

Prof's anti-NAFTA exhibit stirs controversy

Fred Lonidier doesn't make pretty art. In fact, some of his images are downright ugly—by design. He wants to grab your attention and make you think, rather than simply contemplate pretty pictures.

Take his most recent work. A combination of photos and text titled "NAFTA: Not a Fair Trade for All," some of the images feature grotesquely masked workers employed in Mexican *maquiladoras*—the name for the factories that have proliferated along the U.S.-Mexico border since NAFTA was enacted. Or a soiled sanitary napkin, along with a statement from a woman who said they wouldn't hire her until she proved she had her period. For Lonidier, a professor of visual arts at the University of California-San Diego and president of the campus AFT chapter, the point is to spotlight the poor working conditions of the Mexican workers, along with the lack of an independent Mexican labor movement with any real power.

Earlier this year, Lonidier arranged to have the exhibit shown across the California border in Tijuana's largest public university, the Autonomous University of Baja California. It seemed like the perfect setting: Visitors to the university gallery can even see some of the nearby factories through the windows.

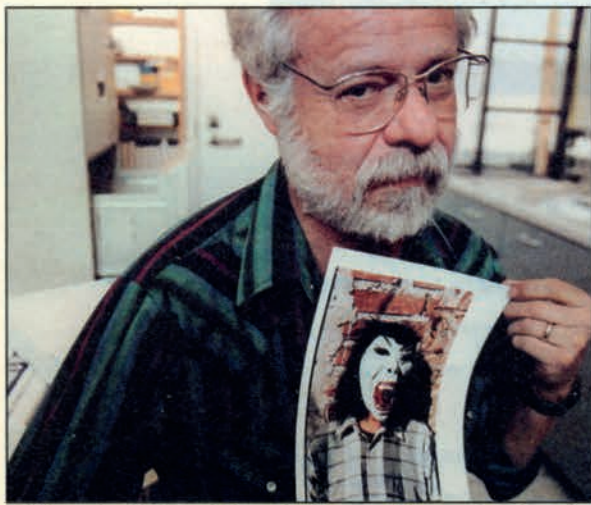
"As long as the show was bottled up at the university, that was fine," Lonidier says. But he didn't just want members of the university community to see the exhibit, so he printed thousands of promotional fliers and distributed them to factory workers as they changed shifts.

Within a matter of days, university officials had shut down the exhibit. Lonidier believes that was done in response to calls from the *maquiladora* owners. "It would have been a stretch, practically speaking, that many workers would come," Lonidier admits. "But I thought I would ask, and I certainly thought some would come." But they never got the chance.

For its part, the university accused Lonidier of meddling in Mexican politics by distributing the fliers to workers. Lonidier sees the university's action as censorship, which clearly shows that the idea of an autonomous university in Mexico is far from a reality.

Lonidier's NAFTA exhibit was shown this past summer at the George Meany Center for Labor Studies near Washington, D.C. For the art professor, settings such as the Meany Center—and better yet, union halls—are ideal for his art. He admits his work is dense and requires time to digest. At a union hall or the Meany Center, people can see it more than once, think about the content and, Lonidier hopes, discuss it with their colleagues.

Lonidier is updating and expanding the collection, which is now about two years old. Although the Tijuana exhibit didn't turn out exactly as he had planned, Lonidier wasn't surprised by the outcome. "This was the first time I've done anything in Mexico, but I hope it's not the last," he says.



AFT member Fred Lonidier, a visual arts professor at the University of California-San Diego, holds a picture from his exhibit that was shut down by the Autonomous University of Baja California in Mexico.

SAN DIEGO UNION TRIBUNE/JOHN NELSON

FRED LONIDIER

N.A.F.T.A.

(Not A Fair Trade for All)

15. November bis
31. Dezember 2017

Eröffnung: Dienstag, 14. November 2017 ab 19.30 Uhr

**Mittwoch, 15. November, 17.00 Uhr, Künstlergespräch
mit Fred Lonidier, dem Kunsthistoriker Wolfgang Brauneis
und Hans-Jürgen Hafner**

kunstbunker

forum für zeitgenössische kunst e.V.

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Donnerstag – Samstag, 16-20 Uhr
Sonntag, 14-18 Uhr
und nach Vereinbarung

Wir bedanken uns bei den Unterstützern dieser Ausstellung:

