

FERNAND MELGAR

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Fernand Melgar was born into a family of Spanish unionists exiled to Tangiers (Morocco). His parents smuggled him in with them when, in 1963, they emigrated to Switzerland as seasonal labourers. In the early eighties, he cut short his business studies in order to found, together with several friends, the *Cabaret Orwell* in Lausanne, soon a mecca for French-speaking Switzerland's underground culture; later, he created the internationally renowned rock music venue *La Dolce Vita*, also in Lausanne. After endowing the latter night spot with a programme of creative video projections, he became a self-taught, freelance film director and producer. In 1983, he began shooting various experimental films and iconoclastic reportages for television. In 1985 he joined Climage, a collective under whose auspices he has directed his documentaries, many considered as benchmarks on the topics of immigration and identity. He has also edited several of Jacqueline Veuve's films, including her *Le Journal de Rivesaltes*, awarded the Swiss Film Award 1998. His documentary *Exit – The Right to Die* has garnered several international awards, including the prestigious EBU Golden Link Award 2006 for the Best European Coproduction, and the 2006 Swiss Film Award. In 2008, his documentary *The Fortress* receives the Golden Leopard at the International Film Festival Locarno (Filmmakers of the present competition). His film *Special Flight* was shot in 2011 at a detention center and honoured internationally with numerous awards, among them the Swiss Film Award 2012 for Best Documentary Film. In *The World Is Like That* (2013) Fernand Melgar recounts the fates of some of the protagonists of Special Flight following their expulsion from Switzerland. His latest documentary *The Shelter* is set in an emergency shelter in Lausanne.

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Fernand Melgar, Our Fellow Man

Reminiscing over the little joys and big worries connected with the Spanish immigration, by paging through **Family Album** (Album de famille). Sharing the laughter and anxieties of **Induction Class** (Classe d'accueil) students come from four different cultural horizons to the Switzerland of their dreams. In **Storm in a C-Cup** (Remue-ménage), getting to know Pascal, who repairs car-bodies in a little provincial town and likes to cross-dress. Joining in the emotions of the **First Day** (Premier jour), at school or with a newly-adopted child. Staring death in the face in **Exit – The Right to Die** (Exit – le droit de mourir), beside those who have decided to cut short their suffering by departing this life.

Otherness is the common denominator of all these films. Fernand Melgar loves people, and every one of his films testifies to his desire to reach out to them. This gift of empathy harks back to the childhood of this Lausanne-based filmmaker.

HIS FIRST CINEMATOGRAPHIC MEMORIES are of summer vacations in Spain: two to three times a week, he would attend outdoor film screenings featuring films by Cantinflas, the popular Mexican comedian, amidst a joyous hubbub, with excited children running here and there. The viewers would converse, laugh, and munch on pipas.

The extreme conviviality of these screenings left an indelible mark on little Fernando. For want of a cinematographic background, he developed a sense of the festive. To his mind, if films are meant for reflection, they also incite encounters and conviviality. "I couldn't make films any other way." When travelling to Oslo, Prague, Spain or Portugal for screenings of his film **Exit**, he looked forward to meeting people, to exchanging ideas, to feeling that "we all belong to the same humanity. That's my incentive for making films."

ONE THEME UNDERLIES ALL OF MELGAR'S FILMS injustice – a theme rooted in his experience as an immigrant. The filmmaker also inherited a heightened awareness of the social values that his two grandfathers – both Spanish anarcho-syndicalists who left for Morocco in the '30s – spent a lifetime defending. Melgar never knew these two great figures, but in his own way he carries on their commitment. "I have within me a family mythology that is also a reality. I feel deep respect for my fellow humans. I have a chance to speak out strongly, I share it with those who have no say whatsoever."

2014	L'abri (documentary)
2013	Le monde est comme ça (documentary)
2011	Vol spécial (documentary)
2008	La forteresse (documentary)
2006	Limites invisibles (short documentary)
2005	La vallée de la jeunesse (short documentary)
	Le puit (video installation)
	Exit – le droit de mourir (documentary)
2003	«J» (short documentary)
	À l'arrière (short documentary, co-director: Grégoire Mayor)
	À table (short documentary, co-director: Grégoire Mayor,) all from the collection «L'histoire, c'est moi»
2002	Remue-ménage (documentary)
2003	Collection Premier Jour (10 short documentaries)
1998	Classe d'accueil (documentary)
1997	Fous du jeu (short documentary, from the collection «Les frissons du hasard»)
1995	Malika (short documentary, from the collection «Lorsque mon heure viendra»)
1993	Album de famille (documentary)
	Chante, jeunesse! (short documentary, from the collection «Photo de classe»)
1991	Je zappe, donc je suis (documentary)
1990	Chroniques cathodiques (co-director, documentary)
1987	L'homme-nu (short documentary)
1986	Le musée imaginaire (short documentary)
	Primeurs (20 experimental films)
1983	Performance au Musée Deutsch (short documentary)

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> Fernand Melgar, Our Fellow Man

Born in Tangier in 1961, Fernand Melgar was two years old when he arrived in Switzerland. He grew up in a suburb of Lausanne where, like all immigrant children, he was the butt of countless shenanigans, taunts and ostracisms. **Family Album** (Album de famille) of 1993 is a highly sensitive account of that early struggle to become integrated. "The Swiss were not bad people," the filmmaker's mother comments. "They just thought we were inferior, that we had no soul, no conscience."

Worse was yet to come with the popular initiatives launched by Zurich's Parliamentary deputy James Schwarzenbach against the "over-foreignization" of Switzerland. Although rejected by the people, this xenophobic attempt inflicted a wound on the immigrants that would never heal. Affected by the Swiss virus of every man for himself, the Spanish community began thinking of emigrating, losing its smile in the process.

MEANWHILE FERNANDITO had become Fernand, acquiring the native (canton of Vaud) accent and on his way to degree in business management. He planned to become a certified public accountant. Miraculously, things began moving in Lausanne. The youth of Vaud's capital city, a grey concrete bastion of boredom, was fed up and, in 1980, hit the streets. After a few skirmishes, the city heard them out and granted them a *Centre autonome* (alternative culture venue).

