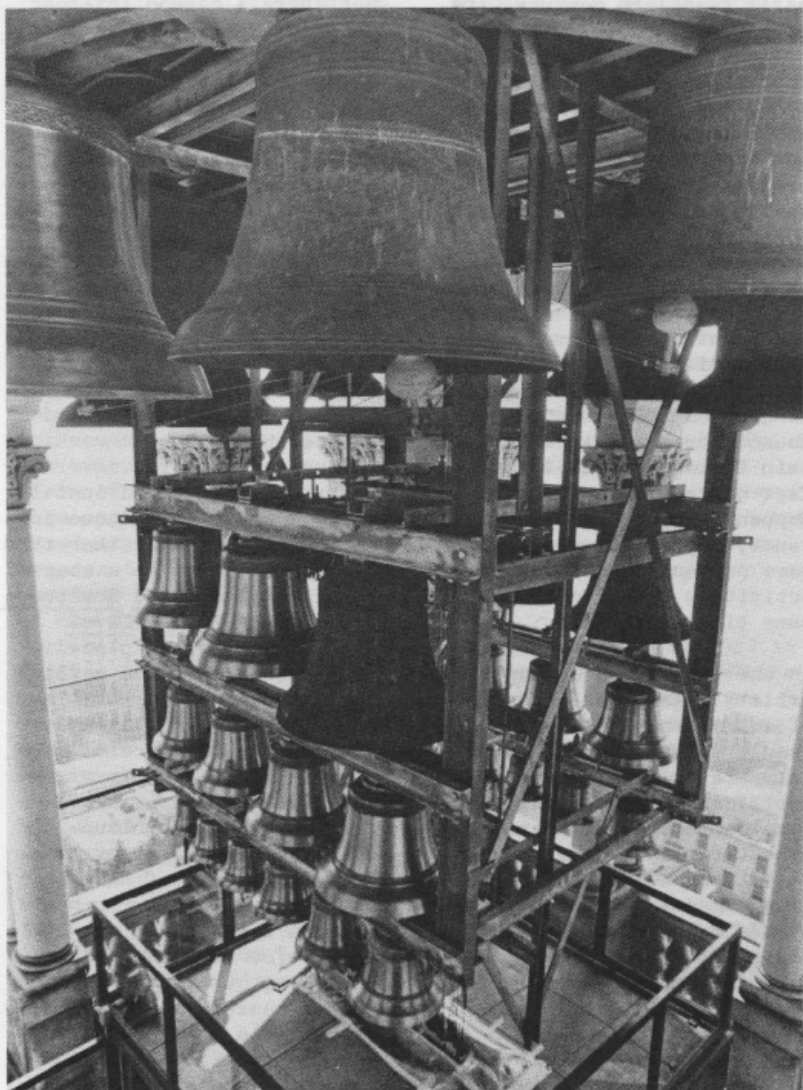


Bill Fontana
MATRIX/BERKELEY 116

University Art Museum
early April - early May 1988

Landscape Sculpture for Carillon, 1982-89



Bill Fontana's Landscape Sculpture with Carillon is a pure sound installation that uses the Sather Tower carillon on the UC Berkeley campus as its sound source. In sound installation, as opposed to sound sculpture, there is no visual element. Instead, pure sound is used sculpturally to define space.

Though the origins of contemporary sound installation can be found in the early twentieth century, its more recent roots are in the ideas of John Cage and the conceptual movement of the 1960s and '70s. Avant-garde composer John Cage, although not the first to include ordinary sounds from the environment in musical compositions, has most fully exploited the notion of sound as music. Furthermore, he is often regarded as the father of recent and contemporary intermedia art forms. Working with choreographer Merce Cunningham and artist Robert Rauschenberg at Black Mountain College in the 1950s, Cage organized the first Happenings, in which poetry, dance, music, and visual art were presented as independent activities occurring in the same time and space.

In the late 1960s conceptual artists began seeking modes of expression that did not result in the production of saleable objects. Some sculptors abandoned the timeless, three-dimensional object for environmental installations that temporarily engaged a total space. Others extended the idea of sculpture into performances in which the artist's body and actions replaced the static sculptural object. Sound has figured prominently in performances by such Bay Area artists as Tom Marioni

(MATRIX 39) and Terry Fox. Marioni explores the potential of music as a means of communicating telepathically with the audience. Fox has played self-invented, simple stringed instruments for long periods of time, inducing a hypnotic effect on himself and his listeners.

Artists who create sonic installations are not part of any school; they are individuals who work independently but share a common interest in transforming the aural environment. Max Neuhaus (New York) was a percussionist before turning to sonic installations in which electronic sound is subtly integrated with the environment. Michael Brewster (Los Angeles), trained as a visual artist, uses electronic tones or clicking noises to position participants in a given space.

