

*Domus*

12 October 2020

domus

## London, Ai Weiwei on mega screen for Europe's largest digital art exhibition

CIRCA is a project dedicated to digital art that every day turns the mega screen of Piccadilly Circus, in the heart of London, into an enormous multimedia canvas, with the possibility of listening and participating using your headphones.



AUTHOR  
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CIRCA is a futuristic project focused on digital art born from an idea of the London artist Josef O'Connor. Started 1 October 2020 until the end of the year, CIRCA turns the advertising screen of Piccadilly Circus in London into a massive digital canvas broadcasting works of art from well-known contemporary artists. Every day for two minutes (20:20 - 20:22 BST/GMT), Piccadilly Lights' advertising will be suspended to present the digital project, which will feature a different artist every month.

The initiative started in early October with the eclectic Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. All spectators, using their own headphones and connecting to the website [www.circa.art](http://www.circa.art), will be able to enjoy a unique audiovisual and immersive experience, while respecting guidelines for social distancing. CIRCA pioneers a new way of enjoying art, engaging and personal but also safe. Every evening, the website will broadcast the artwork in live streaming at the same time as it shows on the mega screen. Throughout the month, artists will upload images, texts and videos online to support their work, in order to expand the artistic discourse and involve a digital community that is as broad and diverse as possible. The launch was preceded by the projection, in the last week of September, of a two-minute video made by Brazilian director Rodrigo Inada, with the participation of well-known personalities in the art scene, including Ai Weiwei and Tracey Emin. CIRCA will contribute towards the restart of the country's cultural economy by selling original prints. All proceeds will be donated to support the United Kingdom's artistic community. At the moment, it is possible to buy limited edition prints made by Ai Weiwei.



## **Ai Weiwei: If you do not question Chinese power, you are complicit with it—that goes for art organisations too**

Dissident artist says that European museums in China are betraying their own values

**CRISTINA RUIZ**

**1st September 2020 12:43 BST**



Ai Weiwei says art institutions that collaborate with the Chinese governments are complicit in their politics © Photo: Dave Parry

European museums have defended their collaborations with corporations owned by the Chinese state in the face of mounting criticism of the country's human rights abuses. We asked the Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei about the responsibility of European art organisations partnering with state-owned firms in China.

**The Art Newspaper: Do you think that European museums should operate in China? Should they try to exert pressure on government officials with regards to the detention of Uyghurs and the crackdown in Hong Kong?**

**Ai Weiwei:** Almost none of the Western museums operating in China support the culture they represent, not even to mention the values they represent. Most of them are in China purely for strategies of self-development, attempting to get away from the struggles facing institutions in the West.

The Pompidou is the perfect example having lent their works to Shanghai, a city under heavy communist censorship. My name cannot even appear in museum exhibitions in Shanghai. It is a gigantic monster of a city that has absolutely no aesthetic or moral foundation upon which art can exist.

On 3 April 2011, the same day I was arrested and placed in secret detention, Germany and China opened the biggest so-called two-state cultural exchange at the National Museum in Beijing. The show cost approximately €30m and it was called “The Art of Enlightenment,” but not a single Chinese institution was enlightened. At the same time, I was in detention and there was not a single voice questioning the Chinese state’s behaviour toward their own artists. The exhibition was a complete failure and a waste of German tax-payer money, yet the German press kept silent about it.

Some galleries continue to stay open in Shanghai or Beijing without selling a single work in the past decade. To ask them to speak out about violations or other political issues in Hong Kong or within China sounds like a joke. In Beijing’s 798 art district, the UCCA [Center for Contemporary Art] functions to please the Chinese government by showing so-called safe art, to decorate the “openness” of Chinese society. In reality, they are collaborators in this crude censorship on ideology and free speech, and they perform their role well.

**In his final report for the *China Tribunal* in London, which investigated the practice of live organ removals from Falun Gong prisoners in China, Geoffrey Nice concluded that: “Governments and any who interact in any substantial way with the People’s Republic of China including... educational and arts establishments should now recognise that they are interacting with a criminal state.”**

The statement is clear. Any state or organisation, business or culture alike, involved with a state with such an extremely poor record on human rights, with divisive ideas about those most important values such as free speech, becomes a part of this power. If you do not question that power you become complicit.



*artnet News*  
14 May 2020

**artnet**®news

## ‘What Would Weiwei Do?’: Watch Studio Assistants of Ai Weiwei Reflect on How the Dissident Artist Taught Them to Speak Their Minds

As part of a collaboration with Art21, hear news-making artists describe their inspirations in their own words.

**Caroline Goldstein**, May 14, 2020



Production still from the "Change" episode of "Art in the Twenty-First Century," Season 6. © Art21, Inc. 2012.

In 2011, [Ai Weiwei](#)’s 12 bronze animal heads were erected at the Pulitzer Fountain at Grand Army Plaza near Central Park, launching an official multi-year world tour. At the unveiling, former Mayor Michael Bloomberg was in attendance, but the artist was nowhere to be found.

Ai had been arrested in China for so-called “economic crimes,” as part of the country’s crackdown on figures speaking out against the communist regime.



Art21 filmed that press conference in 2011, along with exclusive interviews with Ai's studio assistants who traveled to New York in his place, as part of an episode titled "Change." The assistants, E-Shyh Wong and Inserk Yang spoke about working in Ai's studio and reflected on his incarceration, telling Art21 that although at first they wanted to stay quiet so as not to upset the Chinese government, "then we think, what would Weiwei do? And he would probably make the most noise of anybody...I don't think the right way is to be quiet."



Production still from the "Change" episode of "Art in the Twenty-First Century,"  
Season 6. © Art21, Inc. 2012.

The episode, part of PBS's *Art in the Twenty-First Century* series, also features and earlier interview with Ai, who said of his work, "the media is the message," a particularly apt description for his poignant, often ironic pieces. One work he mentions is a marble object in the shape of a security camera, a comment on the intense observation he was under in China.

"Once it's become marble, it's only being watched," he said, "it's not functioning anymore."

Watch the video, which originally appeared as part of Art21's PBS series *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, below. Ai Weiwei's *Safe Passage*, 2016 is on view on the facade of the Minneapolis Institute of Art as part of "*When Home Won't Let You Stay: Art and Migration*"



This is an installment of "Art on Video," a collaboration between Artnet News and Art21 that brings you clips of newsmaking artists. A new series of the nonprofit Art21's flagship series *Art in the Twenty-First Century* is available now on PBS. Catch episodes of other series like "New York Close Up" and "Extended Play" and learn about the organization's educational programs at [Art21.org](http://Art21.org).

L I S S O N   G A L L E R Y

*The Guardian*  
24 April 2020

# The Guardian

**Interview**

## **Ai Weiwei: 'I became the enemy of the established power, but without a crime'**

*Interview by Chris Wiegand*

**The artist reflects on the events that inspired Hampstead theatre's #aiww: The Arrest of Ai Weiwei, streamed by the Guardian this month**



▲ 'The interrogators never believed that what I did could be called art' ... Ai Weiwei. Photograph: Steffen Roth/the Observer



**You began an 81-day confinement on 3 April 2011. What happened that day?**

That day, I woke up and prepared to go to the airport with my assistant Jennifer, who had begun working with me not long before. This was our first trip together and we were going to go to Taiwan to prepare for an exhibition opening later that autumn. Our flight was to Hong Kong where we would transfer to Taipei.

Many things happened in the days before the trip. I had been under surveillance and followed by secret police for years, but the days before the trip involved more frequent visits. There were all kinds of excuses: a fire safety check, residential registrations, many strange reasons that had not been used before. I could sense something was coming, but I could never have imagined what would happen. They could have come to my home in Beijing to see me and take me away if they had wanted to. They could have come and questioned me at any time, but they never directly confronted me. When we approached the immigration checkpoint that day, I knew something was going to happen. A police officer took my passport and I saw the other police gathered in the hall begin moving toward me. Another police officer came and told me he had something to discuss. I followed him into another room. From there, I was led to a car, a black hood was put over my head and I was driven to an unknown area. That was the beginning of 81 days of solitary confinement.

**How have you revisited the confinement in your own art?**

I created a few pieces related to the period of detention. There was SACRED, an installation consisting of six iron boxes with scale dioramas depicting my detention conditions. It showed in exact detail how I slept, walked, ate, was interrogated, washed and used the toilet. I also made The Divine Comedy, a heavy rock album that directly reflected this time.



▲ The scene inside one of six containers that comprise SACRED at the Royal Academy in London in 2015. Photograph: Leon Neal/AFP via Getty Images

### **With this play, your confinement became an artwork - how does that feel?**

When I heard of the play, I felt that it was created in the same spirit as my work at that time. I was trying to fight through all possible forms: artworks, online activities, interviews, happenings, photographs, videos. I would use whatever medium I could get. What I have learned living in this kind of authoritarian society is that

the struggle is often very difficult. Most of the time, your voice cannot be heard. There is no platform without censorship and tight police control. And even if you had a voice, very few people would be able to hear it. Those outside of China are too far away and nobody cares what they have to say. Those within China have the attention of a very small audience that shares the same feelings and can follow the argument. The arguments are not necessarily popular ones, either philosophically or aesthetically, and it takes some effort to follow along.

So when I heard at the time that a good theatre in London was putting on a play based on the book by Barnaby Martin, who is someone I knew to be very alert and attentive to my situation, I was encouraged and felt like it became a part of my activity.

### **How did the confinement change you?**

This was a very harsh experience and it's difficult to grasp it, or even deal with it. It's not a common experience so it's hard to share with another. There is no existing vocabulary to illustrate a condition that requires a special kind of reality. Once it comes to a point when the authority cannot rationally communicate or have a clear exchange of ideas or when they cannot allow the argument, then the only thing they can do is to make you feel that rationality, moral judgment and the law no longer work. They must prove to you that nothing works except power itself. And that power is identified with incomprehensible treatment, which can be ridiculous and surreal, but you must follow every step and detail to get through it.



▲ Benedict Wong as Ai Weiwei with David Lee-Jones, Richard Rees and Andrew Leung in #aiww: The Arrest of Ai Weiwei by Howard Brenton at Hampstead theatre in 2013. Photograph: Tristram Kenton/the Guardian



**The play's title includes the hashtag #aiww. How did social media change your life?**

It's an intelligent title. It's not social media that changed my entire life. My entire life is social media. Without social media, "Ai Weiwei" simply does not exist. I live by social media. In a religious sense, it's not unlike the biblical reference to "the way, the truth, and the life".