Amidst all these goings-on, Fernand found his career track. He came to cinema via the video-tape. In the early '80s, this new support – cheap, lightweight, subversive and rock 'n roll – allowed many a beginner to learn the trade. Albeit not without incurring the disapproval of certain establishment filmmakers, for whom video represented the 'AIDS of imagery'. Under the auspices of the *Cabaret Orwell* and, later, *La Dolce Vita* – two legendary night spots where all Lausanne would let loose – Melgar featured selections that were less commercial than the clips that were gaining ground at the time: his was an eclectic choice of art video films mixing such trailblazers as Bill Viola and Nam June Paik with sketches.

IN 1985, FERNAND MELGAR joined several other video makers – Alex Mayenfisch, Yves Krompt and Antoine Jaccoud – to form the collective Climage (later also joined by Stéphane Goël). "No dogma, nor any editorial policy, but a shared sensibility, a grouping of neurasthenic individuals able to function together. It's not so much friendship that united us, but our work needs. Friendship came later, so we could stand each other." In over twenty years of activity, this fraternal union in Lausanne has produced not only Melgar's films, but also *La conquête du temps libre* (Leisure Time) and *La moitié de la gloire* (Half the Glory by Mayenfisch), and *Campagne perdue* (Lost Countryside), *Le poison* (The Poison) and *Le garçon s'appelait Apache* (The Boy's Name Was Apache) by Goël. "Always

Vol spécial

2013 Muestra de Cine y Derechos Humanos Zaragoza 2013 : Premio Público

2012 Prix Europa Berlin: Grand Prix IRIS; Festival international du film des droits de l'homme Tunis: Grand prix meilleur long métrage; Fünf Seen Filmfestival Gilching: Horizonte Filmpreis; Crossing Europe Filmfestival Linz, FEDEORA Award für Dokumentarfilme; Swiss Film Award: Best Documentary Film; Festival International du Film des Droits de l'Homme de Paris, Prix du Jury Lycéens et Apprentis de Paris pour les Droits de l'Homme; One World Human Rights Film Festival Prague: The Best Film Award; Prix Italia - Documentari d'attualità; San Sebastian Human Rights Film Festival, Grand Prix Amnesty International; Solothurner Filmtage: Prix de Soleure; Silverdocs Documentary Festival AFI Washington: Special World Feature Jury Mention; This Human World Int. Filmfestival der Menschenrechte Wien: One World Filmclubs Award

2011 Festival des Libertés Bruxelles, Mention spéciale du Jury & Mention spéciale Fédération internationale des droits de l'homme; Festival del film Locarno: Prix du Jury Oecuménique & Prix du Jury des Jeunes; Watch Docs Human Rights International Film Festival, Warsaw: Grand Prix

La forteresse

2009 Swiss Film Award: Nomination Best Documentary Film; Award of Excellence, Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, Japan; Jury Special Mention: Human rights competition, Bafici, Buenos Aires Festival International de Cine Independiente; Swiss Movie Pearls 08/09, Locarno; Horizonte Price, Fünf Seen Filmfestival, Gilching, Germany

2008 Golden Leopard (Filmmakers of the present competition), 61st International Film Festival Locarno; Grand Prix, 2nd Cinema Verite – Iran International Documentary Film Festival, Teheran; Camera-Style Award (Grand Prix) and Jury Special Mention for editing (Karine Sudan), 11th Rencontres Internationales du Documentaire de Montréal; Audience Award and Special Mention, 49th Festival dei Popoli, Florence, Italy

Loin derrière la montagne

2007 Winner of the screenplay competition «Grand Public» (open to the public), awarded by Télévision Suisse Romande

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documentaries, because true-life provides stories that are far stronger than those that fiction has to propose.” Or because, as Melgar quotes the Chilean filmmaker Patricio Guzmán “a country without documentaries is like a family without a photo album”.

In 2005, a first Climage production was released: the excellent **Exit – le droit de mourir** (Exit – The Right to Die). Melgar’s interest was aroused by France 2 TV’s reportage on “death tourism,” in which a woman cancer patient from Lyon (France) travels to Zurich in order to take a lethal potion. Melgar inquired into assisted suicide, which Switzerland is the only country in the world to authorize, thanks to a legal loophole. The Geneva Exit association agreed to his following their volunteers – those providers of solace, those flesh-and-blood angels.

MELGAR SPENT TWO YEARS WITHIN THE EXIT ASSOCIATION, capturing on film – with all due discreetness and empathy – the face of suffering, the reality of the void and an immensely humane attitude. “I was afraid of slipping into voyeurism, or pathos. I wanted to avoid being so overwhelmed by emotion that we would forget the main thing: to look our own death straight in the face. I encourage viewers to think. To say to themselves: ‘This person on the screen is my father, is my brother, is myself’...”

“To think about death is to think about freedom: he who has learned to die has unlearned slavery.” Seneca

Rarely has a film inspired such a feeling of fraternity. Having at first promised himself not to shoot the very last moments, Melgar ended up realizing that he had no right to back out at that point, to break the contract of trust binding him to the sick persons. Hence he was there on the day that Micheline took leave of life. He shows the gestures accomplished by Dr. Sobel, which bespeak great spiritual loftiness, and lets us hear his words of peace. When Micheline closed her eyes forever, Fernand the Unbeliever bent to pray: “I was in a spiritual mood like I have rarely been. A moment of humanism when one can believe in a reality that is beyond us.”

Exit is not a film on death, but a film on life. A film that inspires thinking in sociological and metaphysical terms. That reintroduces the sacred into a profane society. That helps us say our good-byes. Deservedly indeed, the Solothurn Film Festival awarded this luminous film the 2006 Swiss Film Prize for Best Documentary Film – the Swiss equivalent of an Oscar!

LIKE OTHER DOCUMENTARY MAKERS, Melgar is also attracted to fiction – “which is to the documentary what the writer is to the journalist.” He has written a first version of **Loin derrière la montagne** (Far Behind the Mountain) a story on immigration within the intimacy of a family. Fiction, however, is an enormous machine that it takes a long time to get going. Because he is impatient by

AWARDS (SELECTION)

Exit – le droit de mourir

2007 Special Jury Mention Eurodoc, Oslo

2006 Swiss Film Award for Best Documentary Film; Pathé Film Critics' Prize; Special Jury Mention, Inter-national Francophone Film Festival, Namur; EBU Award for Best European Co-production

Remue-ménage

2003 «Traces de vie» Film Festival Award, Clermont-Ferrand

Collection «Premier jour»

2003 TV5 Prize International Film and Television Festival «Cinéma Tout Ecran»; Geneva Audience Prize; Winterthur Short Film Festival: Shortlisted twice for the Swiss Film Prize for Best Short Film Quality Award, conferred by the Federal Office of Culture

Classe d'accueil

1999 Young Creators' Prize, awarded by the Canton of Vaud Foundation for Artistic Promotion and Creation

1998 Youth Prize, North-South Media Encounters (NSME), Geneva

Album de Famille

1996 International Labor Organization Prize, North-South Media Festival, for Best Film on social justice

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Lausanne on 4 October 1957. Degree in French Literature. Freelance mandates as illustrator and/or editor with alternative culture magazines (*Combat*, *Non-violent*, *Rebrousse-Poil*) and specialized reviews (*Music Scene*). Music critic for the Swiss newspaper *24 Heures*. From 1981 to 2011, cultural journalist specialized in cinema for the Swiss magazine *L'Hebdo*. Since summer 2011, he has been writing for the cultural column of the Swiss daily *Le Temps*.

