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Form Follows Meaning: An Analysis of the “Istana Garuda” Design through the Lens of Mimesis

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the design of *Istana Garuda* as a representative example of mimetic practice in architecture. Since being announced as the winning design in 2021, it has attracted public attention and sparked debate due to its resemblance to Indonesia’s national symbol, the *Garuda*. The controversy is not only about its aesthetic and the building form and function validity but also questions the credibility of its designer, I Nyoman Nuarta, who, rather than an architect, is a professional sculptor. It is interesting because, in his design, Nuarta draws upon the *Garuda* symbol as a source of meaning and form, integrating it with the concept of “Archsculpt” to bridge aesthetic and pragmatic functions. This article aims to demonstrate that architecture, like other art forms, is a mimetic practice rooted in meaning. By adopting a mimetic approach, this article presents an analytical framework of *form follows meaning* in the design of the *Istana Garuda*. Through the lens of mimesis, this study emphasizes two important points: (1) the design of *Istana Garuda* is the result of an architectural process that foregrounds meaning rather than merely imitating the Garuda’s form, and (2) the mimetic approach can serve as an effective tool for creating architectural works that not only reinforce national identity but also preserve Indonesia’s profound cultural values.

Keywords: Form Follows Meaning; Istana Garuda; Archsculpt; Mimesis; Mimetic Approach

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1. Introduction

The relocation of Indonesia's capital city has long been a significant national topic, originating from the vision of the country's first president, Soekarno. In his 1957 "Palangkaraya Speech," Soekarno proposed moving the capital from Jakarta to Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan, citing concerns about environmental issues, flooding, and traffic congestion in Jakarta. This idea also reflected Soekarno's geopolitical philosophy, which emphasized Indonesian unity and sovereignty^[1, 2].

Although it was not realized during his term due to political and economic challenges, the vision resurfaced in 2019 under the administration of the seventh president, Joko Widodo, fondly known as Jokowi. Based on similar concerns and aspirations, the government established a new capital city in East Kalimantan. This new capital was officially named Nusantara and subsequently referred to as Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) through the enactment of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 3 of 2022^[3].

The centerpiece of the IKN development is the Istana Garuda, which was envisioned from the outset to become the iconic symbol of governance at IKN. The Istana Garuda serves as the presidential office building, designed by I Nyoman Nuarta, a professional sculptor from Bali, Indonesia. Nuarta's initial concept and design were selected through a limited competition organized by the Indonesian government in 2020. From its initial proposal to its final approval by President Jokowi in 2022, the Istana Garuda embodies the form of the Garuda, Indonesia's national emblem^[4].

However, since being announced as the winner of the competition and the publication of its initial design visualization, the project has sparked significant debate among professionals and the public. **Figure 1** shows a screenshot of the Garuda bird design for the new State Palace (Istana Negara) in East Kalimantan, created by I Nyoman Nuarta^[5], which has been the subject of criticism.

Critics, including five major professional associations—IAI (Indonesian Architects Association), GBCI (Green Building Council Indonesia), IARKI (Indonesian Urban Design Experts Association), IALI (Indonesian Landscape Architects Association), and IAP (Indonesian Association of Regional and Urban Planners), have questioned whether the monumental sculptural form appropriately represents the aspirations of modern national architecture^[4, 6].

Concerns center on the design's reliance on mimicking the Garuda form, sparking debates over whether such monumental symbolism truly reflects the goals of contemporary architecture.



Figure 1. Screenshot of the Garuda bird design for the new State Palace in East Kalimantan, created by I Nyoman Nuarta.

Nuarta has defended his design, emphasizing the symbolic and unifying power of the Garuda, whose motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), represents Indonesia's cultural harmony. He described the Garuda as a grand home (palace) symbolizing brotherhood, unity, and harmonious coexistence^[5, 7]. According to Nuarta^[8], the choice of the Garuda as the conceptual foundation was driven by its universal recognition among Indonesians, a nation comprising over 1,300 ethnic groups, each with its own unique culture.

While this debate highlights the tension between symbolism and architectural form, it also raises broader questions about how meaning and form are integrated into the design process. By adopting a mimetic approach^[9], this article presents an analytical framework to explain the architectural process of *form follows meaning* in the design of the Istana Garuda. Through the lens of mimesis, this study emphasizes two key points:

1. The design of the Istana Garuda results from an architectural process that prioritizes meaning over merely replicating the form of the Garuda; and
2. The mimetic approach can serve as an effective tool for creating architectural works that not only reinforce national identity but also preserve the profound cultural values of Indonesia.

Using this mimetic approach, the study not only explores the relationship between meaning and form in the design of the Istana Garuda but also contributes to the broader discourse on how architecture serves as a medium of symbolism to construct national identity.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Mimetic Approach

The concept of mimesis and its discussion can be traced back to the era of Plato and Aristotle. Etymologically, mimesis literally means the act of imitation^[10]. Mimesis is a concept related to representational art^[11, 12], which can be understood in various ways, including: as the most fundamental motive in representing reality through art, including architecture, and as a fundamental principle of society in general^[13, 14]; as a creative process^[10, 15, 16]; as a bridge between the past and the present^[12]; as a way for cultures to preserve their traditions^[12, 17, 18]; and as the reproduction of ideas^[19].

