

„Public Art München – SOLO“ Open Proposal

## THE LICK OF A COPPER TONGUE, by Lina Lapelytė

\*The tongue of a bell — the part inside that swings to make the bell ring

*A year-long collaborative participatory project culminating in a 100 performances - a daily ritual - at the central location in Munich. The monumental composition for the bell sounds of city churches is juxtaposed with the fragility of human voice and the simplicity of song. The stone carved sound reflector - sculptural element of the work - becomes a gathering place for the passers by as well as the listening point, the amplifier of the city soundscape.*

A bell toll – once an invitation for a ritual: to honour a royalty in ancient China; gather in a bathhouse in Rome; to come forward for prayer; perhaps ultimately a call to listen collectively. An intrinsic part of the city, its times and its architecture, bell sounds reverberate across squares and inner yards for a few brief moments uniting its inhabitants for a nonconsensual sonic experience.



This proposal explores bell sounds - rich with sociocultural connotations - as musical instruments, inviting people to come together, this time, for a collective artistic event. The suggested location, the green square near Maximilianeum is where multiple bells of different churches can be heard and the green empty space allows for a sculptural intervention. The arranged and synchronised composition from the surrounding churchbells of the area made possible by a careful negotiation and close relationship building with each church will be followed by a song performed by two young female singers. Sculpture of a sound mirror will create a temporary stage-like formation that will function as an scenographical element and an analog amplifier of the churchbells and gathering/listening point in the absence of the arranged live performance.

From one side, this work delves into the architectural acoustics of the city by designing a location-based sound reflector that focuses city bells and thus allows an immersive instrument-like experience of the surroundings. On the other, it aims to transcend from the references embedded in the bell by juxtaposing it with a song. As the city bells accompany the live performance, a momentary play with materiality, space and rituals for gathering and listening is created. This work aims to renew the perspective of Munich bell sounds by bringing its lightness and intimacy.

## **CONVERSATION WITH CHURCHES**

A crucial part of the project is creating a conversation and collaboration with local churches and/or other bodies in charge of the local bells. Hence, during the first months of the project, artists will be closely working with priests, bell ringers and others involved in the community to understand and learn the specific history, symbolic purpose, and acoustic properties of each bell. This will not only help exchange expertise and find appropriate ways for these historic sounds to find contemporary meanings but also reflect the sound of Munich appropriately.

As mentioned previously, this project highlights the importance to review Munich's historical legacy of bell towers and offering a contemporary perspective to its sounds. For the city sounds to remain actual, it is necessary to create a space where a variety of audiences can come together: both those longing for novelty and those valuing the historical. We see this inclusive yet dynamic project addressing the latter, and thus aligning with the importance of openness and bold approach to the current times highlighted by "Public Art Munchen".

