

Madrid Artist Showcase: Diego Salas, Creative Audiovisual Director

Madrid, a hub of creative talent, is the home to artists working across disciplines, wielding various forms of expression. Local artist Diego Salas is the architect behind *Synesthesia*, a series of recorded visual productions in which he creates an immersive projected environment for Madrid's community of performing artists to use as a stage. Diego is proud of this project which has granted him the opportunity to collaborate with respected artists.



As an active member of Madrid's international community, Diego has designed [the Brotha CJ and the Othahood cover for their 2018 album *Everybody Eats*](#). The animation from this album cover was brought to life when it was rendered on the stage behind this group as they performed at Las Fiestas de San Isidro.



Additionally, Diego has acted in and produced [relatable web series](#) and short films.



His artistic capacity is not limited to grassroots creative projects. I have collaborated with Diego myself to build visually appealing infographics and corporate content for my clients, and he has also crafted logos and branding campaigns for companies in Madrid and beyond.

Several prints, visual designs and other creative works made by Diego will be presented to the public at [VeraArt](#)'s upcoming art show, curated by Maegan Gardner [at VeraContent on February 7th](#). Those in attendance can bear witness to local dancer [Daphne Binioris](#) dancing in synchrony with visual projections controlled by Diego in real-time in a postmodern performance. This will be followed by a performance by [Brotha CJ](#).

Diego hails from Lima, Peru. Like many of us, he has been in the trenches as a teacher and became fond of his adopted home of Madrid, navigating bureaucracy to establish roots here. He is deeply familiar with the process of starting a new life in a foreign country and just recently he celebrated his 14-year anniversary in this city.



Diego opened up about the challenges that he has faced as a freelance artist.

There's a romanticized image of an artist who is always inspired. People don't see the hours or the process behind the scenes, sharing work on social media and building a community with other artists with a similar vision. These less glamorous parts of the process require constant attention.

As we sat for the interview, Diego gave me a sneak peek of the new pieces he will present at VeraArt's upcoming event and talked about his creative process. Diego's lived experiences play a role in some of his pieces where he depicts the emotional aesthetic components of memories in surreal animations. His visuals are often inspired by music and nature. Stimulation from music evokes colorful mental images that Diego quickly recreates onscreen.

Diego had this to say about the volatility of creating art under capitalism:

You will inevitably encounter negative feedback. Don't let imposter syndrome and the other haters and failed projects discourage you. Failure is part of the process and you can learn from it.

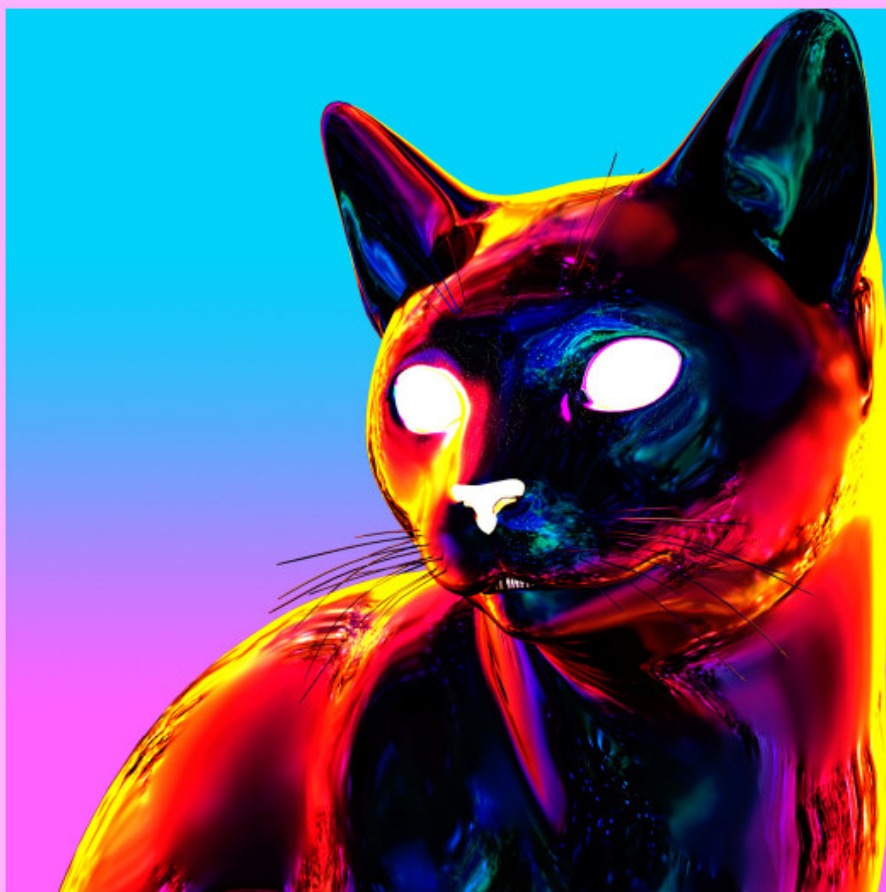
Diego's advice to aspiring artists is:

Don't stop creating. Passion projects that are non-lucrative are valid forms of expression. Don't feel obligated to profit from your art or gain visibility and acclaim immediately, it happens with time and dedication.

Upcoming art show in Madrid

VERAART
+ DIEGO SALAS

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7TH
C/ MARTÍN SOLER 6.
NAVE IZQ



ART EXHIBIT
LIVE MUSIC
DANCE PERFORMANCE
5€ UNLIMITED DRINKS

7:30PM

Be sure to catch Diego at VeraArt's event on February 7th in Madrid. Here's all the event details and make sure to sign up [here on Eventbrite](#).