The concept of mimesis also encompasses various terms, such as imitation and copy^[20–23], mimicry^[24], hyper-reality^[25], repetition, replica^[26, 27], and facsimile^[28]. These terms emerge in the discourse on cultural preservation, where mimesis is positively interpreted as a fundamental human effort to sustain tradition and culture. Girard states, “If humans suddenly stopped imitating, all forms of culture would vanish”^[17].

In its breadth and depth of meaning, mimesis holds hidden complexity within its cognitive dimension^[15], particularly when the subject establishes a mimetic relationship with a model^[29] that is desired to be imitated. This complexity is inherently conflictual because the model chosen by the subject possesses its own intrinsic qualities of meaning. Consequently, the subject is continuously engaged in a “dialogue” to harmonize ideas during the process of creating mimetic products. According to Girard^[29], the mimetic system always involves a triangular relationship between the Subject, Model, and Object.

On the other hand, Maran^[15] examines the concept of mimesis from a semiotic perspective and argues that mimesis is fundamentally a communicative phenomenon within the context of creation. This brief overview leads to the adoption of the mimetic approach as an analytical tool for exploring the concept of *form follows meaning* in the design of Istana Garuda.

The mimetic approach is adapted from the research of Rahmawati, Arifin, and Dwisusanto^[9] in the form of an operational mimetic-semiotic elaboration diagram. This diagram is a theoretical elaboration of Girard’s^[29] idea of the

mimetic triangular relationship and Maran’s^[15] notion of the semiotic dimension of mimesis. In the context of this study, the diagram serves as a framework for the mimetic approach to identify the mimetic relationships among the Subject, Model, and Object and to explore the dimensions operating within these relationships. **Figure 2** illustrates the mimetic approach framework in question.

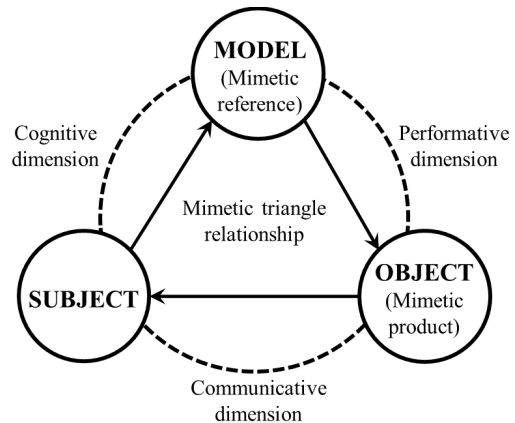


Figure 2. The framework of the mimetic approach.

In this framework, the Subject refers to the person or “entity” performing the mimetic action. In the context of art/creation, Maran refers to the Subject as the “creative subject” because humans inherently possess creative potential. The Subject also plays the role of the meaning-giver, as the most crucial point of mimesis is the search for meaning through expression and/or discovery^[11]. Mimesis occurs when the Subject assigns meaning to the chosen Model.

The Model is understood broadly as the “mimetic reference,” the source of ideas and meaning, as interpreted by the Subject. Girard^[29] defines the Model as the “mediator of desire” within the context of a social system that functions based on imitation. Therefore, there are no limitations on the form of the Model. Anything can be a Model, whether tangible or intangible, as long as the Subject uses it as a mimetic reference to be expressed into the Object.

The Object can also be understood broadly as the “product of mimesis”^[9, 10]. Various works of art, including architecture, and inventions in the fields of science and technology, are mimetic products that can be traced back to the mimetic references used. Just like the Model, there are no limitations to the form of the Object. Thus, the Object, in turn, can function as a Model to be imitated.

The circle with dashed lines represents the semiotic

dimension of mimesis, which is the foundational dimension operating within the mimetic triangular relationship. This basic dimension consists of the cognitive dimension (Subject-Model relationship), the performative dimension (Model-Object relationship), and the communicative dimension (Object-Subject relationship). Understanding these relationships is crucial, as it plays a role in uncovering the process behind the creation of the object, not just the final product of the created object.

2.2. Form Follows Meaning

Meaning in architecture is often linked to the aspect of communication, viewed as a language that can both speak and be read^[30-32]. Metz emphasizes that architecture builds meaning through the dialogue between form, concept, and cultural context^[30]. Goodman and Elgin regard architecture as a symbolic language capable of representing complex ideas^[31], while Eco highlights the architectural system of signs that “speak” and convey meaning through visual elements within a socio-cultural framework^[32].

