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Blossoms of Fire

A film by Maureen Gosling

NEW YORKER FILMS presents MAUREEN GOSLING's "BLOSSOMS OF FIRE" featuring THE PEOPLE OF ANDHRA AND COMING TO BANGALURU, INDIA
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER KELLY CLEGGEN EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS CAROL COOPER, TONY HANNA, NIKHIL PRASAD, JESSICA BROWN WOODEN PRODUCED BY MAUREEN GOSLING, ANDREW HENNING, DANIELA FERRELLI
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Press Contacts:

Ronald Ramsland
New Yorker Films
85 Fifth Ave., 11th Fl.
New York, NY 10003
Ph. 212-645-4600
ron.ramsland@newyorkerfilms.com

BLOSSOMS OF FIRE

Filmmakers

Director, Producer, Editor	Maureen Gosling
Director, Co-Producer	Ellen Osborne
Cinematographer	Xavier Pérez Grobet
Sound Recordist	Gabriela Espinoza
Field Producer	Susana Vásquez Sánchez
Co-Producers	Toni Hanna
	Maria Teresa García de la Noceda
Associate Producer, Still photographer	Kelly Clement
Narrator	Maureen Gosling, English
	Sylvia Mullally Aguirre, Spanish
Narration Written by	Toni Hanna, Maureen Gosling
	Pam Rorke-Levy
Translations-Spanish	Toni Hanna, Lorenzo González
	Maureen Gosling
Translations-Zapotec	Obdulia Ruiz Campbell
	Deborah Augsburg
Character Voices	Soco Aguilar, Jaime Garza
	Lorenzo González, Werner Herzog
	Boris Krutonog, Macario Matus
	Natalia Toledo
Editing Consultants	Maria García de la Noceda
	Claudio Zangarini, Raquel Scherr
Second Unit Camera	Maria Christine Camus
Assistant Camera	Carlos Arrango, Guadalupe Olivera
Additional Camera	Les Blank, Lou Weinert, John Knoop
Transcriptions	Maria García de la Noceda, Anouk Patel
	Obdulia Ruíz Campbell
Cultural Advisors	Beverly Chiñas, PhD
	Howard Campbell, PhD
	Obdulia Ruíz Campbell
	Jeffrey Rubin, PhD
Fiscal Sponsor	Film Arts Foundation, San Francisco

Featuring the People of Juchitán and San Blas Atempa, Oaxaca

Abel Jiménez Regalado, Amado Jiménez Regalado, Angel Santiago Valdiviso, Angel Vega Abrego, Armando López Ortiz, Cecilia Jiménez Salinas, Desideria Pineda López, Elena Marcial López, Florinda Luis Orozco, Francisco Javier Santiago Regalado, Herminio de la Cruz Guerra, Ing. Porfirio Villalobo Robledo, Lucia Toledo Morales, Macario Robles Sánchez, Manuela Cabrera Santiago, Maria Jiménez Salinas, Maria Luisa Thompson Fuentes, Marina Meneses Velásquez, Micaela Guerra Jiménez, Rosa Martha Toledo Martínez, Rosa Santiago López, Rosalba Sánchez Sánchez, Severina López López, Severina Villalobos Pineda, Susana Vásquez Sánchez, Vicente Marcial Cerqueda, Vicente Ruiz Orozco, Virgen Toledo López

Live Music performed by

Banda Princesa Donashii, Feliciano Marino, Florinda Luis Orozco, Felipe Toledo, Francisco Toledo Alonzo - "Unión La Tina", Grupo Berelele, Gueromeño Marimba Band, Jesús Henestrosa, Trio Xavizende

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Visit:

www.maureengosling.com
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A New Yorkers Film Release

USA, 2000	74 minutes, Color
In Spanish and Zapotec with English subtitles	16 mm

SYNOPSIS

Blossoms of Fire is a dazzling, whirling dance of a film that celebrates the extraordinary lives of the Isthmus Zapotecs of southern Oaxaca, Mexico. The Isthmus Zapotecs, whose culture is rooted in a strong work ethic and fierce independent streak, have resulted not only in powerful women, but also in the region's progressive politics and an unusual tolerance of alternative gender roles. Made over a period of ten years, *Blossoms of Fire* was shot and edited entirely on 16mm film. The film is Maureen Gosling's debut as a Producer/ Director after being an editor, and co-filmmaker with documentarian Les Blank for twenty years.

