

Cambridge

Finally, a Latino film festival here

Starting Friday,
34 films will play
on 3 local screens

By Carin Zissis
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Los Angeles, Miami, and San Diego have held Latino film festivals for years, attracting big-name stars as speakers. Even Providence celebrated its 10th in April, with Antonio Banderas in attendance at the festival's \$125-per-person gala dinner. It takes a little longer for such high-powered events for Boston and Cambridge.

Starting Friday and continuing through June 22, the Cambridge Latino Film Festival takes place — and all of the events are free.

"We're working on a very low, low, low budget," said festival director Jose Barriga. "I work on my computer at home, surrounded by boxes of videos."

Barriga, 33, who maintains an apartment/office in Central Square, grew up in Peru and moved here from Los Angeles last summer when he spotted an ad for a community organizer position in Boston. At the time he was work-

ing for the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now after having been a television network producer.

He decided to stay here. "I fell in love with this city," he said. "You can talk to anyone, anywhere, about anything."

But Barriga saw what he called a lack of access to Latino media in the area, and while lamenting this during a conversation with a friend last fall, he came up with the idea for the festival.

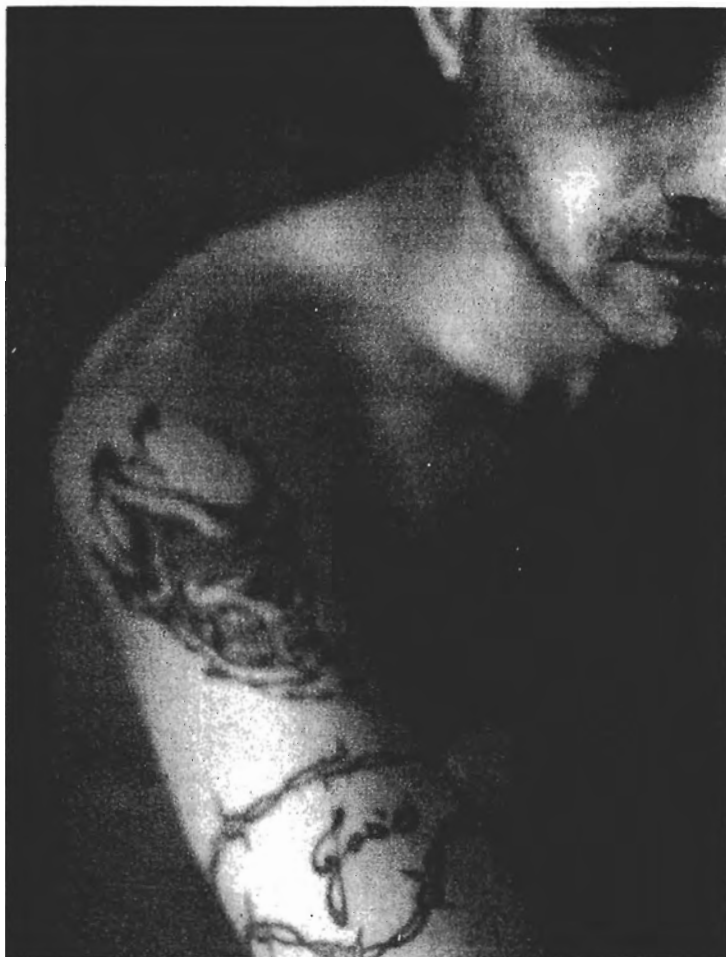
Since January, he's dedicated himself to the project, gaining sponsorship from local nonprofit organizations and collecting 64 submissions from across North and South America, with several from Boston-area filmmakers.

The 34 features, documentaries, and animated films challenge conceptions about Latinos. "Movies from Hollywood stereotype Latinos as drug dealers, gang members, and prostitutes," Barriga said. "I have a personal campaign against these stereotypes. I like to show realities, and to bridge communities."

To that end, Barriga chose community activists, professors, factory workers, and a high school student to be judges on the festival's selection committee. Housing advocate Katie Milton, 24, of Somerville, judged three films, her favorite being "El Toma de la Embajada/The Seizing of the Embassy," from Colombia.

"I really liked it because I didn't know anything about Colombia," she said. "I think there are a lot of stereotypes about immigrants here . . . but what were things like in their country? What made them come here?"

"When I first came to Boston it was extremely difficult," said com-



Jose Gonzalez, photographed by Roberto Arevalo, from the documentary "It's Tough," by Patricia Vallardes.

mittee member Rafael Pereira, a native of Puerto Rico who has lived in Cambridge since 1988. "I don't think there was a receptive ear to having a Latin American voice here. Over the last 10 to 15 years, there has been a revolution."

Pereira, a cooking instructor at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education, collaborated with Barriga to help secure the center as a

festival venue, along with the Cambridge Public Library and Harvard's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies.

"This festival is not only for students of Harvard," said Pereira, "but for Latin Americans and Americans in general."

Barriga said he sees it as a starting point. "The idea is to make a yearly event," he said, "to make a real institution."



A shot from "Blossoms of Fire," by Ellen Osborne.