**In the play, the interrogators accuse you of being a fraud and a conman. Did this happen - and does it reflect any kind of internal criticism you may have about your art and the marketplace?**

It's quite strange. The interrogators never believed that what I did could be called art. They could not believe that something I took could be called art, or that something I dropped could be called art, or an action on the internet or pointing my middle finger toward a monument could be called art. They thought I was famous because I was paid by western anti-China forces. I do not blame them. I don't care whether my work is called art or not. I am an artist because I have no other job; it is not that I like the title very much. It is the only title where you don't have to do very much and no one will question it because people don't understand art anyway. I enjoy the liberty of being someone who is doing nothing practical. At the same time, in the west, including the art world, they think my work isn't "serious". I guess it is



because I am not playing the game in the same way they are playing it, or my voice is different from their way of singing. This part I enjoy even more. If I have to call myself an artist, I would rather be different from the others.



▲ Benedict Wong as Ai Weiwei in the play. Photograph: Tristram Kenton/the Guardian



**Your father was imprisoned - did you find strength through his experience during these 81 days?**

At the beginning of my detention, I was so proud of myself. I matched my father's experience from 80 years ago when he was imprisoned by the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) for political subversion. I was told my crime was subversion against the state.

Before I was detained, I was jealous of my father for having been imprisoned. Having grown up in this communist society, I was supposed to be a part of the second revolutionary generation. Having learned everything from Chairman Mao's education, there was no chance for me to be a criminal. That

was true until I made arguments about the lawfulness of the existing party. I became the ultimate enemy of the established power, but still without a crime. They don't have to like me, but I did not think they would put me in jail. Once that was achieved, I kind of felt happy because it gave me an opportunity to argue my reasoning with them face to face.

Before the arrest, confrontations were never direct because they did not want to have any argument. First, they don't think you are entitled to an argument and, second, they are incapable of making an argument. I had tried to initiate the argument for years on the internet. It became my own game. No one was answering me and therefore the argument couldn't go further. I was fighting against an invisible enemy, which is everywhere but nowhere at the same time. So when it did happen, I thought it was wonderful. We are sitting face to face, two metres across, looking at each other. You ask a question and I answer. I felt some sense of power and usefulness in being confronted directly.

**What advice do you have for artists who are struggling financially and spiritually at this time of lockdown?**

Give up art. Do something which can bring home bread and soap. Rob a bank, but do not get caught.

**There is a lengthy discussion in the play about how best to prepare Beijing noodles. What is your preferred method?**

You need to watch the noodles cook, not for too long or too short. It is really dependent on what kind of sauce you are cooking with. It can be very basic or have a variety of flavours. You could really write a long book about just this topic ...

- #aiww: The Arrest of Ai Weiwei by Howard Brenton will be streamed by the Guardian from 10am on 27 April until 10pm on 3 May.

# LISSON GALLERY

*The Observer*  
22 March 2020



You ask the questions

## Ai Weiwei: 'An artist must be an activist'

▲ Ai Weiwei, photographed on 2 February in his Berlin studio.  
Photograph: Steffen Roth/The Observer

Sun 22 Mar 2020 10:00 GMT

The Chinese artist answers questions from Observer readers and art world luminaries on creativity and protest, Chinese politics - and why he never cooks the same dish twice

by [Tim Lewis](#)

**A**i Weiwei's studio can be found behind unmarked, black metal doors in a grand square in the old east Berlin. You immediately descend two flights of very steep stone stairs before emerging, blinking for light, into a vast, brick-lined cavern that has the proportions of a church. The temperature drops a few degrees. The space was originally, back in the mid-19th century, the cooling warehouses for the Bavarian brewer Joseph Pfeffer. But, since Ai fled China five years ago, this has been his main place of work - and, given that the 62-year-old artist and activist is almost always working, more besides.



“When I’m here, it’s like my home,” says Ai, who wears a blue hoodie and comfortable shoes, his beard less unruly than it appears in photographs. “Like my home,” he clarifies. “I’ve never had a home. In China, my studio was often destroyed. So for me, it’s a shelter – a shelter not so different from refugees in the camps that gradually build up. I can leave, of course, but since 2015, I have stayed here, never had a holiday or weekends. I’m working all the time.” His face crinkles into a smile: “I love work.”

Ai’s output is prolific and diverse. In 2008, he was the [artistic consultant for the Olympic Stadium](#) in Beijing, the Bird’s Nest. Two years later, he filled the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern with [100m handmade and painted porcelain sunflower seeds](#). Early in his career, he made a photo series of himself [dropping a splendid, 2,000-year-old Han dynasty urn](#). Recently, he has created several powerful works – installations, video and a documentary – on [the refugee crisis](#). War and its fallout is also the subject of his latest work, *History of Bombs*.

“In China they say, you’re born as a nude person, you die as a nude person. You should understand both ends

Until the coronavirus outbreak, Ai’s design – a grid of 50 explosive devices from a 1911 grenade to a 2019 guided nuclear missile – was due to cover the floor of the Imperial War Museum London’s vast atrium, underneath the suspended Spitfire and Harrier jet, leading visitors to the spring exhibition, *Refugees: Forced to Flee*.

Now the exhibition is postponed and Ai says when contacted last week: “Cultural institutions are probably the last to be damaged, but the first to show how severely this can affect our understanding about art and culture, which reflect tragic human moments like this. It is very hard to predict the future, but it seems like the situation is not going to be easily resolved and will have a strong impact. All the factors that allowed for this incident still remain the same – this could happen again – and a more thoughtful response in terms of social structure and the philosophical understanding of this situation is required.”

Ai’s notoriety now of course reaches far beyond the art world. He took the 99-year lease on his Berlin studio in 2010 when he was starting to worry about his safety – his freedom – in China. He was right to be concerned: in April 2011, [he was arrested and jailed](#) for 81 days on insubstantial charges. His passport was confiscated and only returned to him in 2015, at which point he came to Germany.



▲ Ai Weiwei in his Berlin studio.  
Photograph: Steffen Roth/The Observer

“When a friend showed me the space, it was in a very bad condition,” Ai recalls. “That’s why nobody wanted it: it’s dark, it’s wet, it’s cold. There’s no light down here. So I said: ‘I want it.’ He was surprised and said: ‘Why do you want it?’ And I said: ‘Because there are so many problems, and I like to solve problems!’”

Before Ai was an artist, he was an architect, and it shows. The studio now has natural light from goodness knows where, and is clinically clean and dry. For the most part, anyway. A while back, he discovered water dripping from the ceiling, so he went to see his upstairs neighbour, the Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson, about it. “Olafur is my dear friend, but we don’t see each other very often, maybe once every three months,” says Ai. “So I said: ‘Olafur,



it's leaking!' And he said: 'Oh, I'm sorry.' And I said: 'No, don't worry, I'll call it a waterfall and when you have the chance, come down to sign it!'"

Those who follow Ai's work and pronouncements might be surprised to learn that he still has a base in Berlin. At the end of last year, he moved with his partner and 10-year-old son to Cambridge. In January, he gave an interview to the *Guardian* in which he was so **excoriating about life in Germany** that you might imagine that he would never set foot in the country again. Germans, he said, "deeply don't like foreigners". He went even further: nazism - by his definition, as an ideology that dismisses alternative viewpoints - "perfectly exists in German daily life today".



▲ One of six containers that comprise Ai Weiwei's work *S.A.C.R.E.D.*, 2015. Photograph: Leon Neal/AFP via Getty Images



What has been the reaction to these comments in Germany? "When I chat like this, it is only because journalists ask me and I have to answer," says Ai. "The German response was very heavy, very dark - a form of 'love it or leave it', or 'go back to China'. Or the more intellectual was: 'Oh, it's only a few taxi drivers.' And I said, 'Yes, but that is a long ride.'"

Ai guffaws, but he's totally serious. He has to keep his studio in Berlin for now, but would like to relocate. "I know I would never get a place like this, but so what?" he says. "Many people have to leave their nation barehanded, and maybe before they used to have a palace. In China they say, you're born as a nude person, you die as a nude person. You should understand both ends."

One of the differences Ai sees between the UK and Germany is the engagement with his work and his opinions. He says that he has done more interviews in one week with the British media than in five years with German outlets. "The Hong Kong riots, the corona situation - I thought the German press would ask what we think about it, right?" he says. "I'm not blaming them or asking for this, but it makes me feel kind of like I'm in China, because my name cannot be written."



On the evidence of this feature, a You Ask the Questions special, there is certainly an intense fascination with Ai in Britain (there are also at least a couple of questions from Germany, and submissions from all over the world). The many hundreds of inquiries ranged from his early life (Ai's father Ai Qing was a notable poet who was ostracised for criticising the Maoist regime; the family lived in a cave for five years and his father was made to clean the village toilet) to his opinions on music and food (he's obsessed with one, not the other). At one point Ai stops me mid-sentence and marvels: "You have important questions from a lot of powerful people! Amazing!"

Subject to any further disruption due to coronavirus, IWM plans to open History of Bombs this summer at IWM London as part of IWM's [Refugees season](#).



## Questions from cultural figures

### Maria Balshaw

Director of the Tate galleries

**You have moved to the UK just as we leave the European Union. What does the idea of the nation state mean to you?**

If you take a historical view, our map is always changing. It continues to evolve. That might be a king's decision or the people's decision in a democracy. I don't think Brexit is a problem. I've asked many people and Britain is Britain. It has problems, but it's still there and this doesn't add more problems. So it's a time for people to rethink what Britain is and how to survive.



### Julian Schnabel

Artist and film-maker

**What is the most satisfying thing to you about being an artist?**

To not even think that I am an artist has been very satisfying for my work.



### Wolfgang Tillmans

Artist

**In free societies, people often have the romantic feeling that better art is produced in circumstances of hardship. What would you say to that?**

This is a tricky question. I would say that many bad artworks have come from circumstances of hardship. But hardship can also be defined as a long period of mental and intellectual struggle.

Marcel Duchamp's work, *The Large Glass* [also known as *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*] looks very casual. Duchamp had the lightest attitude towards art but his mindset was formed over a long time, taking in poetry, French literature, the attitudes of that generation, Dadaism and surrealism. *The Large Glass* speaks of all of that.



