



76. Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Berlinale Generation

Sad Girlz

(CHICAS TRISTES)

COLECTIVO COLMENA PRESENTS IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH POTENZA PRODUCCIONES, MONTGÓ FILMS, PROMENADES FILMS, MARTINI SHOT FILMS AND CTT EXP & RENTALS SUPPORTED BY EFICINE I.L.S.R. 189, ICAA, CNC, AIDE AUX CINÉMAS DU MONDE, SACEM
 "SAD GIRLZ" ROCÍO GUZMÁN, DARANA ÁLVAREZ, TATSUMI MILORI, TOMÁS GARCÍA, RAÚL VILLEGAS, LUCIO LEMUS AND MÓNICA DEL CARMEN CASTING BY MICHELLE BETANCOURT, PAULINA ÁLVAREZ SOUND DESIGN ALEJANDRO CASTILLO, EVA VALIÑO SOUND MIXER ALIN BRINDIS
 ORIGINAL SCORE BY WISSAM HOJEIJ ORIGINAL SONGS BY MISSEX MUSIC PRODUCTION BY SEBASTIÁN CÁRDENAS VESGA "SONIDO SAN FRANCISCO" POST-PRODUCTION CASSIANA UMETSU EDITOR JOSÉ PABLO ESCAMILLA MAKE UP & HAIR DESIGN DANIELA LANDA COSTUME DESIGN DANIELA GUARDADO
 PRODUCTION DESIGN SELVA TULIÁN DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ROSA HADIT HERNÁNDEZ PRODUCED BY CARLO D'URSI, SAMUEL CHAUVIN, ARACELI VELÁZQUEZ AND DANIEL LOUSTAUNAU
 WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY FERNANDA TOVAR



POTENZA
PRODUCCIONES

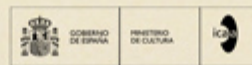
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Colectivo Colmena presents

In co-production with Potenza Producciones, Montgó Films, Promenades Films,
Martini Shot Films, CTT Exp & Rentals

Sad Girls

Mexico / Spain / France, 2026, 90 min.

A film by
Fernanda Tovar

World premiere @



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Press Notes

Further press materials can be downloaded [HERE](#).

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Logline

La Maestra and Paula are inseparable friends and the strongest swimmers on their team, until an incident at a party forces them to choose between silence and speaking out, testing the limits of their friendship.

Synopsis

Paula and La Maestra are sixteen and inseparable. They train together over the summer to represent Mexico at the Junior Pan American Swimming Championship and are the strongest swimmers on their team. One night, at a party, Paula ends up alone with Daniel, a good friend and her longtime crush. Amid reggaetón, flirting, and shots, Paula and Daniel slip into the bathroom together.

Soon after, La Maestra senses that something has changed. Paula seems distant and deeply sad. At first, she insists nothing is wrong, but La Maestra keeps pushing until her friend begins to talk about what happened that night. Searching for answers, they try to name the experience, and what they find feels devastating.

As the two girls respond in different ways, their bond is put to the test. Paula needs time, while La Maestra feels compelled to speak up. Fear, guilt, and anger begin to fracture their friendship, pushing them toward a decision that will redefine who they are, together and apart.



About director Fernanda Tovar



Fernanda Tovar (Mexico City, 1991) is a director, screenwriter, and member of Colectivo Colmena. She graduated from the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC) and took part in Berlinale Talents Guadalajara and Berlinale Talents Latin America in 2020. Her short film **‘My Age, Yours, and the Age of the World’** participated in the Semaine de la Critique de Cannes in 2022 and received a Special Mention at the Morelia International Film Festival. In 2024, her short film **‘I Want to Violently Crash into the Windshield of Love’** premiered at the Tribeca Festival. **‘Sad Girlz’** is her debut feature film.

