



The Role of Aesthetic Visual Imagery as Intellectual Property in Collaboration and Business

A Case Study of Muklay

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of aesthetic visual imagery as intellectual property (IP) within the context of creative collaboration and commercial business, using the case study of contemporary Indonesian artist, Muklay (Muchlis Fachri). Rooted in an aesthetic awareness shaped by urban lifestyles and glocalized culture, Muklay has built an artistic ecosystem and generated economic value and a licensable visual identity. This research adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach, drawing data from practice-based documents, licensing records, collaboration contracts, and visual analyses. The study finds that Muklay's artistic IP functions as a cross-industry communication instrument from automotive to fashion, demonstrating how aesthetic IP can serve as a foundation for value exchange within collaborative frameworks. His visual imagery emerges as a strategic element with artistic, economic, cultural, and symbolic significance. The study highlights the importance of IP protection within the company and recommends establishing ethical and contractual standards in creative partnerships to prevent exploitation.

Keywords: Aesthetic Licensing, Creative Collaboration, Intellectual Property, Muklay, Visual Imagery.

Article history

Received 18 July 2025

Revised 23 July 2023

Accepted 25 July 2025

journal.iistr.org/index.php/JARDIN

DOI: [10.56741/jardin.v1i01.1269](https://doi.org/10.56741/jardin.v1i01.1269)



JARDIN

The Journal of Art and Design Innovation

Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 12-25

Published by Institut Kesenian Jakarta, and managed by IISTR.

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Introduction

In the rapidly evolving creative economy, visual elements serve as forms of artistic expression and intellectual assets with substantial economic value. Aesthetic visual imagery, particularly in collaborative practices between artists and industries, has emerged as a medium for exchanging cultural and economic value. One prominent figure in this context is Muchlis Fachri, widely known as Muklay, an Indonesian visual artist recognized for his distinctive and explorative visual style. Since 2015, Muklay has established collaborations with numerous local and global brands, ranging from fashion and automotive to lifestyle sectors.

This phenomenon illustrates the transformation of visual art from a mere creative output into a form of intellectual property (IP) that can be licensed and commercialized. In the Indonesian legal context, Law No. 28 of 2014 on Copyright affirms that works of visual art are entitled to legal protection, which can be utilized for economic benefit [1].

Despite its growing relevance, academic studies on the role of visual IP in the context of creative collaboration and commercial partnerships remain limited, particularly in Indonesia. This study aims to analyze how Muklay utilizes its visual IP as a cross-sectoral collaborative strategy and business model. The article further explores how aesthetic awareness and legal protection of IP support the role of visual elements in value exchange between artists and industry collaborators.

The structure of this article consists of an introduction, a literature review on IP and visual imagery, the qualitative methodology applied, findings, a discussion based on Muklay's case study, and a conclusion with recommendations for future IP research and development.

Literature Review

The study of visual imagery in the context of creative collaboration is closely linked to theories of cultural representation [2], [3], visual culture [4], and intellectual property practices [5]. Stuart Hall posits that representation is not merely a reflection of reality but a process that constructs meaning through systems of signs. In the case of Muklay, the visual imagery he constructs is not solely an aesthetic depiction, but a form of visual identity recognized by both the public and the industry.

The 21st century has witnessed the phenomenon of media convergence. This condition is characterized by connectivity, immersion, interaction, transformation, and emergence [6]. It marks a post-media and post-Internet era in which visual media dominate screens and interfaces [7].

Life as a medium, whether visual media, scientific media, or technological media, has given rise to a post-digital and post-Internet worldview concerning the nature of materiality, which unfolds alongside complex computation. Art & design and the historical tension embodied in the ampersand (&) between them have become blurred, if not entirely dissolved. While traditional art is, of course, still practiced, its value is diminishing as DIY spaces that support STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) projects increasingly infiltrate schools, libraries, museums, and galleries [8].

According to Mirzoeff, visual culture places imagery and representation at the center of contemporary social communication [4]. This concept becomes fundamental when artistic visuals are used as communicative tools between artists and brands in collaborative endeavors. Schroeder further emphasizes that brands frequently employ visual culture to enhance the symbolic value of their products [9], [10].

