



LAWRENCE ENGLISH

If we are to speak of a primacy of sense, then our eyes hold this title. For most of us, the way we come to know the world is through our eyes. The world is not simply a visual canvas, however, and the role our other senses might play in decoding the complexities of experience can't be overlooked, to use an ocularly loaded term.¹

In *Proximities*, 2024, Lawrence English invites audiences to consider their relationship to listening, place and embodiment. Exploring the way by which sound connects communities, the project establishes understandings of place and involves the creation of a new sound object, in the form of a 712-kg bronze bell, displayed in *Inner Sanctum*. The visitors to the exhibition who ring the bell at various intervals throughout the day mark the passage of time. The bell is also the centrepiece for a series of public activations at dusk, in which multiple bell towers and handbells are utilised to play with ideas of proportion and proximity, and connections between bodies and locations across the city. These events feature local participants, including members of the Adelaide Bellringers and the public, who are invited to collectively create a 'sounding event' in Adelaide.

Historically, the bell has been a marker of time, locality, worship and labour. Apart from its use in musical compositions and ceremonial and religious purposes, it has played a role in timekeeping and in the organisation of daily activities. It has also been used as a form of long-distance communication and a warning signal. English's interest in the bell arose in the mid-2000s when he began to document various European and Japanese bells and their role in shaping behaviour in public spaces. *Proximities* engages these multiple functions and interests to consider how sound operates within cities more broadly and how it might once again become a unifying agent.

Proximities considers how 'scaled resonances' and 'acoustic tethers' might reveal the particularities of a place. The collection of bells – from church bells housed in belfries to domestic handbells – creates a balance between macro and micro sound fields, which when executed together impart a very specific sense of location. English elaborates:

As the bells are struck, their tones are contoured by the environment around them, allowing a unique sense-reading of place to occur, one that is auditory and expands beyond the limited horizon of vision, opening opportunities for new ways of knowing place.²

During the sounding events, the bells and their chimes produce layers of acoustic connection. English's time-based 'score' guides the bellringers and the participating members of the public. The score specifies a sequencing of times and locations throughout the city, meandering across north, east, south and west axes. A communal ringing outside the Art Gallery of South Australia becomes a focal point, while the public can also follow along in their homes and neighbourhoods with a time-based score. Reaching out with a sound that may or may not be heard, the aim is for each individual – wherever they are – to perform their part and to hear someone else. As English explains:

The work also highlights the subjectivity of listenership, in that there will be no way that the entirety of the piece can be experienced by any one person. The sounding becomes an invitation to reconsider the city through a sense we often don't participate in with any focus, audition.³



