# ON BUILDING THE
## MINDANAO
# FILM ARCHIVE:

## An Interview with Dax Cañedo

### Patrick F. Campos

The attempts to build and run a national film archive have had a checkered history and its current incarnation continues to function within a precarious organizational structure. The government has yet to legally mandate and underwrite an autonomous, integrated, and fully functional national audiovisual archive. Today, what we have is the Philippine Film Archive, under the auspices of the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP). The archive is in service but currently undermanned and in need of greater funding and better infrastructure. Its collection is yet to be systematized and made easily accessible to the public.

The importance of the film archive for cultural and heritage preservation has not been recognized broadly, as evidenced by the relatively small number of films contained in and accessible via state-run agencies compared to the collection of privately owned archives. Even producers have not had the foresight to preserve their own productions, leaving their movies to oblivion once these no longer yield financial returns.

This bleak situation is underscored by the existence of uncoordinated efforts at archiving. This is exemplified by the likes of the corporate archive of ABS-CBN, whose holdings include a significant fraction of the mainstream Philippine movies that survive; the FPJ Studios that has lovingly kept intact the filmography of Fernando Poe, Jr.; the Facebook page Casa Grande Vintage Filipino Cinema, where director Mike de Leon painstakingly uploads digitized versions of surviving films by LVN Pictures; and the legendary collection of Simon Santos, proprietor of the rental shop Video 48 in West Avenue, Quezon City. These modes of archival preservation and access are made possible by private capital and the enterprising efforts of cinephiles. We have them in place of a functional national archive.

In Davao City, the Mindanao Film Archive (MFA) project was born in 2018. It is a hybrid of sorts, symptomatic of the situation of the national film archive. It was conceptualized by a group of cinephiles and film festival organizers under the Mindanao Film & Television Development Foundation. Its initial funding came from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), and its access points are housed in FDCP's Cinematheque Centres in Davao and Nabunturan, but it is run by volunteers.

The people behind the project are the same people who began the Mindanao Film Festival (previously dubbed as the Guerrilla Filmmaking Workshop), or the MFF, in 2003, two years ahead of the much vaunted Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival and six years ahead of NCCA's Cinema Rehiyon. The MFF has helped nurture filmmaking in Mindanao by providing a constant venue for exhibition and serving as a point of convergence for the polycentric and continually growing cinema of Mindanao.

The organizers of the MFF are fastidious stewards of the films that the festival has shown in Davao City or programmed for the annual Cinema Rehiyon. Through the years, its collection has grown, and it contains seminal works by now established filmmakers hailing from different parts of Mindanao who started making films in the 2000s. The MFA was conceived in recognition of the urgent need to preserve the collection and make it accessible to audiences and researchers who would help shape and write the history of Mindanao cinema.

In this interview, Dax Cañedo, one of the movers of the MFF, talks about the vision, goals, processes, and current state of the MFA.



Photo from the Mindanao Film Archive Facebook page. All images courtesy of Dax Cañedo.

Opposite page:
Dax Cañedo, president of the Mindanao Film and Television Development Foundation.

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### How did the Mindanao Film Archive project begin?

The idea of a film archive of Mindanao films came about many years before its establishment in late 2018. Oftentimes, we would get requests from filmmakers for a copy of their own film, which we screened in the Mindanao Film Festival, because they have lost their own copies for various reasons. We felt that there was a need to safeguard these films to ensure that they won't forever be lost and so that they can be enjoyed for many more years or generations to come.

Because of the growing number of films in our collection from the Mindanao Film Festival, it was becoming increasingly more difficult to look for particular films that were needed for different occasions such as film festivals, various kinds of film screenings, and research. We felt that the films in our collection needed to be properly catalogued and information about these films stored in a database. We also get a lot of queries from students, researchers, and film enthusiasts as to where they could watch some of the films from Mindanao. It was also apparent that there should be an easier way for interested people to find and watch these films.

On top these observations, our collection was growing every year and other major film festivals in Mindanao started cropping up with growing collections of their own. It was, therefore, imperative that an archive of Mindanao films be established sooner rather than later.

It took years before we were able to find the necessary funding, but after successfully getting a grant from the NCCA National Committee on Archives, the Mindanao Film Archive was established together with the inauguration of the Archive's first publicly-accessible interactive kiosk located at the Cinematheque Centre Davao on December 23, 2018. Our second kiosk, located at the Cinematheque Centre Nabunturan, was later opened on September 28, 2019, with a third one to be opened some time in 2020 in a library in Cagayan de Oro City. By that time, hopefully, hundreds of films from 2003 to 2017 will be made available.

### Whose idea was the MFA?

Although it was my idea for our organization to establish the Mindanao Film Archive, many individuals have also expressed to me the need for an archive. These include Drei Boquiren, Rjay Sta. Teresa, Jay Rosas, Hobart Savior, Bagane Fiola, and many, many more.

### Who are the people working on the project?

The Mindanao Film Archive is run by a small team of dedicated people which includes myself, Ivan Tadena, Lucy Saniel, and our curator, Jay Rosas. We also get volunteers from schools as well as organize community archiving activities to do data encoding. We also partner with organizers of film festivals in Mindanao to help in the process.

### What are your vision and goals?

The Mindanao Film Archive is envisioned to be a facility that collects, preserves, safeguards, and showcases Mindanao culture and heritage captured in moving images.

We plan on including not just films, but other forms of moving images as well, such as archival footage, news reels or television news segments, and even audio-visual presentations, for as long as they capture the culture and heritage of Mindanao.

In order for people to discover or explore the contents of the archive, it is also our goal to make our database and many of the moving images in the archive accessible via interactive kiosks in as many strategic locations in Mindanao as possible. These kiosks are meant to be a free, publicly accessible resource for educators, historians, researchers, students, filmmakers, tourists, and anyone interested in Mindanao culture.

