

Anika
Bootz

Mara
Bestelli

 75 Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Competition

Marcelo
Subiotto

THE MESSAGE

A film by Iván Fund

LUXBOX

A black and white profile photograph of a woman with dark hair, looking out of a window. The window shows a blurred outdoor scene with trees and a bright light source, possibly the sun. The woman's face is in profile, looking towards the right side of the frame. The lighting is soft, highlighting her features against the dark background of the window frame.

ORIGINAL TITLE: *EL MENSAJE*

INTERNATIONAL TITLE: *THE MESSAGE*

DIRECTOR: Iván Fund

COUNTRIES: Argentina, Spain, Uruguay

PRODUCTION YEAR: 2025

DURATION: 91 min.

LANGUAGE: Spanish

TECHNICAL INFORMATIONS: Black & White | Ratio 1.85 | Sound 5.1

CAST

MARA BESTELLI (*MYRIAM*)

MARCELO SUBIOTTO (*ROGER*)

ANIKA BOOTZ (*ANIKA*)

BETANIA CAPPATO (*ELOÍSA*)

SYNOPSIS

On the dusty roads of the Argentinian countryside, a young girl's gift pushes her opportunistic guardians to sell pet medium consultations to make a living. Whether magic or fraud, one thing is certain: the service is real – and innocence is a treasure.



CREW

DIRECTOR Iván Fund

SCREENWRITER Iván Fund, Martín Felipe Castagnet

DOP Gustavo Schiaffino

ART DIRECTOR Adrián Suárez

EDITORS Iván Fund

COSTUME DESIGN Betania Cappato

SOUND Leandro de Loredo, Omar Mustafá

MUSIC Mauro Mourelos

PRODUCTION COMPANIES

Rita Cine, Insomnia Films

PRODUCERS

Iván Fund

Laura Mara Tablón

Gustavo Schiaffino

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Laura Mara Tablón

COPRODUCTION

Amore Cine

Blurr Stories

Panes 360 Contenidos

Animista Cine

WORLD SALES

Luxbox

INTERVIEW WITH IVÁN FUND

Conducted by Cédric Succivalli. Film critic, curator and programmer, President of the International Cinephile Society and Programmer at Giornate degli Autori.

CS - At its heart *The Message* is a coming-of-age story, albeit one that does not always follow the conventions of the genre. What inspired you to make such a subversive exploration of childhood?

IF - I wanted to tell a story about that particular moment in a child's growing up when it empowers itself and decides it can comfort and teach something to its grown-ups, that it has the will to heal something. That moment in which you, as a child, realize you are part of something - and in that process, you gain a voice.

It is, in a way, also the coming-of-age story of the whole family - a family that deals with, through a fully present and caring love and as best they can, their own lack of communication, their past, and their limitations.

CS - Were there any films or other pieces of art you looked at when crafting this film, be it narratively or aesthetically?

IF - I do not work by references; I would not know how to approach the material if I was trying to make it look like or mimic something. What I do have trust in is in the spirits of the masters and artists I admire, from John Cassavetes to Tsai Ming-liang, and from Wenders to Spielberg and classic films. So even if it did not have a direct connection with the material of the film, I would rewatch some of my favorite films or revisit music or photographs. It is like being around a master chef's kitchen - you inevitably end up stinking of what is being cooked. Some of those influences you only realize are present once the film is done, and you watch it and say, "Oh, I stole this from here or that from there."

During the production of *The Message*, the work of the French photographer Bernard Plossu was very present for me - not only his images but also his work ethos, which I feel very much aligned with. He states that photography is about the moments that seem not important but that, in the end, reveal themselves to be - moments out of thin air.

CS - In telling this story, to what extent did you, both visually and narratively, draw on the long and vibrant culture of magical realism that has always populated South American literature and film?

IF - *The Message* is a realistic portrayal of a fantasy world. Or perhaps the other way around. I feel that the last couple of years contemporary Argentinian cinema can be defined by a way of understanding and connecting with a certain indeterminate state of the image; some way of not trying to make fiction look real but rather use the richness and texture of reality as a fiction driven tool to celebrate the nuanced miracles in this world on the one hand, and on the other hand expand the narrative.

CS - As both a folktale and a road movie the film oscillates between places, traversing both rural and urban locations. What inspiration do you draw from the various spaces that serve as the stage for the events in this story?

IF - We shot the film in Entre Ríos, where I was raised and where I have shot almost all my previous films. What I find interesting about the region is that it is filled with dusty roads and small agricultural towns - the scenery of my childhood - and only while shooting this film did I realize how much it resembles the imagery of those classic American films we grew up watching.

In a way I wanted the story to happen in 'Movieland'. As Peter Bogdanovich set *Paper Moon* during the great American depression, *The Message* reflects Argentina's current reality: the economic and social crisis affecting urban centers and its ripple effects in small towns and rural outskirts. But there's something dystopian, if you will, about the world they inhabit.