Diego Salas, Madrid-based

audiovisual artist

▪ [Instagram](#) | [Website](#)

**All photos by [James Stiles of Labl Foto](#).*

Mad Improv – shows and courses of the unexpected

If you've ever ventured to Lavapiés on a Thursday night you may well have felt the vibrant pulse of English language entertainment beating to its own rhythm at [La Escalera de Jacob](#). The long-established indy theatre hosts [MAD Improv](#) – Madrid's go-to group for all things improv in English. The group offers up their [weekly show](#) (now in its third season) to audiences of native and non-native English speakers alike, as reflected in the multiple reviews on their [Trip Advisor page](#). They're now the 44th highest-rated show in all of Madrid, no less.



Their show formats include MAD About You, an improvised chat show complete with improvised interviews with audience members and an improvised house band, and MAD Monologues where fresh stand up material from comics on the local stand up scene inspires the mad improv that follows. But coming to see a MAD Improv show on a Thursday night is, for some, just the beginning of a deeper and ever-surprising journey into doing improvisation themselves.

Improv training



MAD
IMPROV



IMPROV IS THE 'LIFE HACK'
THAT WE ALL NEED.
NOW MORE THAN EVER.

- BEN SERIO, MAD IMPROVISER



That's because MAD Improv, which began life in 2014, run [courses and workshops](#). This month their flagship Green Course for beginners and near-beginners starts for the 7th time, as well as their Blue Course, specially designed for those with existing improv training, such as their own Green Course.



[Steve Loader](#), one of the founding members of MAD Improv, is the teacher of their beginners course. He describes the experience as:

Witnessing a brilliant whirlwind of personal discoveries and magic Eureka moments as participants grasp the basics of improv and run with them. The feedback we get from our alumni is proof that not only anyone can learn improv but also that improv turns out to be much more than just a type of performance, but something that feeds into everyday life.

One student from their last Green Course, Carlos, put it like this:

It's such a good environment, Steve is so enthusiastic and patient that we are all relaxed and lose our shyness and inhibitions. It's more than educational, it's therapeutic. I've received a training in spontaneity and I love it!

Flexing creative muscles



As committing to regular participation on a course isn't for everyone, every Sunday at [Espacio en Blanco](#) the MAD Improvisers offer their weekly [MAD Improv Gym](#), an open drop-in session for anyone who wants to try their hand at improv. The Gym also attracts a group of regulars and is always followed by post-improv drinks. According to Steve:

Between 10 and 20 people come every week to our Gym. It's always formed the foundation of our community. We love offering the sessions.



Steve has been a Madrid resident for 6 years and also runs [courses in clown](#), physical theatre and [scripted theatre](#). In fact, the MAD Improv community acts not only as a meeting point for anyone interested in improv in English, but also as a skills hub for the wider English-speaking arts community.

So, maybe 2020 is the year to find your own creative beat with some mad improv of your own.

MAD Improv

- [Website, Facebook & IG: @mad_improv](#)
- [Show listings](#)
- [TripAdvisor](#)

Art lover's guide to Madrid: 7 resources to keep you up to date

Happy 2020! Perhaps you're one of the many people who have made various resolutions to start the year afresh and become a better version of yourself. Is one of your resolutions to increase your cultural knowledge and take full advantage of the art offered by this great city? Even if you're not the resolution type and you're just looking for some guidance in terms of where to find out more about art in Madrid, never fear! We're here to guide you to the relevant information.

1. [EsMadrid](#)



Now let's say you don't speak Spanish. In that case, your best choice to find information about art in English in Madrid is from the Art and Culture section of Madrid's official tourism website, [EsMadrid](#). In addition to English and Spanish, this site is available in 7 other languages, including Japanese and Russian. Now one of its great pluses is that it breaks down the various tourist passes available like the Paseo del Arte Pass which grants the holder one visit to the permanent collection of each of the city's main museums, the Prado, The Reina Sofia and the Thyssen-Bornemisza. This pass is great for visitors who are just in the city for a short while and who only want to dive into the big ticket sites but there are other passes which give you access to more museums for periods such as ten to fifteen days for the consummate art lover.

EsMadrid's great strength is the breadth of its scope – it covers cultural centres to exhibition halls to house museums and contains the most pertinent information at a glance, including the location, price, opening hours and best transport options. And if you want a great overview of Madrid's art offerings, be sure to take a gander at the Art in Madrid Guide PDF which is an unbeatable introduction to both the leading museums and their holdings as well as some of the lesser known but just as formative art centres like the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, just off of Sol.

2. [Time Out Madrid](#)



Now if you're looking for information that is a bit more curated, don't miss [Time Out Madrid](#). While the English version of their website is not quite as comprehensive as the Spanish one, there are still a number of articles, which are constantly updated, highlighting the most popular, current exhibitions, free art, street art and graffiti as well as the city's most celebrated paintings and museums.

Time Out is an incredibly well-known and versatile publication with branches all over the world and it has even recently launched a print magazine here in Madrid which releases monthly. You can often find the print magazine being given out for free at major metro stations just after release, or later, in trendy cafes, independent bookshops and some libraries. I would highly recommend grabbing a copy if you can because it goes into even more detail of certain expositions and features some recommendations and interviews which are exclusive to the magazine.

3. [Madrid Diferente](#)



Continuing on to Spanish-language recommendations, another favourite is [Madrid Diferente](#). Similar to Time Out Madrid, Madrid Diferente publishes a [weekly agenda](#) of things to do over the entire upcoming week, not just the weekend. Their picks are often eclectic and a little bit off the beaten path. I almost always discover some activity or event that I've never heard of before and that is only happening for just this weekend and that's why I try to check every Thursday because you don't want to miss out!

