

**Sophie Elbaz**  
***Inner Geographies***  
Installation

**Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme**  
In conjunction with the Mois de la Photo in Paris, 2012  
**28 September 2012–27 January 2013**

## **Inner Geographies**, scenography by the artist

Anne H el ene Hoog, exhibition curator *Juifs d'Alg erie* and *Inner Geographies*  
Juliette Braillon, project coordinator

The MAHJ has organised a series of events in 2012 focussing on the history of the Jews of Algeria. The museum is now showing an installation coproduced with Sophie Elbaz, evoking her relationship with her family history, Constantine (her father's birthplace) and Algeria.

*Inner Geographies* is divided into four distinct spaces and combining photographs, videos and family archives, it describes the process by which the artist has reappropriated her family history. The importance of the imaginary in the assimilation of inherited or reconstituted memories is primordial. The evocation of family memory in the discourse of mourning or severance with the past often characterises the vision of the second generation. Sophie Elbaz set out to understand why her grandfather chose to stay in Constantine (where he died on 21 December 1962, six months after Algerian independence), whereas his wife and three children left for France in the 1950s. The several trips she made to Constantine and Algeria gave rise to a complex, ecstatic then painful confrontation with reality. It is with an entirely new vision, drawing on images from the past and those she created herself, that she is now expressing both her enchantment and disenchantment, the driving forces of a singular and extremely personal work.

In 2007, I went to Constantine in search of my Sephardic origins on my father's side. There, I made an initial, poetic film in memory of my grandfather, Jonathan Elbaz, and the * le fantastique* triptych. Today, the reinterpretation of this material left in "limbo" and my family archives has inspired this photographic itinerary. From the need for enchantment to the evidence of disenchantment, it poses the question of our relationship with reality, memory and history, and our right distance from them. The exhibition opens with the question of passed down identity and heritage. The second space, a kind of passage towards the other spaces, symbolises the relationship between the living and the dead, between memories and traces. The third space deals with the idealisation of the rediscovered origin. A series of photographs reflects a totally projective perception of the city of my ancestors and the strange sensation of complete disorientation in such a familiar country. The final section leaves us in the silence of ruins. At the end of the journey, the imaginary dimension is gradually effaced by the reality of Algeria today.

ANNEE 1958

Registre unique

N° 26

Mariage du Cinq-vingt  
mil neuf cent

cinquante-huit

DÉPARTEMENT  
DES ALPES-MARITIMES

VILLE DE  
MENTON

ÉPOUX

ENTRE: Jean Sausseur El Baz

profession Médecin aspirant

Né à Constantine, dépt: algérie

le 28 juillet 1933 (24 ans)

Domicilié à Menton et précédemment à Paris VII Seine

131 rue de l'Université

Fils de Jonathan El Baz

Et de Suzanne Faiza Kalifa, son épouse

de

Contrat de mariage Réant

Signature de l'Époux

Décédé le

à

L'officier de l'état civil,

Sceau de la Mairie.

ÉPOUSE

ET: Françoise Henri Lucie Duval

profession Étudiante en médecine

Née à Belfort Territoires dépt

le 6 septembre 1933 (24 ans)

Domiciliée à Menton, hôtel Magali et précédemment

à Paris VII

Fille de Jean Lucien Louis Duval

Et de André Gabrielle Marie Savelli, son épouse

de

Signature de l'Épouse

Délivré le 5 avril 1958

L'officier de l'état civil,



Décédée le

à

L'officier de l'état civil,

Sceau de la Mairie.

The Hidden Things, 1 light box 1m X 1m, 2012

## The Hidden Things

I always wanted to be my father's daughter, the heiress of his history. I wanted my place in the Elbaz line, the descendants of Rahmin Elbaz, to be recognised. Born in 1856 at Khenchela and nicknamed "Baba Aziz," Rahmin Elbaz became a French citizen when he was fourteen and married Rachel Gallico, born in 1861, the daughter of a rabbi in Strasbourg.

Both died at Khenchela, Rachel in 1943 and Rahmin Elbaz a year later. The personalities of the women in my family, particularly my paternal grandmother, Suzanne Zaira Kalifa (1907-1993), left a deep mark on me as a child. Her love for her sons governed her life. In the photograph taken in Constantine in 1926, she is posing with her mother, Khemissa Allouch, born in Constantine around 1860.