I prefer not to dwell on the sad and absurd reality Argentinians face today. As I answer your question, and as our film - imagined years ago - is now completed, we find ourselves with a president who seeks counsel from his dead dog to make decisions aimed at eradicating culture and selling off our country. And the thing is, we all know it's bullshit, because dogs are among the most perfect, loving creatures, and no living or dead dog could ever say anything like that or be okay with it.

Perhaps now, as always - or more than ever - fiction is not the opposite of reality but a path to understanding the world and its contradictions, bringing us closer to the truth. In this light maybe fantasy has become the new realism.

CS - The film is anchored by a beautiful performance by Anika Bootz. How did you get such a soulful, complex performance out of a younger actor, especially when most of her acting in the film is opposite more seasoned veterans?

IF - Anika is a gift. A very intelligent and sensitive person, totally committed and generous with the work - and she is a cinephile too. It was easier because she already knew Marcelo and Mara very well, and Betania, who plays her mother, is also her real mother. So their beautiful bond was already in place, and that bond was brought into the film.

El Cielo

Cementerio de mascotas

← a 300 mt.

SANCTUARY

We had a very small crew of only seven people in total, so the shoot was very intimate. An important part of the whole process was maintaining the same focus and flexibility both on- and off-camera. There was no strict “action” or “cut”; the whole cast and crew were always ready and attentive to any possible change of course or improvisation that might look promising. That is a way of working that promotes discovery rather than strictly imposing a scene.

I have a very relaxed work schedule. During the shoot I edit every night, and we don't film in the mornings. We use that time to watch the scenes from the previous days and to talk through and plan what is next - Anika and rest of the crew loved that. We also shot some scenes with two cameras, which helped maintain focus on what was happening in the scene at all times.

CS - After directing both *There Will Come Soft Rains* and *Dusk Stone* and co-writing *The Ant Woman*, this is the fourth time you tackle the theme of spirituality and the supernatural between animals and human beings. What is it that drives you to this specific type of story?

IF - I think it has to do with an exploration of childhood or, conversely, of growing older and realizing that there is a way of connecting with the world and with reality that lacks the awe and magical possibilities that children, as well as cinema, naturally inhabit.

CS - It is often said to never work with children or animals, yet you managed to do both with this film. So much of the film revolves around capturing these animals, who become fascinating and expressive characters in their own right - what drew you to focus so closely on these unconventional actors?

IF - I would choose to work with kids and animals any day! Kids are so free - they are a shortcut to fiction because they see the magic in the world. Animals, too, are a miracle of presence. For me, cinema is above all an act of presence, and both children and animals embody that with purity and completely in harmony with the world.

The Message examines our perception of animals and the mystery they embody in our increasingly distant relationship with nature. These days animals are almost fantastical entities, and the film proposes an encounter with their emotional and awe-inspiring presence.

CS - There are encounters with two animals that stand out in particular: a capybara and a horse. These are both featured in South American folklore, representing several different themes. What was the symbolic significance of incorporating these animals into a narrative that often feels like a contemporary folktale in itself?

IF - I liked the idea of a contemporary folktale with animals reflecting on existential matters; I think that particularly that sequence with the capybara is the moment where we witness a glimpse of that spiritual connection with animals that are not, at first glance, ‘pets. I wanted to have a moment where we, as an audience, can allow ourselves to believe that there actually is a higher-level connection linking all of them, even if it is of a totally different order than what they are embodying. Kind of like a leap of faith in a Rossellini film.

CS - Music is quite important throughout this film, including the recurring use of Pet Shop Boys’ *Always On My Mind* - what role did curating music play in the development of this film and in reflecting the metaphysical and literal journeys of your characters?

IF - The process of composing the music was done during the shoot. Mauro Mourelos, the composer and an out-of-this-world jazz musician, would send me a handful of tracks and improvisations every night. I would try them out, edit against them, give him feedback, and then the next night new tracks would arrive. It was a key process in finding the tone and texture of the film. I did know beforehand that I wanted the entire soundtrack to be built around flugelhorn and trumpet melodies - actually ‘monodies’.