## Jude Kelly

### Theatre director

**If artists aren't active in the political space, do you think that they are essentially supporting the status quo?**

An artist must also be an activist - aesthetically, morally, or philosophically. That doesn't mean they have to demonstrate in street protests, but rather deal with these issues through a so-called artistic language. Without that kind of consciousness - to be blind to human struggle - one cannot even be called an artist.



## Hans Ulrich Obrist

### Artistic director, Serpentine Galleries

**What is your unrealised project?**

That will be death. In my life I have gone through pretty much every single trauma: communism, postmodernism, post-capitalism and globalisation, but the only project I think everyone realises is death. I know nothing about death. I haven't met anybody who has come back to tell me their experience. So I'm waiting for the moment and it will come sooner or later.

I'm happy with the work I've done, even though I have done so little. Often in life you don't get the chance to do what you want. For me, that period lasted almost 45 years: I either didn't know what I wanted to do or I knew what I wanted but I didn't get the chance to do it. But since 2005, when I touched a computer for the first time and started to learn how to type, I began working on the internet and have been reborn. So in the past 15 years, I basically did everything and I'm pretty satisfied. If I have to die now, I have no regrets.



## Tim Marlow

### Director of the Design Museum

**Given you've designed buildings as well as installed art in a whole variety of different spaces, what can artists and architects learn from each other?**

This is a bit technical, but I think artists and architects are the same profession, if they're good ones. Even doctors or politicians, they should have vision and they should understand human behaviour and try to offer possibilities for surviving intellectually or physically.





## Elif Shafak

### Writer

**After creating so many works of art that give voice to the voiceless across the world, I wonder what are the emotions that you find easier to think, write or express in Chinese and what are the emotions you find easier to think, write or express in English? I am curious what is your relationship with each language, and how do they differ, if at all, emotionally.**

For Chinese readers, the sensitivity and storytelling about common feelings and people's everyday behaviour are the most effective. For western readers, since I was not raised in the west, my arguments are more about matters of ethics and philosophy. Rationality is easier for any audience to understand.



## Lord Alf Dubs

### Politician

**What steps do you think can we take to persuade European public opinion to be more sympathetic to taking in refugees, especially in Britain?**

It's not possible to persuade anybody. You can only warn people what the consequences will be of not doing it. The idea of helping the unfortunate has always existed in most religions. It's easy to understand but I don't think people will do it in practice. So, in my work, I'd rather warn about what will happen if we are not more sympathetic towards refugees. And that's what I'm doing.

## Questions from readers



▲ Chinese students and their supporters hold a memorial for coronavirus whistleblower Dr Li Wenliang, UCLA, Westwood, California. Photograph: Mark Ralston/AFP via Getty Images





**Aren't you discouraged by the lack of political change in China after fighting for so long?**

***Anonymous, Croatia***

I'm totally discouraged. But I'm very fortunate I committed to fighting China because China is the ideal opponent. He never dies, you cannot beat him with one punch. So it is my life's work.

**You mostly look unhappy. Are you happy, Mr Weiwei?**

***Uwe Wache, Germany***

I am the happiest person with the saddest face on Earth.

**Where did all the sesame seeds go? Can I get some?**

***Nick, Spain***

Ah, the sunflower seeds? Yes, give me your address I will send you one. They are for someone who doesn't mind seeing a dentist, because they will break their teeth on them! But seriously, in China, all the activists love these seeds, they call them the seeds of freedom. So we've sent out a few million seeds. It's very costly, but they give them to their loved ones as wedding or engagement presents. They make a little earring or something. They really love them. I don't know why.

**How did you and your family survive living in a hole in the ground for five years?**

***Anne Gray, UK***

We survived and had many happy moments in that hole [during the cultural revolution, Ai's family had to live in an underground cavern previously used for farm animals]. We had the kind of happiness one will never experience living on Park Avenue or in some kind of palace.



▲ Ai Weiwei's 2010 Turbine Hall installation at Tate Modern, London. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian



**Are the people in Hong Kong fighting a lost cause?**

***Anonymous, Hong Kong***

I have said this before: they have already won. As soon as you start to fight - you can be the weakest or strongest - you have won. Of course, it's very hard to win against a communist regime, but you never die if you keep fighting. So it's like me: am I winning? I think in a certain way I'm impactful. But I'll get old, I will die and who cares?

**Of all of your accomplishments, artistic and political, what are you personally most proud of?**

***Vincent Elliott, Canada***

I'm proud that I retain a clear mind with sensitivity and judgment. If there is one honour I'd love, it's to be known as a clear-minded man. Some of my work is more popular, some less, but that is not so important. You make an effort, that's the most important thing. I think anybody who wants to make the effort can create better work than me.

**Has becoming a parent had an impact on your art?**

***Lorraine Pink, Australia***

Oh yes, definitely it helps me. Whatever I did before is like half of the circle; becoming a parent makes the circle full. So it's very important for me, even if I understand very little about doing it. But still, it's a gift, so you accept that gift. Also, it's only when you become a parent you understand your own parents. That's important, too.



▲ China's National Stadium in Beijing, known as 'the Bird's Nest', designed by Ai with architects Herzog & De Meuron, Stefan Marbach and Li Xinggang of CADG for the 2008 Summer Olympics. Photograph: Kerim Ökten/EPA



**What do you miss most about China?**

***John, Saigon***

What I miss most is standing on the ground in China and fighting for its survival.



**Does music inspire you, and if so what do you listen to?**

***Anonymous, Japan***

Not at all! I wouldn't say that I don't like music, but I have never really turned on music in my life. I have good equipment, I have a lot of musician friends and I have perfect understanding of music. I can analyse music with my musician friends and conductors and they say: "You understand music so well!" But it's like a parallel world in which I'm an alien. When I listen to it, I can rationalise happy emotions, but I don't *like* music. I like silence. No sound at all. Maybe I belong to death.

**Last year you bought 30 tons of buttons from A Brown & Co when the business closed. What plans do you have for them?**

***Bill Brown, USA***

What a pain! We have started to analyse and measure and categorise them. We're still working on that. At the moment, we don't have a plan for them. We never do anything without totally understanding the situation, or at least thinking that we totally understand the situation. We want to find joy, then we can turn it into some other kind of joy.

**Would you rather fight a horse-sized duck or 100 duck-sized horses?**

***Ian Tinkler, Shetland***

I have no preference. I don't see the difference between my opponents. What I am fighting is an ideology, which has no clear shape or size.



▲ Ai Weiwei's artwork Dropping a Han

**As a young man, you destroyed art and cultural artefacts. Do you still see those acts in the same way you did then?**

***Amy Thompson, Mexico***

My work has a solid understanding, but, at the same time, it happens intuitively. It cannot be repeated or clearly defined by the author.



**Do you enjoy cooking? What would you serve at a dinner party?**

***Nigel Simpson, UK***

Yes, tremendously, mainly because my stomach is very sensitive, particularly to food. Cooking is relaxing. Cooking or cutting hair or whatever is a total break from other activities, and stops you getting burned out.

What I cook depends on what's there when I open the refrigerator. I always find something, but my cooking secret is that I cannot cook the same dish twice. I automatically avoid cooking anything the same. It doesn't matter if it is such a good dish: "Can you redo it?" No, not possible. I see it as art. And I'm not the kind of artist that repeats the same work for 20 years.

*The Guardian*  
21 January 2020



## Experience Ai Weiwei's first virtual reality artwork, Omni

Using the frontiers of technology to tell one of the most urgent stories of our time, Omni immerses you in a jungle full of lost elephants and a refugee camp in Bangladesh

- [Simon Hattenstone interviews Ai Weiwei: 'At least people in the UK are polite'](#)



▲ 'Happiness and sadness always coexist': Ai Weiwei's first virtual reality artwork Omni

**A**i Weiwei's first virtual reality video, which you can see here, is called Omni. It fuses together two films the artist has made focusing on the migrant crisis, immersing viewers in the upheaval of displacement and exile for both animals and humans.

The first part of Omni focuses on the elephants of [Myanmar](#). Once, they worked with their trainers, mahouts, dragging logs from the jungle. Now the government has placed severe restrictions on their jobs and the animals are redundant. Lost and confused by the destruction of their natural environment, the elephants attempt to return to the wild, sometimes coming across the refugees whose camps have been erected on their long-lost migratory routes.

“I relate to the elephants,” Ai says. “There are lot of small ones who have lost their parents. Elephants are like humans. Without parents they cannot survive. They have to stay with them until they are seven years old.”

The second part of Omni drops the viewer into the centre of a [migrant camp known as Cox’s Bazaar](#), in Bangladesh just over the border from the refugees’ home in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where they have fled persecution, ethnic cleansing and a military crackdown. The work provides a migrants’-eye view of daily activities, such as queuing for supplies, and takes the viewer through the camp, from its tents to its markets and playgrounds.


As well as the harshness of life in the camp, it shows solidarity, sharing and teaching. “I feel a lot of positive things about humanity even in the worst conditions,” Ai said. “I don’t want to show that there is just sadness. Happiness and sadness always coexist. That’s a reason to protect that happiness.”

- Omni was produced with [Acute Art](#), who work with artists to make virtual and augmented reality videos. On 30 January, Ai Weiwei will show the project to an audience at a [Guardian event at Conway Hall, London](#).
- Viewers on mobile should have the YouTube app already pre-installed. You must click on the title in the embedded video, and will then be taken to the video in-app where you can actually experience the video in 360 degrees.





# LISSON GALLERY

*The Art Newspaper, Podcast*  
4 October 2019





## THE ART NEWSPAPER

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## Frieze week: Ai Weiwei, Mark Bradford, Peter Doig, Melanie Gerlis, Hettie Judah

In this bumper edition we interview three of the world's leading artists, all of whom have shows timed to coincide with Frieze in London, plus all the latest news from the fair

Hosted by [BEN LUKE](#) with guest speakers [MELANIE GERLIS](#) and [LOUISA BUCK](#). Produced by [JULIA MICHALSKA](#) and [DAVID CLACK](#)

**4th October 2019 12:43 BST**

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The Art Newspaper podcast speaks to Mark Bradford, Peter Doig and Ai Weiwei this week. Photos from left to right: © Sim Canetty- Clark and courtesy of Hauser & Wirth London; © Anton Corbijn and courtesy Michael Werner Gallery, New York and London; and © David Clack

In this bumper edition of the podcast we interview three of the world's leading artists, all of whom have shows timed to coincide with the Frieze art fairs: Ai Weiwei at Lisson Gallery, Mark Bradford at Hauser & Wirth and Peter Doig at Michael Werner Gallery. We also get all the latest news of sales and trends at the Frieze fairs from Melanie Gerlis, as another Brexit deadline approaches. And Hettie Judah tells us about her new book, *Art London*, billed as "a guide to places, artists and events" across the city.