The phrase *form follows meaning* is hypothetical in this research and is formulated as an extension of the architectural design principle. This phrase stems from Louis H. Sullivan’s idea^[33] in his 1896 article in *Lippincott’s Magazine*, “form ever follows function,” which emphasized that the building’s form is a natural result of practical needs such as structure, spatial use, and purpose. Sullivan criticized excessive ornamentation and argued that beauty arises when form truthfully expresses function.

However, the idea of *form follows meaning* expands this principle by stressing that meaning also shapes architectural design. The study by Salura & Fauzi^[34] shows that architecture is governed by the dynamic relationship between function, form, and meaning. While function underpins design, form not only reflects function but also embodies symbolic values and cultural context. Therefore, meaning becomes a guide in how form is designed, perceived, and accepted by society. **Figure 3** illustrates the dynamic relationship of Function-Form-Meaning^[34].

This study explores the concept of *form follows meaning* in the design of Istana Garuda, where the building’s form not only imitates the shape of the Garuda as the national symbol but also expresses symbolic meaning through its design. This expression encompasses values of nationalism,

strength, and unity, which are integrated with its primary function as the presidential office. Therefore, this research aims to demonstrate how symbolic meaning can serve as a foundational element in shaping architecture, without disregarding its functional aspects.

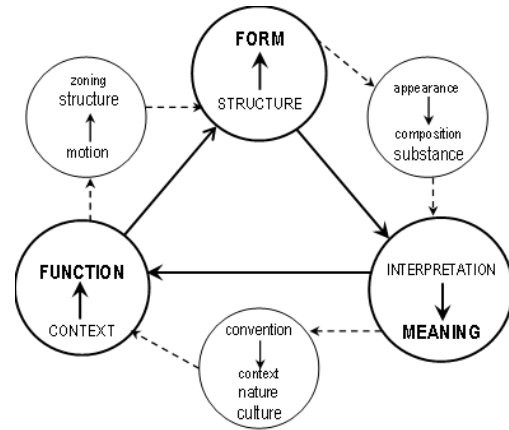


Figure 3. The dynamic relationship of Function-Form-Meaning.

2.3. Methods

This research uses a descriptive-interpretive qualitative approach to understand the object of study, the Istana Garuda, through mimetic analysis. Data collection is non-interactive, relying on archival documents and trusted online sources^[35]. The data and information were primarily obtained from various reliable online sources, including national online media, YouTube channels, and official government and academic institution websites. One of the main sources used in this research is an online seminar titled “Istana Kepresidenan di Ibu Kota Nusantara,” held on August 29, 2024, and uploaded to YouTube, where the designer of Istana Garuda, I Nyoman Nuarta, was one of the keynote speakers. Additionally, an infographic publication titled “Makna Desain Istana Garuda IKN”^[36] was used as a representative source for the elements of Subject-Model-Object in this study. Data collection focused on the period from 2021 to 2024 to maintain narrative consistency and ensure the reliability of the sources.

The interpretation of the data using the mimetic approach is carried out through three main stages:

1. Identification of Subject, Model, and Object based on the infographic “Makna Desain Istana Garuda.”
2. Mapping the relationship between Subject-Model-Object.
3. The framework for the analysis of *form follows meaning*.

3. Results

This section presents the results of the data interpretation, formulated through three main stages. These stages are designed to identify, map, and analyze the relationship between the elements of Subject, Model, and Object in the design of Istana Garuda. Each stage contributes to the development of the *form follows meaning* analysis framework, which is used to reveal how meaning becomes the central principle in the design process of Istana Garuda.

3.1. Identification of Subject, Model, and Object

The infographic *Makna Desain Istana Garuda IKN*^[36] effectively presents information that can be identified as Subject, Model, and Object within the mimesis framework. **Figure 4** displays the identification of Subject, Model, and Object in the context of the Istana Garuda design.

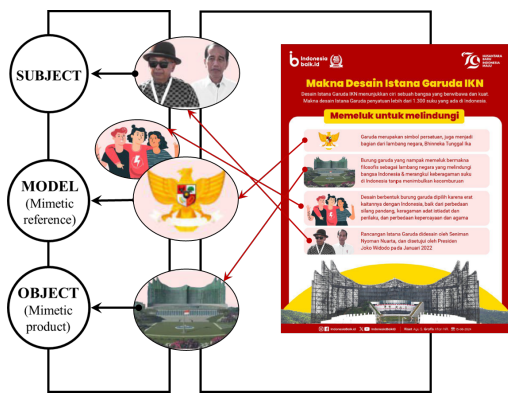


Figure 4. Identification of Subject, Model, and Object.

I Nyoman Nuarta, as the designer of the Istana Garuda, and President Jokowi, as the initiator, are identified as the Subject, whose roles, although different, are decisive in the existence of the Istana Garuda. In the context of the ‘creative subject’ in the mimesis approach, Nuarta is the main Subject who emphasized the Garuda symbol as the basis for the form. The significant meaning intended to be conveyed by the design of the Istana Garuda is ‘Embracing to protect.’ This meaning is rooted in the Garuda symbol as the national emblem and is also expressed through an animation image of three friends embracing each other. Thus, the Garuda emblem is identified as the Model (mimetic reference), accompanied by an image expressing the meaning of ‘uniting diversity’ through the embrace of three friends. The result of the mimetic process is the design of the Istana Garuda,

identified as the Object (mimetic product) that represents the meaning of ‘embracing to protect’.