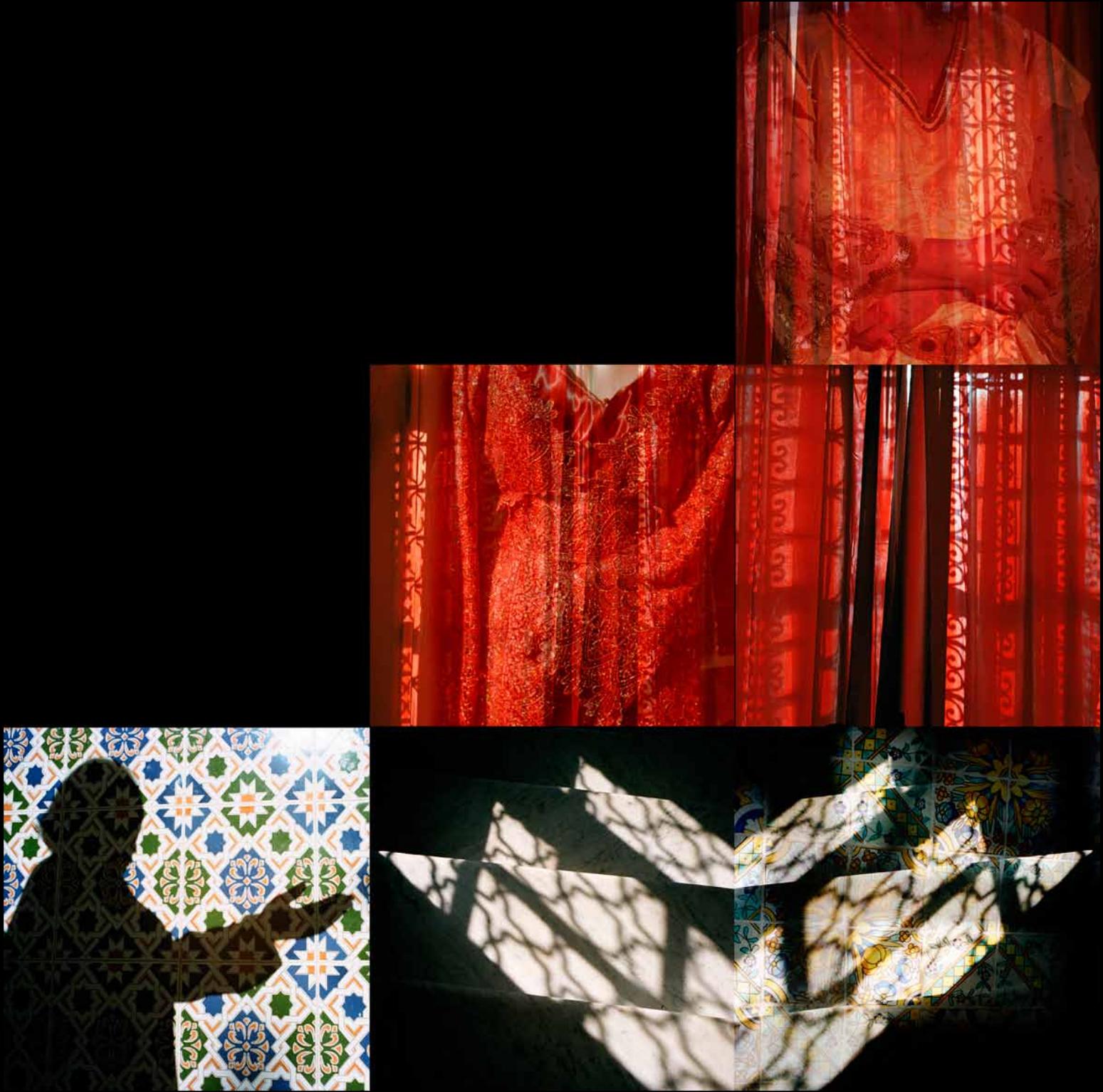
I grew up without any knowledge of my paternal family history. To make up for this loss, I tried to identify with this story through an idealisation of my Arab identity, of the land of my origins, of its men and women, and in doing so I neglected my French culture. For a long time, my life was determined by this loss. I went in search for it everywhere except in myself. I was seeking a home, a family "elsewhere." A nomad, I lost myself in multiple identities far from my origins: the daughter of a Catholic mother and a Jewish father, a child of mixed parentage to whom no history belonged entirely.



Family archives 13,5 x 10 cm

Suzanne Zaira Kalifa my grand-mother (left ).

taken in Constantine in 1926, she is posing with her mother, Khemissa Allouch, born in Constantine around 1860.



*The Hidden Things*, 6 light boxes LED 1M X 1M, 2012

## The Passage

I was fifteen when my mother took me with her to Constantine, to the grave of my grandfather, Jonathan Elbaz.

Years later, I promised to return to this source.

