

Michael Benevento is proud to present *N.A.F.T.A. (Not A Fair Trade for All)* an artwork by Fred Lonidier in which he documents over 15 years of the trade agreement. This impressive body of work consisting of over 40 photo/text panels, Labor Link TV video programs, archival material and billboard proposal will be exhibited in its entirety. Below is a statement from the artist.

By now trade agreements since NAFTA have become more numerous than the public can keep up with. They are all part of a long-term effort to liberalize commerce in such a way as to expand economic growth across the globe. They are all pitched by the U.S. government as having more winners here than losers but have been accompanied by a host of studies and arguments as to actually who the winners are. Trade unions have been universally opposed to them as being, at least in part, motivated by a "race to the bottom" in terms of wages and working conditions. Indeed, like the World Trade Organization agreements, they are treaties and, as such, override national laws in a number of areas beyond labor laws including the environment and other regulations that were hard fought for by many organizations, legislators themselves and signed into law from local to national levels. The documentary artwork, *N.A.F.T.A. (Not A Fair Trade for All)* was begun in the mid 1990s well after that particular trade agreement was enacted. But the maquiladora agreement between the United States of America and Mexico already put into place and its effects upon the workforce in these plants just across our southern border were already pretty much a done deal. So much so, that the so-called "side agreements" around labor and the environment had no enforcement provisions. What was a twenty-mile zone along the northern border of Mexico, NAFTA turned the whole country into places for maquiladora "light assembly" production. Whatever the direct impacts of these trade agreement, *N.A.F.T.A. (Not A Fair Trade for All)* represents some of the troubling conditions of Mexicans who work in the maquiladoras. What stands out the most dramatically is the complete circumvention of quite progressive Mexican labor laws. So much so that maquiladora workers see the only way forward is to form their own democratic independent unions apart from the official, but government controlled, unions. These efforts have turned into a very hard and uphill struggle with the Mexican government and its official unions as well as the foreign companies using maquiladora plants throwing everything they can to defeat any defense of the labor rights of these workers.

*N.A.F.T.A. (Not A Fair Trade for All)* is the latest of many documentary photo/text/video installation artworks for, by and about class struggle by Fred Lonidier.

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