



For Immediate Release

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**Mexican Factory Workers, Filmmakers Collaborate to See Globalization
Through Women's Eyes in P.O.V.'s "MAQUILAPOLIS [city of factories],"
Tuesday, Sept. 26 on PBS**

A Co-production of the Independent Television Service (ITVS)

*"Making explicit the slogan 'knowledge equals power,' Maquilapolis is the rare activist documentary
that really does empower the individual women at the heart of its story."*

– Jay Weissberg, Variety

Welcome to the world of **MAQUILAPOLIS**, a border city where it takes an hour of drudgework inside a poisonous factory to earn enough to buy a jug of potable water. Where it takes about two hours to earn a gallon of milk. Where factory workers find bathroom breaks are few, toxins are many, and the pressure—and intimidation—are always on. It's a place where poverty is so deep that workers are expected to be grateful for the high-end \$11 a day they might earn, to give up hope of ever earning more, or of ever seeking better working conditions. This daily \$11 does not buy them the protection and aid of their local and national governments. In **MAQUILAPOLIS**, undertaxed and under-regulated factories operated by multinational corporations—usually through local middlemen—pollute residential neighborhoods with seeming impunity.

Yet even \$11 a day can prove too high a labor cost for today's international manufacturer. The searing new feature documentary **MAQUILAPOLIS [city of factories]** may take its name and stories from the *maquiladoras*, the multinational assembly plants that sprang up south of the U.S.-Mexican border, in the mid-1960s and multiplied rapidly in the 1990s as a result of 1994's North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA.) But the new global company town that **MAQUILAPOLIS** portrays is also movable. Less than 10 years after NAFTA, the *maquiladoras* of Mexico were already closing down as corporations began to depart for even cheaper labor in Asia, leaving behind decrepit factory sites, slag heaps of toxic material, and endemic unemployment.

Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre's **MAQUILAPOLIS [city of factories]**, an Official Selection of the Tribeca Film Festival, has its national broadcast premiere on **Tuesday, Sept. 26, 2006** at 10 p.m. on PBS, as part of the 19th season of public television's groundbreaking P.O.V. series. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

MAQUILAPOLIS is a powerful and unique film that brought American and Mexican-American filmmakers together with Tijuana factory workers and community organizers to tell the story of globalization through the eyes and voices of the workers themselves—overwhelmingly women—who have borne the costs but reaped few of the benefits. The workers did not just testify on camera, they became an integral part of creating their stories on film. Two women in particular, Carmen Durán and Lourdes Luján, armed with cameras for video diaries, chronicle their struggles. The result is not only an informative and disturbing film, but also an evocative and poetic one.

The very abutment of Tijuana's poor *barrios* against some of the world's wealthiest communities, and the array of low-cost consumer conveniences and devices—televisions, cell phones, intravenous bags, pantyhose, batteries, electronic components—for which the women have surrendered both health and freedom, make for an ironic, twisted poetry of contrasts. But for all the miserable working conditions, health problems, and broken promises, Carmen and Lourdes and others like them—*promotoras* who fight for workers' rights against the new corporate order—are not the pliant female employees anticipated by the companies or the Mexican government. In yet another twist, globalization has brought Carmen and Lourdes greater sophistication about politics and media than existed in earlier generations of the Mexican working-class.

And they put that knowledge to good use. Carmen, an upbeat single mother of three, did not even earn the \$11 a day touted by the *maquiladora* system's promoters; she earned just \$6 a day working the graveyard shift in Tijuana's Sanyo factory. That wasn't enough to get her family out of a dirt-floor shack she built from discarded San Diego garage doors in a neighborhood where sewage and frayed electrical wires run down the middle of the street despite the Mexican government's promises to provide municipal services. Despite harsh conditions at the factory, Carmen stayed on for six years, partly out of loyalty to her co-workers. At 29, she suffered from kidney problems and anemia resulting from her years of factory work. When the company decided to move to Indonesia, Carmen felt angry like the rest of the workers. But when the company decides, as have other multinationals before them, to renege the severance pay required under Mexican law, Carmen becomes an activist and rallies her co-workers, in a David-and-Goliath struggle, to challenge Sanyo in by filing a claim with the labor board.

Lourdes lives in a neighborhood in Tijuana that has not just ordinary sewage running down the middle of the street, but a toxic stew of chemicals and manufacturing agents from the factories on the mesa above their homes. In case there is any doubt about what is happening, the factory takes advantage of every rainfall, however slight, to send an extra torrent of chemical-laden waters down through the neighborhood. The results are predictable: an epidemic of health problems including persistent skin rashes, respiratory problems, allergies, and birth defects. Lourdes, as also attested by her video diary, can't just sit by. She helps organize a community group, the Chilpancingo Collective for Environmental Justice, to fight for an cleanup of a toxic waste dump left behind by a departing battery-recycling factory—a seemingly impossible goal in a country whose environmental protection agencies cry helplessness at every turn.

