Transformation of the Seven Seas Characters from The Little Mermaid into Carnival Costume Design

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ABSTRACT

This costume design project aims to present an imaginative visual interpretation of the Seven Seas characters from The Little Mermaid, while highlighting the potential of fantasy narratives as a source of inspiration in costume design development. The primary inspiration is drawn from the book The Little Mermaid: Guide to Merfolk, which details the unique characteristics of each character and the seas they originate from. Carnival costumes were chosen as the medium of expression due to their fusion of aesthetic, cultural, and imaginative elements. The main issue addressed in this study is how to interpret the Seven Seas characters into costume designs that can effectively represent both the visual identity and narrative value of each character through the adaptation of diverse elements such as color, texture, and silhouette. The creative method refers to the concept by S.P. Gustami, which comprises three stages: (1) exploration, involving literature review and character analysis; (2) design development, which includes ideation and sketch creation; and (3) realization, presented in the form of visual costume design renderings. The outcome of this design process consists of seven carnival costume designs that visually and narratively represent the Seven Seas characters. This work is expected to contribute to the development of fantasy-based costume design and serve as a reference for future conceptual fashion design projects.

Keywords: Carnival costume, Seven Seas, The Little Mermaid

INTRODUCTION

Mermaids are mythological creatures depicted as women with the upper body of a human and the lower body of a fish. Stories about these beings have developed across various world cultures, including European, Asian, and African mythology, and are often associated with the sea, beauty, and mystery (Janickyj et al., 2024). The myth of mermaids has been known for thousands of years. Pamugari (2023) explains that one of the oldest legends originates from Syria around 1000 BCE, involving the goddess Atargatis, who is believed to be an early form of the mermaid figure known today.

In Indonesian local culture, mermaid myths are not merely folklore stories, but also carry moral and social values passed down through generations. They are often portrayed as beautiful and enchanting beings, yet possessing supernatural powers. In the Indonesian context, mermaid myths go beyond entertainment; they serve as a medium for moral education. Sa'diyah and Raharjo (2025: 58), in their study of the folktale "*Putri Duyung di Telaga Lor*", state that the myth conveys values of politeness

and courtesy that are traditionally transmitted through narrative. This demonstrates that myths function not only as entertainment but also as a mechanism for internalizing societal norms.

Mermaids reflect the human relationship with the sea through the concept of the aquapelagic imaginary a cultural imagination that links human identity to aquatic spaces and their inhabitants. This concept broadens the meaning of mermaids beyond mythical creatures, positioning them as symbols of spiritual and emotional ties between humans and the marine environment (Shima Journal, 2025: 11–13).

The existence of mermaid myths reflects humanity's need to understand and personify nature, particularly the vast and inaccessible ocean. In the modern era, although these myths have undergone transformations through popular media, their meaning remains alive and relevant within the cultural dynamics of contemporary society (Elyakim et al., 2024: 141–147). The representation of mermaids has evolved in popular culture, notably through film and children's literature.

One of the most widely recognized modern representations is Disney's The Little Mermaid, a loose adaptation of the classic fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen. This story was first introduced as an animated film in 1989 and became a significant milestone in Disney's revival during the period known as the Disney Renaissance.

In the animated version, Ariel a young mermaid curious about the human world became a popular culture icon representing the spirit of freedom, curiosity, and courage. In 2023, Disney reintroduced the story in a live-action format, offering a new interpretation of its characters with a more realistic approach. Melanie (2023) notes that

the 2023 version of The Little Mermaid underwent significant changes compared to the 1989 animated version, both in terms of characterization and the addition of new elements. This Disney adaptation presents not only visual and narrative transformations but also sparked social debates—particularly in the live-action version—regarding racial representation and the skin color of Ariel (Iman, Paokuma, Hidayati, & Ramawati, 2024).

Although the live-action film remains centered on Ariel's journey, the representation of her sisters serves primarily as a symbol of diversity, without substantial narrative development, making them more of a visual ornament than active characters (Latupeirissa et al., 2024: 6). Ariel's sisters appear only briefly in the film, reinforcing the narrative focus on Ariel herself rather than the dynamics of her family (Arwansyah et al., 2025: 9).

As a companion to the live-action film, Disney released a book titled The Little Mermaid: Guide to Merfolk, written by Eric Geron and published in 2023. This book serves as an important narrative extension, providing additional story elements that were not explored in depth in the film. It introduces seven mermaid princesses from seven different ocean kingdoms, referred to as the Seven Seas. Each character is given a more complete identity, including descriptions of their personalities, the oceanic regions they represent, the unique cultures of their respective kingdoms, and their connections to specific marine creatures from those areas.

