### ARTS

# Aurora Guerrero
## U.S./Mexico

**W**rite what you know." It's an age-old dictum for aspiring writers—and it applies to filmmakers, too. **Aurora Guerrero**, a self-defined queer Chicana, followed that rule to create *Mosquita y Mari*, a coming-of-age film about a friendship between two Chicana teenagers that deepens into a romance. The film, which premiered at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival, is also a celebration of identity—cultural as well as sexual.

*Mosquita y Mari*'s protagonists are Yolanda (Mosquita—"little fly"), a straight-A student under the careful watch of her parents; and Mari, the oldest child of an undocumented family struggling to make ends meet. The story is set in Los Angeles' Huntington Park neighborhood, but it draws deeply on Guerrero's upbringing in northern California as a child of Mexican immigrants and a middle-school friendship she describes as "more than just a friendship—it was also my first love." The importance of cultural identity was instilled in her from an early age. Guerrero, now 40, remembers how her mother would march into school and instruct the teachers to pronounce her brothers' names José and Alejandro instead of Joseph and Alex.

*Mosquita y Mari* is political as well as personal. Guerrero, who received a Master of Fine Arts from the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 1999, wanted to give voice to LGBT, Chicano and undocumented immigrant communities, which "are very marginalized and very much silenced by mainstream media," she says. A love story would dispel the notion that same-sex relationships are unnatural. "I wanted people who don't identify as queer [to] watch and all of a sudden find themselves reminisc-



Aurora Guerrero (left) on set while filming *Mosquita y Mari*. The film was shot over 18 days in June 2011.

ing about their young loves," says Guerrero. "And [it would be] these two girls who are evoking those feelings [. . .] not so much different than what they experienced."

Guerrero also hoped that LGBT Latino audiences would see themselves validated by the film—much as Guerrero herself felt when, as an undergraduate student, she encountered the work of feminist Chicana writers Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga. "[Their work] broke down all these stereotypes of what I thought it meant to be queer," she recalls. "I, in turn, wanted to put out films showing characters [whose] identities are intersecting in very real, authentic ways."

Guerrero's strong community roots and sense of ethnic identity have been crucial to her development as a filmmaker. After graduating from CalArts, she formed the filmmaking collective Womyn Image-Makers with three other queer Chicana artist-activists. Together, they made the widely successful *Pura Lengua* and *Viernes Girl*. When it came time to raise money for *Mosquita y Mari* in 2011, Guerrero again turned to her community—this time via Kickstarter, a popular crowd-funding platform. During a 30-day campaign, she and her team raised $82,000, the entire production budget for the film.

*Mosquita y Mari* is currently on the film festival circuit, taking Guerrero home to San Francisco and as

far away as Japan and Switzerland. It airs in select theaters in New York and Los Angeles in August 2012, and will be broadcast on cable and online at the end of this year. Guerrero is already developing ideas for new projects, including another independent film and a TV pilot. She says she will continue to explore themes of immigration, class and Latino identity generally, but "always [with] a queer *algo*" to reflect the LGBT voice.

### CIVIC

# Public Lab for Open Technology and Science
## Regional

**T**he advent of Google Maps, Google Earth and other easily accessible satellite imaging technology would seem to have made most forms of personal, small-scale cartography obsolete. But outside high-density population centers, many of the images these services provide are often out of date or nonexistent. This is especially a problem in Latin America, where unmapped informal communities spread out from the edges of cites for miles—making it difficult for residents to receive land titles and, by extension, adequate public services.

The **Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science** (PLOTS)—an open-source, grassroots data-gathering and research initiative—is now putting these communities on the map. Founded in 2010, PLOTS grew out of Grassroots Mapping, a project developed by Jeffrey Warren, then a graduate student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Warren was invited by Peruvian NGOs *Escuelab* and Shuawa Arts Organization to Cantagallo, an informal shantytown built over a landfill in Lima. The community was inhabited by 100 Shipibo Indigenous families who had been unable to win title to the land due to lack of evidence supporting their claims of residency. With Warren's instruction, Cantagallo's residents attached a camera with continuous-mode shooting to a helium balloon to take the first clear overhead photos of the entire settlement and delineate its borders.

Though Cantagallo did not receive the title, Warren's successful mapping led him to undertake similar projects in other informal communities in Lima, and a different group used his balloon-mapping prototype for environmental monitoring of the Gulf Coast following the BP oil spill in April 2010. The project delivered some of the only images available of the damage at the time. As the Grassroots Mapping community took shape, seven individuals who had used the technology joined with Warren to found PLOTS.

Today, Public Lab, as it is called by members, has regional chapters in seven U.S. cities, and a digital network of over 200 social scientists, engineers, biologists, cartographers, activists, and community developers across the globe. Together, they develop technologies that can be used by communities to identify and address environmental issues like air pollution or water contamination—what the Lab calls "civic science." In 2011, PLOTS received a three-year, $500-million grant from the Knight Foundation News Challenge, which funds innovative uses of technology.

The information PLOTS produces is accessible to lay persons as well as experts. According to Liz Barry, co-founder and director of the Lab's urban environment unit, the community's signature tools—balloon and kite mapping, near-infrared and thermal photography, spectrometers, and indoor air quality mapping—are all inexpensive and easy to replicate. "The idea is to share what you do and how you do it with your community," says Barry. The hardware, software and data PLOTS generates are produced under a number of open-source licenses and anyone can add or edit content on the PLOTS website.

The groups that use Lab tools cover a broad spectrum of interests. In 2011, PLOTS partnered with *Fundación Ciudadano Inteligente* to live-stream the student protests in Chile using an iPhone; it also worked with activists in New York to monitor Brooklyn's polluted Gowanus Canal using near-infrared cameras that revealed plumes of pollution inflow not included in the Environmental Protection Agency report when it granted the Gowanus Canal "Superfund" status in May 2010. ⓐⓠ



**Ready to fly:** Jeffrey Warren and others launch a balloon-kite hybrid in Lima, Peru.

COURTESY OF JEFFREY WARREN