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nature, he cannot bear to remain inactive. While waiting for the producers to find partners, he has returned to his first love, his unflagging need of a real-life incentive.

Since reality fuels fiction, Melgar took to hanging around the town of Vallorbe [on the Franco-Swiss border], at the *Soupe populaire* [soup-for-the-poor] and at one of the four "CEPs" [immigrant reception and registration centres]. It is here, in this "bottleneck", that he is shooting **The Fortress** (La forteresse), in this place where asylum-seekers spend some 60 days before "hearing themselves kindly being told no."

Assailing the feigned naïveté of some as much as the xenophobia of others, the filmmaker quotes Durrenmatt's reflection in the matter: "Switzerland is a prison whose inhabitants are at once its guards and its inmates." It is not his intention to conduct an investigation, but to observe the government machine and the migratory flow between the world of the affluent and the damned of the earth. "My job is not to stir up controversy, but to propose a subject of reflection. Switzerland is not a racist country, but it tends to define itself by excluding others. The question raised in **The Fortress** is: Can we go on arming ourselves? Will building walls suffice to protect ourselves against the world?"

SWISS CINEMA IS CHANGING. Cured of its complexes, it is indulging in bold new forms, venturing beyond its borders, speaking more freely about money. Melgar notes these changes with interest; he feels that the new wind starting to blow is "extremely positive." He agrees that it is important "to shake the coconut tree, but we must be careful not to transform Swiss cinema into a liberal little business undertaking. Our country's existence is also a matter of heterogeneity, of teeming activities. Neither *Climage* nor I would exist were it not for this specificity of Swiss cinema."

"You Swiss, you defy classification!" is what the French professionals sometimes have to say about us. Truly, indeed, nothing resembles one French film so much as another French film. Whereas in Switzerland, you'll find *War Photographer* by Christian Frei, *Das Fräulein* by Andrea Staka, *L'Usine* (The Factory) by Alex Mayenfisch, *Qué viva Mauricio Demierre* by Stéphane Goël, *Alpine Fire* (Höhenfeuer) by Fredi M. Murer... Fernand Melgar speaks excitedly: "In this country, we have genius. The 'genius of the mountain pastures'! So we'd better watch out that our films don't end up like those Alpine flowers on endangered species posters!"

Pausing to think for a moment, he adds: "If I make films, it's because I'm a 'lonesome cowboy'. Everything is possible here..." So says the son of an immigrant. Antoine Duplan, May 2007

Written and directed by: Fernand Melgar
Cinematography: Fernand Melgar

Sound: Elise Shubs, Jérôme Cuendet, Etienne Curchod
Editing: Karine Sudan, Ruis Pires

Art Direction: Janka Rahm Melgar
Production: Climage, Lausanne; RTS Radio Télévision Suisse; SRG SSR

World Sales: Climage, Lausanne
Original Version: French (german/english subtitles)

Observational documentarian Fernand Melgar bolsters his status as Swiss cinema's social conscience with *The Shelter* (*L'Abri*), chronicling the lively nights at an "emergency" facility for the homeless in his home city Lausanne. [...] An affecting, clear-eyed depiction of the economic crisis's cruel social effects [...] Neil Young, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 30.08.2014

Melgar brings us closer to these men of the shadows who maintain their dignity, who cling to their humanity, at all costs. By avoiding unnecessary paternalism in order to focus instead on cinema's ability to "open windows onto the world", *The Shelter* places us in the face of defeat, the defeat of an entire society incapable of relating to others.

Georgia Del Don, *Cineuropa.org*, 12.08.2014



2014 | DCP | colour | 100' | L'abri

It is winter at an emergency shelter for the homeless in Lausanne. Every night at the door of this little-known basement facility the same entry ritual takes place, resulting in confrontations which can sometimes turn violent. Those on duty at the shelter have the difficult task of "triaging the poor": the women and children first, then the men. Although the total capacity at the shelter is 100, only 50 "chosen ones" will be admitted inside and granted a warm meal and a bed. The others know it will be a long night.

Directed by: Fernand Melgar
Written by: Fernand Melgar,
Cinematography: Fernand Melgar,
Denis Jutzeler

Editing: Janine Waeber, in
Collaboration with Claude Muret,
Janka Rahm Melgar

Sound: Elise Shubs, Christophe
Giovannoni, Jérôme Cuendet
Production: Climage, RTS Radio
Télévision Suisse, ARTE

World Rights: Climage,
Original Version: French (german/
french/english/italian/spanish sub-
titles)

The nearly one-hour film *Le monde est comme ça* is the continuation of Melgar's documentary film *Vol special*, which was honoured with the "Prix de Soleure" last year. (...) In the film, Fernand Melgar concentrates on listening. Instead of addressing prison as an institution, he renders palpable the migrants' inner despair. Melgar is a man on a mission, who wants to lend the voiceless a voice. Pascal Blum, *Der Sonntag*, 13.01.2013



| 2013 | DCP | colour | 51' | Le monde est comme ça

The film recounts the fates of five of the protagonists of the film **Special Flight** following their expulsion from Switzerland. Having been wrenched away from the country in which they had lived and from their children because they had no papers, they are found again in Senegal or Kosovo, in Gambia or Cameroun, destitute and cut off from their families, sometimes even having been tortured upon arrival. This film broaches the private lives of these broken men and testifies to the brutality of a migration policy that is common in Switzerland and in Europe.