Artists like Miguel Covarrubias and Frida Kahlo have often celebrated and rendered tribute in their paintings to the legendary beauty of the woman of Juchitán. *Blossoms of Fire* shows these women in all their brightly colored, opinionated glory as they run their own businesses, embroider their signature of fiery flowers on clothing and comment with angry humor on articles in the foreign press that flippantly and inaccurately depict them as a promiscuous matriarchy.

Veteran film editor and former Les Blank collaborator Maureen Gosling and co-director Ellen Osborne illuminate the infectious self-confidence of the Juchitecan people. A midwife laughs over a young husband's behavior during birth, a gay man cheerfully asserts that "mothers are in charge" in Juchitecan society and many proudly describe the challenges they face in their work and their families. Their lives may be hard, and maintaining Zapotec culture and language may be an ongoing battle, but it is plain that not one of these individuals - man, woman, young, old, gay or straight - would willingly change places with anyone in the first world.

Interview with Maureen Gosling by Belinda Acosta (Austin Chronicle) 5/4/01

"An Indomitable Culture" by Belinda Acosta, May 4, 2001

Their progressive social structure has intrigued intellectuals. Artists and filmmakers revel in their joyous embrace of color and unconventional concepts of beauty. Writers and songwriters have expounded on their grace and power. They are the Zapotecas of Juchitán, one of the few surviving indigenous cultures of Mexico. With so many people writing and talking about the Zapotec women, it was inevitable that some things would trickle back to the small city, located in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Oaxaca, Mexico. What was perhaps not expected was that the Zapotecas would talk back.

In 1994, British journalist Jocasta Shakespeare wrote a damaging story about the Zapotec women for *Elle* magazine. She called the Zapotecas "red-hot mamas" and described a culture in which hyper-sensual women rule their hen-pecked husbands, take teenage lovers at will, and live to dance, drink, and make money. When news of the *Elle* story reached Juchitán, it not only led to a legal suit, but it also launched an angry public discussion in the town -- from intellectuals to market sellers -- about whom to trust and how to make sure their story was handled with care and respect.

So when Maureen Gosling embarked on her study of the Zapotec women of Juchitán, it was not easy for her to gain entry. But Gosling had spent 28 years working with respected documentarian Les Blank -- on acclaimed projects like *Del Mero Corazón*, about Tex-Mex border music, and the award-winning *Burden of Dreams*, examining the obstacles faced by German director Werner Herzog in the making of *Fitzcarraldo*, his film set in the Peruvian Amazon -- and she understood first-hand the responsibility of a filmmaker representing marginalized cultures. The result is *Blossoms of Fire*. Made over a 10-year period, the film is decidedly less sensational than the *Elle* article and is instead a careful study of an indomitable culture. But it also offers discussion on the tension between the modern world and the Third World, the power of the written word, and challenges the first world to re-evaluate assumptions about power, beauty, truth, and progress.

Austin Chronicle: You quote Miguel Covarrubias, Elena Poniatowska, and Sergei Eisenstein on their impressions of the Zapotecas of Juchitán. What was it that drew you to them, and to eventually make *Blossoms of Fire*?

Maureen Gosling: The film was begun by [co-director] Ellen Osborne. While she and her husband were traveling and studying Mexico, they stopped for lunch in Juchitán. Immediately, they noticed something different. The women were more outgoing than other indigenous women in the area, and there were lots of them, all friendly, talking with them, and they just got a kick out of them. Ellen found they had a reputation as a matriarchal society. She started the whole film project and got me on as an editor. Funding dropped off in '91, and she asked me if I wanted to share [producing] responsibility. Gradually Ellen got out of producing. I wasn't happy she didn't want to produce, but I couldn't abandon the project. The subjects, the topics, the themes were too important: gender relations, women and the economy, political empowerment, indigenous people, the acceptance of homosexuality. The more I did my own research, the more I was fascinated.