Another goal of ours is to eventually make the database available on the internet to make it even easier for people to explore what the archive has. If the rightsholders of the moving images so wish it, we can even make videos available for viewing online.

### Explain the significance of your logo.

Designed by Drei Boquiren, who also designed the logo of the Mindanao Film & Television Development Foundation, the logo of the MFA consists of a Manobo warrior's shield and a pair of spears.

The shield incorporates a broken-line pattern near the edges that is reminiscent of the sprocket holes found on celluloid film. The circular element in the middle of the shield was also designed in such a way that it would subtly represent a rotating dial on a vault's combination lock. We also like to believe that the three segments of the shield represents the tri-people of Mindanao [the Lumads, Moros, and Christians] and their respective cultures, with the vertical design accent that runs through the middle of the shield looking like the letter "M" for Mindanao.

All together, these design elements symbolize the Archive's goal of preserving and protecting the culture and heritage of Mindanao as captured through moving images.

### Do you archive only digital files or also other formats?

At the moment, we can only accept films that are already in digital format as this is the only type that our facility can currently handle. However, we plan on digitizing non-digital films as soon as we have the capacity to do so. With regards to the physical storage of non-digital materials (film reels, tapes, etc.), it is currently not in the capability of the Archive and, thus, there are no immediate plans for us to do this.

### Given that archiving has material limitations, how do you decide which films to archive and which ones not to?

The technology we use is scalable and this allows us to grow the capacity of the Archive as more and more moving images are included. However, we understand that the increasingly growing number of materials may outpace the rate at which we can scale our capacity. We are currently just including films that have been screened in the major film festivals of Mindanao

starting in 2003 and will go about it one festival at a time.

We also have a curator that selects notable films and other moving images to include in the Archive even though these have not been screened in any film festival in Mindanao. We also accept direct submissions of works to be considered by the curator for archiving.

### What is your process of acquisition?

Our process of acquisition is currently reversed in that we start with a copy of the film that we already have in our possession. We then contact the filmmakers or rightsholders to determine if they want their films to be archived. We then encode information about the films into our database while doing the necessary video transcoding in compliance with our protocols.

For films that we are not already in possession of, we contact the filmmakers or rightsholders and invite them to donate a copy of their work to the MFA.

### Describe the current state of the Archive. How many films does it contain? Which filmmakers are represented?

There are currently 56 films in the Archive spanning from 2003 to 2010, all coming from the Mindanao Film Festival. The MFF, however, still has over 400 more films in its collection, and we are slowly adding the rest of them in the archive. The Foundation is currently working with Nabunturan Independent Film Exhibition (NABIFILMEX) to add films from their festival and will work with the other film festival organizers soon after.

### How are you dealing with the question of access?

The deposit agreement that the Archive has with the rightsholders of the moving images limits the access and handling of the original materials exclusively to authorized staff and volunteers only. The agreement also allows the rightsholders to expressly specify if and in what manner the public can view their moving images. This can be through our interactive kiosks, film screenings, or online via a website or app.

### How are you dealing with the legal questions of copyright, ownership, etc.?

The archive deposit agreement with the rightsholders clearly states that the rightsholders retain full intellectual property rights of the film or moving image.
The Archive owns only the specific copy which has been deposited with us, and MFA has the right to handle and use that specific copy in accordance with its policies, protocols, and in pursuit of its mission, for as long as such handling and use do not violate the agreed upon levels of access allowed by the rightsholder or any copyright laws that protect the film or moving image.

### How are you dealing with the question of sustainability?

The Mindanao Film Archive currently gets its funding from the NCCA, but the Foundation is currently exploring other sources of funding for the Archive to continue with its mission.

There are no plans to use the films themselves as a means to generate funds, but the deposit agreement with the rightsholders does cover such a possibility, with the potential for them to have a share of the funds raised from the use of their films.

### What are the problems you have encountered so far?

We have encountered many problems since we've started in this endeavor. One problem that caused the delay of adding more films into the Archive is the development of our database software. The process has been slow as we identified bugs and tried to find ways to fix or circumvent them. Because of this, we have had to pause our data encoding process many times and have even lost volunteers along the way as they moved on to other projects.

Another problem is contacting the filmmakers or rightsholders of the older films. Even in the age of social media, tracking them down has been very difficult.

If we are able to contact them, we find that one issue is getting filmmakers or rightsholders to see the value of depositing their work in the Archive or at least trusting the Archive. Some worry that their films will be exploited for financial gain without their knowledge or fair share. Others are concerned that their films will be stolen and pirated. Whatever the reason for their hesitation, we completely understand the concerns and are doing everything we can to address those concerns and slowly build that trust.

We foresee many more problems to come, but for now, these are the main ones we have encountered so far.

### What would you say are the contributions of your model of practice to Philippine cinema, which has for years faced problems in archiving?

Considering that we are only starting out, it's hard to say which of our efforts can contribute to Philippine cinema. We also do not know enough about the previous archiving efforts in the Philippines and what problems were faced by such efforts. Even though we do try to employ the best practices of other archiving efforts in the Philippines and in other parts of the world, it's possible that we may encounter the same pitfalls.

But the thing that we set out to do early on that we believe isn't currently being done by the other archiving efforts in the Philippines, which we hope will be emulated, is opening our archive database to the public and making some of the moving images viewable. So far, we've done this through our interactive kiosks and eventually we intend to make it available on the internet.

We hope that the other archiving efforts in the country can do something similar so that the films in these archives become so much more discoverable and accessible for people to appreciate and celebrate.