Script: Fernand Melgar
Cinematographer: Denis Jutzeler

Sound: Christophe Giovannoni, Jürg Lempen
Editing: Karine Sudan

Music: Wandifa Njie
Production: Climage, Lausanne; RTS
Radio Télévision Suisse; SRG SSR;
Arte

World Rights: Climage, Lausanne
Original Version: French (subtitles:
german, english)
www.volspecial.ch

Thanks to the honesty and clarity of the stated facts, this film avoids all demagoguery in its revelation of the humanly revolting conditions surrounding the special flights. The individual destinies that Fernand Melgar handles are endowed with a rare emotional intensity and, formally, the resulting film does full honor to the cinema of the real.

Jean-Louis Kuffer, *24 heures*, 21 August 2011

The docu's subject get under the skin, and their plight represents one of the major challenges to immigration policy not just in Switzerland, but in the First World as a whole.

Jay Weissberg, *Variety*, 16 August 2011

Melgar's cinema is non-judgemental. It does not separate the Good from the Bad; it captures life in all its contradictory drives, makes room for humor at the core of despair, reveals the truth in all its complexity, avoids the trap of prejudice, lends a face to the socially excluded, hits just where democracy hurts, [and] trusts the intelligence of its viewers. His is a socially engaged but nonetheless objective cinema.

Antoine Duplan, *Le Temps*, 15 August 2011

The film director enables us to hear the diversity of voices that, because of the categories into which they generally fall – undocumented immigrants, the socially excluded or others still – generally remain unheard, attesting to his discerning grasp of social issues.

Manouk Borzakian, *Le Monde diplomatique*, 22 August 2011



| 2011 | 35 mm | colour | 100' | Vol spécial

Awaiting definite deportment from the Swiss territory, rejected asylum seekers and illegal migrants are jailed at the administrative detention centre Frambois in Geneva. Behind the closed prison doors, tension builds day by day. On one side there are wardens full of humanist values, on the other there are men defeated by fear and stress. Relations of friendship and hate, respect and revolt are formed until the announcement of the deportment, which is experienced like a stab. Those who refuse to leave are handcuffed, tied up and forcibly put in a plane. In this extreme situation, despair has a name: *special flight*.

Script: Fernand Melgar, with the collaboration of Claude Muret
Scientific collaboration: Alice Sala

Cinematographer: Camille Cottagnoud
Sound: Marc Von Stürler
Editing: Karine Sudan

Production: Climage, Lausanne
Coproduction: TSR Télévision Suisse Romande, Genève; Télévision Suisse Italienne TSI; SSR SRG; ARTE

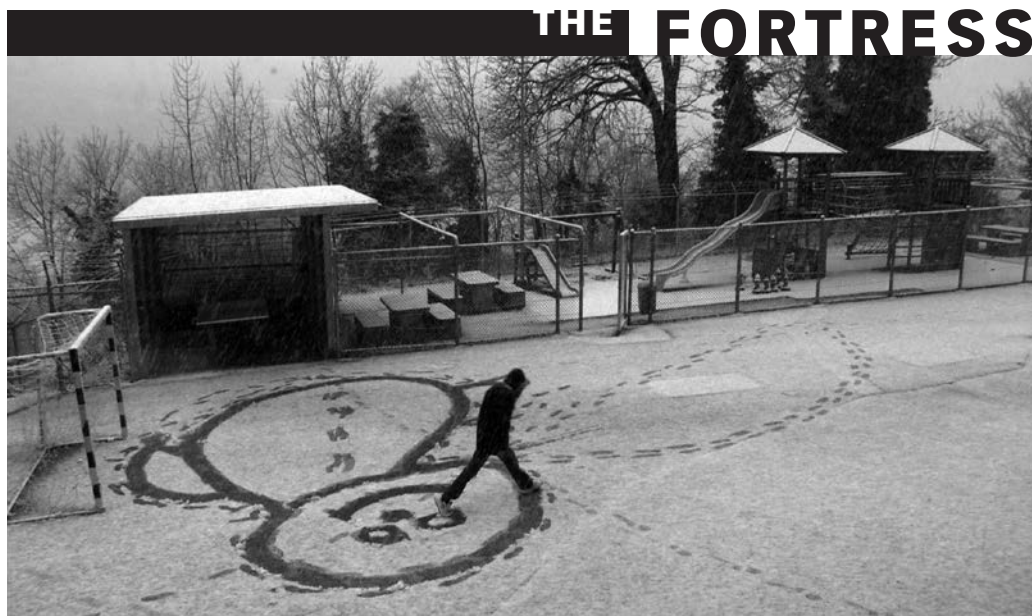
World Rights: Climage, Lausanne
Original Version: French (english subtitles)

A strong and incredible piece. [...] Agonising real-life sequences, human dramas that are created and not resolved, unique moments where the camera is forgotten: there's a touch of Depardon in Fernand Melgar's films. Except that it pushes us to think more. Without passing judgement, it presents an objectivity unaffected by the sequence of shots. [...] Fernand Melgar is quite simply one of the best Swiss documentary makers at the moment. Pascal Gavillet, *Tribune de Genève*, 11 August 2008

In the art of illustrating and questioning the current political situation, cinema could not ask for more. Martin Walder, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 13 August 2008

The Fortress is an essential film. Despite the seriousness of its message, the accuracy is exhilarating, resounding proof that the commitment does not exclude lucidity, and that it can be free of dogma. It's the rest that's the best: the director does not tell us what to think, he gives us something to think about. Thierry Meyer, *24 Heures*, 18 August 2008

A work of rare humanity.
Thierry Jobin, *Le Temps*, 11 August 2008



| 2008 | 35 mm | colour | 104' | La forteresse

Every day men, women and children from all over the world flock to Switzerland's borders. They're escaping war, dictatorship, persecution or climactic and economic disorder. After a journey that is often life-threatening, they are directed towards one of five registration and processing Centres, one of which is Vallorbe. In this austere transit zone, subjected to a system of semi-detention and enforced idleness, the applicants wait for Switzerland to decide on their fate.

Men and women, they themselves from a variety of ethnic origins, manage the day-to-day lives of these drifting human beings. They have the tough job of applying the most restrictive asylum laws in Europe, voted on by the Swiss people in 2006, and to decide who must go and who may stay.