Madrid has so much to offer it can be overwhelming but here you have a streamlined list of options. Now, if you check their "Es Capital" section, you will be exposed to a host of activities and spaces that are intimate and rewarding like Madrid's smallest photo gallery or a self-guided tour of Madrid's most unusual, outdoor sculptures. And if you want to kill two birds with one stone, Madrid Diferente's writers have recently begun including suggestions for recommended restaurants or cafes near to the gallery or museum they're currently highlighting. A win win, in my book!

4. [Madrid Free](#)



Perhaps your number one New Year's resolution is to sort out your finances and you're afraid that this is all sounding very expensive. Well, did you know that there's a website dedicated

solely to free cultural activities in Madrid? It's called [Madrid Free](#) and it has a [dedicated section for Expositions](#) which is updated frequently. It also covers exhibitions from contemporary art galleries as well as the ones from museums and cultural centres like CentroCentro Cibeles and the Matadero. If you want even more up to the minute information on free activities, be sure to also follow them on Facebook if you have it because they update it often.

5. [Arte Informado](#)



So if you want the absolute, most comprehensive list of temporary art offerings in the city, look no further than [Arte Informado](#). This is basically a holy grail for art lovers as this website aims to serve almost every country in the Iberian-American space and includes a magazine, art courses and art prizes. However, even if you just want to know about art expositions, they compile those too with an incredible search engine that allows you to narrow down your choices by date, city or country and even specify the type of art.

At this very moment, if you search for exhibitions in Madrid, narrowing it down no further, it shows 19,787 exhibitions available. You can't deny – that's a lot of art. If that sounds like a bit much, Arte Informado also has a weekly newsletter which you can sign up for that delivers some of the most prominent exhibits right into your mailbox.

6. [Museo del Prado's Instagram](#)

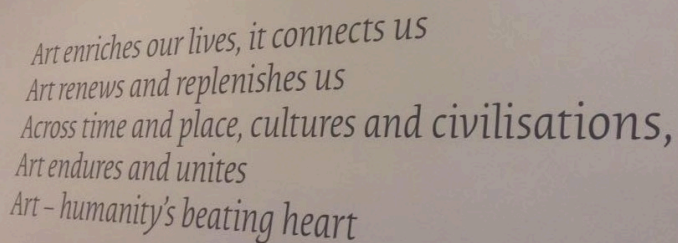
account



MUSEO
DEL
PRADO
200
AÑOS

If you want your Instagram experience to be more positive and enlightening, follow the [Museo del Prado's official account](#): @museoprado. Every weekday morning, they do an Instagram Live video highlighting either an art work or a room of the museum, which is then left up for the rest of the day so you can check it out when you can. Additionally, in their posts, they often share videos showing the mounting of exhibits as well as other day-to-day aspects of working and running a major museum. It's a fantastic, accessible way to flesh out your art history knowledge.

7. [Madrid Art and Culture Facebook group](#)



*Art enriches our lives, it connects us
Art renews and replenishes us
Across time and place, cultures and civilisations,
Art endures and unites
Art - humanity's beating heart*

Finally if you'd like to get more of my insight into Madrid's cultural goings-on, feel free to join my Facebook group, [Madrid Art and Culture](#), which is meant to showcase the many different sides of this city, although it is quite heavy on art and film. I created it about a year and a half ago and

the group now has just over 1400 members with frequent posts about film festivals, art exhibits, plays and much more. Furthermore, as it's a Facebook group, all members are able to post about activities and events that interest them or that they are taking part in.

I hope I've given you the tools to hit the ground running this year when it comes to art. To a culturally enriching 2020!

By Kristen Wiltshire (IG: @makidocious)

When she's not at a museum or the movies, Kristen can usually be found trying to make headway in her giant pile of books or her miles long Netflix queue. She also runs [Madrid Art and Culture](#), a Facebook group dedicated to Madrid's myriad cultural offerings.