## **LOCATION (PUBLIC SPACE FOCUS)**

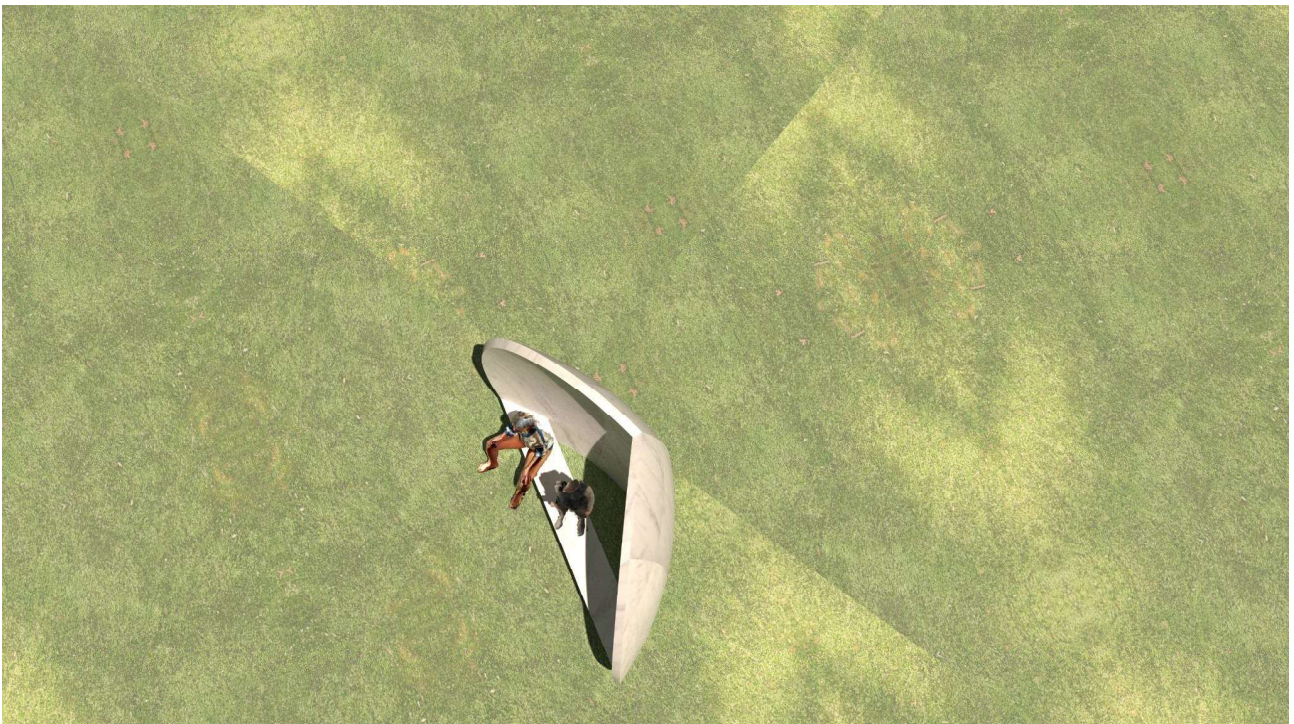
Even though Munich is famous for its city hall glockenspiel, it has numerous bell towers and places of worship, with probably the most prominent and unique bell set located in the two towers of the Cathedral. Bells are one of the signature sounds of the city. Hence, finding a location where they can be experienced simultaneously yet with an awareness of their spatial arrangement is necessary. At the moment, the imagined location is a hill near the Maximilianeum: facing the old town, where most of the church bells are located, from a hill above allows acoustic advantage. Being open and central, such a space grants public accessibility. Being near a historical student foundation which at the moment is also partially used by the Bavarian parliament, it holds symbolic importance: as a truly public forum where voices and city sounds can gather to be heard.

## SCULPTURE

Sound mirrors, or acoustic mirrors, are static constructions used to concentrate and reflect soundwaves from their surroundings. Between the World Wars and before the invention of radar, such devices were used for early detection, and thus a warning, of approaching air raids. Often made from concrete, they are still used to pick up sound travelling from a far distance, thus a tool for surveillance or as a parabolic microphone - however mostly as a science exhibit.

Creating an artistic version of such a device aligns closely with the notion of reimagining instrumental properties of bells, at the time also used for military purposes (mostly by addressing the scarcity of metal for bullets). Such sculpture suggests another kind of repurposing - of sound - and asks what we choose to amplify. Is it what we are eager to hear, or what we anticipate not to? If not air raids, but bells and voices stop ringing, what does this silence tell us - and how do we listen to the absence of (their) sound?

The silence, of course, does not exist, the least in a city such as Munich. This way the sculpture remaining in the selected location for 90 days will provide local audiences with a sonic mirror of the city outside the times of the performances.



## **BELL SOUNDS AND SONG (METHODOLOGIES)**

For this piece, a knowledge of the bell sound palette and an acoustic outline of the city spaces will be collected and analysed. This will require a thorough acoustic and aesthetic research outlined in collaboration with local churches. Bell delay and reverberation details will advise the best combination for the desired soundscape and inform compositional practices for the song.

In the second stage, bell and voice collaboration is developed, with performers getting to know the local environment and adjusting to its sounds. At the moment, the preliminary idea is to devise a song for two young female voices, thus juxtaposing heavy bell partials with lighter, more vulnerable connotations carried by the voice.

On the location and time of the event, the singers place themselves within a sculpture (the inner side of the reflector). Such a position has a dual function. Firstly, it centralises the “stage” with listeners gathering around in a semicircle much like in a city square, highlighting the metaphor of bells inviting to a public *city* event. Secondly, by placing the voice element within the focus point of a sound mirror, the human element is emphasised, creating a conversation between the collected city sounds and the singers.

Bell simulation audio:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L9Fo\\_dN17O9ZNF0hSNI5kA1jcCdVXivj/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L9Fo_dN17O9ZNF0hSNI5kA1jcCdVXivj/view?usp=sharing)

## **OUTREACH AND ACCESS STRATEGY**

The communication strategy planned for this project:

- social media and online presence
- communication of the creative process documentation (film, photographs and texts)
- opening events with press representatives and target audience community members and public event devised by Lucia Pietroiusti.