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Beyond the New Normal: Realizing Innovations for a Sustainable and Crisis-Proactive Society

May 12 - 13, 2022

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## Anito: Avatars of the Pearl (Designing Characters Inspired by the Natural Resources of the Philippines)

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**Abstract:** Anito: Avatars of the Pearl is a collection of digitally illustrated character designs that personify the natural tourist attractions and endemic wildlife species in the Philippines to capture the recognition and improve the interest of Filipino teenagers on the natural resources of the country. The study aims to know how much recognition and interest do the Filipino teenagers have on the natural resources in the Philippines while the artwork applies the innovative concept of anthropomorphic personification to reimagine the natural resources of the Philippines as characters known as *diwatas* and *engkantos*.

**Keywords:** anthropomorphic personification; digital illustration; character design; natural resources; filipino art

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Amid the digital era, Filipino youth today are scoring below the intended terms of discipline in internet usage, which led to concern over the harmful effects of technology (Camus). The situation worsened during the COVID-19 lockdown and so interaction with nature is much needed for teenagers to recover but they cannot easily go out of town due to certain travel restrictions, leading to struggles contributed by the deficiency of teenage experiences gained from going outdoors (Department of Health; Demkowicz et al. 2). Such occurrences can also develop a lack of recognition and interest from teenagers for the Philippines' natural resources, which refers to all living and non-living materials present in nature (Bansard and Schroder.). The Philippines is one of the 17 megadiverse countries in the world as recognized by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) of the United Nations Environment Programme, but its natural resources are in peril of depletion due to exploitation and climate change (Biodiversity A-Z;

Azores). Hence, youth today have their futures at stake and they may not also be interested in such topics which is a dilemma for the National Environmental Awareness Act or Republic Act 9512 of 2008 (Senate of the Philippines). It is recommended to maintain environmental education and improve the capacity of students regarding environmental issues (Punzalan). Although, technology today might have the potential to solve the crisis by raising awareness through social media and online content (Federigan). It can benefit environmental advocacy groups in promoting their solutions to teenagers while also helping distract them from the struggles of lockdown, immersing them into fictional worlds that are still recognizable due to their proximity to reality (Internet Matters Team; Korres and Elexpuru). This can be possible through Anthropomorphic Personification which are characters who are the living (either human or humanoid) embodiment of a non-human concept, often powered or have dominance over the concept they represent (TVTropes). Anthropomorphic Personification has always been part of Filipino culture and heritage. Pre-colonial Filipinos practiced



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*anitismo*, for instance, which was the belief in nature spirits and ancestral souls known as *anito* or *diwata* (Hislop). However, it is rarely present in contemporary content which makes it an underestimated technique that may benefit artists to learn the importance of in-depth research in artworks, and educational sectors to break down complex concepts for students to understand. Therefore, the researcher would like to maximize the potential of Anthropomorphic Personification by personifying the natural resources of the Philippines through digital illustration and character design. The research questions are the following: (1) How much recognition and interest do Filipino teenagers have for the natural resources in the Philippines? and; (2) How can the researcher make character designs using anthropomorphic personification that drives Filipino teenagers to recognize and be interested in the natural resources of the country? Due to time constraints and narrow scope, the responses to the survey do not represent the majority of Filipino teenagers. Additionally, the artwork produced is not a substitute for environmental action, but as one of the possible ways of promoting environmental action among teenagers. The character designs contain artistic interpretations of real-life natural resources and ethnic art in the Philippines but they are not necessarily accurate depictions, and only a portion of these designs is referenced from stock nature photographs taken by the artist since the pandemic restricts her from traveling to more locations. Overall, the artwork did not encompass all of the natural resources in the Philippines, but rather a select few.

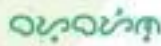
## 2. THE PROCESS

The survey questionnaire was the research methodology that answered the first research question. The respondents were Senior High School students of De La Salle University (Manila) who are 16 to 19 years of age with a sample size of nine (9) and a sampling method of simple random sampling. The survey questions are partially based on the survey conducted by Punzalan in their study on environmental awareness of Senior High School students. The survey was conducted through Google Forms and once it was finalized, it was sent to ten (10) random Senior High School students from each strand/track and the researcher was able to garner nine (9) full responses. The first section opened up with the context of the study and ethical considerations which respondents confirmed that they have read and understood, and hereby consented to participate. After the respondents submitted their informed parental