The Fortress plunges us into the heart of this daily triage of human beings. Access to the Centre, a former luxury hotel nowadays surrounded by barbed wire, was only authorised after lengthy negotiations with the authorities. With a dense narrative that borders on fiction, the film follows its "characters" through their pain, their uncertainty and their joy. Objectively, with emotion and humour, the spectator is shown a condensed image of humanity. The film asks subtle questions about our relationships with one another as citizens, but above all as human beings. It therefore puts forward a new point of view on a currently decisive question in Europe regarding migration flows and the selective immigration intended to contain it.

"We don't know where they're from and they don't know where they're going." Ms Estrella who provides assistance

Script: Fernand Melgar
Cinematographer: Camille Cottagnoud, Stefan Bossert

Sound: Blaise Gabioud
Editing: Karine Sudan
Production: Climage, Lausanne

Coproduction: Les Productions JMH, Neuchâtel; Télévision Suisse Romande TSR, Genève; Télévision Suisse Italienne TSI; SRG SSR

World Rights: Climage, Lausanne; Les Productions JMH, Neuchâtel
Original Version: French (subtitles: english, italian, german, spanish)

It is not easy to evoke illness and death in images. Let alone suicide! Two years of total immersion in the everyday life of French-speaking Switzerland's Exit, side by side with their volunteers, have enabled Fernand Melgar to put together a documentary that is unassailable, both ethically and formally. The film brings to mind for each of us our own intimate relationship with death. Undeniably a useful film, even if it does not fall under the heading of entertainment. Likewise, it is not in a joyous state of mind that one signs up to become a member of Exit. A documentary maker who also adheres to strict rules, this Lausanne-based filmmaker goes by but two precepts: to capture life in all its reality, and to keep oneself out of the picture. We are thus forewarned: everything that goes on the screen is the strict truth, never reenacted or subjected to commentary. On such a thorny issue, every decision represents an ethical stand: distance, camera angle, duration of a shot. All the way through – from the desire to end their lives in a clear-minded fashion on the part of those who know they are condemned, to the deeply humane attitude on the part of the Exit volunteers accompanying them – the film is marked by this concern for dignity. Some of the accompanied persons are also unforgettable. One thinks of Micheline, whom the camera follows past the threshold. Is it a scandal to show that crossing? Only fools would think so. On the contrary, the film could not afford not to. *Exit – The Right to Die* discreetly lifts the veil from a taboo. That is all to its credit. One surmises however that this merely paves the way for a much broader debate. Norbert

Creutz, *Le Temps*, 7 September 2005



2005 | Betacam Digital | colour | 76' | Exit – le droit de mourir

Fernand Melgar uses the precision of the camera shots, together with their editing in terms of the time and space that define the links between the persons portrayed, to clarify the reasons and procedures underlying the decision taken by some to break the ties binding them to Life. For “direct cinema,” the challenge is enormous, for it implies gaining the acceptance of people who act and think on the fringes of generally accepted ethical rules, in order to establish close contact with them and portray their behaviour without distorting it. Here, the camera follows to the bitter end the volunteers accompanying people who, extenuated by illness and sufferance, choose the hour and means of their death. These volunteers work on behalf of Exit, an association in favour of the right to die in dignity, created in French-speaking Switzerland in 1980. Two image schemes confer an initiatory dimension to this real-life story. There are flowing shots that closely follow the movements of conversations and bodies, decoding the overriding needs for active support and compassion among the persons called upon to proceed with the gestures leading to death. The sequence of the two volunteers out for a walk in a foggy landscape punctuated by ghostly trees is staggering: it is this moment that defines the skilled rhythm of the narrative, which never jolts its viewers. Then, too, there are the most precisely framed static shots, which provide an in-depth depiction of the Association's underpinning structures – a whole world of general assemblies, of office and committee meetings. The film's merit is that of establishing at once the closeness of an empathetic outlook and the distancing of an ethnographic vantage point. Until the very end, until the extreme limit to which any movie camera can risk going, it is this duality that lends the film its ethical stance, based on aesthetic choices and gripping narratives.” Jean Perret, director Visions du Réel, International Film Festival, Nyon, April 2005

Script: Fernand Melgar
Cinematographer: Camille Cottagnoud, Aldo Munier, Pierre-Yves Borgeaud, Fernand Melgar

Sound: Blaise Gabioud
Editing: Fernand Melgar
Music: Dalida, Patrick Juvet

Production: Climage, Lausanne
Coproduction: Les Productions JMH, Neuchâtel; Télévision Suisse Romande TSR, Genève; ARTE

World Rights: Climage, Lausanne
Original Version: French (subtitles: german, english)

An admirable film that never makes voyeurs of us. Fernand Melgar captures this atypical life in discreet fashion, in all its anecdotal and moving detail. Even at the height of intimacy, the camera remains a passive observer. So it is left up to the viewers to make up their own mind. *Remue-ménage* denounces nothing, nor does it propagandize. It is, simply, a true and magnificent document. Stéphane

Gobbo, *La Liberté*, 26 August 2002

Fernand Melgar describes his work as 'direct cinema'. No staging is involved, he assures those viewers who would suspect him of fiction, so enthralled are they by the miraculous little gems of spontaneity abounding in this "storm." Their doubts can be explained, he adds, by the film's strenuous editing in compliance with the strict rules of narrative. The result is deeply moving, like the fate of his characters. It is all to the filmmaker's credit to have managed, with a camera, to document that fate with such accuracy and intelligent discretion, in the face of the psychological disaster that rocked Pascal's childhood. Christian Pellet, *Domaine Public*,

31 January 2003



2002 | Betacam digital | colour | 52' | Remue-ménage

Pascal decides which pantyhose looks best and then, following some tips from his wife Carole, puts on his make up. Recording both intimate moments and everyday scenes, Fernand Melgar spent one year following around a couple fighting to change the image outsiders have of them. Pascal, who is both a loving father and a woman dreaming of sequins and variety shows, makes no secret of the need to cross-dress. Their life is a constant battle, a combat led by all three personalities to assert their identity in the face of attacks from their families and the mockery of the village people. In covering the period extending from the birth to the first birthday of their last child, the film in itself is a birthing, a painful delivery. The sequences, each of which is meaningful, link up with each other to form a fluid narrative, with the everyday dialogues and gestures bringing life's little victories and big disappointments to the fore. Be it in childhood snapshots, a television show or an article in the newspaper, the heart of the problem is the representation of self. One mirror-image play follows another in their search to discover themselves, to confront their own image with that of the mask they don. A mirror in front of which to shave or a mirror in front of which to apply makeup. In **Storm in a C-Cup**, the camera's dispassionate gaze discloses the ambiguities, gradually forcing questions to the surface. Questions that remain open until the day the Carnival arrives at last – at a time when, ironically, all the roles are reversed.