• *The Art Newspaper Weekly podcast is available every Friday on our website and all the usual places where you find podcasts including [iTunes](#), [Soundcloud](#) and [TuneIn](#). This podcast is brought to you in association with Bonhams, auctioneers since 1793. [bonhams.com/define](https://bonhams.com/define)*



LISSON GALLERY

*PURPLE*

4 October 2019

# PURPLE DIARY

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## purple ART

[OCTOBER 4 2019]



## AI WEIWEI'S "ROOTS" EXHIBITION AT THE LISSON GALLERY, LONDON

Ai Weiwei's "Roots" Exhibition is on view until November 2nd at the [Lisson Gallery](#), London.

*Photo Megan Kellythorn*





## purple ART

[OCTOBER 4 2019]



## purple ART

[OCTOBER 4 2019]



*Elephant Magazine*  
3 October 2019

## ELEPHANT

CONTEMPORARY CLASSICS

### Why Ai Weiwei's Roots Are More Relevant Now than Ever

As forests burn and the urgency of the climate crisis becomes ever-more pressing, the Chinese artist's commanding sculptures offer a moment to contemplate the natural world, our hold over it, and the many people who find themselves uprooted at the expense of human politics.

Words by Emily Steer



All images: Installation view of Ai Weiwei: Roots at Lisson Gallery, London, 2 October–2 November 2019 © Ai Weiwei, Courtesy Lisson Gallery



A current show, *Trees*, at Fondation Cartier is entirely dedicated to exploring the role of these commanding plants in art, science and the world at large. Trees call to mind ancient myths, and childhood stories where whole universes exist within enormous trunks. They also make us think of deforestation and industry, of human politics and destruction. Trees have been given human properties in culture—marching forth in the worlds of Tolkien and Shakespeare (involving war in both cases, and varying levels of human intervention), and the forest as a whole is often used symbolically in the arts as a place of both discovery and threat. As rainforests burn in Brazil and the global conversation about climate change becomes ever more urgent, trees hold a hugely symbolic place in the collective consciousness.



It feels fitting then, that Ai Weiwei's latest *Roots* pieces, created last year while the artist was working in Brazil, should be on show right now at Lisson Gallery in London. The weighty works, though created in orange rust-coated iron, look as though they have been dragged in straight from the forest, a chunk of sliced-up nature coming to nestle within the clean internal and external walls of the gallery space. The works appear both wild and tamed, powerful but cut down; a strong reminder of our human role in the changing face of nature, and a reminder of how powerful nature is.



Of course, we only see this view of a tree when it has been uprooted, it's usually safely hidden from view. This connects again with human intervention, and with the life of the “uprooted” artist—since he was allowed to leave China in 2015—and the lives of refugees around the world who have suffered at the hands of destructive human forces.

*“The works appear both wild and tamed, powerful but cut down”*





The works also reference the admiration and imagination that trees provoke. “While some resemble great jungle beasts or fantastical creatures, such as the three- and four-legged works *Flyand Level*, others including *Party* and *Martin* (all 2019) consist of shattered, exploded root forms radiating outwards from a central nexus,” says the gallery. “The titles all came as suggestions from Ai Weiwei’s young son Ai Lao, based on his personal observations or connections made when visiting these tree remains with his father, adding to the sense of surreal displacement and alien disjointedness.”



The artist has been working with tree forms for some time. These particular works are cast from the roots and trunks of the endangered Pequi Vinagreiro tree, sourced with the help of locals and communities across Brazil. A film downstairs in the gallery shows the detailed process that is behind the works.

#### Ai Weiwei: Roots

Until 2 November at Lisson Gallery, London

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*Evening Standard*  
2 October 2019

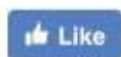
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ARTS

## Ai Weiwei: 'I'm surprised more artists don't use Lego'

ROBERT DEX

3 days ago



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Dissident Chinese artist **Ai Weiwei** says he is “surprised” that more artists do not use Lego after making his latest works of political protest with it.

The 62-year-old, known for filling **Tate Modern's Turbine Hall** with millions of handmade sunflower seeds, said there were “several levels” to the toy bricks.

His latest show features several works made from Lego including a recreation of the front page of the Mueller Report into alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 election that brought Donald Trump to power.

He said: “I'm surprised not so many artists use it. It is a standard, perfect form. There are not so many emotions in there. You can keep buying the precise parts even though other people make it. It is the modern or postmodern idea, the product is made in China.”

Another of the Lego works appears to be a series of abstract lines but is actually the route taken by a refugee boat unable to land in Italy.

Weiwei said: "It gives the appearance of being abstract but at the same time it's not. It's a refusal of humanity to not let those people get on land."

A third work uses the blocks to recreate marks left on a portrait of Chairman Mao when a protester defaced the image in Tiananmen Square during the 1989 protests which were ruthlessly suppressed by the Chinese state.

Weiwei claimed the current protesters in Hong Kong would have faced a similar fate if they had been on the mainland. "If Hong Kong was Chengdu or Shanghai it would be crushed by tanks and be over but because it has history with Britain and is a free port for international business, China is hesitating."

Weiwei, who was jailed without charge in China for 81 days in 2011, says he has no choice but to be a political artist. "I've been given an opportunity to have opinions and my opinions reflect a lot of people who do not have a choice to express themselves, so for me it's a responsibility.

"What has been established in the West in the past 100 years, democracy, freedom of speech, the rule of law, those are not to be taken for granted. We can easily go back to the dark age. We should protect them."

*Ai Weiwei: Roots is at the Lisson Gallery, 27 Bell Street, from tomorrow until November 2.*

More about:

[AI WEIWEI](#)

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 AI WEIWEI: ROOTS AT THE LISSON GALLERY - IN PICTURES





LISSON GALLERY

*The Scotsman*  
2 October 2019



# THE SCOTSMAN

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER



## From forests of Brazil to British gallery: Chinese artist casts ancient tree roots



PICTURE: STUART COWSON/GETTY IMAGES


↑ Chinese contemporary artist Ai Weiwei, who is taking part in Frieze London 2019, with one of the sculptures from his *Roots* exhibition at the Lisson Gallery. The works, in iron and covered in rust, were cast from giant tree roots in Brazil. Some of the trees were over a thousand years old



# LISSON GALLERY

*The Courier*  
2 October 2019



 The Courier & Advertiser (Fife Edition) | 2 Oct 2019 ▾

THE COURIER & ADVERTISER  
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2019

## Picture of the day

A gallery assistant walks in front of *All Fingers Must Point Down* yesterday as Chinese artist Ai Weiwei opens his new exhibition *Ai Weiwei: Roots* at the Lisson Gallery, London.

Picture: Aaron Chown/PA Wire



THE COURIER & ADVERTISER  
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2019

LISSON GALLERY

*The Evening Standard*  
2 October 2019

# EveningStandard.

 Pictures of the day



12/50

Ai Weiwei attends a photocall during the Frieze London 2019: Ai Weiwei exhibition launch at the Lisson Gallery on October 01, 2019 in London.

Getty Images

# LISSON GALLERY

*The Straits Times*  
2 October 2019

## THE STRAITS TIMES

INTERNATIONAL  
EDITION

### Today in Pictures, Oct 2, 2019

A woman with traditional cooling face powder looks on as she sells fruits and vegetables on a wooden boat on Martapura river in South Kalimantan province, Indonesia; a girl walks during sunset along Clifton beach in Karachi, Pakistan; and other pictures from around the world in Today in Pictures.



A gallery assistant walks in front of the "All Fingers Must Point Down" work by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei at the Lisson Gallery, in London, Britain, on Oct 1, 2019. PHOTO: DPA



# LISSON GALLERY

*Culture Whisper*  
2 October 2019

CULTURE*Whisper*

## *Ai Weiwei: Roots, Lisson Gallery review* ★★★★★

02 OCT 19 – 02 NOV 19, MONDAY – FRIDAY: 10:00AM – 6:00PM SATURDAY: 11:00AM - 5:00PM

Ai Weiwei's latest exhibition, *Roots* at Lisson Gallery, touches on environmental issues and the forced movement of people with subtly



By *Emily Spicer* on 1/10/2019



*All Fingers Must Point Down, 2015 (Detail) Bamboo, silk. Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio Photo: Joshua White*

Ai Weiwei's exhibition *Roots*, at Lisson Gallery, does what few shows manage to do. It is subtle and powerful, thought provoking and calming, while combining materials as opposed as iron and silk. It speaks of the past and the present, of ancient ideas and monumental nature, as well as our current political climate, something Ai has a personal experience of.

In every room, and in the gallery's external spaces, sit iron sculptures dusted with an orange patina of rust. These have been cast from the roots of the pequi vinagreiro, sourced in the jungles of Brazil with the help of local communities. The trees are rare and live for more than 1,000 years when left undisturbed. Ai picked through the remains of these giants, looking for the perfect forms, piecing together new compositions to make shapes that seem to have animal qualities, with necks and serpentine limbs. These sculptures engage with both the fragility of the rainforest and those who are 'uprooted' by political and environmental issues, much like Ai himself.



Ai Weiwei, *Roots*. Lisson Gallery

The show also features more fragile works constructed from silk and bamboo. In the past Ai has enlisted the help of Chinese kite makers to produce these large, delicate designs, featuring dragons and many-tailed fish. In this exhibition the papery hangings reference his past works. Hands giving the middle finger (Ai's trademark symbol of defiance) rain down between curly clouds and winged beasts, casting faint shadows on the wall behind. There are Lego works here, too, images that more directly engage with the political climate, such as a huge rendering of the cover of the Mueller Report, which investigated allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election.

Ai has cast tree roots before, and designed bamboo kites and images built from Lego. These works are not new to the Chinese artist. But they are beautiful and hang together so well as to bring a sense of calm to Lisson's white walled galleries.