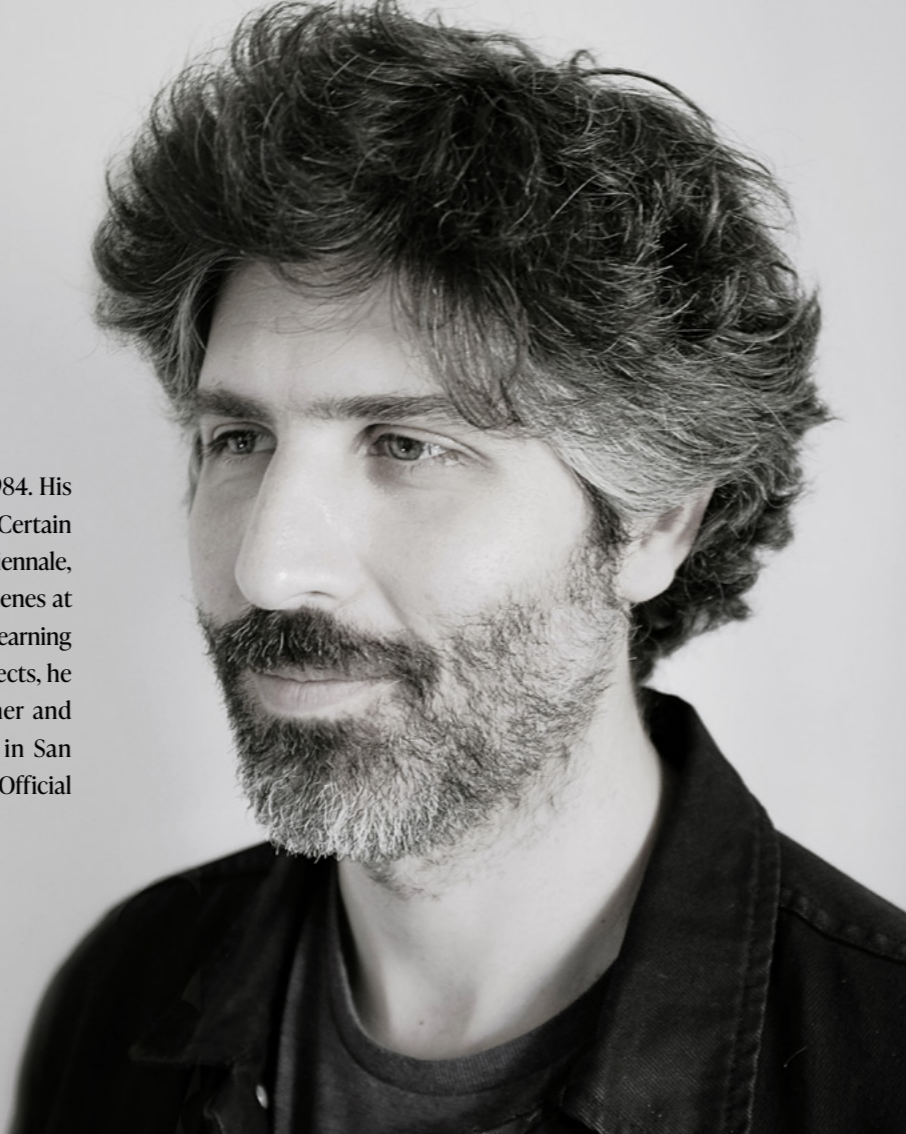
Always on my mind was a beautiful discovery thanks to the van we had rented, the one that features in the film. One day, between takes, Anika hit play on the van's stereo, and suddenly the Pet Shop Boys a funny coincidence, given the ideas of our film) started blasting through the speakers. Anika began dancing behind the wheel, so I quickly grabbed the camera and shot the scene. I immediately realized that this should be in the movie as her ‘comfort song’ - maybe the one CD they have around, or a song she would constantly return to, playing it over and over in the van. And then our Spanish co-producers performed a miracle by managing to acquire the rights to the song.

CS - Beyond the theme of communication and the barriers that stand in our way, what particular message or meditation do you hope audiences will take away from this very unique film?

IF - If you feel lonely, go to the movies and you'll find out that you are not.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Iván Fund was born in San Cristóbal, Argentina in 1984. His films have screened at festivals such as Cannes (Un Certain Regard), Venice, Berlinale, San Sebastian, Rotterdam, Viennale, BFI London, Busan, BAFICI, Havana, Neighboring Scenes at Lincoln Center, Lima, and Mar del Plata, among others, earning various awards. In addition to directing his own projects, he works as a screenwriter, producer, cinematographer and editor. His latest film, *The Message*, participated in San Sebastian's WIP Latam 2024 and will premiere in the Official Competition of Berlinale 2025.



DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

2025 - *THE MESSAGE* (EL MENSAJE)

feature film, fiction / Berlinale Competition 2025

2021 - *DUSK STONE* (PIEDRA NOCHE)

feature film, fiction / Venice Days 2021

2018 - *THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS*

(*VENDRÁN LLUVIAS SUAVES*)

feature film, fiction / Mar Del Plata 2018, Special Jury Prize

2017 - *TOUBLANC*

feature film, fiction / BAFICI 2017

2015 - *THE ORGANISM* (EL ORGANISMO)

Medium-length film, documentary / Mar Del Plata 2015

2014 - *THE AMAZEMENT* (EL ASOMBRO)

feature film, documentary / Mar del Plata 2014

2013 - *AB*

feature film, documentary / BAFICI 2013

2012 - *I GOT LOST A WEEK AGO*

(*ME PERDÍ HACE UNA SEMANA*)

feature film, fiction / Mar Del Plata 2012

2011 - *TODAY I FELT NO FEAR* (HOY NO TUVE MIEDO)

feature film, fiction / BAFICI 2011 Best Photography

2010 - *THE LIPS* (LOS LABIOS)

feature film, fiction

Cannes Un Certain Regard 2010, Best Actress

2009 - *THE LAUGH* (LA RISA)

feature film, fiction / BAFICI Competition 2009



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