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# Manila, Philippines | city profile



*This month, culture360 discovers the local arts and cultural panorama of the Filipino capital city, Manila, highlighting some alternative initiatives that are arousing a diverse and buzzing creative environment.*

Situated on the shore of Manila Bay, on the western edge of Luzon, the largest and most important island in the Philippines, the metropolitan area of Manila is the epicentre of the country's economic, political, social, and cultural activity, and the most densely populated city in the world.

Manila's wide range of cultural influences spanning different historical and cultural periods – American, Spanish, Chinese, and Malay – clearly reflect the turbulent history of the city and country as binds the rich cultural heritage towards the latest contemporary art developments.

As the cultural center of the Philippines, Metro Manila is home to a number of renowned museums and cultural institutions such as the **Metropolitan Museum of Manila**, **Museum of Contemporary Art and Design**, **Ayala Museum** and the **Ateneo Art Gallery**, all of them providing a glimpse of Filipino visual art, culture, and history as well as contemporary art exhibitions of local artists and craftsmen.

It is also inside the entangled urban context of Manila where new independent art initiatives and other ground-breaking cultural platforms have been constantly emerging over the last two decades against all odds.

*“There are many things happening in the art and culture scene in Manila, I would say it is multi-layered and diverse. There are exhibit openings almost every day from commercial galleries to big institutions. What I am also seeing in the last few years and I am excited about, are the spaces and initiatives which start in their own houses. Artists creating exhibitions in one part of their homes or organizing a one-night screening or performances in their garage which is cozier and not intimidating. And because living in the city is getting more expensive, there are also small spaces that are starting their own scenes in nearby provinces like Laguna, Quezon and Rizal - **Mark Salvatus**, Intermedia artist and Co-founder of Load na Dito”*

This recent wave of alternative art platforms has been spearheaded by [Green Papaya Art Projects](#), the longest running, artist-led space in Metro Manila. Opened back in 2000 in Quezon City, this independent initiative has laid the groundwork for local cultural agents by ‘supporting and organizing actions and propositions that explore tactical approaches to the production, dissemination, research, and presentation of contemporary art in various and cross-disciplinary fields’.



*Green Papaya Art Projects*

Artists, researchers, curators, and other like-minded cultural intermediaries have been giving shape to the local non-mainstream cultural art ecosystem ever since. This has generated a parallel network that has managed to make up for the lack of infrastructure, support, and funding while propelling a new stream of creative vitality not just throughout the capital city but also beyond other areas of the fragmented Filipino territory.

Among some of the most relevant art hubs nowadays is [98B COLLABoratory](#), an artist-run initiative and multi-functional space founded in 2012, as a response to the need for alternative venues in Manila. Currently under new leadership, this art laboratory aims to establish links with creatives from diverse disciplines together with the general public.

*“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 are started and are available to the Philippine art community. - **Katherine Nuñez**, Artist and Program Head of 98b COLLABoratory”*

Platforms like Green Papaya and 98B are vital for emerging artists and collectives to create opportunities for themselves in order to produce experimental artworks, stage pieces they never had a chance to, while developing cross cultural exchanges, and connect with the local community.

However, most of these independent non-commercial platforms such as the art research initiative **Load Na Dito**, the artist-run spaces **Sampaguita Projects** and **Project 20**, the film lab **Los Otros** and the open photography investigation platform **Photoma** depend entirely on their personal connections for funding, project resources and partnerships to implement most of their programs and activities.



Another interesting case is the **Bellas Artes Projects Outpost**, a non-collecting, non-selling exhibition space and art library created under the patronage of Bellas Artes Projects, a registered non-profit foundation, aiming to engage with art, architecture, and design through its curated programming.

*“Manila's art & cultural scene is growing in accessibility, resourcefulness and variety, especially in terms of the number of galleries, artist-led initiatives, and audience. The local creative community is quite interlinked, artists tend to band together in group shows, collaborative projects, etc. But slowly I feel there's more mixing in between these groups, which is enriching because after all we get to learn from each other's practice and experience - **Gerome Soriano**, Visual artist, photographer and Photoma team contributor”*



*Bellas Artes Projects Outpost*

Besides non-profit art initiatives, numerous art galleries have proliferated all over the city fostering the contemporary art dialogue, from Escolta's **Mono 8** to Quezon City's **Light & Space Contemporary** and **District Gallery** or Bonifacio Global City's **Pablo** or **Mo Space**, to name just a few.

This trend is best observed in Makati's thriving Chino Roces Avenue, where a number of art galleries - including **Archivo1984**, **Finale Art File**, **Silverlens**, **The Drawing Room**, **Vinyl on Vinyl** or agencies, architecture firms, bookstores and co-working spaces creating one of the city's most interesting cultural district.



*Warehouse Eight*

Among these revitalising initiatives, stand out the multipurpose event space **Warehouse Eight**, which hosts regular cultural happenings; **Kwago** a book platform that is consistently exploring creative ways to make and experience literature through its community programs and **Tarzeer Pictures**, an agency/artist-run gallery promoting Filipino photo artists just to highlight a few.

Another hotspot worth mentioning is Cubao X, in Quezon City, where several art-related outlets can be spotted, including **Studio Soup Library**, an independent book and zine store; **Book Culture**, a bookstore and a space for community events; and **Artists' Collective**, a space for artists to showcase their work.

**Post Gallery**, an alternative venue for upcoming artists to exhibit their works, featuring interactive events on a regular basis and **Kendo Creative/Hidden Space**, a two-story building that serves as a store, a studio, and creative space where art exhibits, markets, zine launches, pop-ups and other events are hosted on a regular basis.