Beyond simply revealing their names and appearances, the book also illustrates how each princess possesses distinct characteristics that reflect the diversity of the marine environments they come from—

ranging from tropical waters and icy seas to deep, dark oceans. For example, one is depicted as hailing from frigid waters, accompanied by sea animals like seals and polar bears, while another comes from a tropical coral sea, coexisting with colorful fish and other marine mammals.

With its rich visual and narrative presentation, this book opens new spaces for interpretation and imagination of the underwater world within The Little Mermaid universe. Its presence serves as an important resource for further exploring characters that previously only played supporting roles in the film. This demonstrates that the potential for developing the mermaid world in popular culture remains vast and can serve as a strong reference for the creation of visual works, costume design, and thematic exploration in contemporary art and fashion.

In the book, Mala is described as the leader of the Chaine Sea, a shallow water region south of Chiveil surrounded by small islands. She has a pink-orange tail and represents Asian culture. Tamika hails from the Fracus Sea, a tropical area rich in coral reefs and African military culture. Karina is the leader of the Saithe Sea, a cold ocean shrouded in mist and ice. Indira leads the Brinedive Sea, a warm region characterized by stone and sand architecture. Kaspia comes from the Apneic Sea, a brackish area abundant with coral reefs. Perla governs the Piton Sea, a calm deep ocean home to whales and orcas. Ariel originates from the Carinae Sea, where the Sea King's palace stands.

In the context of fashion, clothing functions not only as protection for the body but also as a medium for expressing identity, culture, and social as well as personal narratives (Damayanti & Sari, 2020: 45). This understanding is essential as a foundation for designing garments that are not only

aesthetic but also meaningful and relevant to the values conveyed through the design work. Costume design represents a powerful form of visual exploration in delivering artistic and symbolic messages. Carnival costumes, in particular, offer freedom to explore shapes, colors, and strong, theatrical visual concepts (Kusuma & Hartanti, 2019: 58).

Etymologically, the term "design" derives from several loanwords, including the Italian word design, which grammatically means "drawing" and "meaning." Character design is a form of illustration that presents a "character" concept, whether protagonist or antagonist, along with all its attributes such as personality, physical features, facial expressions, weapons used, and so forth. Through the character design process, the desired figure can be portrayed, including body shape, facial expressions, demeanor, and the costume worn (Suwanda, A.K. Patra, Nalan, Arthur S., & Supriatna, 2021: 100).

The objective of this study is to create seven carnival costume designs inspired by the Seven Seas characters from Eric Geron's The Little Mermaid: Guide to Merfolk. Each design will be developed through in-depth visual exploration, considering essential elements such as color palettes that represent the identity of each sea, silhouette shapes, and textures that depict the distinctive atmosphere of each character's marine environment. Furthermore, the design approach will also reference the cultural background and symbolism inherent to each ocean kingdom, aiming to produce costume works that are not only visually aesthetic but also carry strong narrative meaning. Thus, the resulting designs will not only serve as creative interpretations of the mermaid characters but also as representative mediums that portray maritime cultural

diversity and underwater imagination within the spectacular context of carnival.

Based on the problem formulation, the questions this study aims to answer are:

1. How can the visual and cultural characteristics of each character in The Little Mermaid: Guide to Merfolk be translated into costume design?
2. What dominant visual elements in each character can be adapted into carnival costumes?
3. How can the principles of carnival costume design be utilized to strengthen the visual narrative of the characters?

This work is expected to serve as a strong and profound representation of visual narrative in the form of garment designs that are not only imaginative but also communicative, effectively conveying story and character visually. Furthermore, this study aims to contribute significantly to the development of costume design based on fantasy stories, particularly in transforming narrative elements into visually aesthetic, artistic, and meaningful forms within the realm of contemporary fashion.

METHOD

Research methods are closely related to procedures, techniques, tools, and the research design employed (Sugiyono, 2019: 2). Research methods can also be understood as structured ways or steps to obtain valid and reliable knowledge or information. Patriansah, Prasetya, and Aravik (2021) state that methods or steps are used to analyze a new object or phenomenon. This study employs the art creation method developed by SP Gustami, which is considered most suitable for examining exploratory and creative topics. This method is chosen because it offers a systematic approach to the art creation process, focusing not only on the final outcome but also on the stages of thinking and considerations during the creative process.