3.2. Mapping the Relationship Between Subject-Model-Object

The mapping of the relationship between Subject-Model-Object in **Figure 5** aims to demonstrate how the mimesis framework is applied to show the design process of Istana Garuda, involving more specific interaction dimensions, namely:

- Cognitive Dimension: The relationship between Subject and Model, where Nuarta understands and interprets the meanings contained in the Garuda Emblem.
- Performative Dimension: The relationship between Model and Object, where the interpretation of meaning is represented in architectural form. In this dimension, Nuarta emphasizes the concept of *archsculpt*^[37] to shape the form of Istana Garuda. This process involves seven stages of design transformation, culminating in the seventh shape approved by President Jokowi.
- Communicative Dimension: The relationship between Object and Subject, where the final result (Istana Garuda) represents I Nyoman Nuarta as the designer and President Jokowi as the decision-maker, while also conveying a symbolic message to the public.

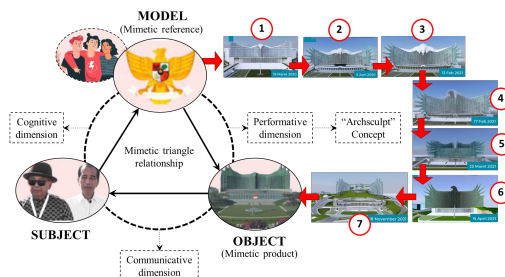


Figure 5. Mapping the relationship between Subject-Model-Object.

3.3. Form Follows Meaning Analysis Framework

The *form follows meaning* analysis framework shown in **Figure 6** is developed by integrating the framework of the mimetic approach with the fundamental aspects of architecture, namely Function, Form, and Meaning. This framework serves as the basis for analyzing how the form of Istana

Garuda is not only an aesthetically pleasing and functional architectural work but also places meaning as the primary foundation guiding the entire design process.

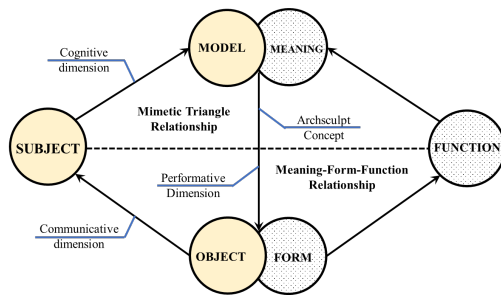


Figure 6. Form follows meaning analysis framework.

In this framework, the mimetic triangle is integrated with the relationship between Function, Form, and Meaning, where the Model element is integrated with Meaning (MM), while the Object is integrated with Form (OF). Therefore, the relationships MM and OF are situated within the performative dimension, supporting the principle of *form follows meaning*. This relationship reflects the application of the archsculpt concept and the process of transforming conceptual ideas and symbolic meaning (MM) into a physical form that can be observed and experienced (OF). This performative dimension encompasses how meaning is embodied in a form that is not only functional but also communicative, reinforcing the message that the architecture intends to convey. As such, this relationship becomes the core of the analysis supporting this principle.

The addition of a dashed line between the Subject and Function emphasizes the dynamic relationship between human needs (the Subject) and the functional goals of architecture. This relationship indicates that function is often influenced by the interpretation and preferences of the Subject, both from the perspective of the designer and the end user. This line also reflects how design decisions are not based solely on formal principles, but also on the complex social, cultural, and political context. In the case of Istana Garuda, the user is dynamic because the presidential office and its staff have a time-limited tenure set by law.

Furthermore, the basic mimetic dimensions intertwined in this analytical framework will be discussed in more depth in the Discussion section. This discussion will explore how the cognitive (Subject-Model), performative (MM-OF), and communicative (Object-Subject) dimensions interact in the design of Istana Garuda. This exploration will enrich the

understanding of how meaning is not only reflected in form but also actively plays a role in the communication process and the reception of the design by the public.

4. Discussion

This research is inspired by the critiques and debates surrounding the design of Istana Garuda, which emerged after it was announced as the winner of the design competition on March 29, 2021^[5, 7]. The criticisms not only targeted the building design, which takes the shape of the Garuda bird, but also the designer, I Nyoman Nuarta, who is “only” an artist or sculptor, rather than a professional architect. Through the lens of mimesis, this study aims to explore the hypothetical idea of *form follows meaning* to demonstrate that: (1) the design of Istana Garuda is the result of an architectural process that prioritizes meaning rather than merely imitating the form of the Garuda, and (2) the mimesis approach can serve as an effective tool to create architectural forms that emphasize meaning while also being functional. Using a descriptive-interpretive qualitative approach, this research produces a *form follows meaning* analysis framework as a foundation to address the research objectives.

