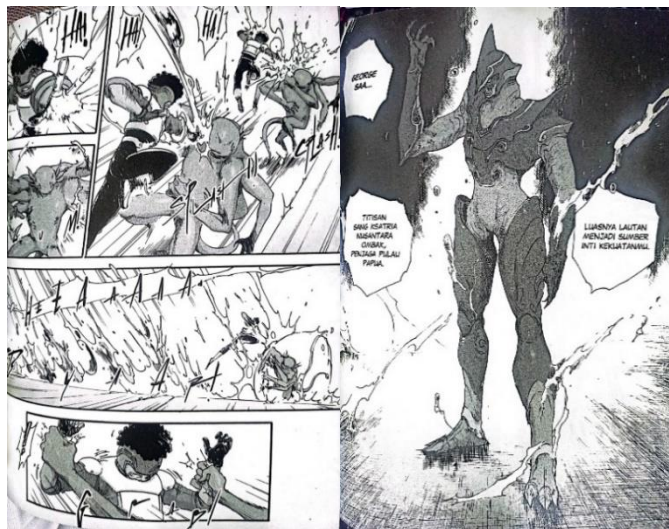
Gambar 5. Renata Mokoginta, Ksatria Nusantara Hitam

George Saa's character design as Kstaria Nusantara Ombak, inspired by the power of the waves and the beauty of the Papuan sea, reflects the application of arts education and the principles of effective visual communication. Art education provides insight into how visual elements such as shape, color, and texture can be used to convey character characteristics and emotions. Masks and helmets featuring sharks not only add an aesthetic dimension but also serve as symbols of the character's strength and adaptation to the marine environment.

In terms of visual communication, this character design utilizes the strong visual association between sharks and the sea to communicate the source of George Saa's power. The fins and sharp snout of its helmet are reminiscent of the speed and agility of a shark, while the dark color of its skin conveys the depth and mystery of the sea. References to Raja Ampat through these design elements not only add unique character but also honor Papua's biodiversity and natural beauty.

Art education also teaches the importance of cultural context in design. By integrating elements such as dark skin that represents the majority ethnicity in Papua, this design respects and celebrates ethnic diversity and cultural richness. This shows how character design can be a powerful tool for education and the promotion of cultural awareness.

George Saa's overall designs are the result of a deep understanding of how art and visual communication can be used to create characters that are not only visually appealing but also rich in story and meaning. This shows the important role arts education plays in creating emotionally and culturally resonant work.



Gambar 6. George Saa, Ksatria Nusantara Ombak

However, in evaluating the character designs in this comic, we cannot ignore the aspects of art education and visual communication which are the foundations for creating strong and convincing characters (Sari & Irena, 2022). Character designs related to themes and culture, as seen in the character Rena who adopts the Anoa theme, should take deeper consideration in selecting visual elements. Art and visual communication education can help designers understand more deeply the motifs, symbols and iconography that are appropriate to the cultural context they wish to convey. For example, the use of a mask that resembles a pig's snout for the character Rena may not be culturally appropriate, and arts education can help in selecting visual elements that are more appropriate and understandable to the target audience.

Art education and visual communication are also important in overcoming ambiguity in character design, as seen in the characters Rimba and Oji. Designers who have a strong understanding of art and visual communication will be able to create designs that are more cohesive and avoid ambiguity that can interfere with understanding character. For example, by strengthening motifs and characteristics that clearly reflect the cultural identity of the region it represents.

Additionally, when it comes to character design consistency, art and visual communication education can help designers understand the principles of cohesive and balanced design. As seen in the character Rangga, where excessive and inconsistent use of color can disrupt the overall aesthetic of the character. With a deeper understanding of the use of color and other visual elements, designers will be able to create characters that are more harmonious and easily recognized by audiences.

Even though the character designs in these comics have some weaknesses and ambiguities, art education and visual communication remain an important foundation in creating characters that are strong, cohesive, and represent culture well. Increased

understanding and application of visual art and design principles can help overcome these weaknesses and improve the overall quality of the resulting artwork. Thus, appreciation for the cultural representation efforts made by Indonesian artists and designers in creating characters that depict the cultural diversity of the archipelago should be widely appreciated.

4. CONCLUSION

This research confirms the important role of art education and visual communication in creating strong and cohesive character designs in the comic *Nusa Five* by Sweta Kartika. In-depth analysis of the main character designs reveals how visual elements such as shape, color, texture, and symbolism are used to communicate characteristics, emotions, and cultural background. The importance of understanding the principles of art and visual design is also emphasized in maintaining consistent character design. The results of this research show that comics are not just mere entertainment, but also a powerful medium for reflecting and influencing culture and society. By utilizing arts education and visual communication, artists like Sweta Kartika can create works that inspire, educate and stimulate appreciation of Indonesia's rich culture. Therefore, continuous support for the development and understanding of arts education and visual communication in comic creation is very important to enrich and strengthen Indonesia's cultural identity in the world of arts and entertainment.

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