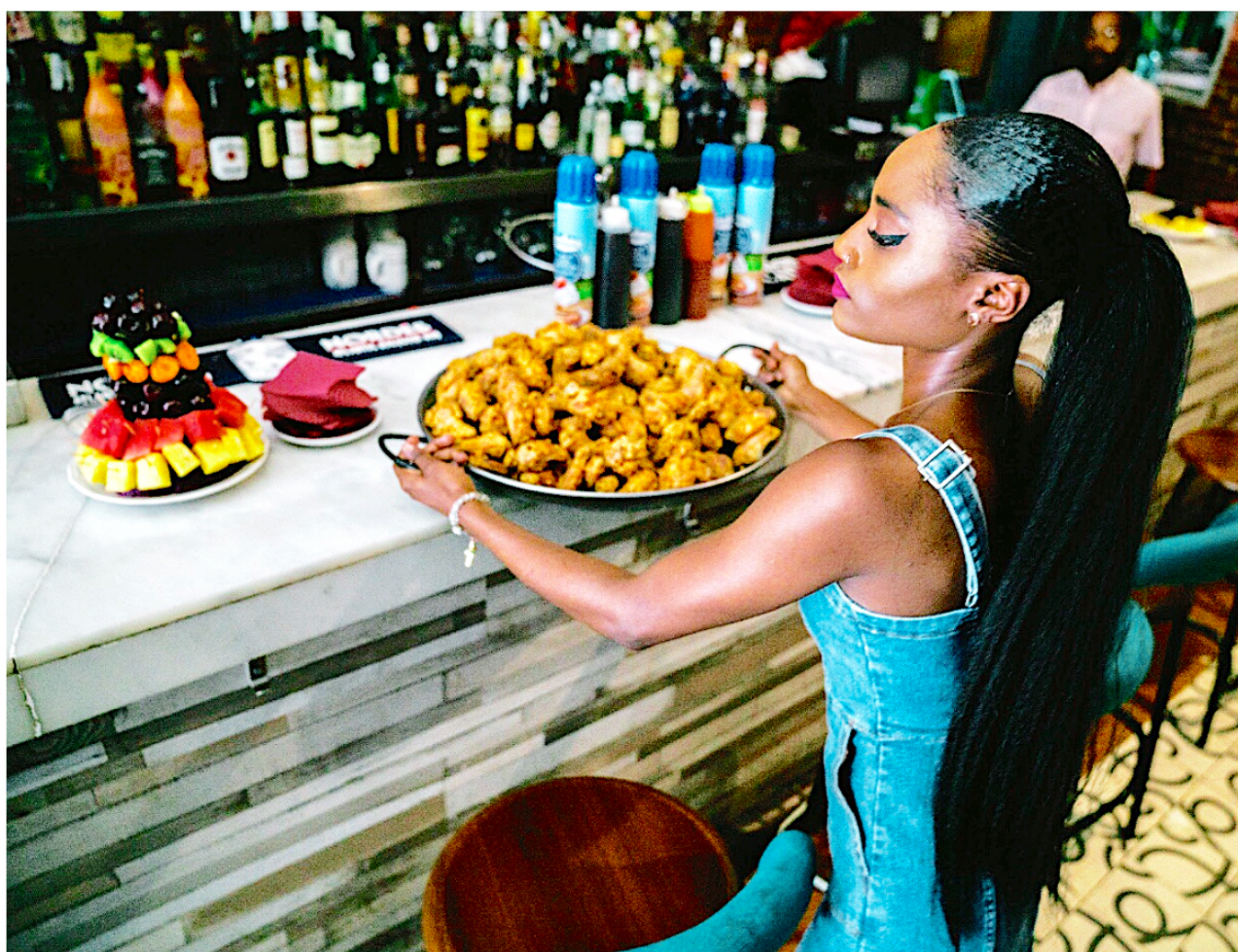
Atlast Alitas – a chef from Atlanta introduces Madrid to Chicken & Waffles, Wings, and more!

Atlanta native Tara Brown was teaching English in Madrid for three years and noticed an essential piece of American culture was missing from the rapidly globalizing Spanish capital: the classic Southern-style brunch. And that's why she created Atlast Alitas, her very own pop-up feasts in the heart of Madrid.

Recognizing this vacuum prompted Tara to give notice and

resign from the school where she was teaching in order to pursue her passion: cooking and creating a community around food. Tara used the popular hospitality platform [Workaway](#) to volunteer and train in the culinary arts in Haifa, Israel and brought the knowledge gained during this stay back to Madrid.

In collaboration with [La Pasa Gin Bar](#), Tara hosts pop-up “Wing & Beats Nights” that are DJ’d by local artist [Profesoul](#) on Friday nights. On select weekend days you can come to her pop-up all-you can eat “Chicken & Waffles Brunch.”



This mouth-watering feast is the real deal, and can offer the American abroad a taste of home. Alternatively, to people from outside of the United States who have never before experienced the blend of **sweet and savory that is chicken and waffles**, Tara offers a heartfelt window into the gastronomy of the southern United States. Tara creates her own sauces from

scratch: **Lemon Pepper, Jack Daniels BBQ, Honey Sriracha and Buffalo Hot.**

Tara's culinary ambitions do not end there as she seeks to expand to catering events and to eventually open her own restaurant in Madrid. The pursuit of an international experience in the culinary world was what brought Tara to Haifa, Israel. There she studied under the chef Koby Carolla, co-founder of the social vegan restaurant [Robin Food](#), whose team rescues discarded fruit and vegetables from Haifa's central market every day at 6am. The rescued produce are adapted into various dishes in an ever-changing daily menu. Patrons here pay as they please, deciding for themselves the value of their meal.

Chef Carolla taught Tara how to lead by example in the kitchen and how to be spontaneous and innovative with whatever ingredients are available. After three months of cooking with and living alongside an [international team of Workaway volunteers](#), Tara returned to Madrid from Israel, empowered to begin her project.



The owner of La Pasa Gin Bar, Adolfo Lorenzo, agreed to collaborate with Tara without much convincing. In addition to granting her access to the kitchen and space of their two locations on Calle San Bernardo and Calle Huertas, he has been sponsoring the costs of the events, which has allowed Tara to reduce risk as she grows her brand.

Tara was the first to introduce the combination of fried Chicken and Waffles to some of her international patrons in Madrid and Haifa, who had never before fathomed such a combination. **Tara's expert opinion on the best way to actually eat this meal is to use your hands to make sure both the sweet and savory flavors are equally represented in each bite.**



Atlast Alitas

You can stay up-to-date via her Facebook page at [Tara Brown](#) and her instagram: [@brownskin_mochadiva](#) and be sure to come to her next pop-up brunch party at [La Pasa Gin Bar](#)!

If you would like Tara to cater your next party she can be contacted at Tara.brown93@yahoo.com.

