



MENTION DU JURY  
**FLORENCE**  
FESTIVAL DEI POPOLI  
2008

MENTION D'HONNEUR  
**MONTREAL**  
POUR LE MONTAGE  
2008



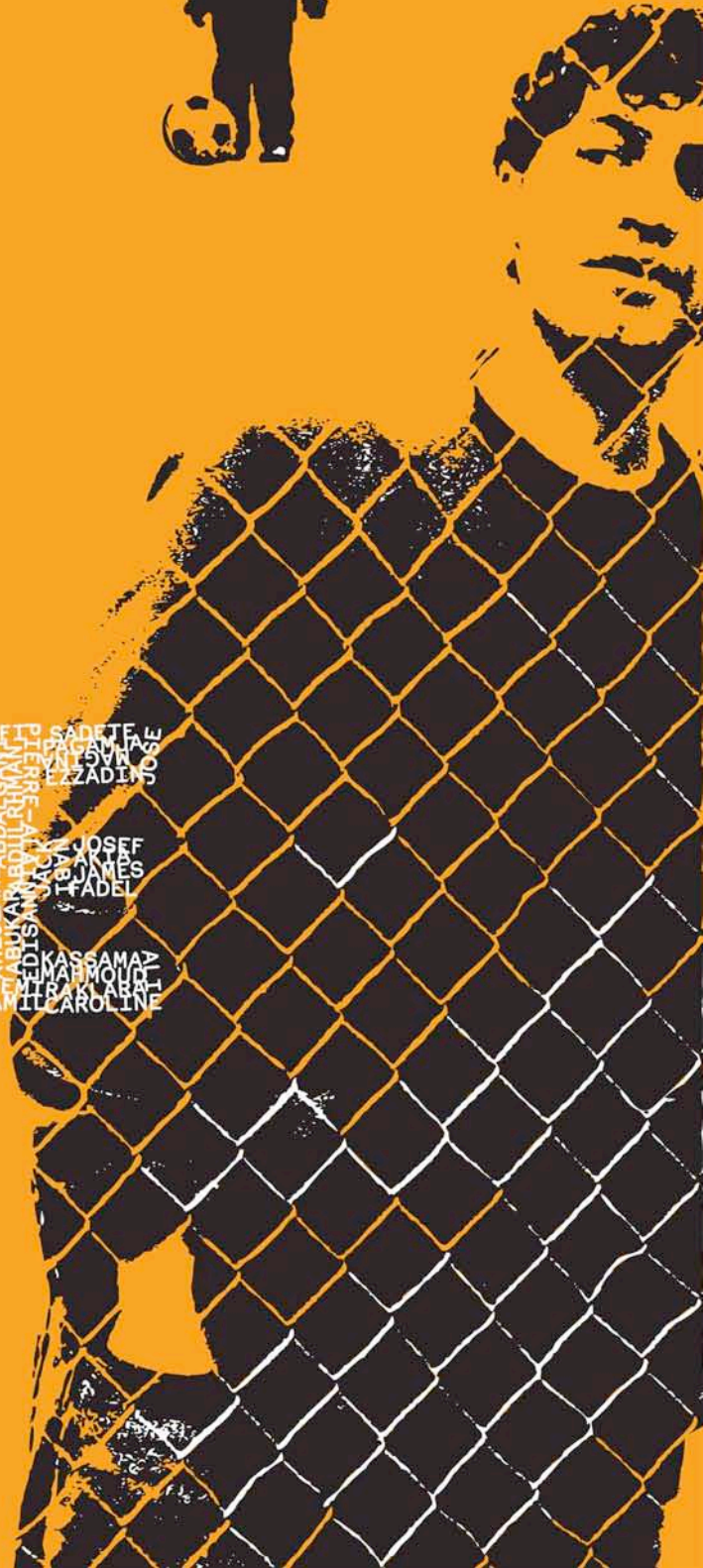
GRAND PRIX  
**MONTREAL**  
RIDM  
2008

GRAND PRIX  
**TEHERAN**  
CINÉMA VÉRITÉ  
2008

SÉLECTION  
**VIENNALE**  
OFFICIELLE  
2008

MENTION  
**BAFICI**  
DROITS HUMAINS  
2008

NOMINATION  
**QUARTZ**  
MEILLEUR DOCUMENTAIRE  
2008



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# PRESS KIT



*By the director of EXIT, Swiss Film Award 2006  
and Golden Link of the best European Documentary*

