

# A Healing Sound Bath at the Wattis



By Purva  
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On February 4, 2023, artist and sound healer Guadalupe Maravilla, assisted by fellow sound healer Michael Jay, hosted a sound bath at the Wattis Institute. This public program was presented in conjunction with *Drum Listens to Heart*, an exhibition on view at the Wattis through March 4, 2023. This was the duo's first time leading a sound bath in California, after having done them extensively in New York and Europe. Through the one-hour session, participants are exposed to vibrations created by various instruments designed to open a portal of healing. In the session, Maravilla talks about healing and loving oneself as "a decision that no one else can make for you."

When participants first walk in, they are given a yoga mat and led into an enclosed space hidden from the public by a wall. This not only provides a sense of privacy from the large windows looking out, but also helps create an intimate atmosphere, away from outside distractions, where people feel physically and emotionally comfortable. The event is open to people of all ages, and there are some children in attendance as well. While getting settled in, during the first fifteen minutes or so, the room fills with lively, but quiet chatter. People that know each other start to get together, and some greet the artist.

The room is painted a pale blue with gold line drawings and patterns; the same patterns are also present on one of two gongs used in the sound bath. Toward the front of the room, facing the participants, are two intriguing, larger-than-life sculptures entitled *Disease Thrower #4* (2019) and *Disease Thrower #16* (2020), made by Maravilla. Both of the sculptures are made of mixed media and measure around 7 to 8 feet tall. They feature rings and rounded forms, and mostly extend vertically. Some of the more obvious materials used are wool, possibly wax, and recycled materials. Both the sculptures are mainly white in color, aside from some smaller details, and feature long tentacle-like forms which sweep the floor in front of them. The main focus of the sculptures is on the gongs. Right below the gongs on *Disease Thrower #4* are a pair of transparent plastic lungs, and some circular mirrors and other reflective items in a vertical line. *Disease Thrower #16* features two gongs and is similar in terms of composition. Towards the center, a curved plastic snake is coming out of metal material.

Before starting the sound bath, the artist explains that these sculptures are made to ward off negative energies. The objects that compose the sculptures aid in this process, and each have different meanings. The artist also explains that NASA discovered

that planets produce vibrations, and that the gongs can make the same vibrations as planets or certain elements. Although the vibration level of the gongs used in this specific sound bath is unknown, one can imagine how powerful gongs can be. These gongs will open a portal to healing, and it is the participants decision to accept and start the healing process.

The artist tells all participants to get comfortable, with or without shoes, and to lie down on the yoga mats with their eyes closed. After all of us comfortably settle down and close our eyes, Maravilla and his assistant Jay get to work. First, the two artists go around the room ringing small gongs and handheld instruments close to the participants' heads. They make sure to go around the whole room, so that everyone receives equal amounts of the vibrations. As a participant, it really engages my ears to follow the pops of sounds around the room and try to guess what instruments are being played. This feels like kind of a warm up for the upcoming steps.

After this session of small vibrations around the room, there is a short piece played on another instrument, which seems like a violin, although the music doesn't much resemble the repetitive, melodious rhythms or tunes of a violin's song. I wish I could see which instrument the sound is coming from, but because I am lying down on my back, my vision is limited to the ceiling above me. Throughout the session, I can only guess where the noises are coming from. Following the "violin" piece is a brief silence of about 2 or 3 minutes.

Next, the larger gongs start and continue for the next 30 to 40 minutes. The first time the facilitators start the gongs, it is very loud, and my ears fill up with the vibrations. There are different patterns in the gongs, including one continuous vibration, several smaller, overlapping taps, and some scraping movements.

After the gongs, the artists go around the room playing small instruments, as they had at the start of the sound bath. The sounds are similar to the ones in the beginning, but this time there is the addition of chimes. I notice that Marvailla and Jay are rotating the chimes above our meditating bodies as they play them. At one point, even though my eyes are closed, I can feel the presence of one of the sound healers near me, and of the chimes being rotated above me.

Whether or not this was the artists' intention, this sound bath resembles the arc of a journey. It ends the way it starts (with the

small instruments), has a climax point (the gongs), and includes some suspense (the musical piece). As the music comes to a stop, Maravilla guides all the participants out of the sound bath by instructing us to start moving our toes, legs, and the rest of our bodies, and encouraging us to stretch.

Finally, the artist explains that we have and we give lots of love to others, but we often forget about ourselves. Through methods like these we can self-heal and take a step towards self-love. The artist speaks about his experience battling cancer and other personal hurdles in his life, sharing that he found sound healing to be helpful. Now, he would like to share it with others. Before participants leave, he explains that because our bodies have been exposed to many strong vibrations during the session, we might feel exhausted, and should drink plenty of water—always—but for the next couple of hours and days especially.

This was my first ever sound bath, and it makes me intrigued to learn about this practice further. I have heard many people often throw out words like meditation, self healing, and soundbaths on social media, which caused me to have a preconception of what a sound bath is. I was expecting singing bowls, tinkling instruments, and shivers to go up my spine. However, after attending this event, I learned the science behind sound baths and vibrations. Sound baths go beyond the pleasant noises you hear, sending focused vibrations into your body. During Maravilla and Jay's session, the sound of the gongs overwhelmed me and flooded my ears. I had never imagined gongs could be so loud and powerful. Maravilla explained to all the participants that we might feel tired after all the vibrations we were exposed to, and I did feel a sense of heaviness in my head and shoulders within me for the rest of the day. In all honesty, I did not feel some life altering energy taking over me in the next couple of days, but due to the tiredness it seemed like something was working. I admit that during this sound bath my mind was preoccupied trying to observe every little thing to relay to readers. However, I am confident that the next time I will go with a new intent: to open a portal of healing and soak in my surroundings.



**Gudalupe Maravilla, *Disease Thrower #4* (2019)**  
**Photo by Purva Gangur**

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