Filmography Fernanda Tozar

Quiero estrellarme en seco contra el parabrisas del amor (I Want to Violently Crash Into the Windshield of Love)

14 min. | 2024 | Fiction, Short film

Tribeca Film Festival, 2024 | 64 Festival Internacional de Cine de Cartagena de Indias, 2024 | Morelia International Film Festival, 2024

El fuego que hemos construido (The Fire We've Built)

13 min. | 2023 | Fiction, Short film

Morelia International Film Festival, 2023 | International Festival of New Latin American Cinema of Havana, 2023 | Cinélatino - Toulouse Latin American Film Festival, 2024 | Guanajuato International Film Festival, 2024

Mi edad, la tuya y la edad del mundo (My Age, Yours, and the Age of the World)

28 min. | 2021 | Fiction, Short film

Semaine de la Critique, Cannes Film Festival, 2022 | Morelia International Film Festival - Special Mention, 2021 | José Rovirosa Prize UNAM - Special Mention, 2021 | Monterrey Film Festival - Best Student Short Film | 2021



Interview with Fernanda Tozar

You've been developing 'Sad Girlz' (Chicas Tristes) for seven years and up to a point, the film was called 'Sad Girl' (Una Chica Triste), in the singular. What's the reason behind the plural in the title?

It was a mentor in the Next Step Workshop of Semaine de la Critique who asked me why my project is called 'Sad Girl', if there are two sad girls – they were right to point that out! Growing up, I thought women were sad in general. I saw sadness as a characteristic of womanhood in a way, and even growing up in Mexico with the dramatic influences of the telenovela culture, I never knew why exactly that was. I guess 'Sad Girlz' both shows and hides that reason. But more importantly, I wanted to highlight a contrast between the title and the actual film – okay, it's sad, but it's also a lot of other things. I remember reading somewhere a testimony from an abuse survivor, who wrote that she felt that her right to happiness was stolen after the abuse – similarly the characters are “happy” girls at first, and then they are “sad” girls, so the film asks: “Why are they sad? Why are we all sad?” There is the possibility of feeling joyful and bright again.

You're part of Colectivo Colmena, a filmmaking collective based in Mexico city, where you work on each other's films in various roles. How did working as part of a collective help you craft a debut feature which pays so much attention to a character's loneliness and the importance of togetherness?

Colmena is a space for us to question the conventional hierarchy in the film industry, for example when you as a director cannot afford to show doubt and insecurity. In those cases, we welcome it and we try to solve the problem together; it's more like having companions, sharing the creative process and working together throughout. 'Sad Girlz' is the fourth Colmena film and we're now also distributing films [in Mexico], since our main goal is to be completely independent from the industry chain. I had started writing alone,

and then I met them as part of Talents Guadalajara. We've been working together since and I've felt more confident to follow my heart, with what the images or whole scenes would look like, especially those more silent and emotionally charged, would stand by themselves. I'm the only female member of the collective, so it was a challenge to draw from my own teenage years and the time I spent alone then, to evoke how that felt and to put it down on the page in a way they understood as well. That experience really helped me push myself to develop the script through the feelings behind every scene.

A relationship between two teenage girls is always so fraught and special at the same time. What was it about this dynamic that made you want to tell the story through the characters of Paula and La Maestra who are best friends and competitors at the same time?

When I started writing, 'Sad Girlz' was shaping up to be a film about gender violence and its gray areas, in the life of teenagers. During the pandemic, however, a lot changed both in the world and inside of me as well. I have a very clear image of going to International Women's Day March (8th March) in Mexico, and seeing young girls shouting for justice and against violence; when I was 15, I wasn't thinking about justice, about my rights, or gender violence. It wasn't a concept for me, but I suddenly wanted to know more about how young girls see these ideas today. Firstly, there's also the difference between how it is in theory—having to report abuse when it happens and speaking up—and the actual reality of going through it, and secondly, friendship is often considered secondary to romantic relationships, which I don't think is true. Your friends are who you choose to share your life with, without similar commitments or responsibility: it's just because you want to. As a teen, your identity is built around and reflected through your friends, in a way, so what would happen, if you have to make a choice of how to deal with abuse, in a relationship that is so intense, even in itself? That was the point when I realised I'd found the kernel of what I was really passionate about; that premise touched my heart deeply, it let me connect to my own experiences of learning what it means to be a woman, together with my friends. In a way, 'Sad Girlz' is a film for my friends.