# THE FORTRESS

**A documentary by Fernand Melgar**



For the first time, a camera unrestrictedly penetrates into the universe of a Swiss reception centre for asylum seekers. It presents a human gaze at an austere transition place, where 200 men, women and children, torn between doubt and hope, are awaiting the state's decision on their behalf. Empathy and distrust punctuate the exchanges between the residents and the staff of the centre in charge of applying the most restrictive asylum law in Europe. With emotion, though also with humour, LA FORTERESSE (THE FORTRESS) immerses us into the heart of this daily sorting process of human beings.

**Documentary – 104' – 35mm – 1:1.66 – Dolby digital SRD – [www.laforteresse.ch](http://www.laforteresse.ch)**

## Awards

[62e LOCARNO FILM FESTIVAL](#) Première mondiale (5–15 août 2008)

**Léopard d'Or, compétition Cinéastes du Présent**

[2e FESTIVAL "CINEMA VERITE" TEHERAN](#) Première internationale (15–19 oct. 2008)

**Grand Prix, compétition internationale**

[49e FESTIVALE DEI POPOLI](#) Florence (14–21 novembre 2008)

**Prix du public et mention spéciale du jury, compétition internationale**

[11e RIDM](#) Montreal (13–23 novembre 2008)

**Grand Prix et mention spéciale du jury pour le montage, compétition internationale**

[PRIX DU CINEMA SUISSE 2009](#), Lucerne (7 mars 2009)

**Nomination meilleure documentaire**

[BAFICI](#) Buenos Aires (25 mars – 5 avril 2009)

**Mention spéciale du jury, compétition Droits Humains**

# Festival

[62e LOCARNO FILM FESTIVAL](#) (5-15 août 2008) **Léopard d'Or, compétition Cinéastes du Présent**

[2e FESTIVAL DE DOCUMENTAIRE "CINEMA VERITE"](#) Téhéran (15-19 oct.2008) **Grand Prix, compétition internationale**

[VIENNALE 2008](#) Vienne (17-29 octobre 2008) Sélection officielle

[49e FESTIVALE DEI POPOLI](#) Florence (14-21 novembre 2008) **Prix du public et mention spéciale du jury, compétition internationale**

[5e FESTIVAL DE CINE EUROPEO](#) de Sevilla (7-15 novembre 2008) Section compétitive Eurodoc

[18e DAKINO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL](#) Bucarest (26-29 novembre 2008) Section "Politique et cinéma"

[11e RIDM](#) Montreal (13-23 novembre 2008) **Grand Prix et mention spéciale du jury pour le montage, compétition internationale**

[46e FIC GIJON](#) - Espagne (20-29 novembre 2008) Programme spécial "Llendes"

[32e GÖTEBORG INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL](#) Suède (23 janvier - 2 février 2009) Sélection officielle

[PRIX DU CINEMA SUISSE 2009](#), Lucerne (7 mars 2009) **Nomination meilleure documentaire**

[CCCB](#) Barcelone (11 février 2009) Programme spécial

[TAMPERE FILM FESTIVAL](#) (4 - 8 mars 2009) Programme spécial "Whatta Helvetia? - States of Mind from the Land of the Alps"

[ONE WORLD 09](#) Prague (11 - 19 mars 2009) Panorama Europe in (One) World: Europe without Barriers

[EURODOK 2009](#) Oslo (18 - 22 mars 2009)

[BAFICI](#) Buenos Aires (25 mars - 5 avril 2009) **Mention spéciale du jury, compétition Droits Humains**

[4e DOC A TUNIS](#) (2 - 6 avril 2009) Programme "Migration et mouvance"

[MOVIE THAT MATTER](#) Amsterdam (2 - 8 avril 2009) Compétition internationale

[7th HUMAN RIGHTS FILM FESTIVAL](#) San Sebastian (18 - 25 avril 2009) Compétition internationale

[DOKFILMWOCHE](#) Hambourg (23 - 29 avril 2009) Programme international

[DOKFEST](#) Munich (6 - 13 mai 2009) Compétition internationale

[NODODOCFEST](#) Trieste (6 - 11 mai 2009) Section compétitive "Panorama"