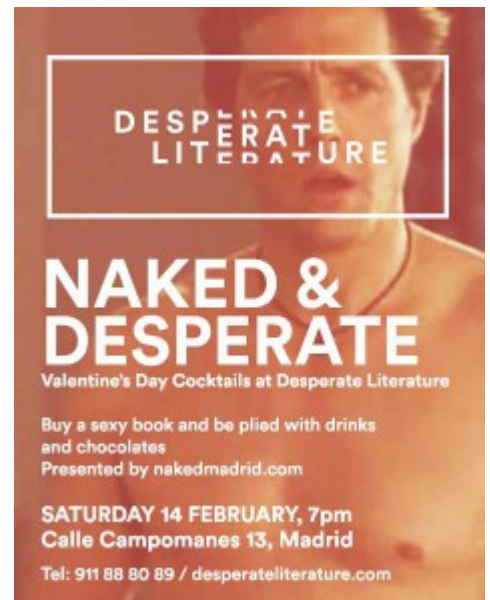
Photography by [Joel Potter](#)

Desperate Literature, so much

more than a bookshop

Four years ago I stumbled upon a newly opened gem, [Desperate Literature](#). I immediately went in, spoke to the staff (who were practically still building the place), and wrote an article about it: [Desperate Literature, for book lovers in Brooklyn, Santorini and now Madrid.](#)

Something about it felt so homey to me. Perhaps it was the English-speaking staff, the familiar titles on the shelves, or the fact that they were playing my brother's kind of music. It just felt like I was stepping into an avid reader's living room in New York rather than a bookshop in Madrid.



I haven't stopped going back since. Many of the times I've gone in with friends and family, we've either been offered a cup of green tea or a glass of whiskey. Naked Madrid even co-hosted a Valentine's event there in 2015. I remember there being lots of mulled wine, chocolate, and a discount in the erotica section.

So much has changed since then, yet the same wonderful vibe and essence remains. The staff is still rotating, international and friendly as ever. The book selection of both new and old titles in English, French and Spanish keeps on

growing. With so many great additions, it was time for a new article, with updated pics too.

First some background info

For anyone who hasn't been yet, Desperate Literature sells by far the best selection of English books in the city, from art and philosophy to history and sociology. Plus a nice "boozy books" section where you get a shot of free whiskey with every purchase. You can also find titles in other languages, as well as handpicked rare editions, signed copies, tote bags, postcards, maps, and more. There's even a kids' section!

Desperate Literature was founded by hardcore book fanatics: Craig Walzer (UK), Corey Eastwood (US), Charlotte Delattre (France) and Terry Craven (UK). Between them, they also own [Atlantis Books](#) in Santorini, Greece, and [Book Thug Nation](#) and [Human Relations](#) in Brooklyn, New York.

Charlotte and Terry are currently running the shop (and living upstairs). Before coming to Madrid, they both worked for several years at the world-famous Paris bookshop [Shakespeare and Company](#). Lucky for us, they're bringing the same philosophy to Desperate Literature, making it much more than a bookshop – it's also a community, event space, publishing house, and a home. According to Terry:

"Desperate Literature's aim is to create a place where people meet for and through literature and to that end we're developing not only our stock, focusing on having the best literature in English, Spanish and French, but a whole array of literary events, a literary magazine and all types of literary collaborations."



Great events: readings, concerts, and more

Desperate Literature has truly blossomed into an international haven for literature and art. It collaborates with local and expat writers, poets, musicians, and artists on a regular basis. They constantly put on cozy concerts, trivia nights, chess events, readings, and talks, as well as fun holiday-themed events like Bloomsday and Christmas sing-alongs. All these intimate events are healthily booze-infused, and usually cost just €3 entry including a drink.

Children's corner

In the back you'll find a very sweet children's corner full of class titles that will make you feel nostalgic, from Dr. Seuss to Roald Dahl. There's also a cute little couch where you can curl up with a good read.



First literary prize

Desperate Literature launched its very own short fiction [prize](#) this year, receiving over 450 entries. They offered a €1000 prize, a stay at the beautiful Civitella Ranieri foundation, and publication in various literary magazines, as well as events at Desperate Literature and Shakespeare and Company.

We'll be launching again in December 2018 and (hopefully) every year to come, with the aim of putting our small bookshop on the international scene for excellent experimental fiction written today.

And first magazine and book!

The shortlist from the fiction prize even led to the publishing of Desperate Literature's first book "[Eleven Stories](#)" in April. And they put out their first magazine last year, [La Errante](#).



While all these additions are undeniably impressive (and there's certainly more in store), what speaks to me most is that the shop continues to feel as warm and cozy as ever, almost as if you were walking into a friend's personal library. Plus the music is great, the signs are quirky, and you're likely to make a friend or get offered a drink if you stick around awhile.

If you're interested in getting to know more about Desperate Literature, definitely stop in and say hello. For more info, here's an insightful article written by Katie Dycus: [Portrait of a Bookstore: Desperate Literature \(Madrid\)](#).

Desperate Literature

- [Facebook](#), [Website](#) & [Instagram](#)

Address: Calle Campomanes, 13

Metro: Santo Domingo, Opera, and Callao

Café Viralata – craft beer, delicious sandwiches, and live music

Jay (Dominican) and Selvi (Italian) are a music-loving couple who decided to put their passion for art and craft beer to good use: in June 2018, they opened Café Viralata in Lavapiés.

While it may be a new bar (with killer decor), it has nothing to do with the wave of pricey hipster joints that has flooded the neighborhood in recent years. No, señor, this place has some very simple raisons d'être: **good music, good food, and good vibes** at more-than-reasonable prices.

The facade piques the interest of passersby with some sassy paintings of doggos (thanks to [@ramon_amoros_ilustrador](#)) and a blackboard announcing the bar's upcoming events (more on that later).



Once inside, we start with what's important: beer! You've got everything from your classic **Estrella Galicia** to **impressive local IPAs**. They've been working closely with the local brewer community, specifically the guys at Abeerzing, to learn more about "el mundo cervecero." So the beer list is constantly growing and changing.

Café Viralata is also the first bar in Madrid to serve Beertag, a brand new beer from La Rioja brewed by Slezia Albino, one of Jay's oldest friends in Madrid from film school.



As for wine, they of course offer Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Verdejo, and Albariño, but they also recommend wines from Madrid, Alicante, Catalunya, Portugal, and Italy, and **their “tinto de verano” is actually made with an Australian wine.** As Jay says, if you’re a purist, you’ve really gotta keep an open mind here.