In the realm of law and the creative economy, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) asserts that visual artworks fall under the category of copyright, which grants both economic and moral rights, as stipulated in Indonesia's Law No. 28 of 2014 on Copyright [1], [5], [11]. The importance of IP licensing in the art business is underscored by Rahmat, who explains that intellectual property can serve as a sustainable revenue stream through royalties, exclusive licenses, and the commercialization of derivative products.

From a cultural economy perspective, Bourdieu explains that artistic taste and aesthetic consumption are closely tied to symbolic capital [12], [13], [14]. Muklay effectively leverages this by developing recognizable visual characters that can be capitalized upon. Meanwhile, Jenkins, through his theory of cultural convergence, highlights the significance of collaboration between content producers and audiences in generating new forms of value [15].

Collaborative work processes have become a key form of creative practice in the post-digital art era. Collaborations between artists and popular brands in this context create a fusion of art and business through transmedia and co-creation approaches [16], [17]. Transmedia utilizes multiple platforms to craft integrated experiences, while co-creation involves jointly developing new products. These collaborations often manifest as limited-edition items, marketing campaigns, or interactive experiences that blend art with branding. Notable examples include partnerships between Adidas and Pharrell Williams, Louis Vuitton and Yayoi Kusama [18]. Such collaborations extend the reach of artists and strengthen brand identity, as demonstrated by KAWS in his work with major brands like Dior, Guess,

and Calvin Klein, using printing technology to amplify the impact of his art through mass-produced products [19].

Thus, this study is grounded in interdisciplinary thought spanning aesthetics, law, cultural economy, and visual communication to examine the strategic role of visual imagery as intellectual property within business collaborations.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach using a case study method that focuses on the practice of intellectual property in Muklay's visual works. The data analyzed consists of visual artwork documentation, collaboration archives, and social media narratives from various brands that have collaborated with the artist.

Primary data was obtained from a digital presentation (IP Muklay file), which includes the artist's profile, a list of collaborations, aesthetic visual values, and an explanation of intellectual property law based on Indonesia's Law No. 28 of 2014 and the WIPO framework. In addition, scholarly references and journal articles were used for theoretical comparison and reinforcement. The "IP Muklay" digital presentation file documents the artist's biography, list of cross-sector collaborations, visual stylistic characteristics, and legal explanations related to Indonesia's Copyright Law No. 28 of 2014 and the WIPO framework. Social media content, such as Instagram Stories and branded posts featuring Muklay's collaborations, was observed to analyze audience interaction and symbolic consumption of the artist's visuals. Collaboration archives, including screenshots, promotional materials, and media coverage, were gathered to trace the trajectory and modalities of Muklay's licensing practices.

Data analysis was conducted through visual and semiotic readings of Muklay's imagery, focusing on recurring aesthetic motifs, branding structures, and symbolic gestures that suggest value transformation in collaborative contexts. An inductive approach was applied to derive thematic patterns from the artist's licensing cases and media narratives, allowing theoretical concepts to emerge organically from the data.

Bourdieu's theory of capital exchange was employed as an analytical framework to deepen the interpretation of collaborative dynamics. This approach enabled the categorization of value exchanges between Muklay and his collaborators in terms of economic capital (licensing fees, royalties), cultural capital (aesthetic distinction, artistic credibility), symbolic capital (brand legitimacy, public recognition), and social capital (network expansion, institutional affiliation). By mapping how these forms of capital circulate

and convert within each collaboration, the analysis illuminates the role of visual intellectual property not only as a legal asset, but also as a medium of multi-dimensional value negotiation within the creative economy.

Data validity was reinforced through triangulation among visual artifacts, legal documents, and public narratives across digital platforms. As the study did not involve direct experimentation or interaction with human subjects, ethical approval was deemed unnecessary by research ethics standards.