[PLANETE DOC REVIEW](#) Varsovie (8-17 mai 2009) Compétition internationale

[SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL](#) (21 mai - 14 juin 2009) Compétition internationale

[GUTH GAFA](#) Irlande (11 - 14 juin 2009) Sélection officielle

[ISCHIA FILM FESTIVAL](#) Italie (5-11 juillet 2009) Sélection officielle "Scenari"

[FÜNF SEEN FILMFESTIVAL Gilchen](#) (28 juillet - 5 août 2009) Compétition films humanitaires

[41e MUESTRA CINEMATOGRAFICA DEL ATLANTICO](#) Alcances (10 - 19 septembre 2009)

[DOCLISBOA](#) Lisbonne (15-25 octobre 2009) Compétition internationale

[YAMAGATA INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL](#) Japon (8-15 octobre 2009) Compétition internationale

# The Fortress

**By Jay Weissberg, *Variety***

Using a pure docu style unencumbered by direct-to-camera interviews, Fernand Melgar takes his observational but still impassioned eye into a Swiss detention center for asylum seekers in "The Fortress." Of course, there's no such thing as purely objective cinema, and Melgar, along with top editor Karine Sudan, picked whom and what to focus on, but they've succeeded handsomely in presenting a largely balanced and engrossing look at the problems facing both staff and applicants. Docu deservedly took home Locarno's Golden Leopard for Filmmakers of the Present, surely a foretaste of a healthy fest life along with guaranteed international cable interest.

Shot over 60 days -- the maximum number an asylum seeker can be held -- the docu enters into the lives of the residents of the holding center in the western Swiss town of Vallorbe. Surrounded by barbed wire, with surveillance cameras trained on them 24/7, this institutional, quasi-penal atmosphere can be a trying place for those with such an uncertain future, especially families with children.

As a haven of peace and wealth in the popular mindset, Switzerland is a natural magnet for immigrants, and the famously insular confederation has a complicated relationship with the refugees at her gates. Only 1% of cases receive asylum status; the others are either given provisional admission or 24 hours to leave the country. The global immigration pattern has changed considerably since Rolf Lyssy's 1978 satire, "The Swissmakers," with a much more codified application procedure.

The docu doesn't directly address the current European debate over immigration -- often thinly disguised racism -- instead bringing home the idea that each asylum seeker has a story. Melgar follows only a few groups within the walls of the compound, some at length and others, such as an Armenian with drug issues, only at the start.

Applicants go through a double-interview process. A Somali man with a tale of cannibalism is deemed unreliable, while a Colombian family's chilling account of murder appears far more genuine. Melgar never reveals who gets asylum and who doesn't, but he does create a space for auds to question the tales told as well as the various factors that go into the process.

The tensions arising from cramming so many people from diverse cultures into a restricted area is only briefly touched upon. Certainly, groups predisposed to sparring create visible friction, such as a scene in which Iraqis and Kurds are seen arguing.

Melgar also gives space to the people who work at the center, from security guards to pastors to the relatively new director of the facility, seen briefing his staff on the need for more personal, humane contact with the asylum-seekers. It's difficult to decide whether Melgar deliberately shows the staff in a positive light -- remarkably friendly and compassionate, even when being tough -- or whether it's a byproduct of the editing process. Touches of humor create nice moments of uplift.

This sense of balance, which Melgar also exhibited in "Exit: The Right to Die," combined with his deceptively casual eye, lifts "The Fortress" above the standard docu presentation. Sudan's skillful editing establishes a kind of narrative form out of something potentially amorphous, while d.p. Camille Cottagnoud's judiciously considered lensing contributes to the sense of dignity instilled in each subject.

# Switzerland, an asylum country?

Does Switzerland, a fortress in the heart of Europe, still deserve its legendary reputation of an asylum country? For centuries, this neutral country has been any refugee's preferred destination. The Geneva Convention provides the basis of the country's asylum policy. One of its principles is to grant asylum to any person who is threatened or persecuted in their home country. Moreover, no person may be tortured or subjected to inhuman or degrading punishments or treatments.