AC: Why did the film take 10 years to make?

MG: Funding. At the beginning, I paid myself for editing but had to give that up because I couldn't get funding. It was hard to get funding in the States, but in Mexico, it was better. We also raised money from a painting an artist donated that we sold for \$10,000. Call it creative fundraising. So in addition to benefits, and several small grants in this country [including one from the American Film Institute], we got the film made. I'm tickled to have gotten money from director John Sayles. I was so pleased to know that someone in his position was so kind and so unassuming.

AC: Blossoms of Fire begins with the reaction of the Zapotec women to that Elle article by Jocasta Shakespeare and the problems it caused. Did the problems fade over time?

MG: I recently found out that Shakespeare has a Web site where she gives women tips on traveling [www.journeywoman.com/traveltales/red_hot.html], and her article is still there! Ellen and I both wrote letters to *Elle* and to her, telling them about the affect of the article on the people and on our film. I sent the letter four places -- the *Elle* offices in Mexico, the U.S., and France, and to the writer. There was no word from any of them. I recently ran into a young woman in France who's also trying to do a film in Juchitán. She said the article still has an effect.

AC: The state of Oaxaca sued Elle magazine -- do you know what became of that?

MG: No, I don't. But it wasn't the state, it was an official organization in the city of Oaxaca. I think it's great that someone came to their rescue. The women in the article really got hit in their community. The inscription under the photo [in the *Elle* article] said the woman had 16-year-old lovers. It was really damaging to them. The whole article was really off. The writer said things like the women had gold coin jewelry and it represented their lovers. It's really their dowries from their grandmothers, for Christ's sake! But actually, people were almost more upset with statements that the men didn't work. There weren't even that many people who read the article, but the rumor mill spread the word.

AC: Besides causing distrust, what other ways did that article affect your project?

MG: It was so obviously off about the culture. They got mad, but not just mad, they got hurt. One day, we were filming traffic, and this man ran up to me and asked, "Are you with *Elle* magazine? Tell me the truth!" He was almost crying. It just killed me because we did such work, doing research, getting permission, and this woman's irresponsibility really put us on the spot a lot. In fact, I wish I could have gone into it more in the film. We got into all these panel discussions on TV with intellectuals on how to deal with outsiders: Who should be allowed to tell their story? I've made a real point of communicating with [the individuals in the film and the local production manager]. I've had friends who've gone down there with letters and photographs and copies of videos, because I didn't want to be like so many other people.

I'm sure [Shakespeare] figured they'd never read her article and didn't even worry about it. It shows her own prejudice. It certainly makes me feel more vigilant. You've got to leave a little room for critiques. That's the way I always work. When I worked with [documentary filmmaker] Les Blank, we always wanted to be careful about how we dealt with people. And most of the time, they were happy with the outcome, which is a good testament. For a film made in Cajun country, some of the elite, upper-class types didn't like it because it was about the poor people,

but the poor people loved it. Often times, it's very emotional for them to see the film because they see family members who are gone, kids that are grown up. It's a record for them.

AC: What kind of feedback have you gotten from the people featured in Blossoms of Fire?

MG: I took a work-in-progress down in '97 and some people saw it and really liked it and gave some feedback. Right after I'm in Austin, I'm taking it to Mexico. The first stop is in Juchitán. I want to try to show it in Juchitán's central plaza as well as at their cultural center.

I feel there's enough research for them to see I really tried hard to include references to their artistic culture. I tried to get a variety of music. They should be able to see I made it with a lot of care. But they're also a very opinionated people, so who knows?

AC: Tell me about working with Les Blank. You had a long working relationship with him.

MG: I started out doing sound recording and assistant editing. In the late Seventies, he let go of the editing and let me slide into place, so that's what I mainly do. I continue to do sound recording because I really enjoy going on the shoots. You get the continuity, you get an affection for the people when you're on shoots, and I liked that. At a certain point, [the weight of the equipment] was killing my body. There was no break-up, I just sort of phased out. I'm very proud of the work we did together. Now I work independently.

AC: Now that the film is finished, are there some postscripts you'd like to add?