The creative process of art creation consists of three (3) stages: 1) Exploration, 2) Design, and 3) Realization (Gustami, 2004: 28–32).

According to Setiaji (2020), the use of smartphones as a medium for creating visual art opens new opportunities in the drawing and design process, especially through applications such as Procreate, MediBang Paint, SketchBook, and Adobe Illustrator. In this digital era, smartphones serve not only as communication devices but also as transformative tools for creative art media capable of producing professional-quality illustrations. Visualization techniques are comprehensively carried out using digital media supported by the graphic design software Ibis Paint X. This application is optimally utilized to create final sketches of costume designs, apply coloring according to predetermined color palettes, and add various visual details such as fabric textures, shimmering effects, and decorative accents that characterize carnival costumes.

A. Exploration Stage

The exploration stage begins with collecting various references and visual inspirations closely related to the theme of carnival costume design, particularly costumes intended for parades or large-scale art performances. Additionally, research by Rahmadhan (2023) emphasizes the importance of concept development in the creation of carnival costumes, including the creative process of design. The collected

references encompass aesthetic as well as symbolic elements that can strengthen the character of each costume to be designed. One of the main sources in this exploration process is the book The Little Mermaid: Guide to Merfolk by Geron (2023), which serves as a crucial foundation to gain deeper understanding of each mermaid character inspiring the designs. This knowledge greatly assists in building a strong and consistent visual identity for each costume design. Through this exploratory process, the following moodboard was created:

Figure 1. Inspiration Moodboard
(Sumber: Dinda Julia, 2025)

According to Anggarini, Bangun, and Saripudin (2020), a moodboard is a tool that can be used in the idea exploration phase to facilitate the design process more efficiently. A moodboard is not merely a collection of images, but also a systematic visual thinking method to generate design concepts.

The moodboard compiled during the design phase represents the seven main mermaid characters, each originating from different sea backgrounds, as inspired by the book The Little Mermaid: Guide to Merfolk (Geron, 2023). Every visual element included in the moodboard holds meaning and plays a role in strengthening the design narrative as well as clarifying the identity of each character within the framework of carnival costume design.

Overall, the moodboard serves as an essential medium for visualizing the aesthetic direction of the costume designs to be developed (Janah, Budhyani & Sudirtha, 2021: 8-10). Colors, textures, silhouettes, and other visual attributes in the moodboard are used as the basis for design decision-making, enabling the creation of strong and narrative visual identities for each costume. Thus, the moodboard functions not only as a visual aid but also as a conceptual map guiding the creative process of character-based carnival costume design.

B. Design Stage

The design stage is conducted based on the visual exploration results obtained in the previous phase, which include aesthetic, symbolic, and narrative references for each mermaid character. This process serves as the initial step in translating exploratory data into concrete visual forms through the creation of costume design sketches. Design concepts are systematically developed in the form of preliminary sketches, with careful consideration of the distinctive characteristics of each character as the primary source of inspiration.

Each design is crafted based on the unique visual identity of the respective character, such as the representation of cultural backgrounds reflected through selected motifs and ornaments, as well as the integration of marine elements like distinctive flora and fauna or textures that embody the character's natural environment. The determination of silhouette shapes is a crucial aspect in conveying the initial impression of the design, tailored to align with the personality of each character.

Figure 2. Design Sketches of the
7 Seven Seas Characters
(Sumber: Dinda Julia, 2025)

C. Realization Stage

In the initial stages of the creative process, mimesis may occur, where referencing previous works is possible and unavoidable. Starting from referencing, it can lead to the development of new possibilities, discoveries, and creations that may originate from adapting earlier idioms (Lois Denissa et al., 2016: 436). This stage involves refining the initial sketches into fully developed final design illustrations. The final illustration not only presents the complete visual form of the costume but also includes various important details that more concretely represent the character's identity. Refinement is carried out by considering the main colors consistent with the color palette established in the moodboard, as well as selecting color gradients to add depth and visual dimension to the costume.

Supporting ornaments such as the application of fringe and other marine texture techniques begin to be depicted in detail at this stage, with the purpose not only as decoration but also to strengthen the symbolism of the sea character that inspires the design. Distinctive elements from each character's marine environment, such as fish scale shapes or coral motifs, are also incorporated. Overall, the final illustration represents the embodiment of the conceptual stage that has gone through the previous exploratory and design processes.