*i* (The Independent)  
2 October 2019



i Newspaper

## Artist appeals to UK to support protests

2 Oct 2019 [+57 more](#) By Sherna Noah

The Chinese artist Ai Weiwei has urged the British Government to make its voice heard in support of the "brave" anti-government protesters in Hong Kong. Weiwei, 62, who is now based in the UK, spoke as police in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory shot a teenage protester at close range.

The Chinese artist Ai Weiwei has called on the UK Government to make its voice heard in support of the "brave" anti-government protesters in Hong Kong.

Ai, 62, who is now based in the UK, spoke as police in the territory shot a teenage protester at close range. Protesters yesterday defied a ban to

march on the 70th anniversary of Communist rule in China.

Ai, famous for his installation of 100 million porcelain "sunflower seeds" at Tate Modern, said: "The young people [in Hong Kong] are so brave, sacrificing their life for ideology. That ideology being shared by the West, Britain should be much

more responsible, should speak clearly."

At the opening of his first art show in London since his move to the UK, the artist said Britain provoked a "laugh" from the Chinese authorities because it did not speak up enough.



Protests turn violent in Hong Kong yesterday as protesters and police clash



Britain yesterday condemned the “disproportionate” use of live ammunition by the Hong Kong police as the latest anti-government protests saw a dramatic escalation in violence.

Hong Kong police shot a teenage protester in the chest at close range yesterday during a dramatic escalation of anti-government protests across the semi-autonomous Chinese territory.

Tens of thousands marched in a day of violent protest as Communist leaders in Beijing celebrated 70 years in power.

The single pistol shot fired by the

officer as protesters swarmed towards him hit the 18-year-old on the left side of his chest, police spokeswoman Yolanda Yu said. She described the protesters as “rioters” and said the officer feared for his life.

Hong Kong’s hospital authority said the teenager was one of two people in critical condition, with a total of 51 injured. While officers have previously fired warning shots in the air during months of protests in Hong Kong, this was the first time a protester is known to have been shot.

There were other instances yesterday when officers also drew their weapons, including two with bloodied faces who pointed pistols, as activists and riot police fought fierce battles at multiple locations in the city.

The UK Government condemned the use of live ammunition. “Whilst there is no excuse for violence, the use of live ammunition is disproportionate and only risks inflaming the situation,” said Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab.

A video that spread quickly on social media appeared to show the officer opening fire as the protester came at him with a metal stick, striking the officer’s shooting arm.



**Ai Weiwei with his work, 'Martin 2019', at the Lisson Gallery in London yesterday**

Taken by the City University student union, it showed a dozen blackclad demonstrators hurling objects at a group of riot police and closing in on the lone officer who pointed his pistol and opened fire.

The protester toppled backwards on to the street, bleeding from below his left shoulder. A security clamp-down to thwart violence that would embarrass Chinese President Xi Jinping failed to deter the protests, including a massive march in the city centre. Organisers said at least 100,000 people marched along a broad city thoroughfare in defiance of a police ban.



**Protests turn violent in Hong Kong yesterday as protesters and police clash** GETTY

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### WHAT THEY SAY

Western Daily Press - 3 Oct 2019

# LISSON GALLERY

*Artlyst*

2 October 2019

**Artlyst**

## Ai Weiwei: Roots

02 October 2019 - 02 November 2019 / Lisson Gallery (27 Bell St) / Art Categories Events, Exhibition / Art Tags Ai Weiwei, Lisson Gallery / [Twitter](#) / [Facebook](#) / [Instagram](#) / [Email](#)



A major exhibition by Ai Weiwei this autumn features a new series of monumental sculptural works in iron, cast from giant tree roots sourced in Brazil during research and production for last year's survey exhibition, 'Raiz', at the Oscar Niemeyer-designed OCA Pavilion in Ibirapuera Park, São Paulo.

Ai worked with local artisans and communities across Brazil, visiting Trancoso in the east to locate roots and trunks from the endangered Pequi Vinagreiro tree, typically found in the Bahian rainforest. Elements of these rare tree roots, some of which could be over a thousand years old, were painstakingly moulded, conjoined and then cast to create striking compositions and bold forms that reflect their Brazilian heritage. While some resemble great jungle beasts or fantastical creatures, such as the three- and four-legged works *Fly* and *Level*, others including *Party* and *Martin* (all 2019) consist of shattered, exploded root forms radiating outwards from a central nexus. The titles all came as suggestions from Ai Weiwei's young son Ai Lao, based on his personal observations or connections made when visiting these tree remains with his father, adding to the sense of surreal displacement and alien disjointedness in the exhibition. This incongruous atmosphere speaks further of the works' depiction of the state of 'uprootedness', one that mirrors not only the artist's peripatetic existence after being allowed to leave China in 2015, but also the plight of the refugees he has spent the last few years documenting, as well as the various indigenous populations that rely on the trees and forests of Brazil for their habitats and sustenance. The deforestation and concomitant purge of peoples and resources relates to previous bodies of work produced by Ai and to the current political realities of many countries, including his native China.

The material employed in making the Roots series – cast iron covered in a patina of orange rust – likewise responds to ancient cultures and man's first tools for tree felling and woodworking, rather than to the recent, more polite art history of bronze or steel sculpture. Although originally contorted by their surrounding landscapes, these roots were not born of nature but made and crafted by human hands, using the ancient techniques of 'lost wax' moulding and then iron casting. These methods represent a traditional, largely bygone way of life that has been usurped and upended by industrialisation and relentless modernisation, illustrating how progress can often come at the expense of cultural and societal well-being.

Contrasting with these heavy, land-bound creatures is a number of floating figures, clouds and dream-like vignettes. Ai has been producing delicate sculptures from stretched silk over bamboo armatures for the past five years, employing a group of Chinese kite makers based in Weifang, a city in Shandong province. Purported to have been invented in China around 500 BC by a carpenter and a philosopher, the kite has held many functions throughout history from measuring distances or wind speed, to communication and military usage. Ai's kites refer back to a mythological encyclopaedia of monsters and creatures known as Shan Hai Jing (the Classic of Mountains and Seas) that also pre-dated Christianity, which depicts fantastical hybrids of chimera, gorgons, unicorns, dragons and griffins. Alongside this bestiary, Ai has added personal and childhood symbols, as well as references back to his own works – Surveillance Camera and his one-fingered salutes, the Study of Perspective series – and those of his influences, including Marcel Duchamp and Vladimir Tatlin.

Finally, the show ends with a development of Ai's experimentation with LEGO bricks. These new wall-based works feature politically-charged, pixelated renderings of the trajectory of a refugee boat refused docking at Lampedusa after two weeks at sea, the front page of the Mueller report into Russian interference in the 2016 US Presidential election, as well as a deconstructed symbol of the contentious protests of Tiananmen Square in 1989.



# LISSON GALLERY

*Time Out*

2 October 2019



## Ai Weiwei: Roots

Art [Lisson Gallery](#), Marylebone Until Saturday November 2 2019



### Time Out says

At the centre of this exhibition by artist and activist Ai Weiwei are a collection of huge iron sculpture cast from the roots of rare Brazilian trees. The nature-based creations consider the idea of 'uprootedness' for humans as well as plants. Visitors will also be able to see Ai's recent LEGO art with a series of wall-based works that include a pixelated image of a refugee boat.

## Ai Weiwei et le 70e anniversaire de la République Populaire de Chine



Par **Maxime Biosse Duplan** • Dernière MAJ: 02/10/2019

TAILLE DU TEXTE  
Aa Aa

**Si l'alliance des arts plastiques et de la dissidence politique devait être incarnée par un seul artiste, ce serait sans doute Ai Weiwei.** Le Chinois de 62 ans expose en ce moment à la galerie Lisson de Londres quelques oeuvres qu'il veut mettre en tension avec le 70e anniversaire de la création de la République Populaire de Chine.

Interrogé sur cet anniversaire, Ai Weiwei répond : *"Ce jour signifie pour moi de la tristesse. Cette nation est déjà établie depuis 70 ans, mais elle ne fera jamais confiance à son peuple, elle ne laissera jamais son peuple utiliser un bulletin de vote, ou ne lui permettra jamais de disposer d'un système judiciaire indépendant. Les Chinois n'auront jamais la liberté d'expression. Et à bien des égards, une humanité et des droits de l'homme".*

A voir dans cette galerie, la page de couverture du rapport Mueller sur l'ingérence de la Russie dans l'élection américaine de 2016.... **Une oeuvre réalisée entièrement en briques Lego.** Ai Weiwei raconte d'ailleurs qu'il a commandé un stock de Lego pour une oeuvre sur la liberté d'expression mais la marque danoise a refusé...

L'artiste, emprisonné plusieurs fois en Chine, s'est exilé en 2015 en Allemagne puis au Royaume Uni.

Greg Hilty, de la galerie Lisson : *"Il est très heureux de s'occuper de formes naturelles, de mythologie, des gens, mais tout se résume à la politique. Il est impossible de regarder le monde aujourd'hui sans voir en quoi il a été façonné par les forces de l'économie, par les politiciens et par les tensions et les évolutions internationales. Et donc, d'une certaine manière, il souhaite être un individu créatif et imaginatif dans le monde, et il doit s'occuper de politique."*

**Roots, c'est le titre de cette exposition à voir à la galerie Lisson, à Londres, jusqu'au 2 novembre.**



# LISSON GALLERY

*London Town*  
2 October 2019



## Ai Weiwei - Roots



The Chinese artist and activist presents a series of monumental sculptural works in iron, cast from giant tree roots sourced in Brazil during research and production for last year's survey exhibition, 'RAIZ', at the Oscar Niemeyer-designed OCA Pavilion in Ibirapuera Park, Sao Paulo. **Ai Weiwei**, known for filling Tate Modern's Turbine Hall with millions of handmade sunflower seeds, uses Lego to make several works in his latest show including a large scale recreation of the front page of the Mueller Report into alleged Russian involvement in the 2016 US election.