MG: One thing that is kind of interesting is the new political situation with President Vicente Fox and the PAN party that's come to power, and how they've become more involved with the indigenous movement [the Zapatistas]. The development in the Isthmus region is bound to build with Fox -- the megaproject, as the locals call it -- a huge project they've tried to get going for a long time that deals with housing, transportation, natural resources, tourism. In the film they say, "We don't mind development, but we want to be included." To arm people with knowledge to confront and demand that they be included in the conversation, rather than bring people from outside, and to consider the locals -- that's a really important development since the film.

AC: I'm so curious to know how the Juchitánas will react to the film.

MG: Well, if they don't like it, I'll just tell them, "Okay. Well, you make the next one!" There's room for more films for all the stories they have. And I hope they will. I'd like to see what they come up with.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

MAUREEN GOSLING (Producer, Director, Editor)

Maureen Gosling has been a documentary filmmaker for more than thirty years and is best known for her twenty-year collaboration with acclaimed independent director, Les Blank. Gosling has also been sought after as an editor, working with such directors as Jed Riffe, Tom Weidlinger, Amie Williams, Shakti Butler (*The Way Home*), Ashley James (*Bomba: Dancing the Drum*) and Pam Rorke Levy (*San Francisco's Neighborhoods: The Mission District*). Her work has often focused on themes of people and their cultural values, music as cultural expression and the changing gender roles of men and women. Her films have been seen in countless film festivals around the world, on national public and cable television, on television in Europe, Australia and Asia, and have been distributed widely to educational institutions. Gosling's own film, *Blossoms of Fire*, a feature documentary filmed and edited completely on 16mm, represents her debut as a Producer/Director. The film is a celebratory tribute to the Isthmus Zapotec people of southern Oaxaca, Mexico. *Blossoms of Fire*, an Intrépidas Productions release, has garnered rave reviews, charming audiences from San Diego to Marseille. The film won the Coral Award for Best Documentary by a Non-Latino Director at the Havana International Film Festival and was broadcast on HBO Latino.

As a director/producer, Maureen Gosling is developing two new film projects. *Bamako Chic*, *The Women Cloth Dyers of Mali*, co-produced with Maxine Downs, explores through the stories of five women, the cultural significance of textiles and cloth to West Africans and the impact that global economic policies, such as micro-credit programs, have on Malian women's lives. *No Mouse Music: The Story of Chris Strachwitz and Arhoolie Records* is being co-produced with Chris Simon. It tells the immigrant success story of record producer Chris Strachwitz who fulfilled his dream of recording the vibrant, authentic regional musical traditions of the United States.

As an editor, Gosling is currently one of four editors on the four-part U.S. public television series to be released in 2006, *California and the American Dream*, produced by Jed Riffe and three other producers. Her program, entitled *California's "Lost" Tribes* focuses on the controversial rise of Indian casinos and its impact on the lives of Native Americans and the state of California. Gosling edited three films directed by Tom Weidlinger: *Heart of Congo*, a new one-hour film on the challenges faced by a health aid organization working in Congo; *Boys Will Be Men*, a one-hour film on the socialization of boys in the United States, broadcast on public television; and the feature documentary *A Dream in Hanoi*, on a unique US-Vietnamese production of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in Vietnam. She edited *Fallon: Deadly Oasis*, directed by Amie Williams, on the town of Fallon, Nevada, which has been suffering a rash of childhood leukemia cases. The film was recently on PBS' POV Series.

Previously Gosling was a partner in Flower Films with Les Blank, as co-filmmaker on a dozen of the twenty 16mm films they made together. She was editor and/or sound recordist on their films on Cajun and Zydeco music, Polish American polka culture, Serbian-American music, New Orleans Mardi Gras and parade traditions, Cuban music in Cuba and New York, Texas-Mexican border music, the delights of garlic and more. *Burden of Dreams* (on the tribulations of German director Werner Herzog shooting his feature *Fitzcarraldo* in the Peruvian Amazon), the team's best known film, received a British Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 1983; was broadcast nationwide on P.B.S.; and was on 12 U.S. critics' Top Ten List of the Best Films of 1982. Gosling was nominated for Best Editing by The American Cinema Editors for *Burden of Dreams*.