Like its neighbouring states of the European Union, Switzerland has adopted drastic measures to curb non-European immigration. In 2006, the majority of the Swiss electorate voted for a tighter asylum and immigration policy. Left-wing parties and the Church were unable to counteract the populist right-wing and its slogan: "No more abuse!" which saw asylum seekers as profiteers of social welfare and as potential drug dealers. It seems that we have come away from a humanitarian Noah's arch and gone back to the principle of "Das Boot ist voll" (the boat is full) in the sombre times of Swiss history during World War II.

## The new procedure

On arrival in the home country of the Red Cross, many exiled persons, worn out by a journey sometimes undertaken at the risk of their lives, believe themselves to be finally safe. They do not know that the most difficult ordeal is yet to come: the new asylum procedure of the Federal Office for Migration (FOM). Everything will be decided within less than 60 days in one of the four FOM reception centres.

On the basis of hearings and countless scientific assessments, FOM officials have the difficult task of deciding whether asylum is to be granted or not. People without identity papers are automatically rejected. After checking their fingerprints and their identity, wanted people are handed over to the police. Applicants who "invent dramatic stories from beginning to end to obtain refugee status" are rejected and have 24 hours to leave Switzerland.

Finally, only 1% of all applicants make it through the first selection process. To begin with, they are given refugee status, a door opener in Switzerland, and they are transferred to a cantonal centre for further proceedings. Some of those who were rejected cannot return home. They go underground, which is coupled with precariousness. As of the age of 15 years, these outcasts risk a prison sentence of up to two years simply for staying in Switzerland illegally.

## The FOM reception centre

In the small border town Vallorbe located in the Swiss Jura (Canton of Vaud), a former military barracks surrounded by barbed wires has been refurbished as a FOM reception centre. Locals grudgingly observe the arrival of sixty or more asylum seekers a week. Keeping them under curfew-like conditions, a private surveillance company is in charge of the safety of the two hundred men, women and children who live there in large dormitories. Initially planned as a short-term reception centre, its promiscuity often triggers great tension between the people and between the communities staying there for weeks in forced idleness. Cases of heavy depression and suicide are not infrequent.

# General info

director and producer	FERNAND MELGAR
cinematography	CAMILLE COTTAGNOUD
sound	MARC VON STÜRLER
editing	KARINE SUDAN
scientific collaboraion	ALICE SALA
screenplay and editing collaboration	CLAUDE MURET
artwork	JANKA RAHM
postproduction	PATRICK LINDENMAIER
sound editing	ALEXANDER MIESCH
mixing	DENIS SÉCHAUD
production	CLIMAGE
coproduction	TÉLÉVISION SUISSE ROMANDE
	UNITÉ DOCUMENTAIRE
	IRÈNE CHALLAND
	GASPARD LAMUNIERE
	TÉLÉVISION SUISSE ITALIENNE
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financial support	L'OFFICE FÉDÉRAL DE LA CULTURE (DFI), SUISSE LA FONDATION VAUDOISE POUR LE CINÉMA FONDS RÉGIO FILMS SUCCÈS PASSAGE ANTENNE SUCCÈS CINÉMA
participation	RADIO ET TÉLÉVISION BELGES FRANCOPHONES CLAIRE COLART,

ISAN 0000-0001-E6F9-0000-2

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# Technical data

original title	LA FORTERESSE
english title	THE FORTRESS
german title	DIE FESTUNG
italian title	LA FORTEZZA
spansih title	LA FORTALEZA
type of film	DOCUMENTARY
running time	100 MINUTES
lenght	2'700 MÈTRES
format	35MM – 1: 1.66
speed	24 FPS
sound processing	DOLBY DIGITAL SRD
language	FRANÇAISE
subtitiling	ANGLAIS – GERMAN
filming location	CENTRE D'ENREGISTREMENT ET DE PROCÉDURE DE L'OFFICE FÉDÉRAL DES MIGRATIONS VALLORBE (SUISSE)
start / end of filming pays de production	DÉCEMBRE 2007 – FÉVRIER 2008 SUISSE
first screening	FESTIVAL DU FILM DE LOCARNO 2008, COMPÉTITION CINÉASTES DU PRÉSENT
son	DOLBY DIGITAL SRD
technical facilities	CLIMAGE, LAUSANNE GB STUDIO BROADCAST, ROMANEL SUR MORGES ANDROMEDA, ZURICH SCHWARZFILM AG, OSTERMUNDIGEN MASE, GENEVE OBIOSOM, LISBONNE

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