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# Directors of 98B COLLABoratory | Manila, Philippines



*This month, culture360 contributor David Fernandez travels to Manila, Philippines. In this article, he interviews Kathrine Nuñez, Gabrielle Gatchalian, Juno Vizcarra and Gabriel Villegas, Co-Directors of 98B COLLABoratory, an artist-run, multidisciplinary site and convergence zone for creative sharing, discussion, and collaboration established in 2012.*

### David Fernandez (DF): How would you describe 98B COLLABoratory?

**98B:** 98B COLLABoratory is an artist-run initiative and space based in Manila, Philippines. The idea is to have a setting where artists and creative individuals from other disciplines can interact and work together, while presenting art, design and creativity in different ways; be it a talk, a bazaar, a publication, a meal, drinking together, or a simple gathering. We are a multidisciplinary art laboratory that seeks to provide and facilitate a space or a platform, where artists, designers, curators, writers, musicians, film makers, activists, educators, researchers, cultural workers, performers, architects, students, together with the general public can both create and research collaboratively.

**DF: What did you set out to achieve when 98B was founded?**

**98B:** When 98B started in 2012, we wanted a place where fellow artists can hang out, discuss, exchange ideas, create projects, drink and share a home cooked meal together. Through the seven years that 98B has been running, these are still the basic things that flow through the veins of our projects and programming. Looking at the mission and vision of our group: 98B is a platform for critical discourse, experimentation, exchange, information and presentation of contemporary art in the Philippines, seeking to establish convergence with creatives from diverse disciplines together with the general public.

We aim to present local and international contemporary art through our various programs, projects and research, outside the confines of the white cube, showcasing art in multiple layers and perspectives to a broad and diverse audience whilst contributing to the contemporary art scene. We are certainly stimulated by ideas, projects and explorations that ask pertinent questions, stretch boundaries and more importantly, provide un-intimidating access to art and creativity.



*98B COLLABoratory*

**DF: How do you see the evolution of 98B as an art platform?**

**98B:** 98B has always made an effort to be adaptable as a platform – to be responsive to what we think the creative community might need more of. It's seen quite a lot of evolution throughout the course of its existence. We feel proud that 98B as a group has been agile that way. We ideate new programs depending on what it is we think might be called for based on what we observe in the ecosystem, and these programs get adjusted depending on what they yield vis-à-vis the people we work with. It is a continuous process of experimentation and satisfying of curiosities with us.

Some small projects grow and end up taking lives of their own. One of our projects, the Future Market, for example, eventually led to the Saturday X Future Market @ Escolta and the development of the [HUB: Make Lab](#), which has since graduated from being one of 98B's projects to an independent platform of its own.

When the HUB: Make Lab was built, our ESC projects, the exhibition leg, began to become a little more frequent and longer in duration. As we go on, we'll continue to be curious and explore new "what-ifs," to act on, and do our best to continue running a platform that provides opportunities for people to feel freer to experiment. We're looking forward to whatever new interesting collaborations the future might bring.

**DF: What are your plans for the future of 98B, do you have any specific goals you would like to attain in the future?**

**98B:** Since 98B's beginnings in 2012, we have put up exhibitions by local and international artists, hosted art residencies, facilitated curators who want to research, had screenings of video works by different artists, created communities, engaged with the neighborhood we are



located in, sat down and had well-spirited conversations about art over meals and drinks, and a lot more. The idea of initiating a space where we could present, and talk about contemporary art in different ways, rather than the usual white cube set-up has always excited us. The past years have been fruitful, and though we have no definite plans of what the future holds for us, a clear thing for us is that we will continuously evolve, grow, and address the needs of the public and community we serve. Through this, is the thing that has been constant and have been doing since we started: doing more collaborations, conversations, and exchanges.

**DF: How is the public in Manila reacting to your programs?**

**98B:** One of our objectives in 98B is to show art in spaces that could be more accessible to the general public. We have for instance, mounted exhibitions in an old store front's window display area so passers-by can easily see the artworks without needing to go inside. We also encourage artists we collaborate with to consider the historical and cultural area of Escolta when formulating their works. Furthermore, we have also reached out to various stakeholders on the street, such as building-owners and street vendors, to name a few, inviting them to participate in our projects. Since the time we moved in our current location, numerous talks, exhibitions, workshops, projects and activities focusing on the contemporary art practices were organized by the 98B Team with the First United Building and Escolta as the backdrop. We have seen the general public take interest and be involved in projects we have mounted and helped create more awareness for our neighbourhood within their local and international networks and contributed towards Escolta becoming an artistic and creative nexus.



**DF: What have been the most important focus of your platform?**

**98B:** In the past seven years we have been operating, 98B has come up with a handful of programs, like a market, an artist residency, a project space, an exhibition program, and a program for artist talks. Each program has its own unique intent, but they all go back and contribute to 98B's general objectives.

**DF: Why is 98b important in the Manila scene?**

**98B:** Every art space, whether it's a gallery, a museum, or an artist-run space, brings its own energy to the flourishing mix of the Manila art scene. We don't see ourselves as important in the Manila scene nor is it our priority to be important and relevant. For 98B, we have always sought and placed value in providing a space where creatives can experiment, explore, collaborate, discuss, exchange and connect, in ways that are different from the commercial setting, or the set-up of a white cube type of space. Being a non-commercial artist-run space that run on the fuel of volunteer work can point to pretty interesting directions in the production and presentation of art.

**DF:** What is Manila's art & cultural scene like nowadays? How would you describe the local creative community?

**98B:** It has been exciting in the past seven years! Recent years have yielded quite a bit of activity. Especially in the independent and artist-initiated platforms. We are extremely happy and excited that a number of independent initiatives and artist run spaces have opened up in Manila and most especially in other parts of the Philippines. As practicing contemporary artists, it has always been our dream that more spaces like us have started and are available to the Philippine art community.

To find out more about **98B COLLABoratory**, please visit: <https://98-b.org/>

*David Fernández is a Spanish-born contributing writer working in South East Asia for nearly a decade. Currently working as freelance arts & cultural project manager and digital media consultant around the region, he is also the co-founder of Cho Why multi-disciplinary project space in Bangkok, Thailand. He previously co-founded Le Cool Bangkok arts & culture webzine and worked as content director.*

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