TO BE NORMAN

C'EST LA QUESTION, ,THAT IS THE QUESTION!
QUESTA È LA DOMANDA, DET ER SPØRGSMÅLET

Olivier Mériel photographs, Pascal Vannier texts, Jean-Marie Levesque historical advisor

Boujou is the polite expression that every true Norman uses with their compatriots or as a mark of their identity to greet a "horsain," someone who is not from the area. In this local greeting, there is both humility and pride. Olivier, Jean-Marie, and Pascal know this because their roots and daily lives belong to this land. The "little people" of Normandy are rather discreet. They say they're taciturn. While its history still makes a lot of noise and fascinates Europe, the United States, and even Oceania. To the point that the Bayeux Tapestry, a grand medieval fresco of the conquest of England by Duke of Normandy William in 1066, and the beaches of the 1944 D-Day landings, almost 1000 years later, share the same curiosity and evoke the same emotions in those who come to visit our 'Normandité'.
This word, we owe to a certain Léopold Sédar Senghor, an academician and former president of Senegal.
A word born from a great love story with Normandy due to his education as a young man and anchored near Caen—where he passed away—by an unbreakable union with Colette, the woman of his life. ''Your green and gold eyes like your land, so fresh at the June solstice Where are you then, eyes of my eyes, my blonde, my Norman, my conqueror?'
The Normans discovered Senegal, not the Portuguese, contrary to official history, claimed Senghor.
In 1984, during a visit to Normandy, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was presented with a personal family tree that, for the first time, directly linked the British sovereign to William the Conqueror, crowned King of England at the age of 39.
This rich culture makes Normans Europeans and Europeans Normans, preserving from North to South the imprints of these great predatory beasts who are both seafarers, farmers, nobles, and shrewd politicians.

TRIBULATIONS WITH EDOUARD THE NORMAN

These are of the main reasons that push Edouard Anquetil (provisional name), native of Bayeux, the place of the most famous tapestry in the world, of the outstanding cathedral erected by he bishop Odon - stepbrother of the Conqueror - decides to re-trace the routes of the Normans he inherited from…as Her Majesty the Queen of England herself carried the same heredity. Edouard wants to feel, to touch and to understand this Norman world, stretching across the seas and not yet to his own story.
Edouard's friends at High school had the American dream. He not but a passion for the United Kingdom. He do knows the places he wants to visit and the persons the hopes to meet.
In Sicily, the Norman used to the drizzles of the Bessin area, expects the wonderful lights of the South and the divine architecture as a legacy of a Brotherhood he feels to belong to.

Anquetil is a Viking name. Edouard is robust with blond hair and blue eyes. The perfect appearance of a Northman. But his first purpose is to find out roots.
A lot of promises appear in the road-trip he drafted.

INTENTIONS

The idea of a journey to the land of the Normans is that of exceptional places and characters of all kinds when they speak of their 'Normanness'. It is about meeting them, without premeditation, and living with them for what they can claim to be Normans.
A road trip, as the French say, that starts at the source with what Normandy offers as a journey to reflect and admire this puzzle of a medieval Europe to be reconstructed in its geography and in what always seeps from its soul. Caen, Falaise, Rouen and its river, the Seine, the route of the abbeys, Mont-Saint-Michel, the most well-known places, but also more discreet ones like Dives-sur-Mer where William built his fleet, Hauteville-la-Guichard, a small village in Manche, the cradle of the Hauteville family who conquered Sicily and Southern Italy.
From the Norman route, now marked in Wexford, county of magnificent Ireland, Olivier Mériel's photographic work with his two cameras (13/18 cm and 10/12 cm) dedicated to purely silver prints always tends to rediscover the soul of the characters encountered, the landscapes, the universes.
A method that requires time to approach them and a degree of improvisation.
The strength of the project lies, on one hand, in a forecast of 70/80 photos throughout the entire road trip, mainly in black and white, and on the other hand, in color with the return to a surprising technique that Olivier Mériel hasn't used in a long time.
It is the foundation of an exhibition whose itinerancy seems logical in the countries visited. And also to be shown in Caen.
It is the foundation of a book with these encounters in images and words, mission of Pascal Vannier.
A publisher, located in Normandy, at Port-en-Bessin, also rooted in the territory from where Edouard departs to his adventure proposes a trilogy dedicated to the three visited countries. The Editions l*a Goélette du Goéland* have the legitimacy of ferrying the project.