Figure 3. Final Costume Designs of the Seven
Seas Characters
(Sumber: Dinda Julia, 2025)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Mermaid

According to Sartini (2022: 92-122), myths are defined as a series of original narratives that develop within societies and are believed to be connected to spiritual powers from the past. Myths, in turn, function to shape norms and customs because they contain deep beliefs that regulate social behavior. Myths are also often associated with the creation of the universe, usually in the form of imaginative stories. Nevertheless, these myths are believed and influence the subconscious of human thought, as evidenced by many communities whose lifestyles are governed by these myths. One of the widely believed myths is the myth of mermaids.

Figure 4. Mermaid Illustration
(Sumber: https://faktualnews.co/2021/01/03/putri-duyung-legenda-dari-seluruh-penjuru-dunia/249360/)

According to Mustika (2020), this creature is not only present in childhood fairy tales but also serves as a symbol of imagination continuously expressed through cross-media artworks. In Europe, mermaids are known as "Mermaid" or "Siren." In the study of sea mythology, this creature is regarded as a symbol of transition and allure toward the unknown beyond the human world (Fakhruddin & Rasyid, 2020). In popular culture, mermaids have evolved into representations of beauty, mystery, and also the hidden humanity within sea creatures. The presence of mermaids as legendary beings imbued with meaning makes them a powerful source of inspiration in the creation of artworks and fashion design.

There are many versions of mermaid legends found across different cultures worldwide. Among them, the most well-known is The Little Mermaid, a story penned by renowned Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen.

B. The Little Mermaid

The film represents themes such as self-discovery, courage, and sacrifice, set against a vibrant underwater world accompanied by iconic music such as Part of Your World. The live-action version of The Little Mermaid was released in 2023, directed by Rob Marshall, with Halle Bailey portraying Ariel. In this version, the story is further developed, including the depiction of Ariel's six sisters, each representing a different sea, although they are only briefly featured.
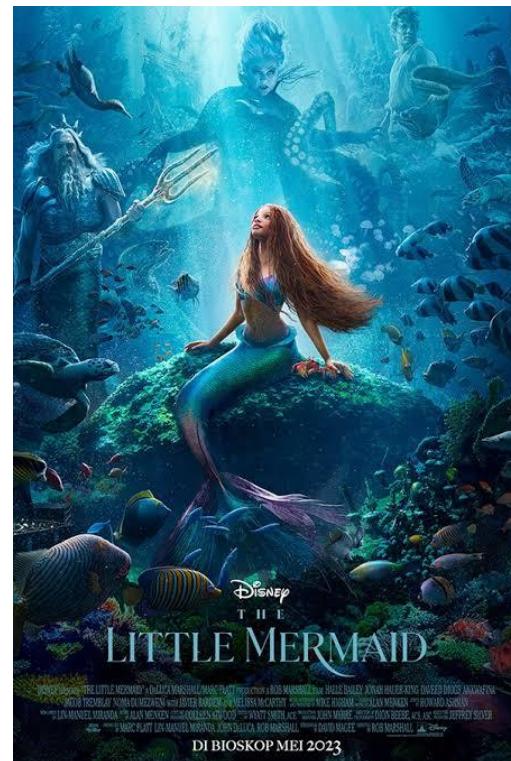

Figure 5. The Little Mermaid Movie Poster
(Sumber: https://www.disney.id/movies/the-little-mermaid)

C. Seven Seas

Based on The Little Mermaid: Guide to Merfolk by Eric Geron (2023), the term Seven Seas refers to seven underwater kingdoms governed by seven mermaid sisters, all daughters of King Triton, the ruler of the seas. Each kingdom not only has its own leader but also represents distinct geographical characteristics, cultures, and marine ecosystems. The uniqueness of each sea is reflected in various aspects, such as the dominant colors symbolizing the atmosphere of the region, the biodiversity inhabiting it, and the cultural values embraced by the underwater communities within each

kingdom. Thus, the concept of the Seven Seas in this book is not merely a fictional territorial division but also a visual and narrative representation of the world's oceanic diversity, symbolically portrayed through the mermaid characters. Each kingdom serves as a reflection of a strong identity, shaped by the interplay of nature, cultural heritage, and the role of each princess in maintaining the balance of life across the vast ocean.

