



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2026 OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD

THE MELTDOWN

A film by MANUELA MARTELLI



RONDA CINE, CINEMA INUTILE and WOOD PRODUCCIONES
In coproduction with ELASTICA FILMS, PIANO, FUNDACIÓN RÍO present



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A film by **MANUELA MARTELLI**

WITH

MAYA O'ROURKE • SASKIA ROSENDAHL • MAIA RAE DOMAGALA

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A wide-angle photograph of a snowy landscape. In the foreground, a stream flows through a snow-covered area. Two people are standing on the snow: one in a purple jacket and red scarf, and another in a teal snow suit. Two black and white dogs are standing near the person in the purple jacket. The background is filled with snow-covered trees and bushes. The sky is overcast and grey.

Chile, 1992. Staying at her grandparents' remote hotel near an Andean ski resort, Inés (9) befriends Hanna (15), a German skier. When Hanna vanishes without a trace, the search for her exposes hidden truths.

KEY DATES

- ▶ **4 SEPTEMBER 1970:** Salvador Allende, leader of the Popular Unity coalition, is democratically elected President of Chile. He is the first Marxist to reach the presidency of a Latin American country through free elections. His government begins a sweeping program of nationalizations, in particular of the copper industry, and far reaching social reforms.
- ▶ **11 SEPTEMBER 1973:** A military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet overthrows Allende, who dies inside the presidential palace as it is bombed by the army. Congress is shut down, political parties are banned, the press is placed under censorship. Chile becomes a military dictatorship that, over seventeen years, will leave more than 3,200 dead and disappeared, close to 40,000 tortured, and several hundred thousand sent into exile.
- ▶ **5 OCTOBER 1988:** In a national referendum, Chileans are asked whether Pinochet should remain in power for another eight years. The « No » wins with nearly 56 percent of the vote, opening the way to free elections.
- ▶ **14 DECEMBER 1989:** Patricio Aylwin, candidate of the democratic opposition coalition, wins the first free presidential election since 1970.
- ▶ **11 MARCH 1990:** Aylwin takes office. Democracy is officially restored, though Pinochet remains commander in chief of the army and the institutional legacy of the dictatorship continues to shape the country.
- ▶ **20 APRIL 1992:** Chile opens its pavilion at the Universal Exposition of Seville, with an iceberg transported from Antarctica as its centerpiece. The gesture is meant as the image of a new Chile, modern, open to the world, having turned the page on the dictatorship. The film is set during this period. ■



Photo © Ronda Cine

INTERVIEW WITH MANUELA MARTELLI

What was your first approach to cinema? Why did you choose this path?

I feel I owe my parents a big part. I grew up in an environment that was very stimulating. They had started their own production company back then: we lived in a big old house, and part of it was dedicated space for the company. There were always a lot of film people around, and they had a photography studio and a lab. Photography and video were not as popular as they are now, but we had a video camera and my mom always carried it on her shoulder. The production company didn't really have a long life, let's say, but those homemade recordings that my mother made, that way she observed things without the need of something extraordinary happening, have been a great inspiration for me. Somehow, becoming a filmmaker has been a way to get closer to those images.

How has it been to transition from being an actor to being a director?

Very gradual. It's been a process of many years, where things combine all the time. I don't see it as a transition, but as two complementary things. Directing is very demanding, and I do give it more and more of my time to make those

projects happen. But every time I'm on set, I feel infinitely grateful for my experience as an actor.

What does it mean to be in Cannes for a second time?

I feel very honored. This selection means a lot to me. It's the first time a fiction film by a Chilean female director is included in Un Certain Regard. It feels like achieving something very important for the film, and also something that could encourage future female directors in Chile. I also feel very happy for the people who supported and trusted the film, and of course for everyone who worked on it. They put so much into it that it's very gratifying to see that work recognized. Cannes is a place that gives enormous visibility to films, and in the end, all you want is for the film to be seen. For me it is also a huge support to continue directing. I feel that Cannes gives a lot of value to auteurs and this can be a great help for future projects. It's such a great gift to be here.

What was the process to decide upon this particular story?