A FIRST AND QUICK APPROACH

In his palace Conte Federico, Pietro, the son of the house as if he had stepped out of a Visconti film, is one of the first portraits created by Olivier Mériel and Pascal Vannier during a week-long mission in Palermo, commissioned by the Regional Council in 2019. It followed the work we had done with Jean-Marie Levesque, the director of the castle and the Museum of Normandy, on the Channel Islands - The Island in the Islands - for an exhibition unfortunately cut short by Covid but immortalized in a book. A follow-up to this first trip to Sicily has never been realized to this day.

The Conte Federico Palace is one of the oldest in the Sicilian capital, Palermo, just a stone's throw from the cathedral. Being Norman for its extraordinary owners means first and foremost encountering daily the Arab-Norman architecture of the palace tower. The lineage of the family is Frederick II, King of Sicily.
His mother was none other than Constance of Hauteville, daughter of Roger II, the first Norman king of the island and thus heir to this dynasty that left the Cotentin Peninsula in the 11th century to become the Altavilla. Leaving from Hauteville-la-Guichard -near Coutances- where today Norman identity deserves attention, it is a significant sibling group that left a legacy carried by unsuspected places and characters.
Near Messina, where Roger I, the first Count of Sicily, landed in May 1061.
In the fortress of Milazzo, Nino Pranunica lives alone with his puppets, a great Sicilian tradition, and recites the epic of the Normans there. It leads to Troina, which maintains this shared history with the Coutances region, and to Cerami, the site of the victories of the conquest where the Norman horses, undoubtedly along with the Arab mounts, were the progenitors of the Sanfratellano, Sicilians who graze proudly at the foot of Etna.
And it is in Piazza Armerina, on August 13 and 14, that the Palio dei Normani celebrates each year the defeat of the Arabs by the Normans. To meet the atmosphere of this festival and the frenzy of the spectators, it must undoubtedly offer a mark of Norman identity that we will try to make as close and lively as if we were at the heart of a true feature film.
In the photo, a street in the center of Palermo after the rain.

SEE PALERMO AND DREAM OF MEDIEVAL NORMANDY

In Palermo, where architectural beauties embody the compromise of several centuries of struggle between victors and vanquished, does the mayor of a city overflowing with such heritage have a Norman secret garden? Mystery, between the Zisa Palace, that of the Normans which includes the Palatine chapel desired by Roger II and open for Sunday mass.

And those streets where one gets lost like a character from the Middle Ages; impossible to escape the markets, Ballaro for example, where the fishmongers glorify swordfish just as much as cod or salted herring brought by the Normans. And, maybe, the opportunity to meet Gigi Mangia, the great Sicilian chef, who is, in his own right, the architect of a cuisine blended with products imported through Norman and Mediterranean influences.
In Palermo, Valentina Bruschi, art historian, journalist, and curator, is perhaps the synthesis of a Sicilian cultural universe marked by the Normans, where she adds

the culture of agriculture amidst her olive groves. She's not alone amid influent artists and zealots of traditions like puppet art.

THE ISLANDS WITH ROYAL ROOTS

Closest to Normandy, the Channel Islands, facing the western coast of the Cherbourg Peninsula, take pride in the legacy of William the Conqueror. On these small pieces of rock, it is the Duke of Normandy that the inhabitants receive during royal visits. Tradition during the seven decades of the reign of Her Majesty Elizabeth II and now with her son, Charles III.

The new sovereign of the Crown was then the Prince of Wales when he presented Bob Le Sueur with his title and medal of MBE, Member of the British Empire, in 2013.
A great figure of the island of Jersey, Bob Le Sueur, who had disappeared almost a hundred years ago, never hesitated to show the pride of his British culture and hastened to say I am not an Englishman!
Magnificent in the language of Molière, he added: I am Normand above all.
We conquered England at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, we Normans!

A few miles away, in the parish of Sainte-
Mary, John Kelleher grew up in the rural world and spoke the 'jerriais' local language, before becoming a recognized historian and inevitable lawyer, graduating from Norman law.
On the islands, laws inspired by English or even European inspiration are obeyed, b ut the Anglo-Normans have never abolished the 'Grand

Coutumier' written in the mid-
thirteenth century, and some articles of which still govern the law of property and procedure, explains Sophie Poirey, the only one to manage the Certificate of Legal and Norman Studies issued only at the University of Caen and a lecturer in the history of law.
Her knowledge of the islands
his complicity as well has opened us unavoidable doors to understand their originality.

