

Robert Morris
Voice, 1974

January 11 – March 28, 2020

18 E 77
24 W 40



Installation view, *Robert Morris: Labyrinths—Voice—Blind Time*, 420 West Broadway, April 6 – 27, 1974

Castelli Gallery is pleased to present *Voice, 1974*, by Robert Morris. The exhibition at 24 W 40, restages one of the artist's rarely presented audio installations alongside preparatory drawings and diagrams. By making sound a key element in *Voice*, Morris challenges the expectation that a work of art must be material, visual, and actively created by the artist. Although the piece incorporates material elements—including speakers and felt-covered boxes that serve as seats for visitors—these components function primarily as supports for the audio recording. The three-and-a-half-hour-long audio piece is divided into four parts, each of which consists of two tracks that have been spliced together. In each section, Morris uses the intangible medium of sound to tangibly alter visitors' spatial awareness—whether by playing tracks through different speakers, using distortion effects, or overlaying tracks played at different volumes.

The spoken content of *Voice* reinforces the work's rejection of conventional aesthetic principles by deconstructing examples of authority that perform similar functions on a cultural level: those that determine the possible forms of subjective experience within a society. For example, in the third section of the recording, a male voice speaks in a subdued tone about a painful scar on his body. Meanwhile, a second louder track plays in which a different male voice recites entries from *The Guinness Book of World Records*. In this mash-up, the record of legitimized accomplishments nearly drowns out the narrative of individual pain. *Voice* also challenges language as a system which regulates the ways we verbally articulate our inner thoughts and emotions. The work's title suggests Morris' privileging of the voice as the unformed "material" that language marshals into a specific form.

The anti-authoritarian spirit that animates *Voice* is likewise present in Morris' *Blind Time* and *Labyrinth* drawings, a selection of which will be on view at the gallery's uptown location at 18 E 77. In 1974, all three bodies of work were debuted in the exhibition *Robert Morris: Labyrinths—Voice—Blind Time*, held simultaneously at Castelli and Sonnabend Gallery. The structure of the labyrinth evokes the confines of the social system that the individual must navigate. Meanwhile, in his *Blind Time* drawings, made with eyes closed, Morris intentionally abandons vision as the artist's primary means of controlling his medium and exerting his creative intention. In this respect, *Voice* offers insight into Morris' approach to art-making as an essentially political act, premised on an awareness of the continuity between the oppressive powers operative in art and society.

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