Results

Muchlis Fachri, known professionally as Muklay, began developing his universe of visual characters in the early 2010s, drawing inspiration from cartoon culture, street art, and the visual expressions of Indonesia's urban youth. His distinctive visual style, consisting of grotesque figures, intense neon colors, and repetitive graphic elements, emerged through cultural sampling that responds to digital life, internet memes, retro games, and 1990s visual aesthetics.

These characters are not assigned personal names but are imbued with expressive traits that function as visual identifiers: bulging eyes, protruding tongues, hyperbolic expressions, and densely detailed contours. The creation process is done through digital drawing pads and analog sketches, which are then digitized into vector formats, allowing for flexible application across various product platforms.

Muklay does not perceive these visual images merely as personal representations but as aesthetic entities with social and economic potential. Each character is not just an "image," but a visual system that can be legally transformed, customized, and reproduced within collaborative contexts.

Awareness of the importance of protecting and managing these visual characters as intellectual assets was systematically reinforced when Muklay began collaborating with major brands. These characters have since become part of his artistic portfolio, endowed with exclusive rights as stipulated in Law No. 28 of 2014 on Copyright. In this regard, Muklay's characters may be categorized as IP in the form of: Illustrated works or drawings with distinctive forms; Visually recognizable characters (public recognition); and Aesthetic representations inherently associated with Muklay's name as a visual brand.

A documentation system, portfolio development, and media-specific usage identification, encompassing canvases, physical products, digital formats, and commercial campaigns, accompany each IP form.

To reinforce the legal and managerial standing of his commercial creative activities, Muklay established PT. Muklay Sejahtera in 2022. This corporate entity is the legal foundation for managing licenses, collaboration contracts, rights distribution, and protecting Muklay's visual assets in cross-sector business partnerships. Through this company, Muklay fulfills several key functions:

- Drafting licensing contracts with third parties (brands, institutions, platforms);
- Defining the limitations of visual usage in terms of duration, medium, and modification;
- Distributing royalties or compensation derived from collaborations;
- Conducting digital audits and maintaining documentation of visual dissemination.

This organizational structure enables Muklay to act not only as an artist but also as a brand owner and legally aware creative entrepreneur. PT. Muklay Sejahtera functions as the negotiation bridge between artistic intentions and commercial demands, mediating between visual expression and contractual regulation. Through this entity, Muklay's visual characters have been commodified into various collaborative formats, including:

- Fashion products (t-shirts, jackets, tote bags with 3Second, Uniqlo);
- Car sticker designs (MG Car Indonesia);
- Product packaging (Neo Rheumacyl, Lock & Lock);
- Digital campaigns (Grab Indonesia, Redmi);
- Public installations and interiors (Citilink, mini-museum exhibitions).

Fig. 1 shows the transmedia outcome of Muklay's signature visual character as a fashion product, created by collaborating with clothing brand 3Second.

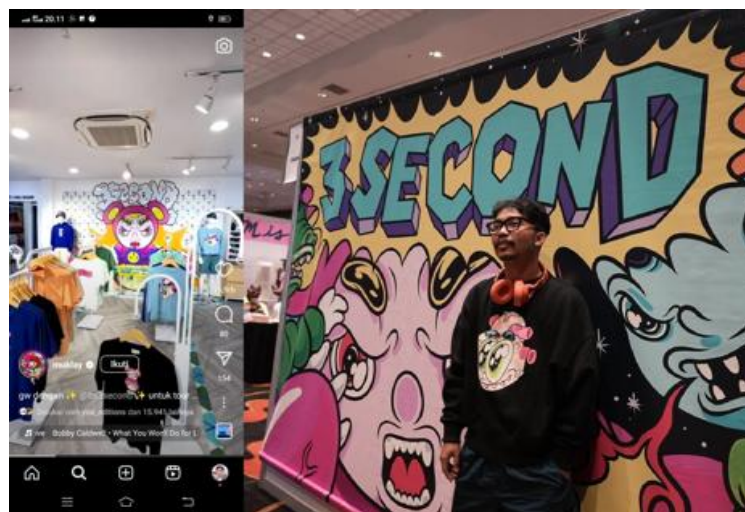


Fig. 1. The outcome in collaboration with 3Second

Fig. 2 shows the transmedia outcome of Muklay's signature visual character as a car sticker design, realized in collaboration with automotive brand MG.



