

# Bill Fontana Silent Echoes

## *Silent Echoes:*

*Ohara, Nanzenji, Higashi, Chionin, Toji,*  
2008

High definition video and sound

*Silent Echoes*, a new audio and video work by Bill Fontana, explores the sounds of five famous Buddhist Temple bells in Kyoto when they are not ringing. Vibration sensors were attached to the bells and acoustic microphones were placed inside of their resonant cavities. They measured and recorded how these bells are in fact ringing all the time in response to the ambient sounds of the environment. In the context and psychology of Buddhist culture the idea of a bell ringing all the time is a powerful metaphor. There is a famous meditation in which one strikes a bowl shaped bell and if one's attention is unwavering one experiences that this bell does not stop ringing as long as one is listening.

'...when a bell rings it is only the sound of the bell listening to the sound of the bell. Or to put it another way it is the sound of yourself ringing. This is the moment of enlightenment.'

*The Three Pillars of Zen*  
Phillip Kapleau

In *Silent Echoes* Fontana has used modern measurement technology to reveal a hidden world of perpetual acoustic energy within an apparently dormant bell. The bell is always listening and is a physical meditation on the world around it. These bells are portals to the acoustic energy around them and they have never been silent. This idea of music being a state of mind tuned into the music going on all time around us has been a

strong interest in all of Fontana's work with live sound sculptures for the past 40 years. These temple bells are a physical analogy to the idea of music as continuous listening. John Cage said many times that 'music is continuous and listening is intermittent'. In using the term sound sculpture to describe his work, Fontana has defined sculpture as a way to make physical some state of the human condition, therefore a sound sculpture makes the act of listening in a musical way continuous and physical.

In *Silent Echoes*, besides the high resolution sound recordings of the bells, a high definition video camera viewed these bells so that in this video installation the audience gazes at a static, nearly life size projection of the bells while being immersed in its resonating echoes of the world around it.



Ohara



Nanzenji



Higashi



Chionin



Toji