Buenos Aires Herald Sunday, January 5, 2002
On Sunday / Art on Sunday

Artists to the rescue

By **Alina Tortosa**
For the Herald

The drastic experience posed by December 20, 2001 exacted an open acknowledgement of a previous situation. The conceptual changes that came about in the management of art and culture events and situations in the local art world in 2002, both in Buenos Aires and in the rest of the country, were already in process. The gist of the matter was, and is, that there is little or no specific government program to promote art and culture. At a time when primary education and famine are the issues at stake, needs that have been neglected for decades, the art world has not only accepted to step back in its demands, but has come forward with proposals to help to provide for its own needs, as well as for the social needs of the community. Some of these projects were backed by official help, or partially supported by local and foreign private foundations, but the previous planning and the energy that set these projects forth came from those artists that understood the need to create sensitive and sensible structures to provide support for their own lives and for the lives of those around them.

Trama, Venus, Las Camitas, the round tables at L'Alliance Francaise, printing workshops in the street, a print work shop in a prison for women, art spaces like Belleza y Felicidad, Duplus and Lelé de Troya in Buenos Aires, MAC UNaM in Misiones, El Ingenio, Sigurdun and La baulera in Tucumán, Vox in Bahía Blanca, Cielo Teórico in Córdoba, Fondo Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo in Mar del Plata are some of the names that represent the changes in attitude towards community projects planned and executed by artists.

The provinces of Misiones, Tucumán, Córdoba, Santa Fé and the cities of Bahia Blanca, Mar del Plata and Usuahia have redesigned the cultural territory of the country with projects of their own that do not necessarily depend on Buenos Aires. Local and foreign curators and art critics are becoming involved with what goes on in their art schools, art spaces and art centres, and artists and art professors sponsored by the Antorchas Foundation travel the length and width of the country to coach and inform.

The Museum of Contemporary Art at Misiones University in Posadas, curated by Francisco Ali Brouchard, founded and supported by Ali Brouchard and by a committed group of interdisciplinary professionals, opened a space for contemporary work that did not exist before. The same group was responsible for showing quality films that had not made the region, and for holding concerts of contemporary classical music. These private citizens created an infrastructure that broadened the scope of the cultural perception of the region, taking over a task that ought to have been developed by the local government. Misiones is in the heart of the triple border region between Paraguay and Brazil. This political and cultural situation provide rich ground for fluent regional international projects.

Tucumán, thanks to the systematic efforts of Carlota Beltrame, is the brightest example of how a city and a province removed from Buenos Aires achieved a visual art life of their own. It all started when Beltrame and her colleagues at Tucumán University modified spontaneously, little by little, the old

fashioned and stereotyped teaching of art, drawing away the pupils from the traditional copying of models into creative experimentation. Though in the beginning this was a painful period to some of the pupils who were at a loss when told to work out their own projects, it has had excellent longer term results, drawing national and international attention to their output.

Vox Space in Bahía Blanca has opened a visual art and literary centre to draw the local population to contemporary creative art and writing. They reach the community through events and workshops at different levels. They are particularly involved with schools, introducing the pupils as well as the teachers to up to date information on art and literature that was totally lacking in the curricula. They organize social activities that go from concerts, exhibitions, plays, poetry readings to truco tournaments. Like in the cases of Misiones, Tucumán, Mar del Plata and Córdoba their concerns do not begin and end with the events themselves –whether exhibitions, classes, lectures, workshops, etc. Their aim is to modify the perception and understanding of the average citizens to bring them closer to an articulate and friendly appreciation of contemporary work.

Cielo Teórico-Estética y Pensamiento en Artes Visuales (Theoretical Heaven- Visual Arts Aesthetics and Thoughts) in Córdoba city, the project run by Andrea Ruiz, Carina Cagnolo, Anibal Buede and José Pizarro is geared mostly to provide art critics and art historians with non-available research material. The library also affords visual and written information to art students and artists and comfortable reading and studying premises.

In April 2000 Gustavo Bruzzone and Roberto Jacoby published the first issue of Ramona, a text only art magazine that offered publishing space to anybody who wanted to comment on the exhibitions held in Buenos Aires or elsewhere, and on current issues related to the art world. In the beginning, serious articles by well-known artists and intellectuals were published next to superficial and poorly written articles by young artists, who mistook being able to publish with having something to say. With time, once the young, mostly resentful effervescence subsided, the publication gained strength and interest and it is still going strong. It has also gone digital. It is emailed once a week or sold in its printed version. It is run by the Start Foundation, where meetings and open discussions are held. Ramona, named after Berni´s character, affords an open controversial art and cultural forum that was missing.

In 2002 Roberto Jacoby was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship for his Venus project: a networking experimental structure made up by artists, intellectuals, scientists and others to establish relationships between people in different professional areas. It is also meant to foster collaborations and to provide a market for what each member has to offer. A very creative range runs from lessons on several disciplines, to web pages, to cooking, to reading, to crafts, etc. These options are paid for with Venus money, to be exchanged eventually for what others in the project may provide that one may need. The project was broadened to include grants and awards. Venus is run by the Start Foundation who is in charge of administrative, counselling, development and communication chores.

On December 28th a meeting of art networking groups was held at Tatlin, a cultural temporary space opened by the Start Foundation. Multiplicity, as this event was called, was heavily attended by *Ramona visual art magazine* and by the *Venus Project*, of course, by *Zapatos Rojos* a digital poetry magazine, Daisy's *Art Dictionary*, a collective digital research project on terms related to art, *Juliana Periodista,* a publication for readers in their early twenties to discuss issues that are otherwise ignored, *Belleza y Felicidad*, the bisexual, bohemian art and performance space, also involved in the publication of poetry, as well as by the Popular Serigraphy Workshop, M777, *Ninguna Persona es Ilegal y Laboratorio de la desobiediencia* from Spain, *Tango Protesta, Indymedia Argentina, Indymedia Italia, Grupo de Arte Callejero,* and others.

Elda Cerrato, Marcelo Cofone, Nora Correas, Diana Dowek, Ricardo Longhini, Ana Maldonado, Margarita Paksa, among other local artists, were not happy with existing artists association, so they founded AAVRA –*Asociación de Artistas Visuales de la República Argentina* to develop cultural, social and

philanthropic projects. *Las Camitas* (The little beds), an exhibition currently held at the *Centro Cultural Recoleta*, is their first community project. More than 500 hundreds artists have worked on as many doll beds for these to be sold as art pieces, to provide the funds to supply the Paroissien Hospital in La Matanza with basic pharmaceutical material. Artists, once more, have taken over duties that should have been fulfilled by the city political authorities. AAVRA sees this first project as a starting point to other community and art related activities.

The Trama program, worked out under the direction of Claudia Fontes, grew out of the need to fill the voids in information and know how in art education, in theoretical aesthetic thinking and in art management. It is helping artists to come to terms with their creative projects as well as with practical matters of market and promotion.

The round tables held at the Alliance Francaise by Tamara Stuby and Esteban Alvarez for the last two years have provided the arena for the controversial and serious discussion of issues related to art education and art politics. And strange though it may read now, this had not taken place before.

So the old clisé of the absent minded artist holds little water to day. The projects mentioned above, run by artists, are intensely focused on clear cut community needs and have demanded intensive planning and long working hours.