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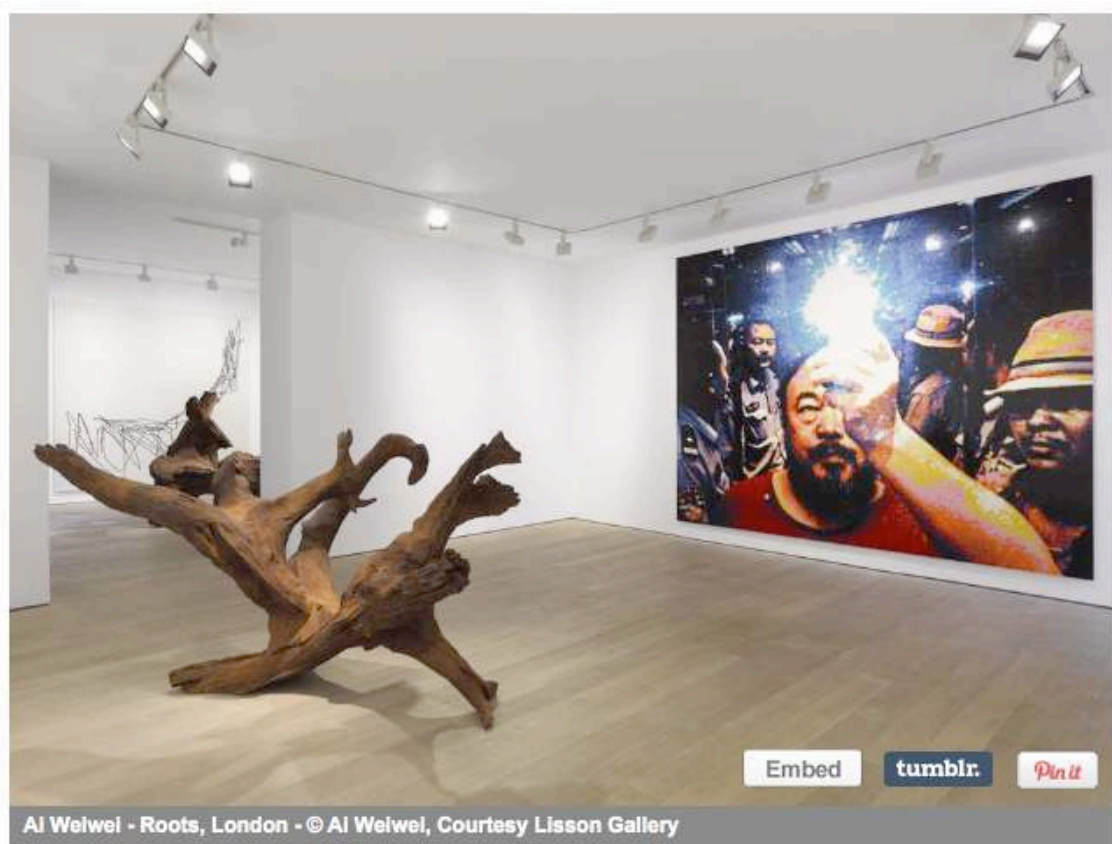
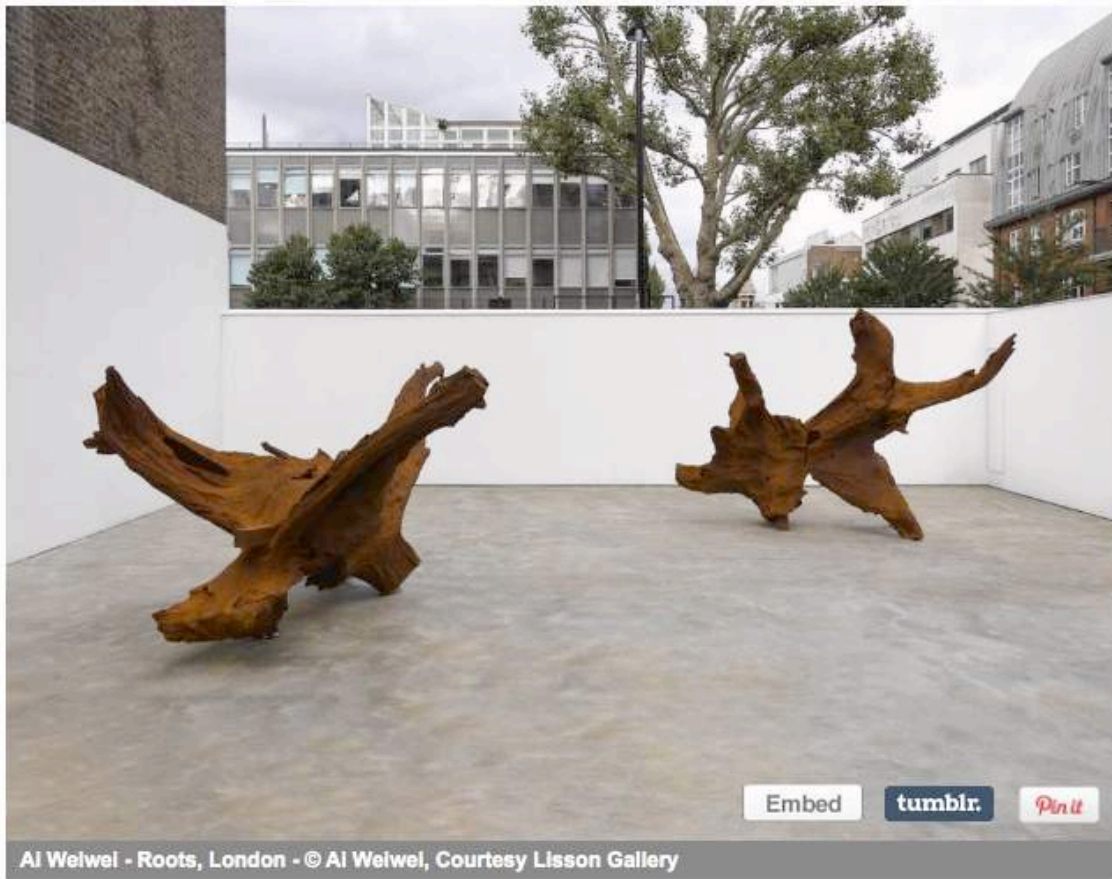
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Ai Weiwei - Roots, London - Ai Weiwei Illumination, 2019, Lego. Courtesy the artist, Lisson Gallery and neugerriemschneider, Berlin © Ai Weiwei, Courtesy Lisson Gallery



Ai Weiwei - Roots, London - Ai Weiwei, Mueller's report, 2019, Lego. Courtesy the artist, Lisson Gallery and neugerriemschneider, Berlin © Ai Weiwei, Courtesy Lisson Gallery





# LISSON GALLERY

*BBC London News*  
1 October 2019



**BBC London**

Evening News: 01/10/2019

The latest news, sport and weather from London.

BBC

**Ai Weiwei**  
Artist and activist

BBC LONDON

BBC

Report On The Investigation Into  
Russian Interference In The  
2016 Presidential Election

Volume I of II

Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller, III  
*Submitted Pursuant to 28 C.F.R. § 600.8(c)*



# LISSON GALLERY

*ITV News*

1 October 2019



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ITV REPORT

1 October 2019 at 10:21pm

## Ai Weiwei: Beijing is 'laughing at weak British Government' over Hong Kong



■ Video report by ITV News [International Affairs Editor Rageh Omaar](#)



Artist Ai Weiwei had launched a stinging attack on the "weakness" of Britain in failing to stand up for the people of Hong Kong who are at **loggerheads with the Chinese**.

On the 70th anniversary of the birth of modern China, he said China has nothing to celebrate - but that Beijing was "laughing" at the UK's timid response to the crackdown on protests.

"I think Britain has so shied away from doing anything to offend China," he told ITV News International Affairs Editor Rageh Omar.

"Britain has its own problems and China is laughing about Britain and whatever we had, the treaty is useless paper.

"So Britain has been very weak on that.

"That is not a good sign, and it sends back a very bad signal to a state like China."

The **dissident and campaigner** asked "what is the glory?" when the longer Beijing was in control of Hong Kong, the worse the situation will become.



*One of Ai Weiwei's works on display in London. Credit: ITV News*

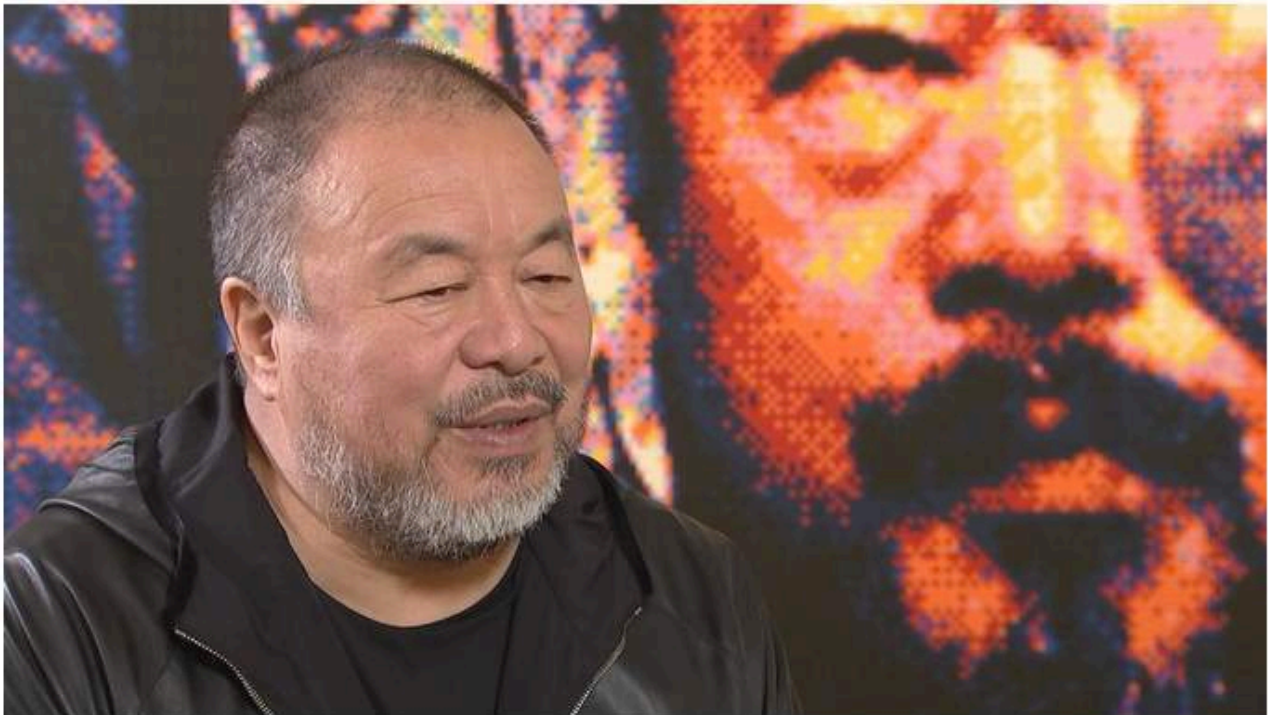


Ai said he was not optimistic the situation would end peacefully.