Once you’ve got your drink, you’ll probably want something to snack on (if you give a mouse a cookie...). Café Viralata goes way beyond your typical tortilla and olives.

Get started with appetizers like the hummus plate and the avocado toast, and if you're looking for something more substantial, go for one of their sandwiches, **which are made with love on fresh sourdough bread** from the folks at bakery [Madre Hizo Pan](#).

A house favorite is "La Piernotta," a Dominican-Italian version of the typical Dominican "*sandwich de pierna*" with *porchetta* (Italian, roasted, oven-baked pork) with smoked *scamorza* cheese, green peppers, and red onions.

And yes, **they also have fabulous vegetarian and vegan options.**

Lastly, if you have a sweet tooth like me, you can't leave without trying the homemade tiramisu, lovingly crafted by [@lacucinadicarlo](#) (who also provide their pastrami).





Once you've got your food and drink sorted, head to the back of the bar to check out what makes this place truly special: an intimate venue, complete with a piano (that Selvi's mom sent them from Italy!), guitars, a projector, two rows of chairs (I said intimate!), and lots of vinyl records to thumb through.

This space offers anything from **live acoustic concerts** to independent film screenings, theater, micro-theater, poetry readings, spoken word, stand-up comedy, magic shows...



It just doesn't get much better than that.

Oh, and if you're wondering what "viralata" means, this is what Jay had to say about it:

In the Dominican Republic, and also in Portuguese-speaking countries such as Brazil, a 'VIRALATA' is what a stray dog and/or any animal or person of mixed race is called. 'VIRAR' means 'TO TURN' and 'LATA' means 'CAN', a reference to the way that strays 'turn cans' while searching for food; in our café, though, we're strippin' away any negative aspect that surviving and struggling through life may have in our modern society. The struggle is real and it makes us better people! So turn cans, dear viralatas, turn those freakin' cans!

Me apunto.

PS: Stay tuned for Café Viralata's grand opening party...

Info

- [Instagram](#) & [Facebook](#)
 - **Address:** Calle Olivar, 17
 - **Metro:** Tirso de Molina, Antón Martín, or Lavapiés
 - **Phone:** +34 912 96 88 26
-

Unleash your inner kid at The Playground

Ever miss recess? Family game nights? Dedicating a whole day to just having a good time?

I don't blame you—**adulthood is hard**. Sometimes all I want to do is go back to being a kid, when I could completely lose myself in a game of cards or kickball and momentarily forget about the rest of the world. I miss the carefree way I made new friends and laughed so hard I couldn't breathe—even with people I'd only just met.

Apparently, I'm not the only one suffering from this particular brand of nostalgia. A few years ago, the lovely and talented Majida Mundial (a longtime Madrid resident who hails from New York) decided to do something about it.

She created [Let's Go Ánimo](#), a company dedicated to helping people have fun, meet new friends, and release the inner child that lives on inside us all.



Majida, the founder of Let's Go Ánimo, cracks up with The Playground participants.

Every month, Let's Go Ánimo hosts [The Playground](#), a night of board games and friendly competition that's every bit as fun as it sounds. At first glance it may seem like your average expat networking night; it's held on Thursday evenings on a trendy Malasaña street, everyone speaks English, and yes, there's wine involved. But the similarities end there.

When you walk in the door, you'll be placed on a team with other attendees who you'll compete with throughout the night. The games are different every time—you might play Jenga, Scattergories, Cards Against Humanity, Limbo, Twister, or an endless number of other classics. The winner of each game is awarded points for their team, and at the end of the evening there's a challenge round to crown the overall champion. **Expect plenty of fun, prizes, and unlimited surprises.**



A fierce Twister competition puts players' balance to the test.

Of course, there are some things that set The Playground apart from the game nights of your youth: namely, alcohol. The **€10 entry fee** includes a drink and a few small tapas, and you can buy more throughout the night if you're still hungry (or thirsty). Beer, wine and *tinto de verano* are usually on offer.

If you're shy or nervous about meeting new people, The Playground will leave you no choice but to let loose and get out of your comfort zone. Awkward icebreakers, dance-offs, improv activities... everything is fair game.

Pro tip: you'll have more fun if you go all out and really get into it—apathy and introversion might be acceptable at a normal bar or networking night, but here they just won't fly.

In addition to the monthly Playground events, Let's Go Ánimo organizes special activities and celebrations throughout the year. Sometimes there's a particular theme; the Christmas edition held in December featured a white elephant gift exchange, an ugly sweater contest, and no shortage of holiday cheer.



Participants strut their stuff in an ugly Christmas sweater fashion show.

Other past events have included picnics in the park and Thanksgiving-themed fun. Let's Go Ánimo also offers corporate [team building workshops](#), and Majida even teaches [Sevillanas dance classes](#) in English, if that's your thing!

Stay up to date on upcoming events by joining the brand new Facebook group, [The High-Vibe Tribe](#). According to Majida, **"This group is being created to build an international family-like community of passionate people all over the world who believe that being an adult does not have to equal living a dull life, and that living the fulfilling life you dream of is not only possible but necessary!"**

So if you're tired of the same old language exchanges and afterwork meet-ups, and you want to try something totally new and unique, mark your calendar for the next edition of The

Playground—or any of Let's Go Ánimo's events—and get ready to have the time of your life.

Info

- [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) & [Website](#)
 - **Location:** El Salón del Artista, Calle de la Palma, 50
 - **Metro:** Noviciado & Tribunal
-

Tapapiés: a guide to everyone's favorite food and culture festival in Lavapiés

It's that time of year again. The air is turning chilly, the leaves are starting to change, and the millennial obsession with all things autumn is taking over social media. But here in Madrid, there's a whole different reason to be excited. With October comes [Tapapiés](#), the annual festival that inundates the streets of the [Lavapiés neighborhood](#) with delicious food, cheap drinks, and live music.