For example, Haro's clamor makes it possible to denounce a property invasion which is the only possible case.
At the site of the dispute itself, the complainant must kneel down and make this call in French three times: 'Haro, haro, haro my Prince, on me fait tort'. In French also, he must recite the prayer 'Notre Père'. Then, he has to
present within 24 hours to the bailiff a statement certifying that he is the author of the complaint. Finally, the Royal Court must rule within a maximum of twelve months, says Sophie Poirey.
Jersey and Guernsey have their own legislatures, the states, and have retained the feudal status of bailiffs and fiefdoms.

Portrait of Sir Richard Collas, bailiff of Guernsey from 2012 to 2020, photographed by Olivier Mériel. Excerpt from the book Island in the Islands.
When John Kelleher talks about the 'file of his life', he tells of the past decade of settling a dispute between the Lord of the Fief of the Fosse, the States of Jersey

and the Crown on the issue of coastal property.
As in ancient times, the story of a ‘lord’ invoking custom to defend the ancestral rights granted to his fiefdom on the coast.
The parties will eventually reach a compromise in the early 2000s.

Former Guernsey Prime Minister Jonathan Le Tocq (pictured below) found a distant ancestor from the Conqueror’s family after crossing legend and genealogy.

An ancestor who was in charge of the Duke's herds! Live stock.

Jonathan Le Tocq spoke the dialect inherited from the Normans before the English l anguage.
I'm Normand, he says loud and clear, too. He also practices the subtleties of the French language.
A third or perhaps even half of the English words come from Norman and French, and there are still a handful including a leading figure at Cambridge University who want to defend
the ‘Djèrnesiais’ language.
Mari Jones, a prominent linguistics teacher who has spent more than 20 years stud ying the rock of exile of a certain Victor Hugo, has observed that Mari Jones is already aware of ‘the existence of many young hidden speakers, that is to say young people who possess
Guernsey and who use it every day without even knowing it’.
And it is not uncommon in Guernsey to be told that Guillaume the Conqueror

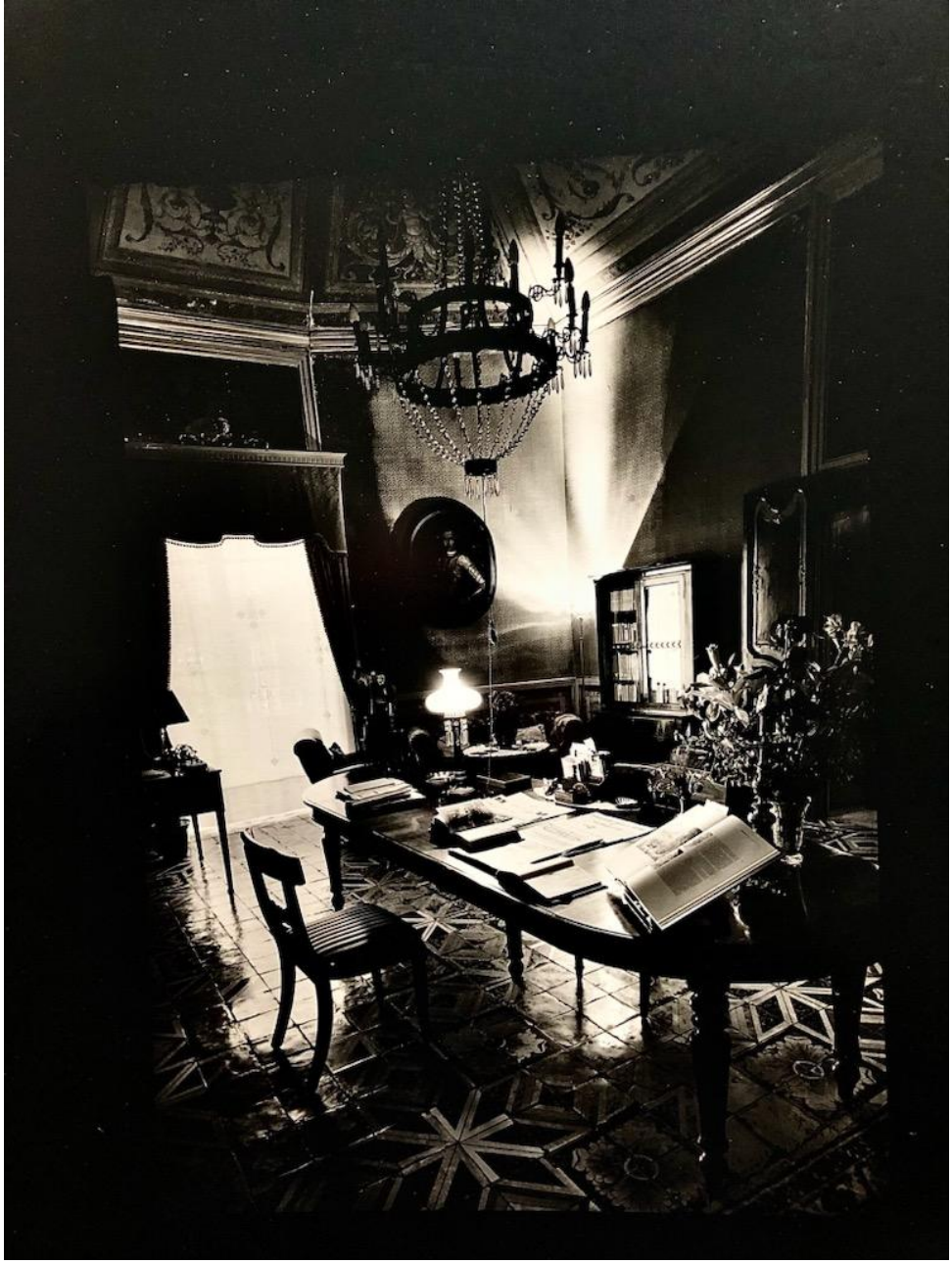
himself spoke about Guernsey.