Figure 6. Daughter of Triton (7 Seven Seas Characters)
(Sumber: @JasonMaccartney)

This book introduces the world of The Little Mermaid in a broader context, where each mermaid represents a strong and vibrant character, with cultural backgrounds, ecosystems, and personalities that reflect the marine regions they govern. The following is a detailed description of the characteristics of each mermaid from the Seven Seas:

Mala's costume design reflects a character that represents the image of a strong yet gentle Asian woman. Bright pink-orange colors are used to depict artistic spirit and cheerfulness, highlighting her passion for self-expression through performing arts such as opera and acrobatics. This color choice also creates a warm and friendly visual impression, mirroring the distinctive atmosphere of the tropical region that forms her background.

The palace shape, inspired by traditional Chinese architecture, serves as a

visual symbol of the cultural background of the Chaine Sea, embodying values of tradition and nobility. This symbolism is reinforced by the selection of the whale as the primary marine animal representation. Additional visual elements such as tropical coral reefs are incorporated to strengthen the geographic identity of her native sea, while also providing texture and visual rhythm that enrich the overall design.

Figure 7. Moodboard of Princess Mala
(Sumber: Dinda Julia, 2025)

Tamika's costume design reflects a resilient and disciplined character shaped by a strong African cultural background. A striking blue-orange color palette is chosen to emphasize the energy and courage that are the defining traits of her personality. This color combination not only provides a strong visual contrast but also reflects the dynamics of the tropical sea from which Tamika originates, the Fracus Sea. Tamika's active involvement in physical activities such as sports and military training is reflected in the use of a bold costume silhouette.

The lionfish serves as the main visual symbol of the characteristic fauna of the Fracus Sea, representing exotic beauty coupled with a sharp self-defense mechanism. The depiction of the lionfish in the design aims to convey the impression that

behind her stunning appearance, Tamika possesses great strength and vigilance. The spear, incorporated as a key ornament and attribute, reinforces the costume's narrative as a symbol of the military culture inherent in the character's background. The spear functions not only as a weapon but also as a representation of honor, protection, and responsibility in guarding the sea and her community. This design portrays Tamika as a mermaid warrior figure, strong both physically and mentally.

Figure 8. Moodboard of Princess Tamika
(Sumber: Dinda Julia, 2025)

Karina's costume design represents the cold and misty atmosphere of the Saithe Sea through a carefully selected palette of deep and light blue tones. The gradient of blue is used to illustrate the transition from calm sea surfaces to the dark depths of the ocean, aligning with Karina's character as a serene figure who harbors immense hidden strength beneath her tranquility.

Elements of ice and glaciers are integrated into the design to reinforce the harsh and challenging environment of the Saithe Sea. Glaciers serve as symbols of hidden danger and the formidable force of frozen nature. Ice structures are translated into textures and intricate details on various parts of the costume, such as headpieces and shoulder ornaments, creating a bold yet elegant silhouette.

The grandeur of the Saithe Sea Kingdom, frozen in appearance, is expressed in the design through an architectural approach inspired by towering ice crystal spires and sharp sea rock formations. These elements emphasize the regal and formidable essence of Karina's underwater realm.

Figure 9. Moodboard of Princess Karina
(Sumber: Dinda Julia, 2025)

Indira hails from the Brinedive Sea, a warm-climate region surrounded by a landscape of stone and sand architecture, creating an open, natural, and sunlit atmosphere. This geographical environment greatly influences the formation of her character and the culture of her people, including Indira herself. Her costume design is crafted to reflect this positive energy through visual elements that convey warmth, joy, and a deep connection to the surrounding natural world.

The dominant use of yellow in the tail and other ornamental details is symbolically chosen to represent sunlight. Ornamentation featuring shell forms and coral flower structures are incorporated as decorative

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elements adorning the body and head, illustrating the rich marine biodiversity that thrives in the warm waters of her territory.

All components of Indira's costume are designed with a thoughtful integration of tropical natural beauty and the vibrant cultural expressions of her sea kingdom.

Figure 10. Moodboard of Princess Indira
(Sumber: Dinda Julia, 2025)

Kaspia comes from the Apneic Sea, a brackish water region characterized by the unique meeting point of freshwater and saltwater, creating a marine ecosystem rich in coral reefs and diverse sea species. The use of blue and orange on the tail and primary ornamental elements symbolizes the dynamic nature of this aquatic environment.

In the costume design, the sterlet fish is chosen as a symbolic creature representing the Apneic Sea. The sterlet, an ancient species known to inhabit low-salinity waters, emphasizes the ecological distinctiveness of Kaspia's domain. Elements of old ships, depicted through motifs and ornamental details, reference the Kingdom of Apneic Sea, evoking a sense of history and reinforcing the narrative of maritime glory and power protected by Kaspia.