Christine Bloch, in: *Catalogue Visions du Réel International Film Festival*, Nyon, April 2002

"We are a united and close family and, despite appearances, a normal one. We are all different from each other, so let's cut out the hypocrisy. I hope we'll be able to live happily someday, in Moudon, sensibly and respectful of differences."

Pascal, in: *arte Magazine*, n° 10, 1–7 March 2003

Script: Fernand Melgar
Cinematographer: Camille Cottagnoud, Thomas Wüthrich

Sound: Gilles Abravanel, Bastien Moeckli
Editing: Fernand Melgar, Béatrice Liardet

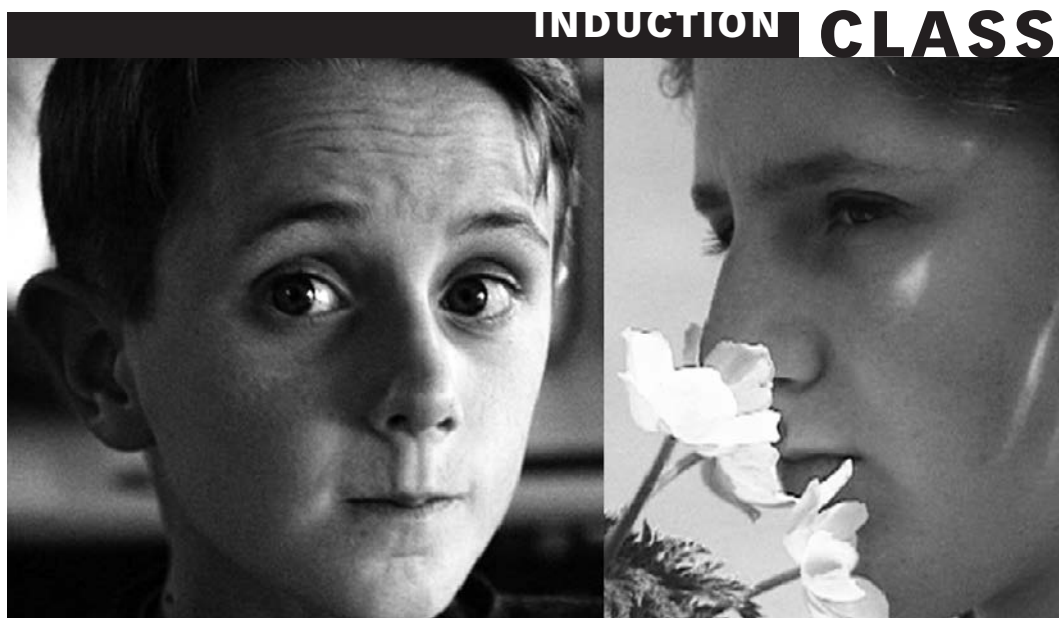
Music: Pascal Comelade, Diatonik-achromatik, Ka bûkamin Semdîn
Production: Climage, Lausanne

Coproduction: Télévision Suisse Romande TSR, Genève; Arte, Paris
World Rights: Climage, Lausanne
Original Version: French

A remarkable documentary that astonishes and innovates through its anti-journalistic approach. No commentary, no biases, no arm-waving tactics, and yet it raises a number of questions – calmly, barely hinted at, by means of inter-cutting a handful of portraits. This is what Fernand Melgar nicely terms as a “captation” approach, or a “floating observation [...] I immerse myself, let myself drift. I don’t try to make the images match my ideas, but rather to put myself in other people’s shoes, to see things at their eye-level. The level at which children see their surroundings.” Of course, that takes time. And patience. “It was terribly difficult to get them to talk at first. Turning up with a camera was like brandishing a Kalachnikov... They had to be brought out of their shell. We never barged in on them, but waited until they invited us in. Joëlle Fabre, *24 Heures*, 28–29 March 1998

Far from extolling the virtues of integration in the Swiss school system, Fernand Melgar provides us with an endearing and discreet portrait of the uprooted youngsters. *Télérama*, 8 April 1998

This moving film is a new conviction piece against indifference. Fernand Melgar is one of the few film directors in French-speaking Switzerland to address the issue of social justice in his documentaries. Ghania Adamo, *Le Temps*, 2 April 1998



1998 | Betacam digital | colour | 55' | Classe d'accueil

June '97: fourteen pupils, aged 11 to 17, share the school benches in Anne Juri's induction class at the Collège de Marcholet (high school) in Crissier (Switzerland). Catholics and Muslims, they are Kurdish, Bosnian, Portuguese or Brazilian. Some have come to join their parents, seasonal workers whose work permit kept them from bringing their youngsters along until now. Others, survivors of the war in Bosnia, live with the bare minimum in a reception centre for asylum-seekers. After one year of community living, some have been relocated into an apartment, in a rent-controlled housing area. Here, living with jobless parents, they must confront those who, whether native Swiss or established immigrants, are hostile to their presence. The children appreciate get a taste of the new life offered to them by Switzerland, a country they idealize and discover during a class outing to the Alps. These privileged moments that they share with their teacher make them forget tomorrow's uncertainties – forcible repatriation for the Bosnian refugees, and a lack of professional prospects for the rest. By intermingling images of an idyllic Switzerland with a far less utopian reality, this film depicts the world of these young teenagers, torn between the memory of their homeland and the desire to make a life for themselves in this country.

Script: Fernand Melgar
Cinematographer: Camille Cottagnoud
Sound: Pascal Fleury, Bernard Seidler

Editing: Stéphane Goël
Music: Nat King Cole, Andres Segovia, Francisco Tarrega

Production: Climage, Lausanne
Coproduction: Télévision Suisse Romande TSR, Genève

World Rights: Climage, Lausanne
Original Version: French, Spanish (subtitles: german)

It's workers we had asked for, but it's human beings who came.

Max Frisch

I have just seen your family portrait: excellent! What you say is true and sensitively handled. It represents a bitter memory but does not refer only to the past. Times have hardly changed. [...] My congratulations for having drawn up such a clear picture of a particularly appalling period of Swiss history, in such a way that, bearing no grudges, you reveal a mentality in which every viewer should be able to recognize and judge him- or herself. My thanks. Freddy Buache (Founder of the Swiss Film Archive in Lausanne)

Above and beyond all the praise, *Album de famille* is an exceptional film in that it is about a kind of catharsis. Fernando and Florinda were interviewed by their son, and not a journalist, with all that implies in the way of candour and emotion.