All of this is made more apparent through the role of sport as a framework for Paula and La Maestra who are both on the qualifying swimming team. More than it being just a narrative framework, what brought you to this particular sport discipline?

I wanted the story to develop in a closed community: if something like what happens to Paula is caused by a random guy, it sucks, but there's a good thing about never seeing the perpetrator again. But if it's your friend and you're both part of this closed community, it's much harder to process and overcome. Another thing is that I want my characters to have dreams: Paula and La Maestra dream about going to compete in Brazil, they're motivated in swimming practice and are learning Portuguese outside of it. I wanted them to have a dream, which would then be at stake later in the film. So many of the conversations around gender violence sideline important, core needs, like: what about our spaces? What about our dreams? I chose swimming specifically because it's a sport that makes you vulnerable in a way that not many sports do—you not only have to undress in front of others, but you also have to be in your swimming suit at all times. The bodily relationship to swimming is different from other sports, which I felt gave some vulnerability to the film and to the characters.

How did you approach filming the underwater scenes in the film, since they are often long and expressive?

On the one hand, it was tough because making an independent film is financially restrictive, while shooting underwater is very expensive. Naturally, we planned a lot, since we wanted not only for those scenes to be effective, but to show how the language of the camera changes: from fixed and stable to handheld underwater, evoking a sense of freedom for the characters. On the other hand, our cinematographer, Rosa Hadit, who specialises in filming underwater, is like a mermaid with a camera! She is extremely sensitive and has a great intuition of how to make things work – I'm amazed by the work she did. In terms of how we worked, Rosa was underwater, together with a scuba diver who helped her with the camera, but it was nighttime and the water was cold. The girls [Rocio Guzmán and

Darana Álvarez] could only swim for like 15 minutes before they had to rest and get warm, while also having a double for the wider shots. They were so dedicated – neither of them had swam like this before and they trained for three months before we started filming.

The enormous amount of trust and intuition that you all shared translates on the screen. This is especially true of the young actresses, Rocio Guzmán and Darana Álvarez. What was the process of casting them and how did you know they will be La Maestra and Paula?

We did the casting together with Michel Betancourt and Paulina Alvarez in Mexico. And actually, Darana, who plays Paula, was the first girl to show up. Rocio, who plays La Maestra, came in to audition for the role of Paula at first, but the moment I saw her, I knew she would be perfect for La Maestra. When we paired them, they did an improv which was so good that I later wrote it in, and it made it into the film – I was completely taken away, when I first saw them together. They had the right amount of both complicity and confrontation, which was needed. During a long rehearsal process we did a lot of acting exercises for them to build up trust, and I also took part in them. Some of them were physical—looking each other in the eye for a long time, or touching each other's hands—and I wanted to be present and vulnerable too, for them to trust me.

Films like ‘Sad Girlz’ can offer a space for reflection and even a newly-conjured memory of something you [the viewer] lacked back then as a teenager. It seems to me that an adult writer-director would develop a special relationship with young actors and find themselves surprised by this new generation of women: that some things have changed, but others remain the same in time. Was your experience in any way similar?

What surprised me the most was discovering how much they know about life! At first, I expected to have to explain to them the thing that happens to Paula as a character, her motivations for not reporting the abuse, or why La Maestra felt so compelled to do something about it. I didn't have to explain anything to them, in fact, they were the ones explaining stuff to me! Another

thing that surprised me was how attuned the boys in the cast were – during the rehearsal process they suspected something was wrong with the character of Paula, but they didn't know, so they improvised around it very well, as if they knew. Afterwards, many of them said they, too, have had some experience or know someone who has experience of abuse and they felt empathy when it was awkward – wanting to say something comforting but also feeling like there is a wall between them that would make it impossible for them to reach Paula. I found that beautiful and heartbreaking at the same time. The whole experience gave me hope in the new generations, who are growing up in such complex times – young people are really smart and are trying really hard to be empathetic; they understand what's going on and don't need explanations. I was rewriting the script with this in mind, they gave me so much and I gave them the raw materials to build something [e.g. characters], but they were the ones doing the building.

The girls' phones, social media, voice messages, and even chat GPT play a big role in the narrative. Apart from them being useful tools in young peoples' lives, how did you calibrate how much to show and conceal while still honoring the privacy between the two main characters?