A long time ago, when I was in theater school, in a writing class, they asked us to write a short piece. The first ideas came back



then. I sat down one night and put it all on the page. This origin remains mysterious to me, it was a very visceral writing process, involving childhood memories and images from the beginning of the 90's. In time, I started seeing it as a film. I was interested in coming back to childhood as a way to unlearn, to question the things we internalize as unmovable. Many times we think of childhood as a state of full naivete, but actually observing it is not an innocent act. In this case, coming back to those early years also started to reveal a series of ghosts that haunt a generation born under dictatorship, who had to assume all the tradeoffs brought by the return of democracy.

What aspects of this historical context were you interested in, and why?

I always ask myself why I keep coming back to the past. There are people who see it as a useless gesture. I have doubted my own need to look into it, questioning if this interest I have is also something that blocks the notion of overcoming trauma. But then, we constantly get things happening in the present that feel too similar to the atrocities of the past, and the answer becomes more evident and urgent.

In Chile, some people have established this idea that the search for truth and justice is something nostalgic, or, as they say, even whiny. I think otherwise. In my films I have also aimed to approach the past from places that create a sense of discomfort, pulling away from portraying main historic events, and more towards people who are affected by them.

Do you believe that cinema is political?

I think everything is. I feel that the separation between politics and the quotidian experience of being in the world is something that is very manipulated by those who benefit from that separation. For me, politics is in everything, in how you treat people, in your children's education, in having a place to call home, in what you eat. I could continue with random examples like these. For me, cinema allows for observation of these things. This is why am so interested in quotidian behaviours and familial dynamics.

Do you think that cinema can be a tool to process or to heal wounds?

Lately I have been questioning the idea of healing wounds. There is something in that

expression that makes me uncomfortable. Maybe it's because I find it harder and harder to heal after the death of a child, or a parent, or a partner, who has been assassinated and tortured. I can't see through the healing the destruction of a country, or a genocide. I am not sure a country can heal from things like these. Maybe the idea of reparation makes more sense to me. There is something about the idea of healing that has to do with a sickness that disappears from one's body. I feel that in the case of historic trauma, these wounds can scar if they are looked after, but they do not disappear. The idea of scarring means that something remains. Scars are memories that are alive, and for me keeping them that way is a necessity.

Would you tell a story set in current Chilean times?

I get strangely uncomfortable by this idea. I feel that I observe the past because it lets me look at things from a distance. Talking about the present gives me vertigo, I find it hard to decipher it. I think that part of this has to do with the overwhelming feeling of the information barrage we're subject to. I am very afraid of the transience, the immediacy that dominates contemporary life. It's not that I think that we can't do the exercise of looking at the present, on the contrary, I think it is essential. It's just that for me the way of looking at the present has been to look for the things we have inherited as a society.



How would you say the historical memory has evolved within Chilean society since the 1990s, the time you describe in your film?

I wouldn't say that historical memory in Chile has evolved in a linear or fully resolved way. If anything, what we've learned is that memory doesn't simply move forward: it shifts, it transforms, it is reinterpreted, layers are added to it, and at times it also moves backwards. History and memory are not linear processes. Since the 1990s, there have been advances in acknowledging human rights violations through truth commissions, judicial processes, and some public policies focused on memory and reparation. More recently, during Gabriel Boric's administration, the National Search Plan was launched, an initiative aimed at clarifying the fate of those who were forcibly disappeared during the dictatorship, many of whom, even more than 50 years later, remain unaccounted for. However, the current government of José Antonio Kast, a far-right president, has already undermined the National Search Plan and other human rights programs. Moreover, two key figures in his cabinet including, notably, the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, took part in

Augusto Pinochet's legal defense in various cases, including his detention in London.

How was the process of casting Inés?

It was very long and difficult. We saw more than 500 girls, which is a lot for a population as small as ours. There were also several requirements that reduced the spectrum: she not only had to have some sense of acting ability, but also had to fit the physical idea of the character, and to speak English. After various stages of casting, which would be more in detail each time, we found two young actresses who we had deep workshops with. But then, we couldn't work with them for various reasons. By then we had little time left and everybody was getting quite nervous. The shoot was coming up, and we still didn't have a lead. And then we got Maya's self-tape. She had recorded it on her own, and she introduced herself in Spanish and English with striking confidence. Her attitude really caught my attention. When we met for auditions, she remained in that strength. And then I was quickly blown away. I am very proud of her work in the film, she is a real warrior.

