

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Artist: Montien Boonma (pronounced *Mon – tee – en Boon – mar*)

Title: *Lotus sound*

Date: 1992

Medium: Terracotta bells, gilded wood

Dimensions: 300 x 350 x 300cm

Lotus sound is a work that perfectly illustrates the fusion of materials and concept in a work of art. The curved arc of terracotta bells is positioned to form a 'curtain', which equally reveals and conceals what is behind it. The form and shape of the bells is such that the 'negative' or empty space between each bell is an inverted replica of the bell forms themselves. This establishes a visual rhythm and a sense of balance which reinforces the contemplative, spiritual nature of the work. Of course the bells are silent, but their rhythmical presence asks us to *imagine* their sound, thus invoking a sense of inner peace. Through the curtain of bells, a golden lotus flower can be seen with petals bursting forth. In Buddhist thought, this flowering is symbolic of enlightenment and freedom from earthly, physical limits. The power of this work resides in its paradoxical ability to evoke sound through silence, and to then still the mind in contemplation.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Montien Boonma was born in 1953 in Thailand. He died in 2000. Through his sculptures and installations, Boonma looked to local and philosophical sources as means of exploring the significance of the spirit and the transcendental. His use of diverse materials including clay, metal and traditional Thai herbs suggested scent, touch, shadow, and silence. Boonma was aware of the impact that global-Western culture and its accompanying economic changes had on the traditional beliefs and values of Thai culture. He strived to attain a balance in his work, which embraced both a sense of ritual and tradition and a restrained contemporary approach. He was a devout Buddhist, and his work reflected his meditations on the relationship between the material and non-material aspects of life. Montien Boonma is one of the most significant artists to emerge from South-East Asia in the late twentieth century.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

- This work is three-dimensional. By looking carefully at the work, and moving around and past it, do you find that your experience is different from that of looking at a painting?
- Are there other works in the exhibition that appeal to senses besides sight?
- Discuss the predicament of traditional belief systems and religious values in a global culture. What spiritual and religious practices are observed in Australia?

References:

- Fenema, Joyce Van et al. *Southeast Asian Art Today*. G + B Arts International, by arrangement with Roeder. Distributed by Craftsman House, Singapore; Roseville East, NSW, 1996.
- Goodman, Jonathan. 'Montien Boonma'. *Art AsiaPacific*, no.20, 1998, pp.94–5.
- Tiffin, Sarah. 'Montien Boonma: Between the temple and the temporal'. In *Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art 2002* [exhibition catalogue]. Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 2002, pp.38–41.
- Wongchirachai, Albert Paravi. 'Montien Boonma'. *Art AsiaPacific*, vol.2, no.3, July 1995, pp.74–81.

Installation art

- De Oliveira, Nicolas et al. *Installation Art*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1994.
- Ewington, Julie. 'Five elements: an abbreviated account of installation art in South-East Asia'. *Art and AsiaPacific*, vol.2, no.1, pp.108–15.