For 11 days at the end of October (this year's 7th edition lasts from October 19–29), dozens of restaurants and bars in Lavapiés offer a very special deal. Each one develops their own **signature tapa**, and offers it to the public for just **€1.50**. For an extra euro, you can also get a *botellín* (a 250 ml bottle of beer) to wash it down. The [event](#) is sponsored by Barcelona's Estrella Damm, and at most places you can choose between a regular beer or Damm Lemon (beer and lemon soda).



A bar advertises its participation in Tapapiés with the festival's official poster.

Lavapiés is known for its incredible cultural diversity, with large immigrant populations from all over Africa, South America, the Middle East, and Central Asia. As a result, it's full of [international eateries](#) offering everything from [Senegalese thieboudienne](#) to Syrian sweets. A good number of these establishments participate in [Tapapiés](#), which means that in one night you can practically eat your way around the world, just by exploring the neighborhood's sloping streets.



The delicious “Crepioca” tapa from Saboor Tapioca

In other words, **this [festival](#) is every adventurous foodie’s dream come true.** There are various strategies for tackling the overwhelming amount of options (**122 tapas in total**) and chaotic crowds. You can simply wander around, dropping into whatever bars you come across and trying your luck. Each one usually advertises a photograph of their tapa with a huge poster out front, so you’ll know more or less what to expect. Don’t forget to stop by **[Mercado de San Fernando](#)** and Mercado Antón Martín, where several vendors also participate.



A tray of tapas at Toscanaccio Italian bakery: marinated eggplant, walnuts, goat cheese, and sun-dried tomato pesto on spelt bread

If you're (A) a picky/allergy-prone eater or (B) determined to try as many different tapas as possible, you might want to consider a more organized strategy. Ask for a brochure at any of the participating places—you'll get a **pocket-sized booklet that contains a list of every single tapa being offered**, as well as a color photograph and a detailed ingredients list for each. They're all plotted on a numbered map, so you can plan out your ideal route. Be warned, though: it's hard to stick to a set plan when there are so many tempting options around every corner.



Dishing out the special tapa at Maloka Bar Brasileiro: yuca in a coconut milk sauce with peanut pesto

My advice? Grab a group of friends who aren't afraid to elbow their way through some crowds and try as many new things as possible. This is not an activity for those who would rather settle in at a cozy restaurant for a relaxed dinner.

Expect to eat standing up while balancing a beer in one hand a a tapa in the other, and shouting at each other just to be heard. **It's messy, it's crazy, it's loud—and it's totally worth it.** The frenetic and colorful spirit of the neighborhood is never more alive than on a night of [Tapapiés](#).



“Carrillada melosa” from Maldito Querer: braised beef cheeks in a sauce of caramelized onion, garlic, herbs, and Pedro Ximénez reduction

To complete the experience, it’s essential to attend one of the [various outdoor performances](#) by local musicians, dancers, and entertainers that take place throughout the event. On Friday, Saturday, and Sunday afternoons and evenings, you can catch live music and shows at nine different designated spots (a full schedule is included in the brochure). There’s also the simultaneous **Chollopíés** festival, which **spotlights the neighborhood’s local businesses** by offering [special discounts](#) on certain products.



Maybe you live in Lavapiés and want to get to know your *barrio* better. Maybe you've never been and want to see what all the hype is about. Or maybe you're just hungry, thirsty, and low on cash. Whatever the case, [Tapapiés](#) is bound to become one of your favorite events in Madrid. If you go into it with **the right mindset, a healthy appetite, and a handful of coins**, I guarantee that come next October, there'll only be one thing on your mind. Who needs pumpkin spice lattes, anyway?

Info

- [Facebook](#)
- [Website](#)
- [Instagram](#)

Check out our roundup of [Tapapiés' offerings last year!](#)

Oysteronomy: Think Outside the Shell

The world is your oyster!

That's the very appropriate slogan of Oysteronomy, a project dreamed up by a diverse team of culinary innovators who are dedicated to making dinner more than just another meal. The concept is both uniquely complex and deceptively simple. At its heart, it's an effort to bring the very best marine delicacies (caviar, king crab, sea urchins, and—of course—oysters) from the sea to your table.

More specifically, it's a Spanish brand that operates in various forms, adapting to the needs of restaurants, events, and individuals seeking a one-of-a-kind dining opportunity. It's a collaboration between various entities, including **Pop Secret** (a brand specializing in creative culinary and artistic events) and [Pol García](#), the celebrated Basque chef who's worked everywhere from London to Shanghai. But it's so much more than that.

Oysteronomy is a gastronomic experiment in combining preparation, presentation, and consumption to create a multisensory

culinary experience.

So what exactly does that look like?

A few weeks ago I got to find out. I was lucky enough to attend the event that officially marked Oysteronomy's arrival in Madrid, a sold-out dinner held at the Cambridge Soho Club in Plaza de España. At the designated hour, twenty-four lucky guests were led beyond the elegant bar area to a private room decked out in marine decor and deep blue lighting, where the magic was set to take place.

The night began with wine and mingling, allowing the guests to get to know one another as they snacked on hors d'oeuvres. An expert team of bartenders and servers attended to the guests and made sure that no one's glass was ever empty.



In an interesting twist, the first oysters of the night were

paired with top-quality sakes from the gourmet importer [Salvioni&Alomar](#). Expert Pablo Alomar explained the elaboration and advantages of sake, an underappreciated but up-and-coming beverage in the Spanish gastronomic scene, and invited the guests to sample a few choice varieties.





