

## SAINT-OUEN-L'AUMÔNE, FRANCE

## Dominique Petitgand

ABBAYE DE MAUBUISSON

Each of Dominique Petitgand's sound installations begins with a drawing, a simple sketch in pen on paper that maps the placement of speakers and the space within which the visitor will experience the work. Although these rudimentary plans are never exhibited, they provide insight into Petitgand's construction of the listener's experience within a given situation. Describing his works as "filled with

silence," Petitgand seems most interested in the interstitial spaces between quiet and noise, the raw voice and the articulation of words—he focuses on the art of listening rather than simply the production of sound.

One of four new works presented in his recent exhibition "*Quelqu'un est tombé*" (Someone Has Fallen), *Les ballons* (The Balloons), 2006/2009, installed in the abbey's barn, formerly a storage space for produce given as



Dominique Petitgand,  
*Exhalaisons*  
(Exhalations),  
2002/2009, sound  
installation for two  
loudspeakers.  
Installation view.

tithes, is a rare example of a work by Petitgand that doesn't involve the voice. The recorded sound of inflated rubber balls, dribbled and bouncing, ricochets from four speakers inside the barn—a damp, cool space lit only by natural light that seeps in through loose roof tiles and a doorway that Petitgand has sealed with clear Plexiglas. The work remains audible upon exiting the historic site, although most do not perceive it before entering. Similarly discreet, *Exhalaisons* (Exhalations), 2002/2009, is a work addressing exhibition visitors or unsuspecting passersby sitting down on a particular park bench on the abbey grounds. Two speakers then emit a series of intimate sounds: a tune being hummed, a few chords strummed on a guitar, a sigh, a sharp intake of breath. No words are spoken. Piercing the sonic ambience, the piece pulls the site's existing sounds—birds, frogs, planes, traffic—to the surface by embellishing, and thus emphasizing, the existing auditory space.

Inside the abbey, Petitgand layers a collection of sounds across three rooms for *Quelqu'un est tombé*, 1993/2009. Four speakers in the first and largest room play an irregular progression of short, loud noises, while the second, much smaller room echoes with long phrases of music. In the third room, the only one that is fully soundproofed, five different voices are heard. "*Je marche, je trébuche, je tombe*" (I walk, I trip, I fall), one of the young voices repeats. Another calls out, "*Quelqu'un est tombé.*" The narrative, like the melodies elsewhere in Petitgand's work, is unresolved but rich with allusions to shared expressions, emotions, and actions. Likewise, in *Je parle* (I Speak), 2009, a speaker is installed in each corner of the abbey's square reception hall, two atop white pedestals and two on the yellow and green-glazed tile floor. We hear children's voices from the speakers on display; the pedestals are about as tall as one would imagine the speakers to be. The speakers on the floor emit a pulsing rhythm that contrasts with the abrupt, contrarian utterances of the young voices: "*Non, non, non . . . jamais . . . on ne se regardait pas . . . on fermait les yeux*" (No, no, no . . . never . . . we were not looking at each other . . . we were closing our eyes). Each clipped and enigmatic phrase negates both vision and explanation.

The words spoken in Petitgand's works are never scripted—rather, they come from recorded interviews and conversations with friends and family. The artist's works are dated to the year of the earliest recording and that of the moment he installs the gathered sounds in a particular place. But although Petitgand records all of the sounds himself—none are "found"—the origin of the sounds is less important than the memories and associations that these fragments can awaken.

—Lillian Davies