4.1. Form Follows Meaning Analysis Framework





The interpretation of the Subject-Model-Object relationship begins by re-presenting the elements of Subject, Model, and Object identified based on the framework of the mimesis approach (Figure 4 in the Results section). These elements are linked with the information found in the infographic “Makna Desain Istana Garuda IKN,” published through the Indonesia Information Portal on August 20, 2024^[36]. Table 1 shows the Subject, Model, and Object in the context of Istana Garuda.

4.1.1. Subject

I Nyoman Nuarta (left) and President Jokowi (right) are the two key figures identified as the Subject, with different roles. In this context, Nuarta is identified as the creative Subject, while Jokowi is the initiating Subject who envisioned^[38] and approved^[36] the design.

Nuarta is a renowned sculptor from Bali, Indonesia, born on November 14, 1951. His strong artistic spirit was

Table 1. Subject, Model, and Object in the context of Istana Garuda.

Elements in the Mimetic Approach	Image Description Infographic “The Meaning of the Istana Garuda IKN Design”
Subject	
	The Istana Garuda design was created by artist Nyoman Nuarta and approved by President Joko Widodo in January 2022.
Model	
	Garuda is a symbol of unity and also a part of the national emblem, <i>Bhinneka Tunggal Ika</i> .
	The design in the shape of the Garuda bird was chosen because of its strong connection to Indonesia, encompassing diverse perspectives, cultural traditions, behaviors, and differences in beliefs and religions.
Object	
	The Garuda bird, depicted with an embracing posture, carries a philosophical meaning as a national symbol that protects the Indonesian people and embraces the diversity of Indonesia’s ethnic groups without inciting jealousy.

fostered from a young age under the guidance of his uncle, a visual arts teacher. Nuarta studied at the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) in 1972, choosing the sculpture department, which became the foundation of his successful career as an acclaimed artist. He is known for his works that adopt modern and naturalistic styles, including monumental masterpieces such as the Garuda Wisnu Kencana (GWK) Statue in Bali^[37].

Nuarta’s remarkable contribution to the arts was recognized by ITB, which awarded him an honorary doctorate in 2021^[39]. This degree was given in recognition of his original thinking in developing visual arts, particularly through multidisciplinary synergy involving technology, social culture, and economic impact. In his speech, Nuarta introduced the concept of “archsculpt,” which merges the aesthetics of art with architectural pragmatism. Nuarta demonstrates a visionary approach to his work. He does not just create art, but also revolutionizes the understanding of art as an integral part of cultural, humanitarian, and technological development. This concept is clearly applied in the development of Istana Garuda, where he combined his sculptural expertise with architectural processes to create a monumental and meaningful national icon.

President Jokowi plays a crucial role as the initiator in the development of Istana Garuda at IKN. As the 7th President of the Republic of Indonesia, he gave approval for the innovative design proposed by I Nyoman Nuarta. This approval reflects Jokowi’s vision of creating an iconic center of government in IKN, which was then expressed through the naming of Istana Garuda.

Jokowi’s decision to initiate the construction of Istana Garuda and leave its inauguration to his successor, Prabowo Subianto, demonstrates his commitment to the continuity of national development. It also reflects a collaborative approach in realizing strategic projects involving various stakeholders, including artists, architects, and the government. Thus, in the context of the mimesis relationship of Subject-Model-Object, President Jokowi plays the role of the initiating Subject who envisions and approves the design of Istana Garuda, while Nuarta serves as the creative Subject who materializes that vision into a fusion of monumental sculpture and architecture.

4.1.2. Model

The Garuda symbol is identified as the Model, or the mimetic reference chosen by Nuarta as the foundation for designing Istana Garuda. This Model encapsulates various

values and meanings interpreted by Nuarta to be expressed in the form of the Istana Garuda building. In various media [5, 7, 36, 37, 40, 41], Nuarta has explained several reasons for choosing the Garuda symbol, including: (1) Garuda is synonymous with Indonesia and is recognized by the entire Indonesian population; (2) it is impossible to encompass the identities of all ethnic groups in Indonesia within a single building; (3) the Garuda symbol carries the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, meaning “unity in diversity.” In line with this reasoning, Nuarta also shared his interpretation of the meanings contained within the Garuda symbol. According to him, Garuda represents a grand house (palace) for fraternity, unity, and harmonious living together. The animation of three friends embracing each other symbolizes unity that embraces diversity in Indonesia. Therefore, this image is also included in the Model as it expresses the meaning of the Garuda.

