

PARIS

Mathieu Briand

GALERIE MAISONNEUVE

"Mr. and Mrs. Briand, the bakers of the 'accursed bread,' have left town on a pilgrimage to Lourdes." "These inhabitants of Pont-Saint-Esprit ate the bread. . . . Some had to be locked up in padded cells for several days." "Mrs. Payen was the last to recover. . . . She sometimes still suffers from delirium." A 1951 copy of *Paris Match*, opened to a sensationalist story on a mass poisoning by bread made from grain infected with ergot (a parasitic fungus found in rye and wheat), lay on a table in Mathieu Briand's "Prologue" to the ten-chapter project "Ubiq: A Mental Odyssey." Offering keys to what is to come, this prologue was a re-creation of Briand's studio: a diverse collection of objects on four tables pushed up against one side of the gallery, with small paintings, notes, photocopies, and found objects on the wall space above.

The Briands of Pont-Saint-Esprit are not relatives of the artist, but that they allegedly sent the town on a bout of hallucinations and flashbacks is notable. Indeed, Mathieu Briand is fascinated by LSD, a semi-synthetic derivative of ergot. Standing beneath a round loaf hung on the wall like a rustic ornament, flasks, test tubes, and petri dishes evoked the chemical process. Near the *Paris Match*, a tacky, miniature grotto with a fountain sheltered some sugar cubes (containing LSD?), recalling the Grotto of Massabielle, which the Pont-Saint-Esprit bakers undoubtedly visited in Lourdes, as well as Leonardo's *The Virgin of the Rocks* (shown in overpainted photocopies hung midway along the wall). Also featured was a fifteenth-century engraving of a manually powered grain mill; on the table below was a wooden model based on it. But where the engraving shows one central wheel, the



View of Mathieu Briand, "Ubiq: a Mental Odyssey," 2007. "Prologue," 2007.

model had two, visually echoing nearby pictures of the double-ringed space station in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. This melding of the past and the past's future reappeared in the form of three open paperbacks glued together in a triangle: Philip K. Dick's *Ubik*, Jorge Luis Borges's *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, and Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Project for a Revolution in New York*. Briand's "studio" bred countless such interconnections, exploring conflicting perceptions of reality, displaced viewpoints, and temporal leaps and lapses.

Galerie Maisonneuve has committed its entire exhibition space to Briand's epic from January 2007 through January 2008. Drastically stretching out the time frame of an exhibition is surely a strategy to short-circuit market conventions that are wearing thin. The pervasiveness of young galleries vending small, crafty drawings of feigned naïveté and of big galleries cranking out gargantuan, loud, densely trashy yet conspicuously expensive installations suggests a prevalent belief that galleries should aim for their market niches. Maisonneuve is a young gallery in a medium-small space that is working big in the only way it can: through time. Briand's eleven-part odyssey is bound to be gargantuan, but it also stands to gain from a logic that runs counter to the instant gratification of a single outburst. His task, for the time being, is to keep viewers coming back for the next chapter the way a good novel keeps readers reading on.

—Jian-Xing Too