What made you think of that moment where Inés discovers the lies of the adults? I thought this image really resonates in a political aspect, with the collective awakening in front of the manipulations of power.

I wanted to look at things from Inés' point of view, and I thought of the things that she might witness. I believe that it isn't an awakening for her as much as it is a forced entry into an adult world, with the weight of having to carry a



secret. Inés is far from being insubordinate. She is a kid, and just like any kid she is learning from the adults surrounding her, even though those behaviours might not be ethical. These are the examples she gets. And when you are a kid, you don't question things around you, you take things as your reality. This process of how her reality gets built is what I was looking to fathom.

It's interesting to include the treatment of the authorities towards Hanna's mother. What made you think of this as a fundamental element of the story?

I think it has to do with looking for new devices to connect emotionally with the past and the history of the country. I thought it was quite interesting to observe the way that institutions of the state abuse their power, through the experience of a foreign person.

This point of view could help with that uncomfortable feeling I was mentioning earlier, the idea of shaking preconceived notions of the past. The fact that the person who suffers this abuse is also a white European woman, a figure that we are used to seeing in places of power, already places us in a different place. I think that using those different perspectives helps us connect with the human side of people, beyond the historical prejudice we might have against them.

Why did you think of some German characters to be confronted to Chilean society? Inés says Lina comes from a country which doesn't exist anymore...

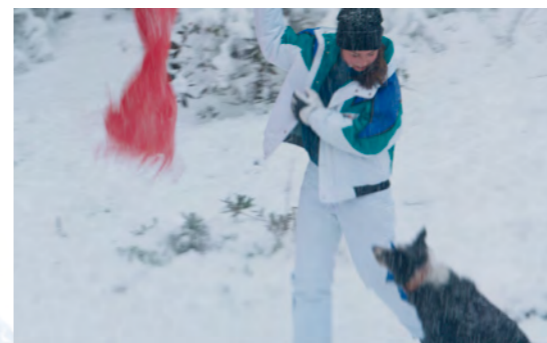
The figure of the foreigner in cinema is almost a genre in itself. It is an interesting device to make something familiar feel



Photos © Ronda Cine

slightly dislocated, or strange. The European identity also resonates with the tension of older colonial imaginaries still present in Expo Sevilla's commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the so-called discovery of Latin America, and this kind of reconstruction of Chile by looking outward, aspiring to external models of modernity. Also, like Chile and Inés, the early 90s bring a shift in paradigm in a broader sense. In Germany, that is very clearly tied to the fall of the Wall. It's not arbitrary that this coincides with the return to democracy in Chile. The same U.S. government that had supported the military coup, once the neoliberal regime was in place, also pressured Pinochet to call the plebiscite that eventually led to democratic elections. I found it interesting how, in both Germany and Chile,

there are very clear moments where capitalism ultimately consolidates itself as the dominant system, alongside the collapse of the socialist bloc and collective political ideals. It was also interesting to me that the idea of a "thaw" had already appeared in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. In a way, this was already announcing the end of that era. Sport was also part of that confrontation between the two blocs. It became a kind of battlefield, where systems confronted each other through medals and records. Doping was a clear reflection of that, of course. For me, Lina is like a remnant of that era, someone left out of orbit. In the film, we only sense this indirectly, which for me also speaks to the mystery of what has been left behind—of that country that has "ceased to exist," but whose people are still there.



Some dialogs make clear allusions to the numerous disappearances under the Chilean dictatorship. Do you think these political facts created a deeper culture of secret?

The transition in Chile involved a series of agreements that required significant concessions in order to restore democracy. Among these concessions were the implementation of the economic model I mentioned earlier, and the acceptance of the Constitution imposed by the dictatorship. This Constitution, among other things, ensured Pinochet's continued role as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, as well as an Amnesty Law that exempted those responsible for crimes committed during the military regime. Obviously, this law became a major obstacle to investigating human rights violations, including torture, executions, and disappearances. At the same time, members of the armed forces operated under what is known as the "pact of silence," covering up crimes and withholding information from the justice system, which resulted in widespread impunity for many of those responsible. I think that, in some way, we all became part of that culture of silence. On

the one hand, fear persisted in Chile for many years; on the other, there was also a broader intention to look toward the future, with the sense that some things had to be left behind or would be resolved over time. That idea of the future was something I heard often in my childhood. Unlike the feeling that exists today, back then there was a sense of a future, and I think we all bought into the idea that this neoliberal system might.

