

Press Release

**Bill Fontana.**

***The Silent Echoes of a Great Sound Sculpture***

*(The Campanone of St. Peter's Basilica)*

**curated by Umberto Vattani and Valentino Catricalà**

**February – December 2025**

**Basilica of St. Peter**

**Vatican City, Rome**

**2025 Jubilee**

The experiment *The Silent Echoes of a Great Sound Sculpture (The Campanone of St. Peter's)* by the acclaimed American artist Bill Fontana, will begin on the **16<sup>th</sup> of February in the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, on the occasion of the "Notte Bianca" during the Jubilee of Artists and the World of Culture, promoted by the Department for Culture and Education.** The thousands of Artists and cultural dignitaries from all over the world who will visit the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February for the "Notte Bianca" will be able to hear, in the Portico of the Basilica, the "Silent Echoes of the Great Bell" of Saint Peter. The first impact with the Basilica will occur in the Portico, with the Sound Installation by Bill Fontana, the latest in a long line of great works of art that have contributed towards the inestimable spiritual and cultural value of the Greatest Basilica of Christianity.

This extraordinary sound installation, **curated by Umberto Vattani and Valentino Catricalà**, makes use of advanced technology to reveal the "silence" of the *Campanone*, the majestic bell cast by Valadier and an enduring symbol of Christianity and the Basilica itself. Using state-of-the-art sensors and a sophisticated audio system, the internal vibrations – normally in no way

audible since it weighs over nine tons - have been captured, amplified, and transformed into a deeply immersive auditory experience.

This project, conceived by the President of the prestigious **Venice International University, Umberto Vattani**, and promoted by **Venice International University – VIU**, with the support of **Enel, Gruppo FS Italiane, and Meyer Sound**, marks **a world first: for the first time in its history**, the *Campanone* will communicate not only its resonant sound but also its profound “silence”.

Pilgrims and visitors entering the Portico of the Basilica will be greeted by this soundscape, which will accompany them on their spiritual journey. Upon their arrival, the bell will offer a welcoming sound and, at the end of their visit, a farewell filled with hope. **This hidden voice of the Great Bell of St. Peter’s conveys a message of peace and brotherhood for the 2025 Jubilee.**

Recognized as one of the foremost pioneers of sound art, Bill Fontana has built an international reputation for transforming the sounds of extreme environments - “from glaciers to ocean depths” - into profound works of art. In collaboration with **IRCAM in Paris** (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique) and a team of expert sound engineers, Fontana recorded the vibrations of the *Campanone* and made them audible through a cutting-edge system of 12 state-of-the-art speakers installed in the Portico of St. Peter’s. This sophisticated setup captures the bell’s subtle nuances and transforms it into a “sound sculpture” projecting messages of peace and hope to all who listen.

The project, which makes use of technological sensors that “give voice” to the Great Bell, goes beyond a mere auditory experience, bringing together technology and spirituality to convey a universal message of harmony. As **Cardinal Gambetti**, the Archpriest of St. Peter’s Basilica and President of the Fabric of Saint Peter, observed: **“Technology, when placed at the service of spirituality, has the power to amplify messages of profound human and universal value.”**

Since the Middle Ages, Bells have played a pivotal role in community life, marking time, calling the faithful to prayer, celebrating joyous occasions, or signaling moments of danger. St. John Paul II referred to them as “the voice of God that invites and consoles, offering reassurance in the silence and the night”. **Pope Francis has similarly emphasized** the need to unite and inspire brotherhood: **“Every gesture that brings us together, every voice that calls for dialogue and peace is a gift to humanity.”**

In this context, Bill Fontana's project unveils a "hidden voice" that unites and invites reflection, echoing the profound historical and spiritual significance of bells in the Christian tradition.

Through this project, **the Campanone of St. Peter's**, at the very heart of Christianity, becomes a powerful symbol of global dialogue. Harnessing the transformative potential of technology and sound art, its silence is reimagined as a universal language that welcomes and inspires. As curator Umberto Vattani remarked: *"Among all the bells of the world, the Valadier Campanone of St. Peter's holds a unique position at the center of Christianity. Our goal is to give voice to its silence. With the aid of technology, we will reveal to the human ear the hidden sounds and silent voices that the Great Bell of St. Peter's holds within. We will make the invisible resonate, breathing new life into this great sound sculpture so that it may convey to the world a language of peace and hope that is accessible to all."*

Valentino Catricalà added: *"This is an unprecedented event. For the first time, a contemporary art installation will be hosted within the Portico of St. Peter's, a place of profound significance and intensity. The electronically developed work on the Campanone of St. Peter's by the great pioneer of sound art, Bill Fontana, becomes a sculpture: an expanding organism resonating within the evocative space of the Portico. This is a dialogue between electronics and spirituality, between the contemporary and the ancient."*

The project is promoted by **Venice International University - VIU with the support of Enel, Gruppo FS Italiane and Meyer Sound**. VIU is an international network uniting 23 prestigious universities and research centers across the globe, from the United States to Japan, from Russia to South Africa. Together, they address the most pressing global challenges of our time. This initiative embodies the spirit of unity and solidarity among nations, as expressed in the immortal words of John Donne: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main."

## **Biography**

**Bill Fontana** (b. 1947, United States) is an American composer and media artist who has developed an international reputation for his pioneering experiments in sound. Since the early 70s, Fontana has used sound as a sculptural medium to interact with and transform our perceptions of visual and architectural spaces. He has realized sound sculptures and radio projects for museums and broadcast organizations around the world. His work has been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Museum Ludwig, Cologne; the Post Museum in Frankfurt; the Art History and Natural History Museums in Vienna; the Tate Modern and Tate Britain, London; the 48th Venice Biennale; the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; MAXXI, Rome; and MAAT, Lisbon. He has done major radio sound art projects for the BBC, the

European Broadcast Union, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, National Public Radio, West German Radio (WDR), Swedish Radio, Radio France and the Austrian State Radio. He is currently working on new commissions for the Kunsthaus Graz, the International Renewable Energy Agency, and the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale. For Silent Echoes, has worked with recordings made on the surface of the Emmanuel bell at Notre-Dame de Paris, which survived the catastrophic 2019 fire at the cathedral, and of the vibrations created by the ice-melt at Dachstein glacier in Austria. MORE INFO: [resoundings.org](http://resoundings.org).

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**Technical information**

**Title:** *Gli echi muti di una grande scultura sonora (Il Campanone di San Pietro)*

**Artist:** Bill Fontana

**Conceived by:** Umberto Vattani

**Curated by:** Umberto Vattani and Valentino Catricalà

**Dates:** February– December 2025

**Location:** Portico of the Basilica of St. Peter, Vatican City, Rome

**Visiting hours:** 9:00 am - 7:00 pm

**Organized by:** Venice International University - VIU

**Sponsors:** Venice International University - VIU, Enel, Gruppo FS Italiane and Meyer Sound

**Admission:** Free