Not long after, Chef García emerged with the second round of oysters. These were accompanied by a swirling fog of liquid nitrogen and several gourmet toppings—eggplant, caviar, and *leche de tigre*, to name a few—some of which were injected directly into the oysters with a plastic syringe. Quite a spectacle, indeed.



The guests were then seated around tables set with seashells and sprinkled with salt, primed and ready for the main event.



The first course of the night consisted of—you guessed it—an oyster, this time still hidden inside its shell. The diners were instructed to tap it with their forks, allowing them to lift the lid and discover the flavors of cucumber and spicy mustard with which it had been infused.



Next came the final oyster of the night, served on a bed of salt and swimming in a creamy and indulgent sauce. This was followed by a salad of caviar and crab, served in miniscule glass jars with tiny spoons to match.



Each course was accompanied by a detailed explanation of its

composition, origin, and flavor profile, delivered to the diners by the chef along with Emma Hidalgo and Julieta Arévalo, the organizers of the event. A DJ provided mood music, varying the soundtrack as each new dish was served. The wine, of course, continued to flow.





And then, just when it seemed like the night might be winding down, the real show began. A tray of king crab legs was placed atop a podium at the front of the room. As a hush fell over the diners, Chef García produced a pan of flaming liquid, which he then poured directly onto the crab, touching it up with a small handheld torch as needed. You heard it here first: flambéed crab legs just might be the newest—and hottest—definition of dinner and a show.







The final savory course was a surprise departure from the marine theme of the event: *carne de vaca brava de lidia*, served juicy and rare (in more ways than one). This unique variety of beef comes from free-range bulls raised for the increasingly controversial tradition of *toreo* (bullfighting). What could be more quintessentially Spanish than that?



Photo courtesy of Oysteronomy

Just in case anyone had yet to be impressed, the meal was wrapped up with a dessert that looked more like modern art than your average ice cream; an abstract spread of frozen sugary creations atop an edible tablecloth, accompanied by smoky tendrils of liquid nitrogen.



Photo courtesy of Oysteronomy



A round of masterfully prepared cocktails closed out the evening, giving the guests time to sit back, relax, and reflect on a night that was full of surprises.

From the first glass of wine to the last grain of salt, Oysteronomy's first event in Madrid was masterfully executed, beautifully designed, and altogether unique. I have little doubt that everyone in attendance will be talking about it for weeks to come. The team behind Oysteronomy has announced their presence in the capital city—and they've certainly made a splash.

Who knew oysters could be so photogenic?



Info

For more information and upcoming events, check out Oysteronomy's [Facebook page](#) and the Pop Secret [website](#).

Where to Dance Bachata and Salsa in Madrid

Always wanted to learn how to dance bachata but didn't want to pay high costs for private lessons? Well, look no further!

It is *muy de moda*, or very popular to dance bachata right now in Spain. Each year there seems to be more meet-up groups and more bars offering *noches de bachata* or *noches latinas*. Located right by Templo de Debod, [The Host](#) offers three bachata classes followed by social dancing every Wednesday night.

For 8 euros you'll have entrance to the bar, access to three classes over the course of two hours and a drink (alcoholic or not) of your choice. You can choose to take all three classes or just one. If you're more of a "people watcher" there are plenty of seats at the bar and around the perimeter of the dance floor. Don't show up too early though because the first class starts when the bar opens at 9PM.



For new dancers, the first question often asked is “Do I need to bring a partner?” **You do not need to bring a partner but you can if you’d like!** The classes tend to begin with the basics, which everyone dances individually. Then, when you do partner up, the pairs rotate so often that by the end of the class you’ll have danced with nearly everyone, you might even remember a few names or have made a new friend by the end of the lesson. On this particular Wednesday, the classes were: modern bachata, Dominican bachata and lastly, sensual bachata.



After the classes end and the students watch or record as the dance instructors model all the steps learned, the social dancing starts! You get the chance to practice what you learned with friends from the class or meet others who are just arriving for the social dancing. The fun doesn't end until 3AM! **If you're more interested in salsa, you should join The Host on Thursdays for class (see below).** You'll also hear a little bit of salsa and kizomba throughout the night but Wednesdays are specifically for bachata at The Host!



Info

- Address: Calle Ferraz 38
- Metro: Argüelles / Ventura Rodriguez / Plaza España
- [Facebook](#)

Other classes at The Host:

Tuesday: Kizomba (classes 21:00-23:00 and social dancing until 3)

Wednesday: Bachata (classes 21:00- 23:00 and social dancing until 3)

Thursday: Salsa (classes 21:00-23:00 and social dancing until 3)

Friday: Bachata (classes 22:00-@24:00 and social dancing

until 5:30)

Facebook pages and groups on Madrid's salsa and bachata scene:

1. [Salsa Madrid](#) (page)
2. [Salsa Madrid](#) (group)

Here are some more salsa places to check out:

[Azucar:](#)

For 8 euro you can enjoy classes and a drink at Azucar near Metro Atocha. It is a smaller nightclub but brings in dancers of many levels.

[Tropical House:](#)

Near Metro Plaza de España is the best place to start dancing salsa or bachata as a beginner. Tropical also offers kizomba lessons on Fridays and Saturdays.

[Cats:](#)

On Sundays at Cats (now called Sala Mitty) you can dance salsa and bachata. The crowd is great and there's plenty of room to dance as it doesn't get completely packed.

[El Son:](#)

A close walk from Puerta del Sol, El Son offers classes from Monday through Thursday at 6 euro a class.

La Negra Tomasa:

In Sol but doesn't feel like it. Live Cuban music every night and although there isn't a lot of space to dance, if you love salsa music, La Negra Tomasa is a must.

You may also like: [Where to get fit in Madrid](#)