



VITO ACCONCI
Maze Table, 1985
 Glass and silicone
 2'6" x 12' x 12'

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Maze Table

October 28 - December 10, 2022

Rhona Hoffman Gallery is pleased to exhibit Vito Acconci's *Maze Table* for a second time, the first being in 1985-86. The 1985 press release attests: "Vito Acconci has been pressuring the boundaries of artistic practice since the early 70's when he used his own body as medium, thus becoming instrumental in establishing performance art as a genre. In his site-specific installations in the later 70's, he continued his explorations of the viewer's relationships with his environment, art and the artist. His sculptures distort the physical and psychological conventions of furniture." These words maintain their veracity today, and Acconci's legacy and influence continues to inform contemporary sculpture, design, architecture, and performance, among other artistic disciplines.

Vito Acconci's *Maze Table* was originally commissioned by the Lions Gallery of the Senses in the Wadsworth Atheneum (Hartford, CT) with the assistance of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The sole artwork in an exhibition titled *MATRIX*, the plated glass and silicone *Maze Table* premiered in 1985 at the Lions Gallery of the Senses, initially conceived by Acconci with the visually impaired in mind. Considering the visitor experiences of these individuals while explaining the structure's material choice, Acconci stated: "I wanted to make something that sighted people would not have a privileged view of, therefore I wanted to make it transparent, with glass. A maze might be uncomfortable for a sighted person, but really comfortable for a blind person."¹ *Maze Table*, akin to Acconci's other projects, is concerned with functionality or lack thereof, comfort in contrast to discomfort, power and control, and tension - in this instance tension between the idea of furniture as enabling support or repose versus the materiality of the glass, elegant and enticing yet potentially precarious and harmful.

Maze Table reflects Acconci's preoccupation with one's environment and how the viewer navigates space. With his interactive sculptures, the visitor becomes that which activates, completes, and allows the object to reach its final form. Building upon his performance practice,

¹ Jocko Weyland, "Vito Acconci: In Conversation with Jocko Weyland," *San Francisco Art Quarterly (SFAQ)*, April 28, 2017.

wherein the visitor is bestowed with an important participatory role (whether that is their mere presence or active engagement), *Maze Table's* constricting, transparent form is best revealed when occupied. Moreover, in a letter to Andrea Miller-Keller, the curator of the 1985 Lions Gallery of the Senses *MATRIX* exhibition, Acconci wrote: "I've decided to do something that would emphasize the people using it, rather than the features of the thing used. I wanted not a definite thing but rather an occasion for interaction, for people moving through the piece... to emphasize the use of the piece and de-emphasize, to as great a degree as possible, the physical presence of the piece."²

Still today Acconci's *Maze Table* challenges one's perception of confinement, intimacy, social interaction, control, and even domesticity. Kate Linker writes on *Maze Table* in her 1994 book *Vito Acconci*, "Through a skillful play of dislocations, the work at once seduces and displaces its viewers, directing their motion along carefully predetermined paths."³ Simultaneously disorienting and playful, the *Maze Table* installation serves as a moment for the viewer to not simply look but to engage, enter, and become engulfed in the artwork.

Vito Acconci (b. 1940, Bronx, NY; d. 2017, New York) earned a BA in literature from Holy Cross College (Worcester, MA) in 1962. He completed an MFA in writing at the University of Iowa in Iowa City two years later. After returning to New York, he went on to develop a diverse body of work in poetry, criticism, performance art, sound, film and video, photography, and sculpture.

Following his first solo show in 1969, at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Acconci participated in numerous exhibitions. Retrospectives have been organized by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (1978) and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (1980). Print retrospectives have been mounted by Landfall Press in New York (1990) and the Gallery of Art at the University of Missouri in Kansas City (1994). Acconci's achievements have been recognized with fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (1976, 1980, 1983, and 1993), John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation (1979), and American Academy in Rome (1986). He also received the International Sculpture Center's Lifetime Achievement Award (1997) and two New York City Art Commission Awards for Excellence in Design (1999 and 2004). He was a finalist for the Hugo Boss Prize in 2000.

Acconci taught at numerous institutions, among them the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, Nova Scotia College of Art & Design in Halifax, San Francisco Art Institute, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, School of Visual Arts in New York, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Yale University in New Haven. Acconci died on April 27, 2017, in New York.

² Andrea Miller-Keller, *Vito Acconci/MATRIX* (Hartford: Lions Gallery of the Senses, 1985) 2.

³ Kate Linker, *Vito Acconci* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1994) 153.