consent forms and answered the basic demographic questions., they proceeded to the next section which contained eight (8) open-ended questions, checkbox questions, and linear rating scales. The summary of responses is as follows: (1) All of the respondents described the natural resources of the Philippines as rich and abundant, mentioning agriculture, wildlife, and the like. Five (5) of the responses also mentioned how it is being exploited and depleted by human activity and industrialization. (2) The respondents typically learn about the natural resources in academics (100%), followed by travels (77.8%), social media (66.7%), entertainment media (44.4%), family and/or peers (33.3%), then organizations (11.1%). (3) Four (4) of the respondents are interested in the natural resources, four (4) are neutral, while one (1) is not interested. (4) Eight (8) respondents have encountered the natural resources in real-life while one (1) has not. (5) Those who have encountered it gave examples of natural attractions and endemic wildlife species, while the respondent who has not, stated that they do not travel. (6) All nine (9) respondents have encountered the natural resources of the Philippines in media and/or entertainment (7) Five (5) of them encountered it in Filipino travel shows and nature documentaries while four (4) encountered them in Filipino films. And lastly, (8) All of the respondents' experiences with these media were entertaining and informative, almost persuading them to visit the natural resources in actuality. After gathering data for the research methodology, the artist chose the medium of digital illustration for the artwork, which is defined as the use of a computer or digital tools in illustrating an image through a pointing device (Definitions). The subject is character design, defined as the creation of an original character for a story or script to be used in a film, TV series, video game, or comic (Kar). The innovative method employed in the artwork would be anthropomorphic personification. Natural resources can be divided into biotic factors which are the living organisms of the Earth (animals, plants, fungi, etc.), and abiotic factors which are the nonliving components (soil, water, air, etc.) (National Geographic Society). Applying this to the artwork, five (5) characters were based on biotic natural resources which were endemic wildlife species consisting of one (1) plant, one (1) bird, one (1) mammal, one (1) reptile, and one (1) insect. The other five (5) characters were based on abiotic factors, specifically natural attractions, wherein one (1) is from Luzon, one (1) is from the Visayas, one is (1) from Mindanao, and two (2) are from the stock nature photographs of the artist. The artist listed ten (10) popular candidates for each classification for a poll in the survey questionnaire to



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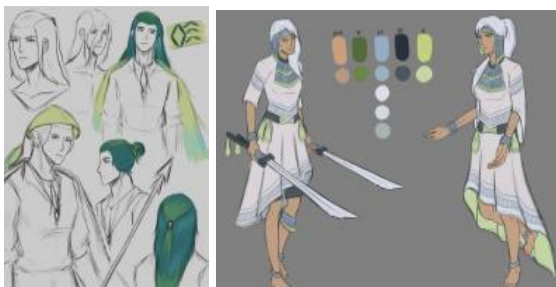
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identify which were the natural resources that the respondents are more familiar with. The results of the poll are in Section 3 as part of the artwork. The artist started on the character design, applying the three parts of an effective character design, namely physiology, sociology, and psychology (Lankoski). The physiology of the character designs is a fusion of basic human features and natural resources with some inspiration taken from Filipino pre-colonial and ethnic art to reflect the distribution/location of the natural resources. Each character also has their own origin story inspired by both legends and facts about the natural resources they embody. The overall artmaking process was based on both the artist's personal character design process and a book titled *Draw With Jazza: Creating Characters*, which is a thorough guide to creating character designs (Brooks). The following are the general stages: (1) **Conceptualization**. The artist used Google Docs to compile all her references and inspirations. She firstly researched the natural resources she based the character on.

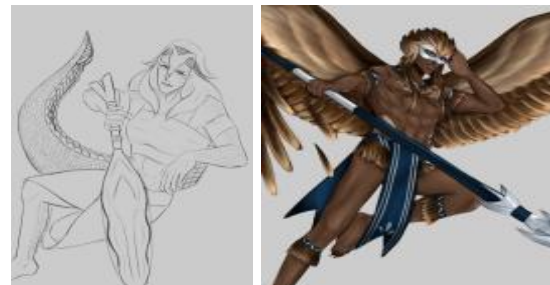
Fig. 2.1. Left: *Brainstorm Sketch of Agustino* (Paoay Lake); Right: *Model Sheet of Maria and Cristina* (Maria Cristina Falls)



(2) **Character Design**. After gathering visual inspiration, the artist drew brainstorm sketches in Medibang Paint Pro. Next was the model sheet that showcased the full-body sketch of the final character. She laid out a temporary color palette for the character and then matched it with colors inspired by Fernando Amorsolo's paintings (The Kahimyang Project). She tweaked the colors to what looked fitting and utilized the 60-30-10 rule, excluding the skin tone (Adelugba). (3) **Character Development**. For the character's story, the artist combined the folklore or symbolism about the natural resource with her own retelling of the legend. (4) **Concept**