In 2007, I wandered in the abandoned Jewish cemetery in vain, never finding Jonathan's grave. I was deeply moved by the solitude of the dead. If my grandfather hadn't decided to stay in Constantine after Algeria's independence in 1962, I wouldn't have been able to retrace the path of my origins. He is my only link with this land. During this quest I felt him by my side, guiding and protecting me in this city where I was alone.



*The passage*, video installation, 4mn, 2012

## Qacentina blues

In Qacentina – the Turkish name for Constantine – I experienced a strange state of limbo between the world of memory and that of my quest. Emotions superimposed themselves. I was a stranger yet everything was familiar.

In the hotel room where my grandfather died of a stroke, dreams invaded my sleep, and a date, 21 December 1962, the day when *La Dépêche de Constantine* announced on its front page the “Sudden death of Doctor J. Elbaz.”

A search: up, down, here, there, up again, down again... Places tell a story, conjure images of a past of which nothing remains. Grievous traces on white marble gravestones allow themselves to be stared at. I pace up and down rows of dead people forgotten by time itself. The ancestor lights up for the Shabbat, the imam begins Friday evening prayer.

This island suspended on the wings of time does not fear eternity. On this bench where my grandfather used to sit, only this moment belongs to both of us.

The Rhumel sings of Constantine. An eternal, desolate and hopeless rock, Constantine stands proud and immortal. We have to wash ourselves after so many dead.



*Fantastic island, Constantine, 2007*

Collection prints – Diasec 60 x 60 cm

Left to right : *The bridge, My grand-father bench, the cliff*

## Qacentina

To conclude her quest for her origins, she also presented her first video-film, which she made in late 2007 in Constantine, Algeria, and which traces in a poetical form the memory of her grandfather, Jonathan Elbaz. The film is also an account of her search for the Sephardic roots on her father's side of the family in a country where a certain memory has become silent.



*Qacentina*  
Duration: 12mn  
Produced in 2008  
Medium : vidéo 16

## The Silence of Ruins

*“Don’t tread so heavily!*

*Believe me, the skin of the earth*

*Is made entirely of the bodies we were.”*

*Abu al-Ala al-Ma’arri, Syrian philosopher and poet (973-1057).*

Slowly, the source emerges from its imaginary dimension and overwhelms me with its reality. What remains of this past is the name, the blood, the smell of this land that has become familiar, the story, the friendships.

Opposite the new city, Qacentina, alive but exhausted, stands in rebellious silence. In the Souiqa, a vestige of the city’s Ottoman period, life winds its way through the ruins. Melancholy is made from the secrets of the absent.

And if men die, places remain.



*The silence of ruins, covered installation*  
*Souika 2, 212 x 414 cm, 2012.*



*The silence of ruins.* Constantine , 2012  
Serie, Fragmentation. 12 argentic prints 60 x 60 cm mounted

Views of the exhibition **Inner Geographies**,  
exposed 28 september 2012 to 27 january 2013 at Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme,

Credit: Paul Allain and Christophe Fouin - DR Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme



*The passage*



*The passage*



*Quacentina blues*



*Quacentina blues*



*The silence of ruins*



*Fragmentation*





## Sophie Elbaz

born in 1960 in Paris from a father born in Algeria and a French mother, Sophie Elbaz left to Mexico in 1980 where she took her first photographs. She spent a whole year between Guatemala and Mexico. Upon her return to Paris, she decided to leave for the States in 1983 where she assisted the American artists Ernestine Ruben, Patrick Demarchelier and Gilles Peress.

In 1984, she was accepted in the intensive photojournalism program of F. Ritchin, then Picture Editor at the New York Times, at the International Center of Photography (I.C.P.) in New York

In 1986, she was given her first reporter assignment by Reuters to cover West Africa where she was charged with current events in twenty-two African countries. Africa would be a veritable initiation which resonated in her deeper self. In 1989, she joined the Sygma agency after working as a reporter in India. She would be the only woman in the Sygma «news magazine» department and report on critical events that strongly influenced her vision of life. During the Balkan war, thanks to a grant «Villa Medici hors les murs», she spent three years constructing «Contre toute attente» (Against all expectations), a black-and-white photographic essay exposed at many festival or Museum.

The next year, she parted with the world of photo agencies to engage in a more personal creative project, “Mémoire d’Elles”, which began in 1996 with the support of AFAA (rebaptized Cultures France), an intimate mosaic on four generations of French women during the course of a century. A book went to print in 1998, soon followed by two itinerant exhibitions, which travelled through the French cultural network from the Middle-East to Africa until 2003.