*Studio Soup Library*

*“The contemporary art scene in Metro Manila is very vibrant; it's common to have more than half a dozen openings on an evening across the metro region - the logistics of visiting openings amid urban sprawl... There's so much to experience and absorbing that saturation is always a possibility. However, because there's so much to see and because you can bump into art peeps at a wide range of different openings, there's also a real possibility for criticality to bounce off the wall amidst conversations about the latest gossip - **Roy Voragen**, Curator and Program Manager, 1335MABINI”*

Furthermore, another clear symptom of the recent ripple effect experienced at a domestic level is the convergence of several art events in Manila every year around the month of February - the officialized National Arts Month, such as the well-established **Art Fair Philippines**, the recently-created **Manila Biennale** and the multidisciplinary urban art festival **Fringe Manila**.

All these cultural enterprises, each one with its differences, mirror a flourishing and uninhibited community, eager to embrace collaborations within the region and continue to generate opportunities for Filipino practitioners while the city of Manila keeps gaining exposure as one of Southeast Asia's most stimulating art landscapes.

*“Although some people would say our local scene is booming, it is still in its infancy with plenty of room for growth. Philippines has never lacked in artistry, but only recently, has it had a good support system. A system that consists of artists who are willing to push the envelope with their works, whether by medium, concepts or technique. Established, up and coming galleries, and curators willing to showcase these types of works to open a dialogue about the current state of contemporary art in the Philippines and change peoples' preconceived notions of what art is. Old and young collectors willing to financially support these exhibitions. With this current system in place, the Manila art scene is looking, bright, becoming a player in the widening global market - **Carlo Reyes**, Gallery Director & Creative Director, Mono8 Gallery”*

Links:

1335 Mabini: <http://www.1335mabini.com/>

98b COLLABoratory: <https://98-b.org/>

Ateneo Art Gallery <https://ateneoartgallery.com/>

Archivo1984 <https://www.archivo1984.com/about>

Ayala Museum: <http://www.ayalamuseum.org>

Ballet Artes Project: <http://www.balletarteproject.org>


- Belas Artes Projects: <http://www.belasartesprojects.org>
- District Gallery <http://www.artistplayground.ph/the-gallery>
- Light & Space Contemporary: <http://www.lightandspacecontemporary.org/>
- Load na dito: <https://www.facebook.com/loadnaditoprojects/>
- Metropolitan Museum of Manila <https://www.metmuseum.ph/>
- Museum of Contemporary Art and Design: <http://www.mcadmanila.org.ph>
- Mono8: <http://www.mono8gallery.com/>
- Mo\_Space: <https://www.mo-space.net/>
- Pablo: <https://pablogalleries.com/>
- Photoma: [www.photoma.info/](http://www.photoma.info/)
- Sampaguita Projects: <https://www.facebook.com/sampaguitaprojects>
- Silverlens: [www.silverlensgalleries.com/](http://www.silverlensgalleries.com/)
- Studio Soup: <https://www.facebook.com/studiosouplibrary/>
- Vinyl on Vinyl <http://vinylonvinylgallery.com/>
- Kwago: <https://isipkwago.com/>
- Tarzeer Pictures: <https://www.facebook.com/tarzeerpictures/>

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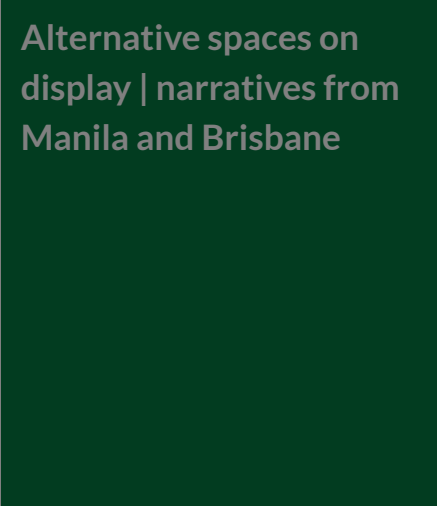
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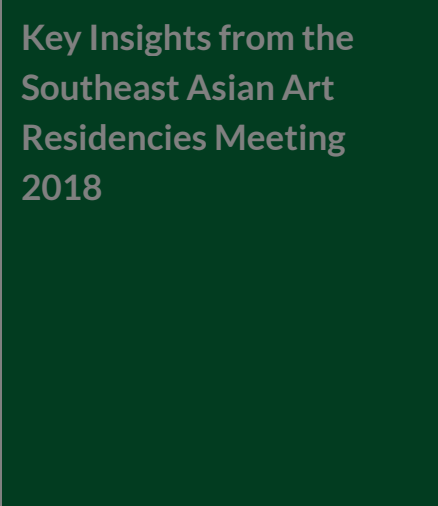
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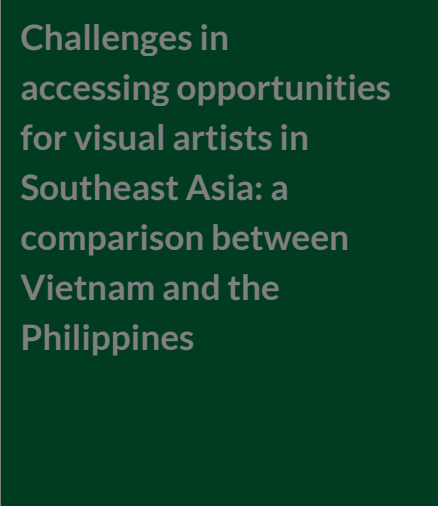
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