Fig. 2. The outcome in collaboration with MG

Fig. 3 shows the transmedia outcome of Muklay's signature visual character as part of a digital marketing campaign, developed in collaboration with smartphone brand Redmi.



Fig. 3. The outcome in collaboration with Redmi

Each collaboration is managed through legal documentation that outlines the terms of limited licensing, royalty arrangements, visual rights, and protocols for reuse. In this practice, Muklay's characters function as glocal commodities—visual products rooted in local culture yet adaptable to global contexts—tailored to align with the identity and narrative of the collaborating brand.

Discussions

A. The Position of Muklay's Visual Imagery within the Context of the IP-Based Creative Industry

The visual imagery developed by Muklay (Muchlis Fachri) should not be viewed merely as the result of an aesthetic creation process, but rather as a representation of a visual value system that operates within contemporary culture's social and creative economic fields. Muklay's visual characters with their vivid colors, expressive gestures, and surreal cartoon idioms are rooted in a digital visual culture that is massively produced and reproduced by prosumers on social media platforms.

Since 2015, Muklay has collaborated with various global and local brands such as Uniqlo, Coach, 3Second, and MG Motor. In these collaborations, visual imagery is not treated simply as a decorative element but as a core identity that connects the brand to specific audience segments. Muklay's imagery serves as an interface between artistic value, brand communication, and lifestyle representation. This positioning places Muklay in a unique role as an artist who creates and as a visual systems architect whose work can be legally and economically exchanged through copyright protection and licensing mechanisms.

B. Visual Imagery as Aesthetic Intellectual Property

Muklay's shift toward the legal recognition of intellectual property began intensifying in 2022, when he established PT. Muklay Sejahtera as the legal entity overseeing his image-based commercial activities. This initiative was supported by the acknowledgment of Law No. 28 of 2014 on Copyright, which guarantees creators' and holders' exclusive rights.

Strategically, Muklay opened licensing opportunities through limited, exclusive, and non-exclusive usage frameworks. This approach facilitates economic circulation through visual designs reproduced in derivative forms such as artwear, collectible merchandise, commercial product packaging, and automotive modifications. In this context, Muklay's visual imagery functions beyond artistic categorization—it becomes a legal object, a communicative tool, and a cultural commodity capable of being capitalized upon.

C. Value Exchange in Visual Collaboration Practices

The collaborations between Muklay and various brands demonstrate a complex pattern of value exchange. Brands, as collaborators, gain access to aesthetic assets in the form of a widely recognized visual identity that resonates with urban, youthful, and creative market segments. On the other hand, Muklay receives financial compensation, expanded market reach, and symbolic capital that reinforces the position of his imagery within the visual field of popular culture.

These collaborations also serve as a form of cultural legitimization, embedding Muklay's artwork within mainstream consumer experiences. Moreover, they reflect a strategic alignment where artistic expression and commercial branding mutually benefit from shared narratives and audience engagement.

Table 1. Collaboration as an Exchange of Values Based on Pierre Bourdieu's Theory

Actor	Capital Offered	Capital Received	Type of Exchange (Bourdieu)
Collaborator (e.g., brand, company)	- Economic capital (funding, royalties) - Symbolic capital (brand exposure, media coverage)	- Access to Muklay's aesthetic visual imagery - Cultural capital (association with urban art) - Artistic capital (uniqueness & originality) - Communication value (targeted segments) - Identity value (brand differentiation)	- Economic ↔ Symbolic - Economic ↔ Cultural
Muklay	- Aesthetic capital (unique visual characters) - Cultural capital (recognition in urban youth culture) - Symbolic capital (artistic legitimacy)	- Economic capital (licensing fees, royalties) - Symbolic amplification (collaborator's market reach) - Social capital (networking and expanded audience) - Institutional legitimacy (formal partnerships)	- Artistic ↔ Economic - Symbolic ↔ Social - Cultural ↔ Economic

This model is grounded in the awareness that Muklay's visual imagery possesses functional value as a medium of communication across sectors and disciplines.