THE UK, THE OTHER MIRROR

At the very gates of the battlefield of Hastings, the Abbey of Battle, built by the victo r William the Conqueror, will be consecrated by his son William Le Roux. Local people are very close to this heritage to help its preservation.

One of his benefactors at the abbey is Richard de Luci, an Anglo-
Norman baron from the department of Orne.
He was entrusted with the task of guarding the Tower of London, an emblematic monument to England's new "master" built at the end of the conquest year on the orders of the Conqueror himself.
How can you not feel Norman looking at this major work of the English capital?
But who knows really Hastings Town, its charm and the links with this history we follow? And how the Millenium of William the Conqueror's birth date will be celebrated in the rotin alongside the re-enactment of the battle in 2026.

Pushing to Leicestershire, asking David Manners born in 1959, the owner of the cas tle of
Belvoir, if he feels Norman in his building rebuilt three times on the foundations of Normandy is a bet.
In 11th century Norman, Belvoir means "beautiful view". Two and a half hours away by car,Norwich, the capital of Norfolk, houses a cathedral and a dungeon of surprising architecture built by the Normans just after the conquest. And now brand-new restored is a focus with a great sense.



THE NORMAN WAY, THE IRISH WAY TO THE NORMANS

Ireland and County Wexford have just opened the Norman Way, a pilgrimage that is unparalleled in the history that connects our two countries.

A dialog about the Norman landings in Bannow in May 1169, the inventiveness of the Normans in Stokestown Castle and Duncormick, their Christianity in Tomhaggard and Tintern Abbey and their building art, with the Hook lighthouse as its symbol, considered to be the oldest in the world. Strongbow's son-in-law had the tower built in the 13th century.
John Fitzgerald Kennedy may not be asked if he feels Norman, but we might learn along the way that the name of the 35th president of the United States comes from Fitzgerald, a Norman knight who came to Ireland in 1169.

Adjacent to the Wexford, Kilkenny County is home to the castle of the same name. Guillaume de Clare is the father. The building is huge.
He later entrusted her to William Marshal, his son-in-law, who frequently emerged as a key figure on the Norman Way.

But it is Clare's Richard FitzGilbert who belongs to Who's who. Also known as Richard de Bienfait, Lord of Bienfait and Orbec in the Land of Calvadosian Auge, his father was the guardian of the young William, also known as the Bastard. And his nickname leaves no doubt about his power, Strongbow. Not only a physical power, but also a power that stretches from England to Wales.
The Château de Trim, on the Boyne, the historic river, is home to a unique Norman architectural ensemble in Europe. From Lacy's family -
Lassy's place name in Calvados emerged Hugh and his son Walter, who commissioned the masterpiece in the late twelfth century.