Bill Fontana, whose background is in music and philosophy, has been working in the Bay Area for several years creating sound installations which are unique in employing ambient rather than electronic sound as a source. In his recent Sound Sculpture with a Sequence of Level Crossings, Fontana placed microphones near the warning bells at eight railroad level crossings in Berkeley and Emeryville, California. The signals from each microphone were simultaneously heard from corresponding loudspeakers mounted along the top of the wall of the Oakland Auditorium. Fontana's piece was not intended for an assembled audience, but rather for the casual passerby. The listener was able to compare, at a single location, actual sounds from many points in the landscape. Responses to

perceiving familiar environmental sound (train noises) in an altogether unexpected and impossible location varied from disorientation to amusement. Fontana likens his method to that of a photographer. In each work he focuses on an aspect of environmental sound in much the same way that a photographer selects and frames a small section of the visual world.

The MATRIX installation marks the first time Fontana has used a musical instrument as the primary sound source for an installation. The carillon's attraction is twofold: It is one of the few musical instruments specifically intended to relate to the environment, and it is a conspicuous acoustic landmark on the campus. The tower and the carillon can be seen and heard from the Museum sculpture garden, the site of the installation. Microphones connected to telephone lines are mounted on the roofs of six buildings in the sound field of the tower. Sounds from each microphone are mixed at the Museum and broadcast live to two speakers hung on the exterior of the Museum overlooking the garden. Two compositions, Musical Sculpture for Carillon #1 and #2, created by Fontana for this installation, are played regularly during the course of the exhibition. The compositions, based on repetition and gradual change are related to works by new music composers Philip Glass and Steve Reich as well as to traditional English bell ringing, called "change ringing."

Sound travels at a speed of approximately five seconds per mile. It is also affected

by the topography of the landscape and the prevailing weather conditions. The differences in time required for the sound to arrive at the various microphone locations (ranging from one-half second to two seconds) are translated into a complex series of bell echoes which effect the structural patterns of the music heard at the Museum. In addition to the carillon bell tones, any ambient sounds of sufficient volume (such as car horns, stadium noises, birds, and voices) are picked up by one or more of the microphones and become part of the piece. Fontana, like Cage, not only accepts but welcomes unexpected occurrences and the new musical forms they create.

Fontana's installation brings about an intensified awareness of the way the speed of sound, the shape of the landscape, and the environmental conditions at any given moment determine how sound is experienced. By comparing the different auditory qualities of the same sound as heard from many points in a landscape, the participant can construct a mental landscape.

Fontana was born in 1947 in Cleveland, Ohio. He studied philosophy and music in Cleveland before attending the New School for Social Research in New York, where he received a B.A. in 1970. He has received numerous fellowships and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and other institutions. He received a DAAD Fellowship in 1983-84; a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1985-87; and a grant from The LEF Foundation in 1987-88.

Constance Lewallen

Works in MATRIX:

1. Landscape Sculpture with Carillon, 1982-88, sound installation and related documentation. Lent by the artist.

2. Musical Sculpture for Carillon No. 1, 1988, musical composition.

3. Musical Sculpture for Carillon No. 2, 1988, musical composition.

Selected one-person exhibitions:

Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, CA '80; Akademie der Künste, Berlin, W. Germany, Für Augen und Ohren '80 (traveled to Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, catalogues); The Brooklyn Museum, NY '83; Amerika Haus, Berlin, W. Germany '83 (catalogue); Wacoal Art Center, Tokyo, Japan '86; Whitney Museum of American Art, NY '86; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, W. Germany, Metropolis Köln through the Golden Gate '87 (catalogue); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Sound Sculptures through the Golden Gate '87; San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery, Echo Garden '88.

Selected group exhibitions:

New Music America, San Francisco '81, Washington, DC '83, Los Angeles, '85; 12th International Sculpture Conference Oakland, CA '82; Inventionen, W. Berlin '84; International Bauausstellung Berlin, W. Germany,

Idee/Prozess/Ergebnis '84;
13th Biennale de Paris,
Section Son '85.

Selected bibliography by the artist (see also catalogues under exhibitions):

"Entferne Züge und Klang Recycling Skulptur," Alles und Noch Viel Mehr: Das Poetische ABC, catalogue for exhibition at Kunstmuseum Bern '84.

"The Relocation of Ambient Sound: Urban Sound Sculpture," Leonardo, vol. 20, no. 2 (May-June '87).

Landscape Sculpture with Carillon is co-sponsored by the Department of Music, UC Berkeley. Fontana's scores for the carillon are performed by Jeff Davis.

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Photo credit: Saxon Donnelly