It was a challenge because from the very beginning, I've felt it was most important to respect the characters, especially Paula. It was a rule we had during the editing stage: the audience should be learning things alongside the characters, as they discover what has happened. In that way, the pacing was mostly tuned to La Maestra: first she realises something is off with her friend, but she doesn't really know what, then she is afraid to ask. Instead of a reveal, Paula just spells out what happened, but she's not giving it a definition. That's when they look up the definition of what happened online. That's what happens with social media and chat GPT — you get a black-or-white answer for your existential questions, while the reality is not so binary. If Chat GPT condemns what happened, that's it, and that changes their life, even if that is what has actually happened. It's just some cold, hard words, and that's it. There is no human empathy and no warmth. I sometimes feel that as AI continues to advance, the human aspects of life will become increasingly precious. So my main goal was to show that, the

actual bright things that end up saving your life in those confusing and impossible to define moments. I don't have the answers, just the questions.

How did you work on translating the respect and care for the characters in visual terms?

I always knew we were making a film about a topic that is difficult and sad, so it was important to do it in the most loving, caring, respectful way possible. I talked to the actors about this all the time, to the DOP, to the editor. Whenever we felt lost, we asked ourselves: what's the most loving way to say or show this? And we went for that. For example, the “morning after” scene, when Paula wakes up after the party. She can't sleep, lays there with eyes open, with La Maestra sleeping next to her. Then, she grabs her phone, scrolls, leaves it aside, and gets up to leave the frame. The way we staged and shot it, there was no privacy for her. When we were editing, I felt that one way of editing this scene was confusing and the other was too invasive, giving it all away. What we did was shift the point of view to be entirely on La Maestra's face and give Paula more privacy during the first part of the film, as she is trying to understand what has happened to her. That way the audience could see her enough to notice that something is wrong, but she also has somewhere to hide. She has the right to hide it: from us and from her friend, while deciding what to do.

Interview by Savina Petkova, January 2026

About Colectivo Cosmena

Colectivo Colmena is a Mexico City based collective of filmmakers that approaches cinema as a tool for personal and collective transformation. Their work is rooted in collaboration, alternative production models, and a commitment to bold, emotionally resonant, and deeply human stories.

In 2023, Colectivo Colmena received a Special Jury Mention at the Morelia International Film Festival, recognizing their contribution to contemporary Mexican cinema. Their films have screened internationally at major festivals including Venice, Locarno, Berlin, and Tribeca.

The collective is currently developing projects such as **Dios y la cumbia del Diablo** by Carlos Lenin and **Adiós a Satán** by José Pablo Escamilla.



Cast

Rocio Guzmán
Darana Álvarez
Tatsumi Milori
Tomás García Agraz
Mónica del Carmen
Raúl Villegas
Lucio Lemus
Luisa Almaguer
Andrea Camacho
Áyax
Óscar Lever
Mario Flores
Héctor “Toch” Kuri
Daniel Aranzubia

La Maestra
Paula
Raz
Mario
Valeria
Esteban
Daniel
Mujer canta Karaoke
Carmen
Laura
Chancas
Raúl
Pedro
Carlos

Crew

Director & Writer	Fernanda Tovar
Cinematography	Rosa Hadit Hernández
Editing	José Pablo Escamilla
Music	Wissam Hojeij
Original Songs	Carolina Torres Topaga, Sebastián Cárdenas Vesga (Sonido San Francisco)
Sound Design, re-recording mixer	Alejandro Castillo, Eva Valiño
Sound Supervisor	Eva Valiño
Location Sound	Alin Brindis
Production Design	Selva Tulián
Costumes	Daniela Guardado
Make-Up	Daniela Landa
Casting	Michelle Betancourt, Paulina Álvarez Muñoz
Production	Daniel Loustau, Araceli Velázquez (Colectivo Colmena, Mexico)
Co-production	Carlo D'Ursi (Potenza Producciones, Spain), Montgó Films, Samuel Chauvin (Promenades Films, France), Martini Shot Films and CTT Exp & Rentals
World Sales	Alpha Violet

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