D. Visual Imagery as a Transmedial Medium and Lifestyle Representation

Within the framework of visual culture, Muklay's works can be understood as transmedial entities, fluid and adaptive. They appear not only on canvas or digital screens, but also in jackets, helmets, cars, water bottles, and public interior spaces. These visual images traverse media boundaries and generate cultural resonance, translating into an art-infused consumptive lifestyle. This transmedial presence enhances the accessibility and everyday relevance of Muklay's art, embedding it into the routines of urban life. It also blurs the lines between high art and popular culture, positioning his work at the intersection of artistic innovation and consumer identity.

This demonstrates that Muklay's visual language is both a marker of identity and a branding communication device. Based on virtual ethnographic analysis conducted through observations of Instagram Stories and audience community posts, Muklay's visuals are

associated with fun, creative, and edgy traits that brands strategically utilize in crafting their product narratives.

E. Licensing Strategies and the Ethics of Intellectual Property Contracts

In Indonesia, the protection system for creative works is grounded in Law No. 28 of 2014 on Copyright, which serves not only as a legal framework but also as an ethical and moral guideline in recognizing intellectual expression[1]. The law asserts that every creation-including works of visual art, illustrations, and graphic designs-carries inherent legal value from the moment it is manifested in tangible form. According to Article 1 Paragraph 1, copyright is defined as the exclusive right of a creator or copyright holder to control the use of their work, which arises automatically without the need for formal registration, provided it does not conflict with other prevailing laws and regulations. This guarantees that visual works, such as those created by Muklay, are protected from the moment of creation and publication.

Furthermore, Article 4 outlines two essential dimensions of copyright: economic and moral rights. Economic rights allow creators to derive financial benefits from using their works. In contrast, moral rights ensure acknowledgment of the creator's identity and protect the work's integrity from distortion or misrepresentation. In collaborative artistic practices, this article directly influences contractual structures, requiring users not only to provide financial compensation but also to credit the creator and maintain the originality of the artwork.

Additionally, Article 9 grants exclusive rights to copyright holders for publishing, reproducing, and authorizing the use of their works, which forms the legal foundation for licensing agreements between artists and commercial entities. These exclusive rights enable creators to control how much their works are distributed, modified, or transformed into derivative products. Article 58 then stipulates that copyright protection for visual works extends throughout the creator's lifetime and 70 years after death, ensuring long-term economic and moral value across generations.

Thus, the Copyright Law functions as a juridical instrument and an ethical umbrella that positions art as a valuable intellectual expression, establishing a just relationship between creators and users within the creative economy. In Muklay's visual works, this law is a critical foundation in designing collaboration contracts, licensing agreements, and establishing a legal entity, PT. Muklay Sejahtera is the legal extension of the copyright holder.

In business collaboration processes, Muklay implements licensing strategies tailored to the needs of each party. Several key clauses are included in his licensing contracts, such as:

- Moral and economic rights remain with the creator;
- Time and territorial limitations of distribution;
- Prohibition of modifications without written consent;
- Royalty schemes and compensation structures.

The "IP Muklay" document explicitly recommends using intellectual property consultants or notaries to ensure that contracts are legally sound, ethically fair, and creator-oriented. This is especially crucial given the power imbalance between large brands and individual creators, which can lead to symbolic exploitation.

Licensing visual works is a strategic business instrument enabling value exchange between creators and collaborators within a legally defined framework. In principle, licensing practices are based on mutual benefit through negotiation and agreement processes, where exclusive or non-exclusive rights to use the visual assets are granted to the collaborator in exchange for predetermined compensation.