In 1995, she also discovered Cuba. In her own rendering of the Garcia Lorca opera house in Havana, a set of photos that would be widely exhibited .

From 2000 to 2005, she devoted herself entirely to her artistic work and has been developing a technique allowing her to rework pictures using organic components. This experimentation allows her to transform the images from her travels. This led her to bring a completely different world of imagination into her work, a world of emotion derived from a process of subtraction in which chemistry gradually changes fixed notions of what a photograph is.

Origines, an African serie of these «metamorphoses», initially exhibited during a festival in Bamako in 2003, were also displayed in Barcelona, Milan, Berne and Paris during 2004.

In 2006, she presented the Indian series: “Were are you about ?” By this new set of images done in different environment, she lived a transcendence of inner violence while she was enduring the process of disease during 18 months.

In 2007, Sophie Elbaz was invited to participate in the 8th Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates. The Biennial’s theme focused on the environment. Elbaz set out to produce an organic photographic work, reinforcing the idea of the contamination of the environment throughout time. It is entitled I Accuse.

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initial, poetic film in memory of my grandfather, Jonathan Elbaz, and the *Île fantastique* triptych.

In 2008, *The others side of the self (L'envers de soi)* includes some of the most significant work from the photographic career of Sophie Elbaz was presented at the prestigious European Center for Photography (MEP), Paris, France from June to September 2008. She presents her more recent work under a trilogy entitled *Aleyo*, on the theme of the Sacred, the Body, and Politics.

In 2012, *Interior Geographies* is shown at The MAHJ, The Museum of Arts and History of Judaism for the Month of Photography in Paris. The exhibition is divided into four distinct spaces and combining photographs, videos and family archives, it describes the process by which the artist has reappropriated her family history.

The several trips she made to Constantine and Algeria gave rise to a complex, ecstatic then painful confrontation with reality.

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## Solo exhibitions

2012: *Inner Geographies*, Month of Photography, Museum of art and history of Judaism, Paris.

2010: *Qacentina* is presented at AP'art, Art Festival at the Château des Alpilles à Saint-Rémy de Provence, France.

2009: *El Lorca* at the Raum Gallery, Bern, Switzerland.

*Dreams of the Earth*, is presented during the Month of Photography, at PhotoRio in Rio, Brazil

2008: *L'envers de soi (The others side of the self)* includes some of the most significant work from the photographic career of Sophie Elbaz. is presented at the European Center for Photography (MEP), Paris, France.

Parution of the book *Aleyo* – Ed - Images en Manœuvres

*Qacentina*, Video 12mm made in Algeria.

*Aleyo* at the Gallery Seine 51 in Paris.

Three months residency in Rio, Brazil.

*Origins et where are you about ?* shown at the CCF\* of Alger, Algeria.

2007: *Origins and How far along are you ?* will be exposed at the French Cultural Center, Alger, Algeria.

Artist residency in Constantine, Algeria.

2006: *How far along are you?* Exhibition at the Raum Gallery, Bern, Switzerland

*Origins*. Exhibition at the AFD (French agency of development) in Paris.

2004: *Caracaos*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Maracaïbo, Venezuela.

2003: *Caracaos*, Exhibition at the National Gallery, Fine Art Museum, Caracas, Venezuela.

*Origins*, Exhibition at the 5th Bamako Biennial, Bamako, Mali.

*Origins* presented at l'Espace Lhomond, Swiss Oceanic Institute (tied with Schlumberger, Neufilze Bank and Mallet-Art), in Paris.

*A Time for living*, for the city of Marseille exhibited at the Fnac in Marseille for woman 'day.

2002: *Memory of Theirs*, exhibition at French Cultural Centers in Bahrein and United Emirates and Qatar.

At the Peace festival in Salvador.

Presented in Honduras, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and in Guatamala, Bolivia.

*16 Districts, 16 Families*, Photographic creation ordered by the delegation of the Family Action and Rights of Woman of the Ville de Marseille, presented by the town during the week for woman.