Antoine Duplan, *L'Hebdo*, 26 May 1994



1993 | Betacam digital | colour | 54' | Album de famille

First of all, **Family Album** is a letter addressed by Fernand Melgar to his parents, Florinda and Fernando, Spanish immigrants living in Switzerland as of the mid-'60s. Then, too, it is addressed to a whole generation that came to work for several decades, in order to make up for the country's cruel labour shortage. And, finally, it is addressed to the Switzerland of yore, "a land of asylum and welcome" rejoicing in the influx of foreigners by droves. Thus the film endlessly oscillates between private and collective, individual and universal... By skilfully superimposing personal snapshots and newsreel excerpts, images of the present and of the past, the film traces, chapter by chapter, the different stages of a painful itinerary. Through this letter also, Fernand Melgar's parents address us, whether or not we know any of those "segundos" in quest of remembrance and identity. They appeal to our conscience and past history, asking us still today: "What sort of welcome do you give to this foreigner, this fellow human, come in search of bread and work?" Bertrand Bacqué, in: *Catalogue Visions du Réel, International Film Festival, Nyon, 1993*

THE VALLEY OF YOUTH

2005 | Digital Betacam | colour | 26' | La vallée de la jeunesse
Cartographie N° 6

The initiative for the *Cartographies* (Mappings) collection of short films comes from the Swiss choreographer Philippe Saire, who wanted to shift dance from its customary venues and to create choreographies *in situ*. Indeed, *Cartographies* does lead dance outside any walls, tying it in with life, presenting it to passers-by. *Cartographies* interacts with the architecture, highlighting various city (Lausanne) sites and reviving them through the fragility and abstraction of dance. The idea behind this piece, *Cartographie n°6*, was to follow the choreographer working with his dancers right from the start, disclosing not only his improvisations and discoveries, but also occasional wrong tracks and doubts. How is a movement born? How are gestures sequenced? Why choose one choreographic phrase over another? How is contemporary dance written?



Script: Fernand Melgar, librement inspiré de «L'amour de la fille et du garçon» de C.-F. Ramuz,
Cinematographer: Steff Bossert, Camille Cottagnoud
Sound: Blaise Gabioud
Editing: Karine Sudan
Cast: Karine Grasset, Philippe Saire, Julien Sulser, Mike Winter

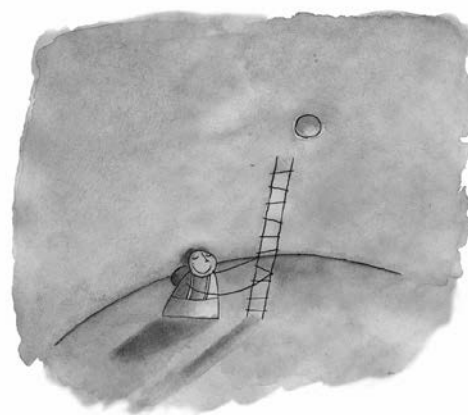
Production: Climage, Lausanne
Coproduction: Cie Philippe Saire, Lausanne; Télévision Suisse Romande TSR, Genève
World Rights: Climage, Lausanne
Original Version: French (english subtitles)

"FIRST DAY" COLLECTION

2003 | 35 mm and Digital Betacam | colour | Collection "Premier jour"

A first job, a first date, or a first trip can leave an indelible mark on us. The first time is tantamount to an initiation; it has the taste of the unfamiliar, of a challenge and a discovery. Fernand Melgar, a filmmaker established in Lausanne, decided to make a series of abbreviated shorts immortalizing the "first day". A very small crew was used to shoot the films, which capture fragments of daily life shot in real-time and on-the-spot, thus making an unforgettable experience of everyday incidents. The filmmaker's approach, however, involves more than simply recording: he suggests all the suffering, selfishness and vanity that go into these trivial incidents, despite the good intentions at their origin. The adoption of a child, a job accomplished by a handicapped person, a journey undertaken by a blind man – all little narratives with highly complex and cruel implications. In but a few minutes, Melgar pinpoints various states of existential *malaise*. Jean Perret, director of Visions du Réel, International

Film Festival, Nyon, April 2000



Script and editing: Fernand Melgar
Cinematographer: Camille Cottagnoud, Fernand Melgar
Sound: Blaise Gabioud, Gilles Abravanel, Fernand Melgar
Music: Julien Sulser
Production: Climage, Lausanne

Coproduction: Les Productions JMH, Neuchâtel; Télévision Suisse Romande TSR Genève; SRG SSR; ARTE
World Rights: Climage, Lausanne
Original Version: French (subtitles: english, german)

"FIRST DAY" THE FIGHT

| 2003 | 35 mm | colour | 9' | Le combat

// ...with unsettling brio, *Le Combat* invites us to attend Randy's first boxing match – Randy, a young teenager whose child-like expression belies a relentless punch. The camera work is flowing and full of empathy, as capable of connecting with the film characters on a personal level as of keeping at a remove from them when necessary." *Agence du Court Métrage, Paris,*

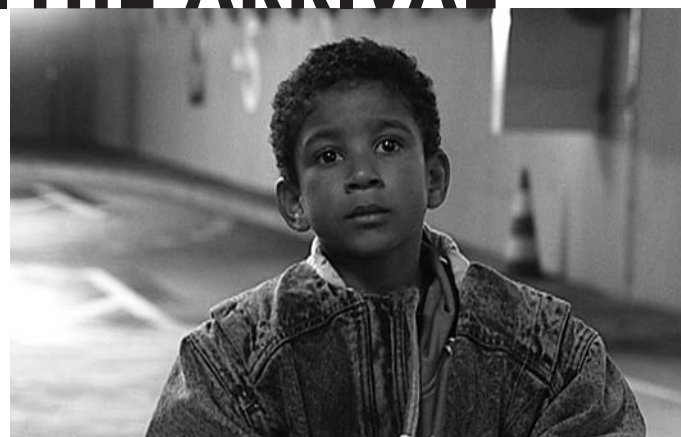
March 2003



"FIRST DAY" THE ARRIVAL

| 2003 | 35 mm | colour | 9' | L'arrivée

// A film that, thanks to a staging brilliantly divested of all pathos, transcribes the emotion surrounding a child's arrival. The filmmaker succeeds beautifully in handling a serious and essential subject on the basis of everyday gestures and fragments of conversation that are astoundingly commonplace: unfolding a pram in a parking lot, buying a dummy in a drugstore, hesitating between a glass baby bottle and a plastic one. As such, Fernand Melgar's film proves that what cinema has to say comes across all the better when it is handled without any explanatory rhetoric. A nimble camera constantly on the alert switches between close-ups of the faces. Slowly but surely, the tension grows. The mother lights a cigarette, the father looks to the right, then to the left. Soon, everyone is standing in front of the Arrivals gate: their wait is shot like the preliminaries to a delivery, to the tempo provided by the automatic doors as they open and close: the mother's face tenses, her eyes fill with tears, she fears a catastrophe.