Women from every generation are at the center of THE MELTDOWN. It feels they're exposed to quite some misogynistic behaviours...

For me, this is part of portraying an era, with all the echoes that it may have in the present, of course. There was no intention to underline it, I think it came in a more organic way, just by imagining the lives of these women and the kinds of situations they would be exposed to. The Meltdown has a very personal root, as I mentioned. Its origin comes largely from my childhood memories, and part of those memories carry that misogynistic component of a patriarchal world. The thing is that now we have at least a basic language to articulate



those situations as abuses of power, or sexual abuse or aggression. Maybe if we had seen *The Meltdown* in the 90s, we wouldn't read that dynamic in the same way. It happens to me when I go back to films I watched as a child or as a teenager, I'm often shocked by portrayals of women and narratives that back then went completely unnoticed for me. The same happens with class representation or racial issues. What used to go completely unnoticed is now, I would say slowly, starting to come to the surface. For me, the idea of meltdown has precisely to do with that; with what becomes exposed, what comes to the surface.

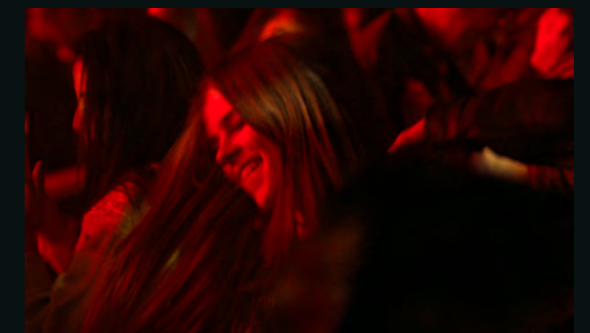
Why did you chose to shoot in this particular region of Chile? We can see how ethnically diverse it is, even if this is never formulated within the dialogs...

The film required a setting that doesn't exist in one place, so we shot across two regions of southern Chile. One gave us the mountain landscape and the density of the native forest. The other gave us a ski resort and a small family-run hotel that had never been modernized, somewhere still suspended in another time. Both regions are Indigenous land, and both carry the long history of dispossession that has reduced those territories over generations. Chile is a deeply unequal society, and that inequality is inseparable from skin color, social origin, and the features associated with Indigenous identity. The film sits inside that divide.

The omnipresence of snow doesn't only bring a sense of mystery it's also something which can cover some unspeakable truths...

The origin of the film is tied to a memory

of the Antarctic iceberg exhibited at the Chilean pavilion at the World's Fair in Seville. At the time, it was framed as a heroic gesture from a country emerging from dictatorship and opening itself to the world, an emblem of modernity and efficiency. If we could move a piece of ice across the ocean, it was said, we could move anything. But both the iceberg and the hotel operate within the same duality, between what is shown and what is hidden. The hotel presents warmth, order, and seamless service, while concealing the labor and invisible work that sustain that illusion. The exhibition did something similar, projecting an image outward, while the hidden side kept not only everything that would shatter this front, but also all that we do not want to reveal even to ourselves. While researching the film, I was struck when I was told by people who had worked on the mission that the iceberg was melting, which is not hard to imagine, but it made everything very clear. At some point, things melt. In Chile, one of those moments came very clearly in 2019, with a massive social uprising against inequality and the cost of living. The word "dignity" became central, naming what had long been suppressed. Snow



Photos © Ronda Cine

holds that tension between concealment and revelation, between what is frozen and what, inevitably, comes to light.

Where some existing films important to you as references or influences during your creative process on *THE MELTDOWN*?

The idea of “reference” makes me a bit uncomfortable, because it’s a term that’s so often used in advertising or in the world of series. For me, it’s more of a dialogue with certain films; it’s like a game, something I really enjoy, because of course I do it with films I love and that have moved me for different reasons. In that sense, I’m quite nostalgic, or maybe even “vintage.” I’m very drawn to films from the 60s and 70s. *Cría cuervos*, *The Spirit of the Beehive*, and *Au revoir les enfants* were films that accompanied me closely throughout the entire process of making this film. *L’Avventura*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Conversation*, and some of Pakula’s films as well. Benjamin Echazarreta, the cinematographer, showed me *Don’t Look Now*, which I had never seen before and found absolutely mesmerizing. I feel that there was a great deal of narrative freedom in those years, something that today, with the dominance of series, is very easy to lose. I have a certain conflict with that; I think we could be playing much more. Films from the 80s and 90s were also very present: *Three Women* and other Altman films, *Fanny and Alexander*, *Ratcatcher*, *Fucking Amal...* I’ll stop myself there.