Through Carmen and Lourdes we learn the stories and daily realities of other *maquiladora* workers. We also hear from company and government spokespeople, who point to the relative benefit of a low wage in a virtually no-wage country. But "Maquilapolis" promises no worker anywhere even that low wage, as the Mexican people have been among the first to learn.

Ultimately, Carmen and her co-workers win a relatively astounding victory: the labor board forces Sanyo to pay the workers severances as high as \$2,500 (in Carmen's case), an amount far greater than most companies are used to paying. And Lourdes' group, simply a committee of neighborhood women working with cross-border activists from the U.S., succeeds in forcing both the U.S. and Mexican governments to recognize the need for environmental cleanup and to begin creating a fund for it.

There is also heartbreak in these victories. Carmen's severance allows her to put a floor under her children's feet, but she's left with little prospect of a new job. And Lourdes' group has won its point—but whether the political will or, ultimately, the money to accomplish the full cleanup will materialize remains in doubt. While the poor people of "Maquilapolis" do the work that keeps the malls of the Western World humming, they end up earning no stake in that world. In Mexico, now that the initial wave of off-shore manufacturing has passed to other regions of the world, workers like Carmen and Lourdes face an unemployed future amid a devastated landscape.

“The factory workers who appear in **MAQUILAPOLIS** were involved in every stage of production,” says director Vicky Funari. “We wanted to embrace subjectivity—their subjectivity—as a value, and to merge our filmmaking with their voices.”

“We wanted to present not just the facts but the everyday reality,” says De La Torre. “Can you imagine the feeling of being so completely at the mercy of a global economic system that has no interest in your welfare? What many middle-class North Americans experience as financial pressure, people quite close to them—their neighbors, in fact—experience as life-and-death struggle.”

MAQUILAPOLIS [city of factories] was produced in association with the Independent Television Service (ITVS) and is a project of Creative Capital, with support from the Sundance Institute Documentary Fund.

About the filmmakers:

Vicky Funari

Co-producer/Co-director

Vicky Funari's filmmaking focuses on the lives of working people and on the complex identities of today's culturally mixed and dynamic migratory populations. Funari produced, directed and edited the acclaimed nonfiction feature film **Paulina**, which has screened in over 30 of the world's most prestigious film festivals and won numerous awards. **PAULINA** aired on the Sundance Channel in 2000. Funari also co-directed and edited **Live Nude Girls Unite!**, an account of the first successful strippers' union in the country, which premiered at the 2000 South by Southwest (SXSW) Film Festival and aired on Cinemax in 2001. Her other credits include **SKIN-ES-THE-SI-A**, an award-winning experimental short. Funari, who lives in Vallejo, Calif., served on the Board of Directors of the Latino media arts organization Cine Accion from 1996 to 2000.

Sergio De La Torre

Co-producer/Co-director

Sergio De La Torre is a photographer and performance/installation artist who grew up in the Tijuana/San Diego border area. His works have focused on issues regarding diaspora, tourism and identity politics. In 1995, De La Torre co-founded the performance/installation group Los Tricksters. He has also produced collaborative works with artist/writer Coco Fusco for a variety of venues including street fairs, academic conferences, art galleries, and film festivals. De La Torre's works, including **Access Denied**, **Disappearing** and **Mexiclone**, have appeared in the Bienal Barro de America at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas, Venezuela; in the Cleveland Performance Art Festival; at the El Tapango Centro Cultural in Mexico City; and in San Francisco at the DeYoung Museum and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. His film and video work has included photography for **La Raza**, directed by Adolfo Dávila, and assistant to the art director on **Garden of Eden**, directed by Maria Novaro. He lives in Oakland, Calif.

Credits:

Co-producer/co-directors:	Vicky Funari, Sergio De La Torre
Executive Producer:	Vivian Kleiman
Co-producers:	Darcy McKinnon, Annelise Wunderlich
Cinematography:	Daniel Gorrell, Sophia Constantinou
Editor:	Vicky Funari
Original Music:	Pauline Oliveros with the Nortec Collective and John Blue

Running Time: 56:46

Festivals:

- U.S. Premiere, Tribeca Film Festival, April-May 2006 – *Special Recognition for Outstanding Achievement in Documentary*
- Green Film Festival of Seoul, May 2006 – *Honorable Mention*
- World Premiere, International Film Festival Rotterdam, February 2006
- Latin American Premiere, Guadalajara Film Festival, March 2006
- Chicago Latino Film Festival, May 2006
- Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Film Festival, May 2006
- Newport International Film Festival, June 2006

Co-Presenters:



ITVS funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the PBS series Independent Lens. ITVS was established by an historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have helped to revitalize the relationship between the public and public television. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. For more information, please visit www.itvs.org.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 19th season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought nearly 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available online at www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique *Talking Back* feature, filmmaker interviews and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films. *Youth Views*, P.O.V.'s youth engagement initiative, expands these efforts by working directly with youth service organizations.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Ford Foundation, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s Community Engagement activities and the *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston, and Thirteen/WNET New York.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.americandocumentary.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation. Cara Mertes is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

Media Sponsor:



TAPE REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.