4.1.3. Object

Istana Garuda is identified as the Object (mimetic product) that represents the profound meaning of “embracing to protect,” while also manifesting the Garuda form in a monumental way, along with its architectural function as the presidential office. As a mimetic product, Istana Garuda expresses a harmonious blend of sculpture and architecture, as shown in **Figure 7**, through the application of the arch-sculpt concept. The composition of the Garuda form is made up of 4,650 vertical copper rods, which not only shape its aesthetics but also function as natural shading, reduce the greenhouse effect, and improve the building’s energy efficiency [37]. The choice of copper as the main material is based on its malleability, corrosion resistance, and ease of shaping. Additionally, copper acts as a good conductor, forming a Faraday Cage to protect against electricity and lightning, as well as preventing fires caused by static electricity.



Figure 7. Istana Garuda as a fusion of sculpture and architecture.

The shape of the Garuda bird, which appears to be embracing, as shown in **Figure 8** carries a symbolic message

about the country’s protection of its people, while also embracing the diversity of Indonesia’s ethnic groups without provoking inter-group jealousy. From an architectural perspective, the pragmatic function of the presidential office is found in the body of the Garuda, which has been meticulously designed using the concept of green design.

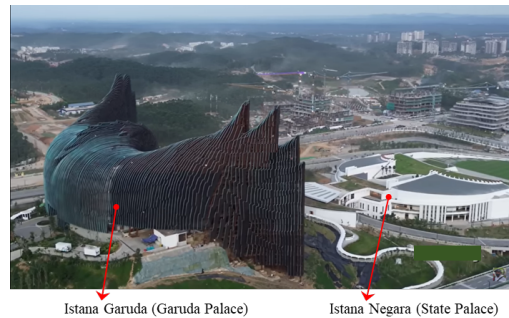


Figure 8. Istana Garuda as a fusion of sculpture and architecture.

The interpretation of the Subject-Model-Object relationship involves an interactive dimension, visually presented in the Subject-Model-Object relationship mapping diagram (**Figure 5** in the Results section). As a representational art form [11, 12], the mimesis process involves two main phases [15]. The first phase is the creation process, which serves as a channel for the Subject’s creativity, while the second phase is the reception or disclosure of the created work.

The first phase involves two dimensions: (1) the cognitive dimension, where the creative Subject recognizes and acknowledges the mimetic potential of a Model, which can be an object, symbol, situation, event, phenomenon, or person, and (2) the performative dimension, where the creative Subject expresses, reveals, or performs this potential mimetically, through imitation and/or representation into their creation, the Object. In the second phase, the performative dimension transitions into the communicative dimension, where the created Object is communicated, received, or experienced.

The cognitive dimension exists in the Subject-Model relationship. In this dimension, Nuarta (the Subject) recognizes and acknowledges the mimetic potential of the Garuda Emblem (the Model) by interpreting the meanings contained within it and exploring various ideas to apply in the design of the Istana Garuda. The performative dimension exists in the Model-Object relationship. Mimesis occurs in this dimension, where Nuarta creatively expresses and translates his ideas into the design (Object). In this dimension, Nuarta

applies the concept of archsculpt, combining sculpture and architecture^[37]. From this concept, Nuarta designs the Istana Garuda with two functions: the aesthetic function expressed in the form of the Istana Garuda as a monumental work of art representing the Garuda bird, and the pragmatic function as the president’s office, where the President of the Republic of Indonesia manages the daily affairs of the government.

The next dimension is the communicative dimension, which exists in the Object-Subject relationship. In this dimension, Nuarta conveys and communicates the results of his design to President Jokowi and the judging panel in the design competition for the Istana Garuda. When announced as the winner of the competition, this mimesis process repeats with the same Model, the same meaning, but a different form, until it finally receives approval/acceptance during the seventh design phase. After receiving approval, the Istana Garuda design enters the construction phase to realize the Istana Garuda as the true Object or product of mimesis. In the communicative dimension, the Istana Garuda not only represents I Nyoman Nuarta and President Jokowi, but also communicates meaning widely to other subjects who use or experience it.

4.2. Interpretation of Form Follows Meaning

The interpretation of form follows meaning is based on the analytical framework (Figure 6) that integrates the mimesis approach through the Subject-Model-Object relationship and three fundamental aspects of architecture: Function, Form, and Meaning. In this integration, the Model is paired with Meaning (MM), while the Object is paired with Form (OF), so that the MM-OF relationship becomes the core of the form follows meaning concept in the context of Istana Garuda.

The relationship between the Subject and Function is depicted with a dashed line to indicate its dynamic nature. This reflects that the Subject is understood broadly, including as a user who not only interacts with the Object but also interprets the Meaning contained within it. This analytical framework leads to the interpretive diagram of form follows meaning in the design of Istana Garuda, as shown in Figure 9. In this diagram, Istana Garuda (OF) is identified as a mimetic product, a created Object, and an architectural Form.