**Art**. After some revisions, the artist illustrated the concept art. She divided her process into six parts:

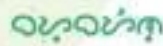
Fig. 2.2. Left: *Refined Sketch/Lineart of Aya* (Philippine Crocodile); Right: *Flat Colors + Shading and Highlights of Juni* (Philippine Eagle)



(a) *Sketch*. The artist broke down the anatomy of the character in a pose that portrays their personality and abilities. (b) *Refined Sketch/Lineart*. The artist preferred doing a refined sketch as the lineart, hence, she used a thinner pencil brush to draw the character. (c) *Flat Colors*. The artist created a new layer and used the watercolor brush to fill in the flat colors of the character. (d) *Shading and Highlights*. The skin was colored in a separate layer with the blending mode set on 'Multiply' for shading. The same applied to highlights, except the blending mode is 'Add'. The artist repeated the process of shading and highlighting for the rest of the flat colors. (e) *Background*. The background was either based on the natural resource itself or its natural habitat, with a style inspired by Amorsolo's paintings. (f) *Render*. The background was slightly tinted with a cooler color while the character was shaded with the same color to blend with the background and has a warmer color as a tint and highlight to stand out. (5) **Compilation and Execution**. The ten (10) digital illustrations alongside their respective character biographies were compiled and edited into the digital concept art book pages as seen in the exhibition.



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Fig. 2.3. Background + Render of Calo (*Rafflesia philippensis*)



### 3. THE ARTWORK/ CREATIVE WORK

As a Filipino teenager herself, the artist faced several difficulties during the lockdown but thanks to her family, she was able to travel out of town often to take a break. It gave her a newfound appreciation for the natural resources of the Philippines, but the survey she had conducted show that there are teenagers who can only witness its appeal through academics, travel shows, and nature documentaries, resulting in neutrality, and even disinterest, in such topics. Other entertainment and media also focus more on the issues surrounding the environment rather than the wonders within it. Using the data she had gathered, she was able to know her audience and she created the artwork for them to appreciate the natural resources of the country and the culture surrounding it. Ten (10) natural resources were reimagined by the artist as *diwatas*, who are the deities of the natural attractions of the country, and *engkantos*, who are the spirits of their respective endemic wildlife species.

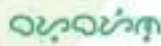
Fig. 3.1. Left: *Halisay* (Taal Volcano); Right: *Bahandlao* (Chocolate Hills)

**Halisay.** The Taal Volcano, located in Batangas, is the second most active volcano in the country (Smithsonian Institution). Long ago, Lakan Taal was said to be a respected elder, who led his town into prosperity. He forbid his people to climb the summit of the mountain but after his sudden disappearance, they decided to ignore his instruction and found a hole abundantly filled with gemstones. They started hoarding and fighting over them which angered Lakan Taal who wished that Bathala may bring disaster to them, and soon enough, a large fire emitted from the hole, killing the villagers and forming the volcano as it is today (Travel Inspires). The artist reimagined that Lakan Taal was actually hiding a young *diwata*, Halisay, who he raised as his daughter in the confines of the summit. She was restricted to leave but the sudden appearance of the townspeople caused her great distress that she accidentally released her strangely powerful abilities. She grew up guilty of what she had done but, slowly and surely, she controlled her abilities so that it may not happen again.

**Agustino.** The Paoay Lake is the largest lake in Ilocos Norte and was believed to be the location of a wealthy barangay that sank due to an earthquake (Villamor and Buencamino). The people of the barangay were blinded by greed, except for Juan and Maria who were told by a godly voice to flee before it sank (Red Maleta). The artist reimagined that after the calamity, Juan and Maria were blessed with a child named Agustino, the *diwata* that inhabits the lake, rehabilitating a diverse species of birds, plants, and fish. **Bahandlao.** The Chocolate Hills of Bohol is a famous geological formation declared as the third National Geological Monument of the Philippines (UNESCO World Heritage Centre). The hills were believed to be the boulders used in a fight between two giants but it was also believed that the formations were the teardrops of a broken-hearted giant (NHNZ). The artist reimagined the legends to be about the giant *diwata*, Bahandlao, who had a lovers' quarrel with another giant leading to the formation of hills. Bahandlao was depressed



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and his tears fell onto the barren hills, suddenly giving life to them and turning them into a habitat for animals and plants. This motivated him to move on and take more time for himself.