Would you like to continue directing in Chile, or would you like to tell stories of other countries?

At the moment, I feel the need to talk about Chile because I feel very close to it, but I also think it would be interesting to observe something from a foreign distance.

Do you have any advice for women who are starting to direct?

I feel we can exercise new ways of leadership. This is not easy in a world that is as masculine as filmmaking. With this film, more than in my first, I registered how hard things were being a woman in our field. I might have had to do with the fact that the overall structure of the film was much bigger. You start to feel things that add up, small gestures that are hard to describe out of context, but that have to do with questioning your authority or your competence. For myself, I kept coming back to the most important things, my own feelings and intentions about the film and the way I wanted to make it. You have to find a way to communicate that, with care and respect, and to assert yourself and be loyal to that first instinct. Sometimes you manage, sometimes you don’t, but it’s also important to be kind to yourself in that process. Making films has taught me that no matter how much I try, not everything will go the way I imagined, and maybe that’s the most beautiful thing about it. ■

Questions by Andrea Rendón (México)



CREW

Directed and screenplay by MANUELA MARTELL
DOP BENJAMÍN ECHAZARRETA • Sound FEDERICO GONZÁLEZ • Sound designer JAVIER UMPIERREZ • Editor YIBRÁN ASUAD • Production designer NOHEMÍ GONZÁLEZ • Art director FRANCISCA CORREA • Costume designer CAROLINA ESPINA • Music MARIÁ PORTUGAL • First ad ALEJANDRO LAGOS • Line producer PATRICIO PEREIRA • Production manager PAOLA ZOCCOLA • Production companies RONDA CINE (Chile), CINEMA INUTILE (USA), WOOD PRODUCCIONES (Chile) • In coproduction with ELASTICA FILMS (Spain), PIANO (Mexico), FUNDACIÓN RÍO (Chile) • Produced by ALEJANDRA GARCÍA, ALEX C. LO, ANDRÉS WOOD • Coproduced by MARÍA ZAMORA, JULIO CHAVEZMONTES, PABLO DÍAZ • Executive producer JAVIERA PALMA QUAAS • Co-executive producer CASEY BADER • International sales LOSANGE FILMS

CAST

Inés - MAYA O'ROURKE • Lina - SASKIA ROSENDAHL • Hanna - MAIA RAE DOMAGALA • Alexander - JAKUB GIERSZAL • Techa - PAULINA URRUTIA • Ricardo - MAURICIO PESUTIC • Sebastián - LAUTARO CANTILLANA • Sonia - PAULA ZÚÑIGA • Soto - ROBERTO FARIÁS • Paty - DANIELA PINO • Genaro - LUIS URIBE • Marcela - MARCELA SALINAS

MANUELA MARTELLI

Manuela Martelli debuted as a teenager in the film **B-Happy**, obtaining the *Coral Award for Best Leading Role* at the *Havana Film Festival*. Since then, she has participated in numerous films and TV series, collaborating with directors such as Andrés Wood, Sebastián Lelio, and Martín Rejtman, among others.

In 2010, she received a Fulbright scholarship to study for a Master's degree in Film at Temple University, USA. During her studies, she directed **Apnea**, which premiered at FicValdivia in 2014. A year later, she was selected to participate in the Chile Factory program, where she co-directed the short film **Marea** with Amirah Tajdin. The film premiered at the *Quinzaine des Réalisateurs* at the *Cannes Film Festival* and was also presented at the *Sundance* and *NYFF* festivals, among others.

In 2022, Manuela premiered her first feature film, **1976**, at the *Cannes Directors' Fortnight*. The film screened at prestigious international film festivals such as *San Sebastián* and *New Directors/New Films*, winning several awards and recognitions, including the *Sutherland Award* at *BFI* and a nomination for one of the *DGA Award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement of a First-Time Feature Film Director Debut*. ■