For visual creators like Muklay, licensing offers several significant economic benefits. First, royalties provide periodic income based on the frequency of use or volume of licensed work sold. Second, creators can charge an upfront licensing fee as compensation for legal usage rights, serving as a direct income source. Third, the opportunity to offer exclusive licenses allows a single party to obtain sole usage rights over a specific period, typically at a higher cost due to the strategic value of exclusivity. Fourth, licensing enables income diversification, as a single visual work can be licensed across multiple sectors (e.g., digital media, apparel, automotive, FMCG), creating parallel revenue streams. Fifth, licensing facilitates the commercialization of derivative products such as artwear, collectible merchandise, or limited edition prints, all of which become revenue channels based on aesthetic works.

On the other hand, for collaborators or industry partners, licensing visual artworks offers equally important benefits. They obtain legal rights to use and commercialize the works through licensing, whether in visual campaigns, products, or public space activations. They can also request customized visuals via creative briefs developed based on the brand's vision and identity, which the creator translates into key visuals consistent with their signature style. This process enhances the product's artistic value and strengthens emotional connectivity with target audiences, positioning art as a strategic communication medium between business entities and consumer audiences.

F. Visual Imagery as an Aesthetic Ecosystem and Infrastructure

Muklay's visual work does not merely exist as isolated art objects but has evolved into a living aesthetic ecosystem. Fig. 4 explains the ecosystem.

Within this ecosystem, imagery **converges** personal expression, the creative economy, and collective identity. Muklay's working model illustrates how visual intellectual property can construct an artistic infrastructure that is both economically sustainable and culturally meaningful.

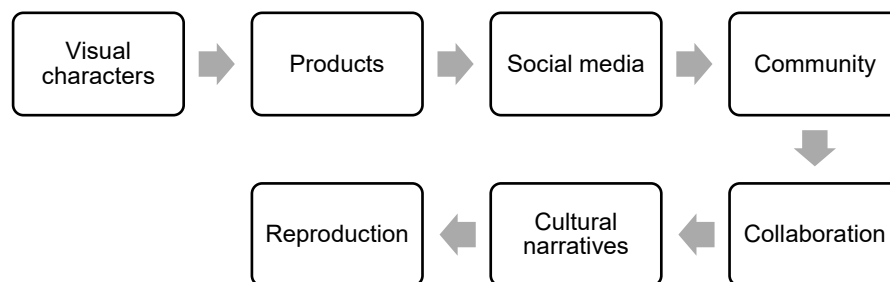


Fig. 4. Aesthetic Ecosystem and Infrastructure

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the aesthetic visual imagery developed by Muklay has transcended the traditional boundaries of fine art as a contemplative object, transforming into a legal, communicative, and economic entity that actively operates within the contemporary creative industry ecosystem. Through copyright registration and structured licensing strategies, these visual images have become forms of intellectual property with significant bargaining power in cross-sector business collaborations.

Muklay's dual role as both an artist and a creative entrepreneur illustrates how aesthetic practices can be converted into symbolic capital and economic value through visual licensing systems, ethical contracts, and the transmedial distribution of imagery. His collaborations not only produce consumer products but also construct visual identity narratives that the market absorbs as components of contemporary lifestyle culture.

Furthermore, these findings reinforce the thesis that in the digital age, visual imagery is not merely representational but also performative—it acts as an agent within socio-cultural networks, shapes aesthetic experience, and fosters participatory spaces among creators, collaborators, and audiences. In this context, intellectual property protection emerges as a fundamental aspect that ensures creators' sustainability and sovereignty over their works.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study is primarily limited by its scope, which focuses on a single case study—namely, the practice of visual intellectual property by the artist Muklay. While this approach allows for in-depth analysis of visual strategies, licensing mechanisms, and collaborative practices within a specific creative entity, the findings cannot be directly generalized to Indonesia's broader community of visual artists. Furthermore, restricted access to confidential legal contract documents limited the analysis of actual economic structures and royalty schemes in quantitative terms.

Another limitation lies in the reliance on descriptive and qualitative data drawn from presentation documents, social media observations, and secondary sources such as online articles. Although methodologically valid within qualitative research frameworks, this approach does not yet comprehensively map the national visual IP industry, particularly regarding how intellectual property law is implemented among independent artists, creative MSMEs, or community-based fashion industries.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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