"On both sides, students in Hong Kong have rights to protect their freedom, but on the other hand, the Chinese communists... will not give up just one step," he said.

The 62-year-old believes a dangerous moment has been reached in Hong Kong's history: "Yes, 30 years ago they used tanks to crush a very peaceful demonstration.

"And the whole of the West is watching and China is still booming and everyone wants to have business with China and today they also think the same way - nothing has changed."



*Ai says China is 'laughing' at Britain. Credit: ITV News*

Ai, who is now based in the UK, spoke as police in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory **shot a teenage protester at close range**.

Protesters defied a ban to take to the streets and march on the 70th anniversary of Communist rule in China.

Famous for his installation of 100 million "sunflower seeds" at the Tate Modern, Ai earlier spoke to the PA news agency saying: "The young people [in Hong Kong] are so brave, sacrificing

their life for ideology."

He said: "That ideology being shared by the West, Britain should be much more responsible, should speak clearly."

The artist was opening his first art show in London since announcing his move to the UK.

"The Chinese government... they really look down on Britain.

"Britain has been so timid... internationally," he said.

"The British Government should speak out today to give a clear message about what's happening in Hong Kong."



*Protesters take cover in Hong Kong Credit: Gemunu Amarasinghe/AP*



Ai's comments came as Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab issued a statement saying that "whilst there is no excuse for violence, the use of live ammunition is disproportionate, and only risks inflaming the situation".

"This incident underlines the need for a constructive dialogue to address the legitimate concerns of the people of Hong Kong. We need to see restraint and a de-escalation from both protesters and the Hong Kong authorities," he said.

The artist left China in 2015 before moving to Berlin and then the UK.

He said of China: "There is so much lacking in terms of political change, they are so stubborn and shy away from basic human conditions, human rights, freedom of speech".

His new exhibition features huge sculptural works in iron, cast from giant tree roots sourced in Brazil.



*Ai Weiwei opens his new exhibition Credit: Aaron Chown/PA*



### Ai Weiwei Opens New London Show At Lisson Gallery

1 October 2019 / Art Categories Preview / Art Tags Ai Weiwei, Lego, Lisson Gallery, roots / [Twitter](#) / [Facebook](#) / [LinkedIn](#) / [Instagram](#) / [Email](#)



A significant exhibition by Ai Weiwei featuring a new series of monumental sculptural works in iron cast from large tree roots sourced in Brazil during research and production for last year's survey exhibition, 'Raiz', at the Oscar Niemeyer-designed OCA Pavilion in Ibirapuera Park, São Paulo.

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Ai worked with local artisans and communities across Brazil

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Visiting Trancoso in the east to locate roots and trunks from the endangered Pequi Vinagreiro tree, typically found in the Bahian rainforest. Elements of these rare tree roots, some of which could be over a thousand years old, were painstakingly moulded, conjoined and then cast to create striking compositions and bold forms that reflect their Brazilian heritage. While some resemble great jungle beasts or fantastical creatures, such as the three- and four-legged works Fly and Level, others including Party and Martin (all 2019) consist of shattered,

exploded root forms radiating outwards from a central nexus.

The titles all came as suggestions from Ai Weiwei's young son Ai Lao, based on his personal observations or connections made when visiting these tree remains with his father, adding to the sense of surreal displacement and alien disjointedness in the exhibition. This incongruous atmosphere speaks further of the works' depiction of the state of 'uprootedness', one that mirrors not only the artist's peripatetic existence after being allowed to leave China in 2015, but also the plight of the refugees he has spent the last few years documenting, as well as the various indigenous populations that rely on the trees and forests of Brazil for their habitats and sustenance.

The deforestation and concomitant purge of peoples and resources relate to previous bodies of work produced by Ai and to the current political realities of many countries, including his native China.

The material employed in making the Roots series – cast iron covered in a patina of orange rust – likewise responds to ancient



Ai Weiwei Lisson Gallery

cultures and man's first tools for tree felling and woodworking, rather than to the recent, more

polite art history of bronze or steel sculpture. Although originally contorted by their surrounding landscapes, these roots were not born of nature but made and crafted by human hands, using the ancient techniques of 'lost wax' moulding and then iron casting. These methods represent a traditional, mostly bygone way of life that has been usurped and upended by industrialisation and constant modernisation, illustrating how progress can often come at the expense of cultural and societal well-being.

Contrasting with these massive, land-bound creatures is several floating figures, clouds and dream-like vignettes. Ai has been producing delicate sculptures from stretched silk over bamboo armatures for the past five years, employing a group of Chinese kite makers based in Weifang, a city in Shandong province. Purported to have been invented in China around 500 BC by a carpenter and a philosopher, the kite has held many functions throughout history from measuring distances or wind speed to communication and military usage. Ai's kites refer back to a mythological encyclopaedia of monsters and creatures known as Shan Hai Jing (The Classic of Mountains and Seas) that also pre-dated Christianity, which depicts fantastical hybrids of chimera, gorgons, unicorns, dragons and griffins. Alongside this bestiary, Ai has added personal and childhood symbols, as well as references back to his own works – Surveillance Camera and his one-fingered salutes, the Study of Perspective series – and those of his influences, including Marcel Duchamp and Vladimir Tatlin.

Finally, the show ends with the development of Ai's experimentation with LEGO bricks. These new wall-based works feature politically-charged, pixelated renderings of the trajectory of a refugee boat refused docking at Lampedusa after two weeks at sea, the front page of the Mueller report into Russian interference in the 2016 US Presidential election, as

Finally, the show ends with the development of Ai's experimentation with LEGO bricks. These new wall-based works feature politically-charged, pixelated renderings of the trajectory of a refugee boat refused docking at Lampedusa after two weeks at sea, the front page of the Mueller report into Russian interference in the 2016 US Presidential election, as well as a deconstructed symbol of the contentious protests of Tiananmen Square in 1989.

A new book, also entitled Roots – featuring contributions from nature writer Robert Macfarlane; Distanz will publish the curator of 'Raiz', Marcello Dantas; the Chair of Asian Art at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Christina Yu Yu; Brazilian anthropologist Lilia Moritz Schwarcz among others – on the occasion of this exhibition, which is presented in collaboration with Ai's Berlin gallery, neugerriemschneider.

A global citizen, artist and thinker, Ai Weiwei moves between modes of production and investigation, subject to the direction and outcome of his research, whether into the Chinese earthquake of 2008 (for works such as Straight, 2008-12 and Remembering, 2009) or the worldwide plight of refugees and forced migrants (for Law of the Journey and his feature-length documentaries, Human Flow and The Rest). From early iconoclastic positions in regards to authority and history, which included Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn and a series of middle-finger salutes to sites of power, Study of Perspective (both 1995), Ai's production expanded to encompass architecture, public art and performance. Beyond concerns of form or protest, Ai now measures our existence about economic, political, natural and social forces, uniting the craftsmanship with conceptual creativity. Universal symbols of humanity and community, such as bicycles, flowers and trees, as well as the perennial problems of borders and conflicts are given renewed potency through installations, sculptures, films and photographs, while Ai continues to speak out publicly on issues he believes necessary.

**Ai Weiwei: Roots 2 October – 2 November 2019 Lisson Gallery London**

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# LISSON GALLERY

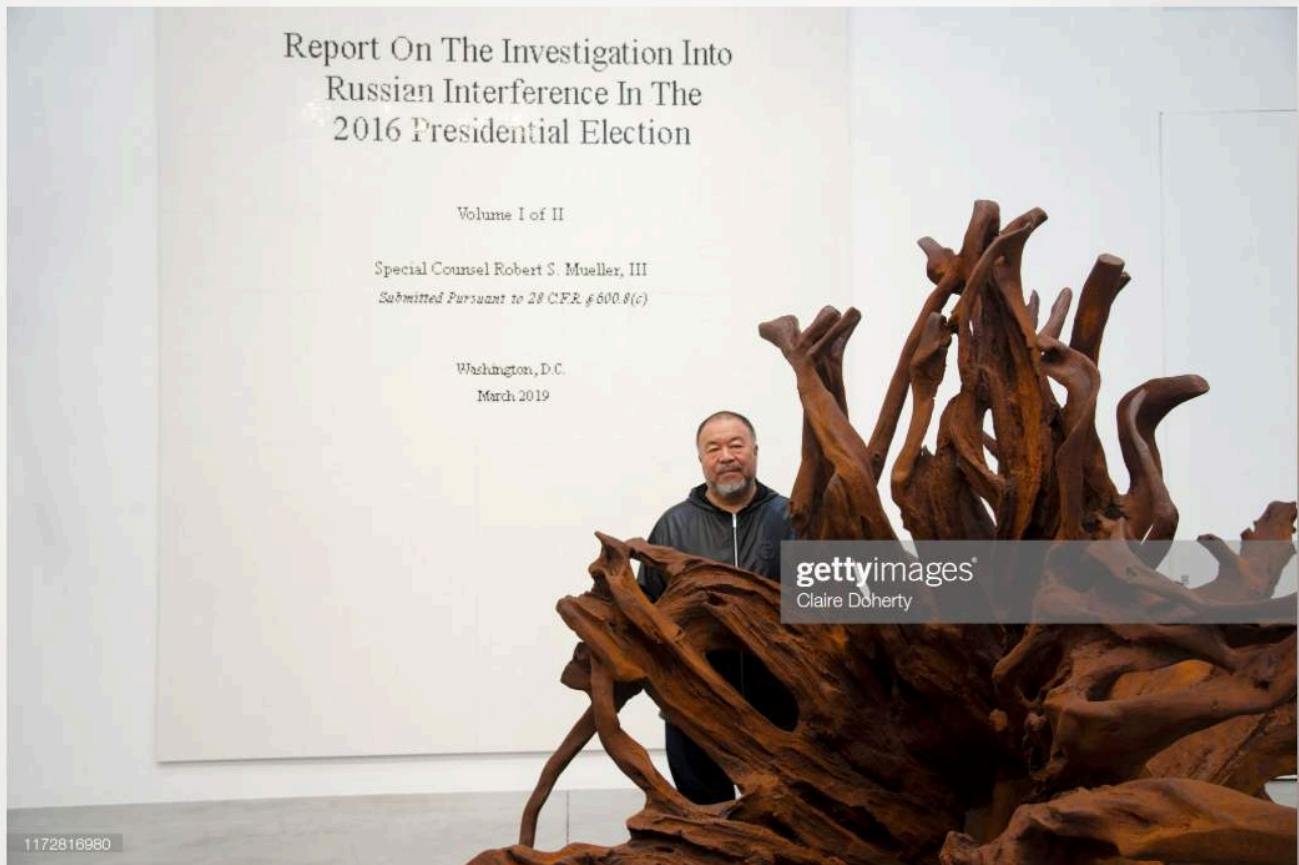
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1 October 2019