- 2001: Memory of Theirs, Exhibition for the Photographic Month at Tunis, Tunisia.  
 Memory of Theirs, exposed at the Art Center at Bagdad, Irak, Cultural Centers of Beyrouth, Tripoli, Deir and Kamar, Saïda, Tyr and Nabatieh, Libanon.  
 Memory of Theirs exposed at the French Cultural Centers of Haïti and Saint-Domingue.  
 Memory of Theirs, Exhibition at the central library of the university of Caracas and invited at a women symposium, Venezuela.
- 2000: Memory of Theirs, Exhibition at the Cultural Centers of Damas, Lahaquieh, Tartous, Gallery le Pont in Alep, Association of Fine Arts at Homs, Syria and at Aman in Jordan.
- 1999: Memory of Theirs, presented City Hall of Orleans within the framework of the Forum for Human Rights, France  
 Against all expectation follows the Theater play of Olivier Py, « Requiem for Sebrenica », in Orleans, Paris and Geneva.  
 EL Lorca, exhibition at the National Center for Photography, Geneva, Switzerland.
- 1997: African femininity,, Exhibition at Pictorial Service for the Month of Photography, Paris, France.
- 1996: Against all expectation,Exhibition at the Cetinje Biennial, Montenegro, Only Biennial for contemporary art in the East.  
 1995 Against all expectation Exhibition at KODAK ,Paris.  
 Against all expectation Exhibition at the Museum of Orange, France.
- 1994: Against all expectation Exhibition at Visa pour l'Image, Perpignan, France

## Selected group exhibitions

- 2011: Group show « Carthography » , Algerian Memories, at Cornerhouse, Manchester ,England.
- 2007: 8th Sharjah biennial, Emirats Arab united.
- 2005: Origins, exhibition at the French Institute in Joannesburg, South Africa.  
 How far along are you? Collective exhibition at the Vantabren Contemporary Art, Aix in Provence, France
- 2005: Origins, exhibition at the French Cultural Center of Kinshasa, Congo.
- 2004: Origins, exhibition at the City Hall of Saint-Denis, Reunion Island.
- 2004: Origins, exhibition at the Contemporary Cultural Center, CCB of Barcelone, Espagne.
- 2004: Origins, exhibition «Made in Africa» at the Porte Romana Museum, Milan, Italy.
- 2004: Origins, exhibition at the Kornhausforum Museum, Bern, Switzerland.
- 2003: Origins, exhibition with Alfons Alt at the Lhomond Space in Paris, France.
- 2003: Buffalo Caravan, Modern Art Museum Arhuskunstmuseum, Denmark.  
 Buffalo caravan at la Friche Belle de Mai, Marseille, France.

## Residences

- 2008: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 3 months. Maison de France and the City of Rio for the year of Francein Brazil.
- 2007: Constantine, Algeria.1 month. CCF, French Cultural Center.
- 2003: Caracas, Venezuela. 2 months. Fondation Llama.

## Video

**Qacentina, Video,12mm - 2008**

## Selected bibliography

Marisa Paolucci « African Self-portraits », Il Manifesto, April 4th 2004.

Michket Krifa « Recovered Images », Paris Photo Magazin, February/March 2003 n°24.

Simon N'Njami « Bamako or Africa as it looks at itself » Le Monde 2 n° 33 october 2003

Maryline Crivello « Vision of war » La pensée de midi/Acte sud N°9 winter 2002

« Living in Exile » American photo, September/October 1996.

Bernard Cier, philosopher, « The coming scene » text for the exhibition, « How far along are you? » november 2004

## Artist's publication

2008: Publication of the monography, ALEYO, 112 pages. Editions Images en Manœuvre. Texts, JL Monterosso, director of the European Center for Photography (MEP), Paris, Alain Borer, philosopher and Seloua Luste Boulbina, philosopher

2005: Publication of the book, Origins, in collaboration with the architects Moatti & Riviere presenting JPGaultier's house of haute couture in Paris.

2004: « 325 rue Saint-Martin », Realisation of a unique book offered to JP Gaultier on the metamorphosis of the site.

2003: ART SUD published, Caracaos, text and portfolio by Sophie Elbaz.

1998: Publication of the book, Memory of theirs, Editions Points de suspension Texts by Catherine Trautmann, Ministre of Culture, Françoise Heritier, Professor au collège de France, Paris.

1997: El Lorca, Publication of 25 pages in Geo-Korea, may 1997 n°6

Publication in various international magazines like Time, Paris-Match, Stern etc...

## Filmography

« Fax Culture » presented « El Lorca ». Swiss Television 1999

« Fax Culture » presented « Contre toute attente » Swiss Television 1997

« Against all expectation » on LCI, (cable chain of information), France. 1995

Canadian Television : The future of photojournalism in 1994

« Le Déclat de Sophie » portrait realized by Décryptage, FR3, France.

France 3 Marseille et M6 Marseille : « 16 portraits, 16 districts ».

## Collections

Museum of art and history of Judaism

Maison Européenne de la Photographie (MEP) in Paris.

Ariane de Rothschild

France Telecom, New-York, USA.

Jean-Paul Gaultier, Paris.

Private collectioners in Paris, London, New-York, Milan, Berne.