

Bill Fontana

Silent Echoes. Notre-Dame

Premiere 2022



© Bill Fontana

Press release
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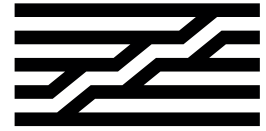
#SilentEchoes

New presentation of the installation

Wednesday, October 12 — Monday, November 14, 2022
Center Pompidou, South terrace of the Museum, level 5
Simultaneously at Arter gallery in Istanbul
through December 4, 2022 (arter.org.tr)

Since the early 1970s, Bill Fontana has focused his work on the amplified sound of chosen objects and places, interweaving discreet sounds into subtle acoustic landscapes. Following the fire on 15 April 2019 at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, the artist designed a live sound sculpture for ten channels at the IRCAM studios, using seismic accelerators attached to ten of the cathedral's bells. Reduced to silence during the restoration works to the building, the bells nevertheless remain extraordinary recesses of sound. Each bell responds through its tonality to the noises of the restoration worksite and the murmurs of the city. Broadcast in real time, these multiple sounds are fashioned into an ensemble relayed through thirty loudspeakers.

Following its premiere in June of this year as part of IRCAM's ManiFeste festival, this new sound sculpture by Bill Fontana is presented to the public for the second time on the South Terrace on the 5th floor of the Centre Pompidou, facing the towers of Notre-Dame de Paris. Fontana's sound sculpture can also be heard in Istanbul until December 4th. This is a co-production by IRCAM and the Centre Pompidou, in partnership with the public body overseeing the preservation and restoration of Notre Dame Cathedral, which granted access to the worksite.



Bill Fontana
Silent Echoes. Notre-Dame

Sound Sculpture
Premiere 2022, Commissioned by IRCAM-Centre Pompidou

Exhibition commissioning Marcella Lista, chief curator,
New Media Collection at Musée national d'art moderne-Centre Pompidou

Production Bill Fontana Studio.
Coproduction Coproduction IRCAM, Centre Pompidou

In partnership with



Établissement public
chargé de la conservation
et de la restauration
de la cathédrale
Notre-Dame de Paris

With the support of



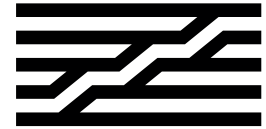
Bill Fontana



Born in Cleveland in 1947, Bill Fontana studied Music and Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York, then travelled to Australia, Japan and Germany before devoting his time to composition. He began to create sound sculptures in 1968. These sculptures showcase the urban environment as a living source of musical information, with the common power to evoke a visual image in the listener's mind.

His work has been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Tate Modern and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. His most famous works include: *Distant Trains*, *Satellite Ear Bridge Cologne-San Francisco*, *The Sound of an Unblown Flute*, *Panoramic Echoes* and *Acoustical Visions of the Golden Gate Bridge*, in addition to *Sound Island* at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris in 1994, to mark the 50th anniversary of the Normandy landings.

www.resoundings.org



Sculpting sound

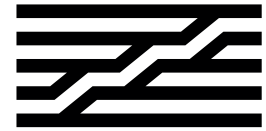
Course of Bill Fontana's work by Marcella Lista

During his studies in the 1960s at the New School for Social Research in New York, Bill Fontana met John Cage and rapidly developed an interest in music as a conscious practice and an extension of hearing. He soon set aside musical composition to record the sounds emerging from the environment, using the technique of *field recording*, and gradually built up a vast sound library which he continues to enrich to this day.

Following the Fluxus movement and its characteristic musical iconoclasm, he designed a founding work in 1972, entitled *Sound Sculpture with Resonators*. The work consisted of amplifying the echoes produced naturally inside various everyday objects, which the artist placed on a New York rooftop, exposed to the sounds of the city, broadcasting them in real time inside the building. Abstracted from their source, the sounds reveal accidental harmonic textures, both enigmatic and unpredictable, which are in turn spatialised in an empty room. Bill Fontana's concept of sound sculpture is derived from an idea developed by Marcel Duchamp in a brief note jotted down among the papers of *La Mariée Mise à Nu par ses Célibataires Même*: 'Musical sculpture. Sounds lasting and leaving from different places and forming a sounding sculpture which lasts.' While this notion rapidly became an essential aspect of his artistic language, his fascination with the principle of projecting sound matter in a remote place from its point of origin also remained a key feature.