Roskilde, an extraordinary shipbuilding site is the kingdom of drakkars with its permanent carpenters keeping a so long tradition of building.
Unesco world heritage sites such as Trelleborg, the circular fortress most likely built at the dawn of the eleventh century, are magical for the Viking spirit.

The sweet and mysterious island of Møn is a sublime haven of wooden churches where frescoes from the 12th and 13th centuries bear witness to the conversion to Christianity of the Vikings.
You need four hours by train from Copenhagen to Aalborg and visit the Denmark's largest cemetery, where early Viking - era graves are among the more than 700 tombs.
And if you don't make a long stop to enjoy beer, it's too bad for you.
In Viking culture, it was to be drunk with moderation, even if the intoxication of hops put them in touch with the gods and their ancestors.
At least they thought so.

It does not fall the one that real friends help to advance in his path.
This Viking adage is the one that will carry us during this road-trip thanks also to suggestions, lights against our ignorances and emotions that wec annot prejudge but whose perspective has already settled in our heads.

ESTIMATED BUDGET

Five territories

March 2026
England: Hastings , Battle, Rochester and Norwich
15 days

May 2026
Ireland : The Norman Way Wexford Co and Meath Co
7 days

August 2026
Sicile : Palerme, Troïna, Piazza Armerina
7 days

October 2026
Sicile : Palerme and Etna area

7 days
England : Anniversary of the Battle of Hastings
2 days

December 2026
Denmark : Copenhagen and around 7 days

THE AUTHORS

OLIVIER MÉRIEL

I have been photographing since I was 18. From the beginning, I experienced this c hoice as a life commitment and an inner adventure.

1984 —Exhibition Espace Canon Paris -Iceland, contact 20 X 25.

1989—Galerie Michèle Chomette Paris - personal exhibition

1990—Order: Potigny Decommissioned Plant -
Collection of photographs - Edition Marval Paris

1994 —Printemps de Cahors—order more exposure to the space Caviole

1996—Calais -Lace Museum -order more exhibition and booklet

1996—Exhibition Galerie Vivienne Paris - Bibliothèque Nationale
Catalog Jean-Claude Lemagny

1997—Lofoten Archipelago Norway - exhibition more collection -
editing -Images in Maneuvers.

1998—Maison Victor Hugo Paris
Exhibition more book text by Michel Butor - edition Paris Museums
Hauteville House -Guernsey -Photo Month -MEP—

1999—Institut Français -BRNO—Czechia -exhibition -

2000—Artothèque Caen -Museum of Fine Arts Caen -

Rivages Normands exhibition

2001—Exhibition Mont-Saint-Michel -Abbey -

2002—Trouville—exhibition more book -Villa Montebello
portrait of a city - edition Cahiers du Temps.

2003 —Exhibition Galerie Esther Woerdehoff Paris

2003—Creation in Saint-Aubin sur mer of a photographic center dedicated to the silver photography ‘ Mother of Pearl Light".

2004—Cannes -Museum exhibition plus book edition Images en Maneuvers .

2005—Meeting with writer Charles Juliet—Silent Natures-
Five Continents Edition.

2006—New York—Candace Perich Gallery Exhibition

2006—Conches en Ouche -exhibition Museum plus book edition Nazraeli Press.

2007—Sicily - exhibition Abbaye Monreale.

2008—New York - Candace Perich Gallery exhibition

2008—exhibition plus book Musée Malraux du havre - edition Cahiers du Temps.

2009—exhibition Tuscany -Poppi Museum—Florence Museum -
book publishes the Cahiers du Temps.

2009/2014—member of the FRAC Basse-Normandie acquisition commission.

2010—Tuscany -exhibition Abbey aux Dames Caen.

2011—Exhibition Parie Galerie Alain Blondel

2012—Giverny- Museum of Impressionists—exhibition more book edition
the Cahiers du Temps. 1st Impressionist festival.

2013 —A port city—Cherbourg- exhibition plus book edition
the Cahiers du Temps.

2014—Le monde du Rail - exhibition plus edition les Cahiers du Temps.

2015—Abbaye aux Dames -Caen - l’Orne un rivière -2nd festival
Impressionist - book edition les Cahiers du Temps.

2014 / 2018—four years of work with the International Institute
of Human Rights. Palestine

2014—Exhibition Abbaye aux Dames -70 years of the landing—conservatory of the

landing. Book: the pages of stories—publishing over time.