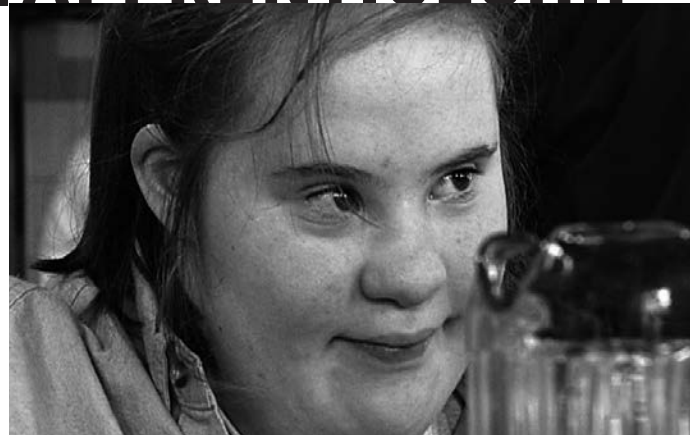
What if her daughter doesn't come after all? The father puffs and grows impatient. "Is she coming or not?" The first days are, above all, the encounters of a lifetime, which is why they always have to do with love. Viewers choke with emotion. In but a few minutes, the whole point is conveyed."

Emmanuelle André, Doc en court, December 2003

"FIRST DAY" THE APPRENTICESHIP

| 2003 | 35mm | colour | 9' | L'apprentissage

// ...L'apprentissage is the sort of film whose subject matter subdues audiences. Viewers hesitate to smile at the sight of Béatrice, a young girl with Down's Syndrome, who is spending her first day at the Elan Welcome and Occupational Training Centre. Yet their smile is all to the honour of a short film in which Fernand Melgar has, in a seemingly effortless manner, avoided such pitfalls as cynicism and pity. Any disability, whether depicted in images or encountered in real-life, always puts ordinary, altogether normal viewers ill at ease. Here, thanks to the exceptional accuracy of the film's shooting, the camera's skilful distance gauging, the filmmaker manages to make us smile along with Béatrice. On the trip to the Centre, the camera follows the rear-view mirror reflection of the mother and daughter conversing on the back seat of the car – a scene that is emblematic of this work. Without disguising the inevitable distortion that the camera's intervention wreaks on the image, the film takes up as its own the reply that Béatrice gives to her mother, when asked whether she was happy: "Yes, and



how about you?" Respectfully observant of the filmed person's singularity, Melgar is past master at underscoring – not in spite of but rather because of this otherness – a shared humanity."

Martin Goutte, *Institut Louis Lumière*, Lyon, December 2003

"FIRST DAY" THE VISIT

| 2003 | 35 mm | colour | 9' | La visite

Denis, who recently lost his eyesight, has just acquired a guide-dog to be able to move around freely. For his first outing, he decides to pay a visit to his family. However, to do so he must take a train and then find his way around in a city to which he has never returned since being disabled. We see him place all his trust in the dog to avoid (any) obstacles, even if it could mean getting lost in a labyrinth of snow-covered pavements. "A real slice of happiness... nine minutes of sheer emotion." Pascal Baeriswyl, *Le Courrier*, December 2002



"FIRST DAY" THE INTERNSHIP

| 2003 | Bétadigital | colour | 7' | Le stage

Gañe is hesitant. She wants to enter a difficult field that is normally reserved for men.

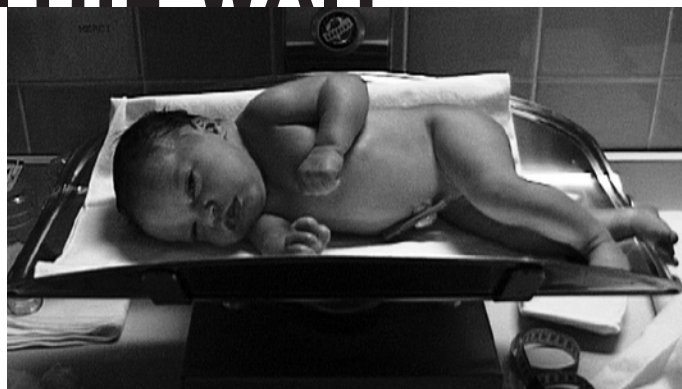


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"FIRST DAY" THE WAIT

| 2003 | Bétadigital | colour | 7' | L'attente

Pascal, a transvestite, rushes to the hospital to be at his wife's side.



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"FIRST DAY" ALPINE ASCENT

| 2003 | Bétadigital | colour | 8' | L'inalpe

15-year-old Fabrice helps bring the cows up to the mountain pastures for the first time, in keeping with Swiss tradition.



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"FIRST DAY" THE SALE

| 2003 | Betacam digital | colour | 8' | La vente

Ten years ago, Denise lost her husband in tragic circumstances. Today, a new ordeal awaits her. "A slice of life in images that speak out more powerfully than words."

François Baertschi, *GHI*, December 2002



| |

"FIRST DAY" BACK TO SCHOOL

| 2003 | Betacam digital | colour | 8' | La rentrée

For Lucienne, a French teacher, the beginning of the new school year is far from ordinary: none of her students speak the language! "Fernand Melgar succeeds in capturing moments in life in a discreet and straightforward manner rarely seen on the small screen." Jérôme Estèbe, *Tribune de Genève*, December 2002



| |

"FIRST DAY" THE ORDINATION

| 2003 | Betacam digital | colour | 9' | L'ordination

For the seminarian Jean, a Vietnamese refugee, the big day is here at last. "An eight-minute story as enthralling as it is moving." Martin Goutte, *Docs en Courts*, December 2003



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