

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## VITO ACCONCI: PUBLIC PLACES

February 11 - May 3, 1988

". . . it seems fair to argue that, in substance, though [Acconci] has changed he has remained the same. The obsessions--with private and public interaction, with contradiction, authority, and control--continue. His art is as extreme and subversive as it has always been."

--Linda Shearer\*

A major exhibition featuring three monumental public sculptures by American artist Vito Acconci opens at The Museum of Modern Art on February 11, 1988. Organized by Linda Shearer, curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, VITO ACCONCI: PUBLIC PLACES focuses on the increasingly public nature of the artist's work over the past five years. Taking the form of architectural structures and furniture, these works invite the interaction of the viewer.

Continuing through May 3, the exhibition is supported in part by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funding has been provided by the Coca-Cola Foundation, General Atlantic Corporation, The Ford Motor Company Fund, and the New York State Council on the Arts. The catalogue is funded by a grant from The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

This is Acconci's first individual exhibition in a New York City museum and the first time that a number of his major public works have been shown together in a gallery setting. It includes reconstructions of three large-scale

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sculptures originally seen outdoors: House of Cars (1983), Bad Dream House (1984), and Face of the Earth (1984). The recent Garden of Columns (Town Square for Workers) (1987), created for the Coca-Cola headquarters in Atlanta, is represented by a model. Also included are models for Proposal for a Playground (1983) and Proposal for Spanish Landing (1987), designed for the city of San Diego, along with the sculpture Landing (1986-87).

Since his start in the late sixties, Acconci has worked in a variety of media, including performance art, audio/video, and site-specific installations. His earliest performance pieces, in which the artist confronted viewers with his physical presence, established his ongoing fascination with the human body, as well as an irrepressible urge toward controversy. By the mid-seventies he had removed himself physically from his pieces--stating that his shift was "from a kind of psychological self to a sociological self"--and begun exploring environmental installations and sculpture. Though this work has become more accessible, it ultimately retains the disorienting and provocative quality of his early work.

The works in this exhibition reflect Acconci's interest in creating environments that evoke the dynamics of a town square. Inspired by the village greens of American history and frontier settlements depicted in Westerns, many of his pieces express a longing for the security promised by a community, as well as a resistance to the conformity it imposes. Acconci intends that these works convey "the notion of a kind of discussion place, argument place, start-a-revolution place."

The clever duality of Acconci's art is typified in Face of the Earth, a whimsical mini-park in the shape of a face. Yet, with its hollow, skull-like eyes and nose, this seemingly benign structure masks an underlying, sinister

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humor. Originally constructed of Astroturf and intended for the outdoors, the piece has been recreated for the exhibition in stone with real grass and Museum shrubbery, reversing the contradiction. Proposal for a Playground, consisting of three sports helmets enlarged and rendered in pink, is similarly playful. But what would have been protective headgear at normal size now take on the appearance of prisons and cages, their outrageous color subverting the violence of male contact sports. (1976, 1980, and 1983), and the New York State Council

All of Acconci's work deals with the power of conventions, both architectural and social. In Bad Dream House, he reveals his ambivalence work towards "home" as both a cherished ideal and a source of authority and Theater repression. He takes the middle-class dream of the suburban tract house and literally inverts it, so that an object of much social expectation becomes a nightmare. House of Cars, with its pun on "house of cards," is equally p.m. perverse and precarious. Constructed of six abandoned cars arranged in a makeshift frame, the sculpture has a playground-like quality that doubles as a politicized statement on urban survival.

Born in 1940 in the Bronx, New York, Vito Acconci received his B.A. degree in 1962 from Holy Cross College, Worcester, Massachusetts, and his M.F.A. in 1964 from the University of Iowa, Iowa City. Over the years he has taught at various schools in the United States and Canada, including Parsons School of Design, the School of Visual Arts, and Cooper Union, New York; Yale University; the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; and the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Minnesota.

No. 12 Since the late sixties, Acconci's work has been represented in numerous individual and group exhibitions in this country and abroad. Other Voices for a Second Sight, one of his first installations, was presented in The Museum of

Modern Art's 1974 exhibition EIGHT CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS. The retrospective VITO ACCONCI: DOMESTIC TRAPPINGS, which opened in early 1987 at La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, California, was most recently seen at the Neuberger Museum, State University of New York, Purchase.

Acconci is the recipient of grants from the American Academy in Rome (1987), the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation (1979), the National Endowment for the Arts (1976, 1980, and 1983), and the New York State Council on the Arts (1974). He currently lives and works in Brooklyn.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Vito Acconci discusses his public work on Tuesday, April 5, at 8:30 p.m., in the Museum's Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1. Tickets for the lecture are \$8, \$7 members, and \$5 students. As part of the Museum's week-long CONTEMPORARY ART IN CONTEXT program, the artist is conducting a gallery talk in the exhibition on Friday, March 4, at 12:30 p.m. Enrollment for both the lecture and gallery talk are arranged through the Department of Education, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019; 212/708-9795.

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For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.