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Book of Bells

by John Kefala Kerr

Originally created for the Monks' Dormitory Library in Durham Cathedral, Book of Bells is a sonorous meditation on Europe's oldest surviving bound book—The Lindisfarne Gospels. Composed using digitally manipulated bell, brass and voice recordings made in County Durham, along with an assemblage of extracts taken from a range of books, the work invites visitors to participate in re-imagining and re-hearing 'bell' in recast form. From church bell to trumpet bell, floral campanula to statistical bell curve, the many forms of the bell have, since antiquity, performed an important function in terms of warning, announcing, summoning, marshalling, commemorating, depicting, etc. Book of Bells brings sounds and words together to evoke the Gospels' status as audible word, historical artifact, sacred text and calligraphic artwork. A reference to trumpets in St. Matthew's gospel, sung by the Durham Cathedral choristers, and other evocations extracted from the books in this installation, conjure textual 'bells' whose presence exists only in the imagination.

Book of Bells is incomplete without public participation. Contribute to the many tintinnabular jinglings and implausibly sustained brass elongations by completing the word search task.

Book of Bells is dedicated to the memory of Jonathan Harvey.

A BRASS: Durham International Festival/Durham Cathedral commission.

www.johnkefalakerr.com

