

Bill Fontana

Primal Energies

01.07.-04.10.2020

In his exhibition at the Kunsthaus Graz, Bill Fontana investigates *Primal Energies*, foregrounding renewable energy with hydropower, geothermal, solar and wind energy. He takes fragments of images and sounds and transfers these into a sound sculpture that fills the whole of Space01. We hear sounds that have never been heard before. Visual and acoustic structures overlap, merging into the physical experience of an environment that is rapidly transforming due to climate change.

In collaboration with the 'Kultur inklusiv' project, Ö1 Kunstradio (ORF), Radio Helsinki, mur.at, the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz (Institute of Music Aesthetics, Institute of Electronic Music and Acoustics), FunkFeuer Graz
Supported by AVL Cultural Foundation
Reenactment *Sonic Projections (Graz)* as part of Graz 'Year of Culture 2020'
Venue: Space01

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Bill Fontana has collected sounds from eight places in Portugal, California, England, Italy, Germany and Austria, which are arranged into a unique composition played throughout Space01 over 64 loudspeakers. Overview images depict these locations while detailed images show energy-producing elements of power stations, such as water turbines or wind turbines. There is a calm monotony to the movement of the motionless image sections, the repetitions of their rotations are seemingly endless. The installation casts an enveloping spell over those watching. The multi-dimensional soundscape means that we notice different aspects depending on our position in the room. The sound of the River Mur running through the centre of Graz is integrated live into the work: a tree standing in the water acts as a resonance structure, the tones carried via sound meter into the exhibition space. The recently opened hydroelectric power station to the south of the city has reduced the rush of the river to a quieter murmur; underwater hydrophones capture also the sound of the turbines.

Ever since he was a student, Bill Fontana has been interested in sound as a sculptural medium. In creating an interplay with

architectural space and visual impressions, he is able not only to shift our perception, but also to visualise its potential. Careful and conscious hearing forms the basis of his research into ambient sounds, which fascinate him as a form of found composition. Just as others might capture images with a camera, he has been gathering sounds since the 1970s. Over the last 50 years, his diverse collection has grown to over a thousand.

From 1974 to 1976 Fontana worked for a radio station in Australia and there created his first radio sculpture, prompted by his extraordinary experience of a total solar eclipse in the rainforest. He managed to record the clamour and excitement of the birds leading up to the eclipse, followed by their complete silence as darkness fell, and finally the timid reawakening of their voices afterwards, and broadcast this on the radio. The hubbub and then subsequent stillness had a lasting impact on him.

In the 1970s he was still making analogue recordings using cassettes and microphone preamplifiers, but during the 1980s he went over to the first digital recorders, which back then were still quite large and heavy. Today he travels with an entire sound studio: his vibration sensors, hydrophones, accelerators, vibration meters, microphones and

other devices all fit into a small suitcase and accompany him across the world.

His sounds provide a wealth of material for his sound sculptures, which are not performed in concert halls but rather are installed in museums or public spaces, each requiring a sophisticated technological sound concept to produce an immersive experience. He drew inspiration from his mentor John Cage, whose famous work of silence (*4'33"*, 1952) has gone down in history, and Marcel Duchamp, through whose work he not only discovered the term 'musical sculpture' but also came across the idea of using 'found material' in the sense of 'readymades'. Starting with the idea that music is continuous, something that happens everywhere and all the time, he began to understand hearing itself as perception of music. Since 2009 he has added a level of images to his compositions, a development that became interesting for him thanks to the technological evolution of digital cameras and the option of structural editing. What images are produced by sounds in our head, and what sounds can we imagine from images? This is not like a soundtrack, but rather about combining a sound with a 'vision'.

In Space01 at the Kunsthaus Graz, Bill Fontana condenses his recordings into a unique experience whose importance comes into stark focus in these times of enormous energy consumption. By allowing us to hear what we are unable to perceive in everyday life, Fontana calls on us to be more attentive. By listening carefully, seeing consciously, and pausing to become more aware of what is going on around us, we will perhaps be prompted to deal with it more sensitively. When Fontana uses trees as resonance bodies for the human impact on nature, making them into its mouthpiece, as it were, this is also because it has become urgent (and not just for him), in times of global warming, that we take a closer look and finally make changes in (our own) human behaviour.

Media library

The media library in the Needle provides insights into the many projects created by Bill Fontana, who was born in 1947 in Cleveland, Ohio and now lives in San Francisco, California.

Many of them are also available for listening on www.resoundings.org. Parallel to the exhibition, Bill Fontana has also created the work *Graphic Waves* for the Bix façade.

TIP: Sonic Projections

While Bill Fontana is projecting the sounds of energy production on the inside of the Kunsthaus, once every hour his *Sonic Projections* will also be sending sounds of nature and culture from all over the world into urban space in Graz. This project is a reenactment of the sound installation he developed for the city as part of the 1988 steirischer herbst festival, which explored the National Socialist seizure of power in 1938. Although at the time it was quickly shut down by resistance to the whole of the political festival, the work continues to resonate with a melancholic longing in the memory of many local residents. For the 'Year of Culture 2020', Fontana has adapted the *Sonic Projections from Schloßberg*, using historical and more recent environmental sounds, such as a foghorn or an Australian lyrebird, to create a musical sound dialogue between the Graz clocktower and the Kunsthaus. These unfamiliar sounds also call for attentive listening and a brief pause. Recorded in eight places around the city, the sounds blend with everyday noises in public space and are transmitted as a continuous sound pattern on the façade of the Kunsthaus.

A sound dialogue between the Kunsthaus and the clocktower, every hour for several minutes from 8 am to 8 pm.

Recorded in: Schönaugasse, Europaplatz, the entrance to the main railway station, the Volksgarten, Mariahilferplatz, Stadtpark, Augartensteg.

Combined on the façade of the Kunsthaus (Lendkai).

Further details at:
www.sonicprojections.at

Programme July - August

08.07., 5 pm

White Noise—More than an ear for the murmur of the Mur, Guided city walk with Justin Winkler and Margarethe Maierhofer-Lischka

15.07., 5 pm

Inclusive guided tour in cooperation with Kultur inklusiv

26.08., 5 pm

City walk 'Smelling, feeling, hearing' in cooperation with Kultur inklusiv

02.09., 5 pm

City walk 'Smelling, feeling, hearing' in cooperation with Kultur inklusiv

Art talk

Wednesday, 08.07., 4 pm

Wednesday, 22.07., 4 pm

Wednesday, 05.08., 4 pm

Wednesday, 19.08., 4 pm

Saturday, 04.07., 3.30 pm

Saturday, 11.07., 3.30 pm

Saturday, 18.07., 3.30 pm

Saturday, 25.07., 3.30 pm

Saturday, 01.08., 3.30 pm

Saturday, 15.08., 3.30 pm

Saturday, 22.08., 3.30 pm

Saturday, 29.08., 3.30 pm

Daily guided architectural tours at 11 am

And

Space-Time.

Welcome to the belly of the Alien!

Thu-Sun, 1 pm-5 pm

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