

bitforms gallery

Bill Fontana, *Sonic Visions*
February 17–April 9, 2022

bitforms gallery SF
1275 Minnesota Street
San Francisco, CA 94017

Opening reception: Thursday, February 17, 6–8 PM
Gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday: 11 AM–6 PM

Founded in November 2001, bitforms gallery represents established, mid-career, and emerging artists critically engaged with new technologies. In 2020, the gallery organized a satellite location in San Francisco at Minnesota Street Project, a space that seeks to retain and strengthen the city's contemporary art community while developing an internationally recognized arts destination. One year later, we are pleased to announce our continued programming in San Francisco as an extension of our advocacy for the collection of ephemeral, time-based, and digital artworks.

bitforms gallery is pleased to present Bill Fontana's first solo exhibition with the gallery, *Sonic Visions*. On view at bitforms gallery SF, the exhibition reveals recent and remastered works within three sites: the gallery, an immersive black box media room, and the atrium of Minnesota Street Project. *Sonic Visions* demonstrates the artist's use of time as a material through a masterful unification of sonic and visual recordings.

Fontana's practice is rooted in composition as a tool to immortalize moments of listening, a hyperfocus he describes as hearing with both eyes and ears. *Landscape Sculpture with Foghorns* was created using sound mapping, a process of placing microphones in diverse locations to combine sound from all angles. At its debut in 1981, the acoustics of San Francisco Bay were procured from eight different sites as a live audio sculpture. The work is presented today, four decades later, as a contemporary visualization remastered to include video collage alongside the original musical patterns.

Acoustical Visions of Golden Gate Bridge extends the aural portrait of the bay to a beloved landmark. This video harnesses the kinetic energy of the bridge as both orchestral and visual elements; the drifting bugle of a foghorn and percussive passing of vehicles form a musical structure while the dancing shadows of cars and a rarely-seen angle of the bridge shape a unique pictorial accompaniment. Fontana used live microphones and several accelerometers, devices that measure vibration, to capture these reverberations while a video camera broadcast the peculiar underside of the bridge's south tower.

Exhibited works in *Sonic Visions* document the artist's visual responses to his field recordings. *Vertical Wavescape* and *Desert Soundings* both concentrate on the natural world via an up-close examination of sounds and patterns. The voice of waves and sand dunes is made manifest through buried accelerometers. Fontana then emphasizes the meditative qualities of listening through the arrangements of naturally occurring patterns and design.

The final artworks are presented as site-specific installations that consider timelessness. *Acoustic Time Travel* is exhibited with eight-channel sound and projected in an immersive black box space. The work was created using the Large Hadron Collider in CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research in Switzerland, that Fontana had access to as an artist in residence. Its musical vocabulary comes from a sonic databank generated by high energy particle beams passing through hundreds of parallel copper plates on a light speed journey. A slow, dreamy video of soft focus cars entering San Francisco from the Golden Gate Bridge accompanies the audio in a quixotic time-based procession. While the Cern collider attempts to recreate the origin of life, the exhibition flows back into the atrium with the oldest form of life, *Sequoia Trees River Echo*. Fontana was interested in listening to the oldest living inhabitants of the earth, 3000 year old Sequoia trees. After mounting accelerometers on the trunks of trees, he observed vibrations of the flowing Kaweah River reverberating throughout the ground. This work is broadcast through Minnesota Street Project's atrium as an 8-channel sound sculpture. A video screen near the entrance displays a video collage of giant tree stills overlaid with the river. The sound of an ancient environmental voice that has been secretly vibrating for thousands of years stands in juxtaposition to the opposite end of eternity, a particle collider trying to recreate the birth of the universe.

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Bill Fontana
b. 1947, USA

In a career spanning 50 years, Bill Fontana is internationally recognized for his pioneering experiments in sound. He has consistently used sound as a sculptural medium to interact with and transform our perceptions of visual and architectural spaces. Applying his knowledge of composition, he draws out patterns of sound from natural and manmade worlds to create sound works that have the potential to conjure up visual imagery in the mind of the listener.

Many of these works create live listening networks that collect information from sources as diverse as the Large Hadron Collider at CERN, the Millennium Bridge in London, the beaches of Normandy, fog horns in San Francisco, old growth forests, hydroelectric turbines and urban environments. From the late nineties until the present Fontana's projects have explored hybrid listening technologies using acoustic microphones, underwater sensors (hydrophones) and structural/material sensors (accelerometers). His more recent works are explorations of the relationship between image and sound, expressed through the combined mediums of audio and video.

This summer Fontana will present a series of sound and video sculptures that reveal the silent resonances of the ten bells of Notre Dame. He has been given exclusive access to the restoration site to set up a live network of sensors on the bells that will remain in place throughout the restoration. In June-July 2022, the Centre Pompidou will present Fontana's sound installation that animates the 5th floor terrace with the resonances of the bells that are housed in the iconic cathedral towers which are directly visible from this vantage point.

The presentation continues in October 2022, when IRCAM Pompidou will celebrate the reopening of their renowned Espace de la Projection by presenting Fontana's totally immersive multi-channel sound and video installation that plunges the visitor into the hidden acoustic and visual structures of Notre Dame.