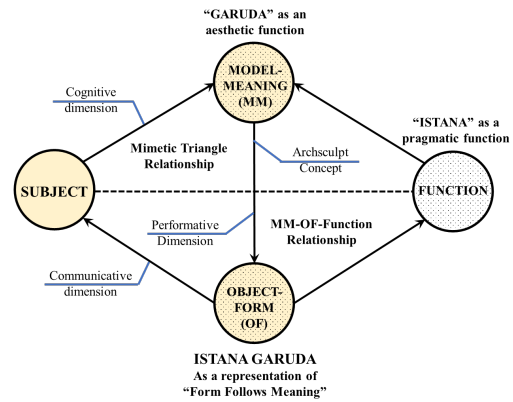


Figure 9. Interpretive diagram of form follows meaning in the design of Istana Garuda.

The relationship between MM-OF depicts two complementary processes during the creation phase: first, the mimesis process involving the performative dimension; and second, the architectural process utilizing the concept of archsculpt. As both an Object and architectural Form, Istana Garuda conveys two primary meanings. The first meaning is “Istana”, representing its pragmatic function as the place where the president carries out presidential duties. The second meaning is “Garuda”, which presents an aesthetic function through the monumental form of Garuda^[37]. Thus, Istana Garuda becomes the concrete manifestation of the integration of symbolic and functional meanings, creating a harmony between the aesthetic and pragmatic dimensions in architecture, and therefore, explicitly represents the concept of form follows meaning. Consequently, the diagram of the form follows meaning interpretation shifts the dynamic relationship of Function-Form-Meaning (Figure 3) to Meaning-Form-Function.

In addition to the symbolic meanings of Garuda, such as unity, strength, and beauty that bring peace to the people, Nuarta also incorporated numerical symbols into the design of Istana Garuda. In an interview published in online news media^[5, 7], Nuarta stated that the Garuda on Istana Negara (the name used before President Joko Widodo named it Istana Garuda) will represent the date 17-8-1945, the date of Indonesia’s independence. The wings of the Garuda will span 200 meters with a height of 76 meters. According to him, the number 76 serves as a reminder that the groundbreaking moment marking the beginning of the Istana Negara’s construction occurred when Indonesia turned 76 years old in 2021.

The function in the OF-Function relationship is adap-

tive because the pragmatic function as the president's office, which was determined from the outset, needs to adapt to the transformation of the OF design until it reaches the final approved form. This adaptation relates to the functional aspects of the building, which accommodate various practical functions such as activities, movement, security, and safety. All of these aspects contribute to the pragmatic Function context of Istana Garuda, while also serving as important considerations that complement MM in the Function-MM relationship. Furthermore, in the MM-OF relationship, the transformation of the Istana Garuda design occurs, as mapped in **Figure 5** in the Results section.

Design transformation can be understood as the process of reproducing ideas^[19] within the framework of mimesis. The design transformation also reflects the application of the archsculpt concept, where Nuarta professionally integrates sculpture expertise and architectural processes. He acknowledges himself as both an architect and sculptor^[5, 7], involving a team of professional architects to work on the details. This was made possible because, according to Nuarta, he has owned an architecture firm since 1975^[37]. In an online seminar, Nuarta explained that each stage of design transformation is visualized through a model or mock-up, a term well-known in the architecture world. In each stage of transformation, Nuarta also explained the application of surrealist or realist movements, terms recognized in the world of art.

4.3. Transformation of Public Reception toward Istana Garuda

According to the latest reports, Istana Garuda is nearly completed and will be inaugurated by President Prabowo Subianto during his first 100 days in office^[41]. Prabowo Subianto is the 8th President of the Republic of Indonesia and was inaugurated on October 20, 2024, succeeding Joko Widodo, whose term has ended. However, before the end of his term, President Joko Widodo had the opportunity to attend and serve as the ceremonial inspector for the 79th Indonesian Independence Day commemoration on August 17, 2024, at Istana Negara, IKN. According to Jokowi^[38], this commemoration marked that Indonesia now has a new capital, Ibu Kota Nusantara.

The public response to the construction of Istana Garuda has evolved dynamically along with the publicity

surrounding its process. Initially, publications and discussions on social media and mainstream media revealed sharp criticisms, ridicule, and doubts regarding the design, function, and symbolic relevance of the building. However, over time, increasingly widespread and targeted publications have provided space for a reinterpretation of Istana Garuda. Articles exploring the philosophy behind the design, such as the meaning of "embracing to protect" reflected in the Garuda form, as well as appreciation for the integration of modern sculpture art with pragmatic architectural function, have helped shift public perception.

In addition, the narrative built by the government and academic institutions, such as ITB, which has praised Nuarta's work as a symbol of national revival and inspiration, has provided a new, more positive perspective. Through communication, both directly through official statements and indirectly through media reports, Istana Garuda has begun to be accepted not only as a government building but also as a national symbol reflecting the nation's independence, diversity, and pride.

This transformation of public reception demonstrates how the communicative dimension operates within the OF-Subject relationship, where the Object (Istana Garuda) is no longer viewed as an alien or controversial entity, but as a representation of collective meaning valued by the Subject (the public). Publications conveying the philosophical, aesthetic, and pragmatic meanings of the Istana Garuda design serve as a communication medium that connects the Subject with the Object in a more positive light.