**Maria and Cristina.** The Maria Cristina Falls is located in Iligan and is the primary source of hydroelectric power for the city's industries. Legend has it that it was named after twin sisters that loved each other deeply that they sacrificed their lives for each other (Fernando). They are reinterpreted by the artist as daughters of a female human and a male *diwata*. Maria grew up to be the protector of her father's river from the nearby Sultanate. Cristina, on the other hand, has powers of electricity but refused to use them since she fell in love with the Sultan's son. The sisters had such opposing worldviews that it led to a conflict between the river and the Sultanate, which made Cristina fall from a cliff. Maria saved her sister but she got electrocuted in the process. Cristina was so guilt-stricken that her abilities made the cliff spew water but it turned out that the water came from their father's river which subsequently healed Maria. The sisters apologized to each other and realized that despite being polar opposites, their familial love kept them together. **Pamela.** Siargao is an island located in the Philippine Sea, off the coast of Surigao Del Norte. The island is a popular tourist destination and surfing spot which inspired the artist to create Pamela, a bright and optimistic *diwata* that welcomes humans into her island. She also has the ability to magically surf around her abode and grow palm trees. **Juni.** The Philippine Eagle is a critically endangered species of eagle that is endemic in eastern Luzon, Samar, Leyte, and Mindanao (BirdLife International). It is the national bird of the Philippines and the symbol of hope and inspiration for the Filipino people that the artist was inspired to design an *engkanto* called Juni (Manapat). He came from a lineage of Haribons that were known as leaders and protectors of the forest. However, their tribe failed to protect themselves from unknown forces, which massacred most of the *engkantos*, causing him, his mother, and the remaining to flee. Years had passed and the trauma still lingers within them but not for the fearless and resilient Juni who believes that they can still take back their territory.



Fig. 3.2. Left: Ligbuhayan (Luzon Blue Tiger Butterfly); Right: Mago (Philippine Tarsier)

**Ligbuhayan.** The Luzon Blue Tiger Butterfly is a species of the Parantica butterfly that is endemic to Luzon (University of Michigan). Butterflies being the souls of dead relatives is a common superstitious belief in the Philippines, which inspired the artist to design the *engkanto*, Ligbuhayan (Malasig). Ligbuhayan has the unique ability to conjure butterflies that serve as temporary earthly vessels for the souls of the underworld. He is also one of the few *engkantos* that are very close to humans that he would often listen to the life stories of those who had passed. **Calo.** The *Rafflesia philippensis* is a species of parasitic plant found within the Mount Banahaw National Park in Calabarzon (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew). The *Rafflesia* is also called the 'corpse flower' due to its pungent odor similar to rotting flesh that attracts pollinators (Library of Congress). This inspired the artist to create an *engkanto* called Calo, who is silent but deadly to his unsuspecting victims. Calo has the ability to monitor and apprehend evil *engkantos*, hence his mysterious and serious demeanor. **Mago.** The Philippine Tarsier is a near-threatened species of Tarsier that can be found in the islands of Maripipi, Siargao, Basilan, and Dinagat (Shekelle). The legend involving Tarsiers describes them as pets of the spirits that inhabit balete trees (NHNZ). Mago is the *engkanto* that the artist designed to be the dweller of balete trees and the second-in-command to the Haribon *engkanto*. Her enhanced vision and the ability to magically produce arrows made her a skilled archer. **Aya.** The Philippine Crocodile, generally called *buwaya*, is a critically endangered crocodile species that can be found within the Luzon rainforest, the Ligawasan Marsh in Bukidnon, and possibly in the Agusan Marsh in Mindanao (Weerd). Ancient Tagalogs believed that the *buwaya* was responsible for bringing a deceased person's spirit into either Maca (heaven) or Kasanaan (hell), through a



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tomb on its back (Guzman). The artist was inspired by this myth, leading to the creation of the character, Aya who is an audacious *engkanto* that collects human souls with her *barong* sword and transports them to the underworld through a portal within her basket.

The full collection is available in the Digital Arts exhibition of the 4th De La Salle University Senior High School Research Congress. Five (5) of the ten (10) digital illustrations (Agustino, Maria and Cristina, Juni, Calo, and, Aya) were also featured at the 15th De La Salle University Exhibit for three months starting March 28, 2022.

## 4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The artist would like to express her sincerest gratitude to her research adviser, Mr. Gione Dainelle S. Pagdanganan for his continuous support and guidance throughout the research process. The artist may not be able to make this work possible without his immense knowledge and patience. She would also like to thank her research mentor, Ms. Candice Perez for her thorough and enjoyable Practical Research discussions, as well as the Artwork Proposal panelists, Ms. Jaimee Esteban and Ms. Rein Natividad for their insightful comments and suggestions which greatly improved the work in its early stages. Additionally, The artist appreciates the nine (9) respondents of the qualitative research questionnaire for dedicating their time to participate in the study. Special thanks also go to the artist's supportive and loving family for inspiring and motivating her during the creative process. Lastly, the artist would like to thank God for letting her overcome the challenges and making this journey worthwhile. Thank you all.

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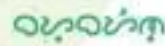
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