In 1980, Bill Fontana installed microphones under the suspension bridge which links Cincinnati to Covington; the vibrations from passing vehicles produced a drone of variable frequencies and intensity which Fontana retransmitted in real time through loudspeakers set up on a public square next to the Center for Contemporary Art in Cincinnati. In 1990, he transmitted the sounds of a nearby forest, threatened by the building of a dam, through seventy loudspeakers placed on the esplanades of Vienna's museums. In 1994, his first major installation in France already involved a Parisian monument. *Sound Island*, commissioned by the City of Paris and the Ministry for Culture, broadcast the live sounds of Normandy the coast, captured by microphones and hydrophones, at the Arc de Triomphe on Place de l'Étoile.

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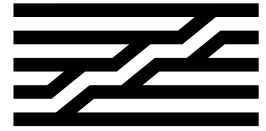


A discursive space emerges from this *in situ* technique which interweaves two distant places, with all their sensory, cultural and political resonances. Placing acoustic exploration at the forefront of his work, Bill Fontana also reveals the richness of sonic material at the edge of human hearing. The seismic accelerometers currently attached to the bells of Notre Dame appeared in his work in 2006, when he amplified London's Millennium Bridge in the Turbine Hall of the neighbouring Tate Modern. His in-depth exploration of the harmonic structure of bells began in 2007 with *Panoramic Echoes*, which reactivated the chimes of the historical MetLife skyscraper in New York. For the first work in the *Silent Echoes* series in 2009, the artist turned to the bells of Kyoto's Buddhist temples, transmitting the echoes they produced when still. The intimate listening to the constant vibration of these ancient instruments, the immersion in the wonder of matter, also echoes John Cage's philosophy: 'Music is continuous, only listening is intermittent.' For Bill Fontana, musical sculpture is a visual idea rooted essentially in duration: 'It is also a temporal concept', he wrote in 1978, 'which contrary to a performance has neither a beginning, middle nor end, but offers a continuum in the same way as a physical object.'

The recent emergence of video in Bill Fontana's work also serves as a complexification of representation rather than a direct illustration of the places evoked. From the patio of the Centre Pompidou, the aerial view of Notre Dame Cathedral creates a unique situation, calling on all the senses. Visitors can create their own composition as they move through the thirty loudspeakers, which subtly reproduce the sounds of the ten bells and foster dialogues between them. One can measure the difference between the eye and the ear, between the physical perceptions of the here and now, the city's soundscape reflected in the harmonics of each bell, and all the sights to take in from this extraordinary viewpoint.



Silent Echoes. Acoustic Visions, 2022 © Bill Fontana



A word from the partners

About the public institution in charge of the conservation and restoration of Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral



Établissement public
chargé de la conservation
et de la restauration
de la cathédrale
Notre-Dame de Paris

The public institution in charge of the conservation and restoration of Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral, provided for by the law of July 29, 2019, was created on December 1, 2019. Placed under the supervision of the Ministère de la Culture, it ensures the conduct, coordination and implementation of studies and operations contributing to the conservation and restoration of the cathedral. Its mission is also to promote the site and the trades and know-how that contribute to it, particularly through the implementation of cultural programs with an educational vocation, in France and abroad.

More info on www.rebatirnotredamedeparis.fr

Follow the news of the construction site on Facebook and Instagram @rebatirnotredamedeparis

About Orange



Orange is proud to provide financial and technical support for the *Silent Echoes. Notre-Dame* installation. As part of the Group's support for the restoration and outreach of the Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral, Orange has committed to working with IRCAM and artist Bill Fontana to keep the cathedral's ten bells, which have been silent since the fire of April 15, 2019, ringing and hearing.

Thanks to Orange Events, Orange is making available to the project all the power of its network and its capacity for innovation to allow visitors of *Silent Echoes. Notre-Dame* to live a unique experience.

Practical information

The Centre Pompidou

How to get there

75191 Paris cedex 04 / T. 00 33 (0)1 44 78 12 33

Metro: Hôtel de Ville, Rambuteau / RER Châtelet-Les-Halles

Opening times and ticket desk

Open every day from 11am to 9pm,
except on Tuesdays

Museum and exhibitions

14€, reduced price 11€

Free admission for people under 18 and for Centre Pompidou members (POP¹ card).

People under 26*, teachers and students of art schools, as well as members of the Maison des Artistes are entitled to free admission to the Museum and a reduced-price ticket for the exhibitions.

* 18-25 year olds living in an EU State or another State party to the Agreement on the European Economic Area

centrepompidou.fr

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