2016—Abbatiale Conques Aveyron.

2016—Arles festival exhibition with the Conservatoire du Littoral

2016 —Exposition Institut Français in Jerusalem

2017 —Exhibition Palestine Caen University - meeting with students

2018 / 2020—Work on Mauritania—exhibition Institut Français-Institut
International Human Rights Organization

2019—Venice -exhibition Arcanes Paris Gallery

2020—Exhibition Musée de Normandie - the Channel Islands -
book editions Fage

2021 / 2023 —Work on the world of fishing -
book plus exhibition autumn 2023

2021—Creation of the Festival Argentique -Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer -biennial—

2022 —Summer work and exhibition on Iceland with CAP North Association
project presented in the framework of the next argentique festival
Saint-Aubin sure mer 2023 -Iceland 1982 / 2022

2024 —Congo ‘ the country where fish die of old age "
Halles Saint-Aubin sur mer - in partnership with UNESCO and the
Congolese government.

2025 —Auschwitz “ Memoirs of Auschwitz - Beyond the Abyss
Exhibition Abbeys aux Dames Caen - Paris Holocaust Memorial -
Grid tarps by UNESCO Paris

After a 10
year collaboration with the Galerie Michèle Chomette Paris, I preferred to be independent and to work in an ad hoc way with other galleries.
I live on commissions from governments, private institutions, print sales, and exhibiti ons.
I build my projects as a filmmaker who knows how to create a story and look for part ners to make it. I live in Saint-Aubin-sur-
Mer between Caen and Bayeux, my birthplace of always.
My work is in many collections, either Museums, Institutions or private institutions.

Collections Institutions:

Artothèque Caen
Caen Fine Arts Museums
Malraux le Havre Museum
MEP Maris

Paris National Library
Museum of the Impressionists
Montebello Trouville Museum
Museum of Normandy Caen
Lower Normandy Frac
FNAC Paris
Conservatoire du Littoral Paris
Maison Victor Hugo Paris
Marine Museum
Cahors Museum
Calais Museum of Fine Arts
Galerie Château d'eau Toulouse
Candie Museum Guernsey
Solvaer Museum Norway

PASCAL VANNIER

Pascal Vannier spent most of his career at France Télévisions. Both at the national editorial of France 3, for the creation of a new news program, on 19/20, and then in Normandy after a job at Antenne 2 (France 2 today).
A presenter and major reporter, he is the author of numerous documentaries on vari ous subjects, including the events of the summer of 1944 in Normandy, and he wor ks closely with the magazine de la mer Littoral in Rennes, Brittany.

He was associate editor of the French 3 Normandy programs, was in charge of spe cial operations, and is the author of two exceptional odysseys, the history of the Cit é de la Mer de Cherbourg and that of the dairy cooperative of Isigny Sainte-Mère, published by Ouest-France Editions.

Together with the photographer Olivier Mériel, he wrote the 'Island in the Isla nds', a black and white escapade on the Channel Islands and an exhibition at the Musée de Normandie with the collaboration of its director Jean-Marie Levesque.
Pascal Vannier participated in audiovisual projects for the Caen Memorial, th e BritishMuseum of Pegasus Bridge and the Cité de la Mer de Cherbourg.

In 2023, he was curator of the exhibition event of the 30th Prix Bayeux Calva dos-Normandie of war correspondents, *The Other Landing*.
An exhibition dedicated to the war reporters of the three months of the Battle of Normandy with a book published in October 2025. Pascal Vannier resides in Normandy.

Main documentaries:
The Summer of Freedom (52')
Les temps du Mont-Saint-Michel (52')
Karine Saporta designer France/Japan (52')
Horses of battle (52')
Jersey, the silver island (52')
Le Havre and immigration from Brittany (52')
Cherbourg, the transatlantic blues United States/ Great Britain/France (52')

The Other Landing (52’) War correspondents in Normandy -Archives
Moulinex, Chronicle of a Death Foretold (25)- France
Enemies United States/ Germany/ France (25')
Forgotten Black Soldiers- WWII in Cherbourg (25’)
The Death Valley (25’) Asbestose in Normandy
Zece Prajini (25’) Musique - Romania
La « sarditude » de Paolo Fresu (25’) Musique - Sardinia/Italy/France
Sleeping Beauty (13’) - Cherbourg, the Art Deco transatlantic hall- France
Lost City -South Africa- (13’)