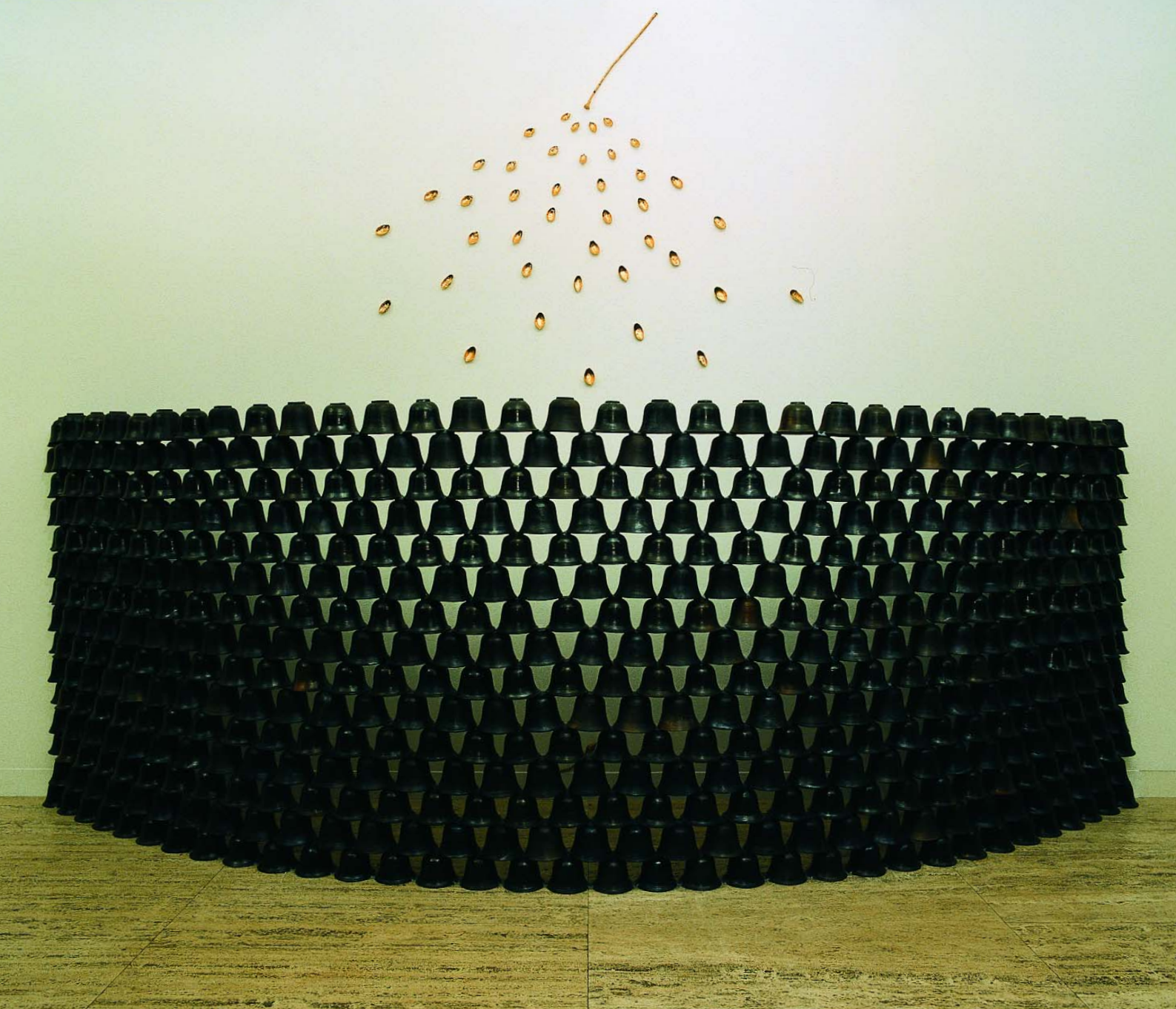
Buddhism

- Boisselier, Jean. *The Wisdom of the Buddha*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1994.
- Conze, Edward. *Buddhist Scriptures*. Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic., 1959. (Penguin Classics).

Over: Montien Boonma Thailand 1953–2000
Lotus sound 1992 Terracotta, gilded wood
 300 x 350 x 300cm The Kenneth and Yasuko Myer Collection of Contemporary Asian Art Purchased 1993 with funds from The Myer Foundation, Michael Myer and Ann Gamble Myer through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

Below: Montien Boonma Thailand 1953–2000
 The artist installing *Lotus sound* at the First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery, 1993 Photograph: Christabelle Baranay





Buddhism heavily influences Asian art. Montien Boonma combined the Buddhist philosophy for nature and simplicity – often clay, cotton fabric, wood, sound and space – with a capacity to capture the major moral environmental issues of the day. His works capture space and invite the viewer to enter this space, as if in meditation and reflection.

Websites

<http://www.rama9art.org/montien/>
<http://www.qag.qld.gov.au/collections/myer/montien.htm>
<http://images.google.com/> (search for 'Montien Boonma')

ACTIVITY

Find other works by Montien Boonma. Examine his use of icons. How does he reflect his Thai culture in the construction of his artworks? How does this serve to define his culture?

ACTIVITY

Find other artworks by Montien Boonma. Record the similarities and differences between these works. Discuss the way Boonma has consistently explored a central theme of ideas through different forms.

Montien Boonma's work are based on his devout Buddhist beliefs. His works explore the relationship between the material world of objects and the non-material or spiritual world. He is interested in exploring the significance of the transcendental and the intuitive.

In this way, his work became influential for a number of contemporary sculptors who tried to move sculpture away from an obsession with the material qualities of stone, wood or metal to the idea that a sculpture can be about inviting a sense of contemplation and inclusion.

Boonma's sculpture stresses a calm and quiet engagement with society. To achieve this, he includes sound and smell. He sources these from traditional Thai herbs and from traditional Thai chants and music. The atmosphere when you experience the work of Boonma is one of quiet contemplation and reflection.

ACTIVITY

Find some images of sculptures that appeal to you. Gather smells and music that could accompany the works. Try creating your own artwork that appeals to the senses other than vision. For example, make a tactile or 'felt' artwork ... or make a soundscape ... or smellscape.

Montien Boonma makes use of diverse materials in his artwork including clay, metal and traditional Thai herbs.

ACTIVITY

Explore making a sculptural piece using a range of materials.