4.4. Implication and Future Research

This study offers an important contribution to understanding the concept of *form follows meaning* through the lens of mimesis as an analytical framework in symbolic architectural design. Its main implication is expanding the design perspective by placing meaning as a central element that guides its relationship with form and function in architecture. By using mimesis as an analytical lens, the creative relationship between the Subject, Model, and Object in design can be identified as a dynamic process that explores, adapts, and represents meaning contextually.

In the context of symbolic architecture such as Istana Garuda, the mimesis approach enables a deep exploration of how philosophical meanings, such as "embracing to protect,"

are translated from the initial idea into monumental architectural form. Thus, the concept of *form follows meaning* through the lens of mimesis not only ensures the communication of cultural values and national identity, but also strengthens the aesthetic appeal that connects the public with the message conveyed by the architectural work.

Additionally, this finding makes a significant contribution to the development of architectural design methods oriented towards identity representation. The mimesis lens is not only relevant for national-scale projects like Istana Garuda but can also be applied to designs oriented towards local symbolism, community culture, or even individual identity. By integrating mimesis into the design process, architecture can become a medium of communication that transcends physical boundaries, creating a profound dialogue between its users and the values and meanings it represents.

However, there are several limitations in this study. First, the data sources used primarily come from archival documents and online media, meaning the analysis is limited to the information available. Second, the approach used does not fully encompass the technical and material aspects of design, which could provide additional insights into the relationship between form and function. Third, the focus on a single case study, namely Istana Garuda, limits the generalization of findings to other symbolic architectural contexts. Fourth, the interpretative nature of the analysis opens room for the researcher's subjectivity.

Moreover, although this study successfully demonstrates the relevance of Istana Garuda's design within the *form follows meaning* framework, the true success of this design can only be evaluated once the building is actively used. This aspect of use involves the interaction of users with the space, the sustainability of function, and the effectiveness of the building in conveying the symbolic values and identity it represents. Therefore, the evaluation of Istana Garuda's design should not stop at conceptual analysis but also require an approach based on the experience of the Subject and direct observation of the Object-Form after the building has been operational.

User experience-based research using a mimesis approach has been conducted by Rahmawati, Arifin, and Dwisusanto^[9]. Their research formulated the procedural diagram of the Mimesis-Semiosis method in the context of vernacular heritage preservation. In the diagram, the Subject is seen as a

collective entity, the core community at the study site, while the Model and Object are identified as spatial objects based on architectural codes, social symbolic codes, and functional codes. The results showed that the mimesis-semiotic method is an approach that protects cultural meaning, respects the role of the core community, and ensures the continuity of vernacular heritage traditions and practices, while still acknowledging changes within society.

This point highlights the need for longitudinal studies that observe how the cultural and national values carried by Istana Garuda are translated into user experiences. As part of future research, this could provide further insights into how symbolic architectural designs achieve their comprehensive goals. This approach not only enriches conceptual understanding but also provides a more solid practical foundation for the development of symbolic design in the future.

5. Conclusions

The interpretive framework of *form follows meaning* developed in this study makes a significant contribution to understanding symbolic architectural design and the representation of identity through the lens of mimesis. This research affirms that the design of Istana Garuda is not merely about mimicking the form of the Garuda but is the result of a dynamic process of applying the archsculpt concept, interpreted through the lens of mimesis. The findings clarify that mimesis is not just about imitation but is an analytical approach that explores, adapts, and creatively represents meaning. In this way, architecture not only serves its technical function but also acts as an effective medium for cultural communication.

This study also opens up opportunities to integrate the mimesis approach with fundamental aspects of architecture, such as the dynamic relationship between Subject, Model-Meaning, Object-Form, and Function. In this context, post-occupancy evaluation research using a longitudinal approach can enrich our understanding of how meaning can be creatively articulated and translated into user experiences. Moreover, cross-typology and cross-scale studies in architecture provide space for further exploration of the relevance of *form follows meaning* in designs that involve cultural identity, whether at the local, community, or national level.

It is important to note that the limitations of this study,

such as the reliance on secondary data and the focus on a single case study, open opportunities for more diverse research approaches in the future. This study also highlights the importance of holistically examining the effectiveness of design, including the context of user interaction with the space, the sustainability of function, and the communication of symbolic values represented by the building.

By exploring the relationship between *form follows meaning* and mimesis, this study not only offers a new perspective on symbolic architectural design but also provides a practical and theoretical foundation for developing design approaches that are more responsive to cultural contexts. In the long term, this approach could enrich the discourse of architecture by introducing a framework that supports the communication of fundamental architectural values in a more creative and meaningful way.

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Data Availability Statement

The data and information used in this study were obtained from various publicly available online media, including news articles, official reports, and online videos. Links to these sources are provided in the references section in accordance with citation guidelines. As the data originate from public media, no new datasets were generated during this study.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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