

Dominique Petitgand

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Quelqu'un est tombé

Abbey of Maubuisson, Val d'Oise, France

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La tête la première

Frac Haute-Normandie, Sotteville-lès-Rouen, France

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A burst of short, sharp clicks resonates loudly through the large empty hall. It stands in stark contrast to the thundery, hypnotic drone that issues intermittently from the adjoining anteroom and instills a note of urgency into the solemn child's voice that occasionally emerges from an adjacent space. The sounds of this loudspeaker installation by Dominique Petitgand are like the lines and colors of a visual artist: broken up by pauses and silences, they have become distinct entities that can be contrasted and juxtaposed.



Dominique Petitgand, *Quelqu'un est tombé* (Somebody fell), (1993-2009). Installation view at the Abbey of Maubuisson, France. Photo: Catherine Brossais.

Titled *Quelqu'un est tombé* (1993-2009) (Somebody fell), it is just one of the immaterial works in the French artist's one-man show in the Cistercian Abbey of Maubuisson. Untrammelled by visuals, these installations conjure up life-like mental images and vivid imaginary worlds. They also appropriate and question their surroundings, not unlike the works of Daniel Buren. In Petitgand's *Les ballons* (2006-2009) (The balls), four speakers installed in the corners of a barn diffuse the sounds of balls bouncing off different materials. Punctuated by pauses that throw them into sharp relief, the sounds hurtle through the darkened space, altering its perspectives and infusing it with a new and powerful dynamic.



Dominique Petitgand, *Les ballons* (The balls), (2006-2009). Installation view at the Abbey of Maubuisson, France. Photo: Catherine Brossais.

At his concurrent exhibition at the Frac Haute-Normandie, the capacity of sound to redefine space is rendered even more explicitly. Here, a single installation titled *La tête la première* (1995-2009) (Head first) uses sound to demarcate six different areas on the upper and lower levels of an empty open-plan space — a disembodied voice intermittently occupies the upper level, while the occasional whirr or drone rises out of the silence in another part of the gallery. Petitgand has carefully orchestrated his materials: the sounds from one area are diffused in conjunction with those of certain other areas, alternately enhancing, dominating and drowning them out. As visitors pick their way amid these sonic irruptions, they become increasingly aware of the silences, which seem to reverberate just as loudly through the empty gallery. In Petitgand's works, silence is far more than just the absence of sound.