Shells and coral reef elements are incorporated as decorative features, symbolizing both protection and beauty within the rich and layered identity of her underwater world.

Figure 11. Moodboard of Princess Caspia
(Sumber: Dinda Julia, 2025)

Perla is the leader of the Piton Sea, a deep-sea environment characterized by high pressure, minimal light, and a unique deep-ocean ecosystem. The inclusion of the orca whale as a central design element serves as a powerful symbol, representing both challenges and internal conflict. Although the orca is portrayed as an antagonist in her story, its presence in the costume reflects Perla's courage in confronting even the most formidable enemies.

Coral reef and seaweed elements are incorporated as organic accents throughout the costume, representing the region's rich biodiversity and Perla's deep connection to the underwater world.

Figure 12. Moodboard of Princess Perla
(Sumber: Dinda Julia, 2025)

Ariel, the youngest daughter of King Triton and heiress to the Carinae Sea, is visually represented through a costume design that emphasizes a blend of underwater beauty and her adventurous spirit. A teal and purple tail was chosen to reflect Ariel's vibrant personality—teal symbolizes her deep connection to the ocean, while purple suggests imagination, courage, and the personal transformation she undergoes throughout her story.

Ariel's costume incorporates distinctive visual elements from the Carinae Sea, a region known for its strong currents and the grandeur of the underwater palace that houses the royal Triton family. The architectural motifs inspired by the Carinae palace within the costume reflect the majestic marine realm from which Ariel originates. These elements reinforce her identity as someone born into royalty but brave enough to transcend the limits of tradition.

The inclusion of the shark as part of the design serves as a symbol of strength and speed, characteristic of the Carinae Sea, and represents the rich marine ecosystem Ariel inhabits.

Figure 13. Moodboard of Princess Ariel
(Sumber: Dinda Julia, 2025)

D. Costum Carnival

In the world of art and fashion, clothing is not merely a means of covering the body, but also a medium for representing ideas, values, and history. Fashion functions as a symbolic and artifactual form of communication that can convey social messages to the public in an indirect yet meaningful way (Cut Nia, 2023: 57–67). For university students, clothing serves as an important medium to express their identities and ideologies on social media platforms (Qorib, F., Ermelinda, J., & Oktarina, R. A., 2023: 236–251). One form of such expression can be seen in carnival costumes, which are specifically designed for performances or parades with the aim of conveying particular themes through visual elements such as form, color, and ornamentation. More than just attire, carnival costumes serve as mediums of cultural and identity expression. Thus, with their symbolic and artistic visual elements, carnival costumes become a tangible embodiment of clothing's function as an expression of culture, identity, and social values.

Carnival costumes offer freedom in exploring bold and striking visual forms, colors, and symbols. This makes them especially suitable for representing fantastical characters such as the mermaids from The Little Mermaid, each of whom possesses a unique oceanic identity, culture, and distinguishing features.

According to Widjiningsih (1982: 2), costume design refers to fashion planning that takes into account philosophical, historical, ethical, aesthetic, and religious values in both form and function. In creating a well-designed costume, key considerations include the aesthetic form, proportional structure, and the use of appropriate materials.

The resulting carnival costume designs fulfill these criteria. Each costume is designed with attention to balanced proportions, color

selections that align with the character's traits, and the use of symbolic visual elements such as marine animals, castles, and ornaments unique to each sea. These elements are presented in a vivid and eye-catching yet proportional manner, consistent with the purpose of carnival costumes as communicative and artistic expressions.

CONCLUSION

The carnival costume designs inspired by the Seven Seas characters from The Little Mermaid demonstrate that marine elements and fictional characters can be translated into expressive and communicative fashion. These costumes highlight the function of costume as a visual medium capable of conveying narrative, while also opening opportunities for further exploration in the fashion industry. They illustrate the potential of costume as a powerful visual medium for storytelling, providing greater space for creative experimentation in fashion. The creation of carnival costumes is influenced by social conditions rooted in legends, fairy tales, and myths, as well as the designer's role in crafting new costume forms (Deni Setiawan, 2015: 2).

This work successfully captures the characteristics of each character through visual elements such as color, symbolic sea creatures, and distinctive ornaments. The costumes are not only visually appealing but also convey the unique identities and stories of each character.

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