Gosling's films with Les Blank have been shown:

•On Television

National and local PBS in the United States, as well as BRAVO, the Learning Channel and The Discovery Channel cable stations. The BBC and Channel 4 in Britain have broadcast all of the films. Most of the films have been aired in Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Germany, Denmark, Finland, France, Korea, Australia, China, the Netherlands.

•In the Following Retrospectives

- 1995 Tribute at the San Francisco International Film Festival.
- 1992 Monica Theatre, Santa Monica, California; Vienna Film Festival, Austria.
- 1991 Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, California.
- 1990 Augsburg Independent Film Days, Augsburg, Germany.
- 1989 Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, California.
- 1986 Cinemathèque Française, Paris.
- 1985 Univ. of California, Los Angeles; Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.
- 1984 Honolulu Academy of Arts; Cineteca Nacional, Mexico City.
- 1983 University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; University of Kansas; Cinemateca Uruguayo, Montevideo; Cinemateca Nacional, Quito, Ecuador; Cineteca Distrital, Bogotá, Colombia
- 1979 Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

In 1996 Gosling was an Editing Instructor in the Cinema Department at San Francisco State University, Fall Semester. She taught Editing and Filmmaking workshops at Film Arts Foundation and the Independent Feature Project in 1998, 1992 and 1990. She served on the Board of Cine Acción, a Latino film organization from 1996-2002. She received a BA in Social Anthropology from the University of Michigan in 1972.

ELLEN OSBORNE (Director, Co-Producer)

Ellen Osborne has worked in the film business since 1987. She produced, and wrote the independent feature, *Poco Loco*, with Deborah Koons Garcia. In 1994 Osborne line produced the feature, *Nina Takes a Lover*. The 1990 documentary, *Clowning Around*, produced and edited by Osborne, won numerous awards including a student Academy Award and a College Television Award. Osborne was one of the founders of the Taos Talking Picture Festival, which hosted its first festival in 1995 in Taos, New Mexico. She co-programmed and managed the festival until 1999. More recently Osborne worked on the independent features *Tao of Steve*, *Tortilla Heaven*, and *Sheer Bliss*. In 2001 she moved to Los Angeles where she works in the Art department for television and film. Her most recent film project was the Paramount feature, *Team America: World Police*. Currently, she is splitting her time between fine art painting and various graphic design and matte painting jobs in the art department. During a six-month excursion in Mexico, Osborne and her ex-husband Kelly Clement initiated the idea for the film, *Blossoms of Fire*.

TONI HANNA (Co-Producer, Translator, Writer)

Toni Hanna worked from 1988 to 2001 in various facets of the independent film industry, as producer, researcher, film festival programmer, writer and media journalist. She first met Maureen Gosling in the 'eighties while working for Les Blank's Flower Films, where she assisted on six of Blank's documentaries and managed the distribution of his films. Her first encounter with Juchitán was in 1984, during a state of seige imposed by the PRI. Years later, she had the singular experience of viewing *Blossoms of Fire* with a rapt Juchitecan audience in the same plaza where military once stood. In addition to documentaries, Toni produced many series,

segments and spots for the cable networks. Currently, she is working hard at her second career, real estate.

MARIA TERESA GARCÍA DE LA NOCEDA (Co-Producer, Editing Consultant, Translator)

Maria Teresa García de la Noceda is a San Francisco filmmaker born in Spain. She has been working in the film industry as a director, producer, consultant editor, researcher, translator, production coordinator, and as a talent since 1985. Co-producer of *Columbus on Trial*, she has also directed and produced *Candela*, and *Tigris and Euphrates*. She has published some articles in *Año Cero* (Madrid, Spain, 1997) and *Información Comercial Española* (Madrid, Spain, 1973-1974); her poems and collages have been published in *Nuestro Equipo*, *Nuestro Mundo* (Monterey, California, 1999-2000). She has also been working as a Court Interpreter, since 2000.

XAVIER PÉREZ GROBET (Cinematographer)

Xavier Pérez Grobet has been a Director of Photography since 1991, on almost three dozen documentaries, television series and feature films in Mexico and the U.S. The 1995 feature *Sin remitente*, which he shot, won numerous Arieles (Mexican Oscar). *Santitos* in 1999 received the Latin America Cinema Award at Sundance. Pérez Grobet first made a name for himself in the States with the Oscar nominee *Before Night Falls* by Julian Schnabel, which showed off his sensual, vibrant camerawork. Since coming to the States, he's been the eye behind a list of powerful indie projects, from *Tortilla Soup* to, most recently, *9 Lives*, which premiered at the Sundance Festival, and *The Woodsman*. He's jumped to a big Hollywood feature with Sony Pictures' *Monster House*, the second feature film to rely on the performance capture technology debuted in *The Polar Express*. *Nacho Libre*, starring Jack Black, will be a 2006 release.

GABRIELA ESPINOZA (Sound Recordist)

Gabriela was born in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and grew up in Mexico City. She has been a recording engineer for feature, documentary and video productions for more than eleven years. As a Zapotec, she knows the culture well and understands the Zapotec language. She currently teaches sound engineering at Mexico City's film school, CUJEC.

SUSANA VÁSQUEZ SÁNCHEZ (Field Producer)

Susana Vásquez Sánchez is a native of Juchitán who works at the Foro Ecológico, Juchitán's ecology center. She is fluent in both Spanish and Zapotec. Susana coordinated most of the interviews for the film, conducted some of the Spanish and all of the Zapotec interviews. She also appears in *Blossoms of Fire*.

KELLY CLEMENT (Associate Producer/Still Photographer)

After many years of working in theater, Kelly received an M.A. in film production from San Francisco State University. In 1990 he directed *Clowning Around*, for which he received an Academy Award for best student documentary. He has since produced and directed numerous films, videos and multimedia projects. In 1995 Kelly became the Director of Programming for the Taos Talking Picture Festival. He also taught film courses at the University of New Mexico and online film history classes for the Minnesota College of Art and Design. Currently, he works as a film programmer for Starz Denver International Film Festival, the Mill Valley Film Festival, True/False Film Festival and the Nantucket Film Festival. Along with Ellen Osborne, Kelly initiated the idea of a film on the Isthmus Zapotecs.

FESTIVAL SCREENINGS/AWARDS

- WINNER** Coral Prize for Best Foreign Documentary About Latin America, Havana International Film Festival, Havana, Cuba.
- WINNER** "Best Of" Sunnyside of the Doc Film Market, Marseille, France
- WINNER** Award for Excellence - Society for Visual Anthropology
American Anthropological Association
- WINNER** Best Documentary - Film Fest New Haven, Conn.
- WINNER** Second Prize, Community Category,
Terres en Vues First People's Festival, Montréal, Québec
- WINNER** Prix Union Latine, Competition - La Cita Festival de Biarritz, Biarritz, France

San Francisco International Film Festival
Auckland and Wellington Film Festivals, New Zealand
Biarritz Latino Film Festival, France
Bilan du Film Ethnographique, Paris, France
Chicago Latino Film Festival
Cinefestival, San Antonio, Texas
¡Cine Latino! San Francisco
CineSol Latino Film Festival - South Padre Island, Texas
Cine Vegas, Las Vegas
Docupolis Film Festival, Barcelona, Spain
Environmental Film Festival, Washington, DC
EthnoFilmFest Berlin, Germany
Film Fra Sor (Films from the South), Oslo, Norway
Film Fest New Haven, Conn
Freiberger Film Festival, Germany
Great Plains Film Festival, Lincoln, Nebraska
Guangzhou Int'l Doc FF, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China
Inside Out Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival, Toronto
Int'l Lesbian Film Festival (Immaginaria), Bologna, Italy
Kalamata Documentary Film Festival, Greece
Los Angeles Latino Film Festival
Nashville International Film Festival, Tennessee
National Museum of the American Indian Film Festival, NY
Ozark Foothills Film Festival, Arkansas
Parnü Anthropological Film Festival, Estonia
San Diego Latino Film Festival, San Diego, California
Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival, Greece
Women in the Director's Chair, Chicago, Illinois.