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## Ai Weiwei Exhibition Roots Opens

Chinese artist Ai Weiwei poses for photographers with his work 'The Cover Page of The Mueller Report, Submitted to Attorney General William Barr by Robert Mueller on March 22, 2019' made from Lego and 'Martin 2019' at the opening of his new exhibition Ai Weiwei: Roots at the Lisson Gallery, London, United Kingdom on 1st October 2019. (photo by Claire Doherty/In Pictures via Getty Images)



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## 10 art exhibitions to see during Frieze week

By David McAllister

Published 26 September 2019

The beginning of October marks the start of Frieze week, and with it a slew of exciting new shows, installations and more popping up across London. Read on for our recommended list of what to see both in and beyond the fairs this month.





**Ai Weiwei,**  
*Palace*, 2019. [More](#)

Courtesy the artist, Lisson Gallery and neugerriemschneider, Berlin.

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## 6. Ai Weiwei: Roots

**Lisson Gallery, 2 October – 2 November 2019**

What do we see when we look at Ai Weiwei Hon RA's *Palace* (2019; pictured)? While its texture and sprawling forms suggest something out of nature, in fact our eyes deceive us, because what we're looking at isn't wood but rusting metal (Ai's own way of eschewing the "polite art history" of polished steel). Cast in iron from the roots of endangered trees found in Brazil and then bolted together to create a newly abstracted form, *Palace* is one in a series of new 'root' sculptures on view at the Lisson Gallery this month, each in their own way pointing towards something both sacred but discarded, natural yet constructed – perhaps a visual nod to Ai's own personal experience of uprootedness. Be sure to catch Ai Weiwei in conversation with the RA's very own Artistic Director, Tim Marlow, at [Frieze Masters at 12pm on Friday 4 October](#).



# LISSON GALLERY

*Wallpaper\**  
1 October 2019

## Wallpaper\*



More than 160 galleries from 35 countries will descend on Regent's Park for what is set to be the most international edition of Frieze London (3 – 6 October) since its launch in 2003, introducing new curators, emerging artists and sections showcasing performance. In tandem with Frieze Sculpture, Frieze Masters and numerous openings at galleries citywide, the fair leads the action during one of the most event-packed weeks in London's cultural calendar. Here, plot your route through the best exhibitions, satellite fairs and more, that Frieze Week has to offer.



## Ai Weiwei: Roots



Ai Weiwei is putting down roots in London with a new series of monumental iron sculptures, cast from rare Pequi Vinagreiro tree roots sourced in Brazil during research for his 2018 exhibition at the Oscar Niemeyer-designed OCA Pavilion in São Paulo. Alongside the hefty works, the artist will also present a series of delicate silk sculptures created in tandem with Chinese kite makers, as well as new wall-based Lego works. Pictured, detail of iron root in production in Beijing.

**'Ai Weiwei: Roots', 2 October – 2 November.**  
[lissongallery.com](http://lissongallery.com)

[VIEW GOOGLE MAPS](#)

### Top 13 London exhibitions to visit during Frieze Week 2019

There's a lot going on in London next week but here is our choice of 13 exhibitions you have to try and catch hopefully we will bump into you when we are out and about.



#### **12 Ai Weiwei: Roots Lisson Gallery**

A major exhibition by Ai Weiwei this autumn features a new series of monumental sculptural works in iron, cast from giant tree roots sourced in Brazil during research and production for last year's survey exhibition, 'Raiz', at the Oscar Niemeyer-designed OCA Pavilion in Ibirapuera Park, São Paulo.

Ai Weiwei: Roots 2 October – 2 November 2019 Lisson Gallery



*Evening Standard*  
26 September 2019



## Frieze Art Fair 2019: A complete guide to the highlights of London's biggest art week

JESSIE THOMPSON

Thursday 26 September 2019 11:23

The return of Frieze Art Fair means things are about to get busy for the London art world.

Here's our guide to the best shows and events for art fans to cram into the biggest seven days of the year.

### **Ai Weiwei: Roots**

*Lisson Gallery, NW1. Oct 2 - Nov 2*

The Chinese dissident artist shows politically-charged works built from Lego alongside monumental sculptures made from tree roots.

[lissongallery.com](http://lissongallery.com)

*The Guardian*  
13 September 2019

## The Guardian

### **Ai Weiwei: I'm looking forward to arguing with Brits about Brexit**



▲ Ai Weiwei, who was granted refuge in Germany four years ago, has moved to Cambridge. Photograph: John MacDougall/AFP/Getty Images

The Chinese dissident artist on his UK move and why no one wants to get on the wrong side of China

Ai Weiwei has described his recent move to the UK as a step into the unknown and said he was looking forward to getting involved in arguments about Brexit.

In an exclusive interview with the Guardian, speaking from the Berlin studio he has retained 10 days after moving with his family to Cambridge, the Chinese dissident artist said he had been following the heated debates about the UK's withdrawal from the EU and was intrigued to watch the country's future unfold. As long as he cannot return to China, the UK represents the preferred place for his family to make their home.

But he added: "I don't know anything about Britain. It is unknown territory for me. All I know is I'm so tired of superpowers after growing up in a country aspiring to be one. And the US is so backward in many ways, I just want a safe home for my son where he can be educated in English."



▲ A 2015 porcelain artwork from Ai's Wave series. Photograph: Jens Ziehe/Courtesy of Ai Weiwei and neugerriemschneider, Berlin



He said he would watch with interest how the country dealt with its political quandary. “The parliament is a circus and Boris Johnson is one of quite a few clowns out there right now. This is clearly a moment of social change; the old structure needs new possibilities ... I am an outsider so I will listen to the arguments. I do think you have to trust people to make mistakes, to learn from the consequences and make improvements - that’s how the history of human development goes.”

The 61-year-old, who was granted refuge in Germany four years ago after three months of prison detention followed by a lengthy house arrest in China, distanced himself from reports that he was leaving the country because it had become intolerant towards the almost 1 million refugees who arrived in 2015. He and his family had decided to move to Britain for “more prosaic” reasons such as weather and schooling, he said.

“The education system will put more demands on my son than the German one, and he’s told me he needs more pressure, and both my son and girlfriend are happy to not have to face another long Berlin winter,” he said.

“Basically the centre of argument has moved from me, to being one about where it is best for my son, Ai Lao, to be,” he said. “We found him a school in Cambridge and we’re lucky they accepted him. The environment is peaceful and productive, like a garden, and my son is happy.”

Ai said he looked forward to getting involved in the arguments Britons were having with each other over Brexit. “The more argument there is the better for me,” he said. “I like more argument as I’m basically like a boxer, and enjoy the stimulation. I’m not someone who greets the neighbours and pretends everything is fine if it’s not. We are in the midst of a lot of conflicts in the world right now ... you cannot pretend it’s not happening.”

**“I will not stay in a certain box - in China, in Germany or in the UK**

He said he would always be grateful to the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, for enabling him to find a safe haven in Berlin. But he said during his time there he had felt frustrated at being excluded from political and social debate, and he would remain relevant only if he was able to participate in the conversation. He speaks no German so the language barrier was a problem.

“Germans think I’m a hero because I stood up to communism in China; they think I’m crazy and brave. I’m not brave; I just respond to things I think are wrong - whether in Germany or China. But I’ve felt a lot of resistance when I’ve tried to talk with people - including high-level German friends of mine - about uncomfortable things here, like unfriendliness to foreigners. They have warned me that people don’t like you to talk about those controversial issues. They told me, ‘They expect you to concentrate on being an artist.’ But I can’t do that, I will not stay in a certain box - in China, in Germany or in the UK.”





▲ A still from *Human Flow*, a German documentary co-produced and directed by Ai Weiwei about the global refugee crisis. Photograph: AC Films/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock



He has enjoyed an array of stellar shows of his works, most recently in Düsseldorf, his largest in Europe to date, since moving to Germany. But a number of controversies had added extra, unwanted frisson to his stay, he said. A legal dispute with Volkswagen, which used one of his refugee-themed artworks as a backdrop for an ad campaign, led to the carmaker having to pay him €230,000 (£205,000) in compensation.

He strongly believes the Berlin film festival turned down films he had made about refugees and other human rights issues over fears of upsetting the Chinese authorities or the Chinese companies that were among the event sponsors. “Chinese investment in the film industry is now around 40%,” Ai said. “So you see, you have to be practical about that. Germans know they have to deal with China. No one wants to commit economic suicide.”

The films *The Rest*, his documentary on refugees in Europe, as well as *Ai Weiwei: Yours Truly*, Cheryl Haines’s account of his exhibition on the prison island of Alcatraz, and *Beijing Spring*, about a Chinese artist community to which he belonged, were not chosen for the festival, which prides itself on its political content. “Fine, I think to myself. Maybe they don’t like it. But it’s not just my films - others critical of China’s history and past were turned down too,” Ai said.

The Berlinale denies the accusation, but Ai is convinced the reason is “none of them were going to receive China’s golden seal of approval. And no one wants to get on the wrong side of China.”

That followed an earlier decision by the French director Emmanuel Benbihy to cut Ai and his son, now aged 10, out of *Berlin, I Love You*, the latest instalment of the Cities in Love series celebrating cities around the world, this one starring Helen Mirren, Keira Knightley and Jim Sturgess. Benbihy complained that Ai’s two-minute scene was “too political”, which the artist said this was further proof that he was now considered a “liability”.

The artist was speaking in his subterranean studio in eastern Berlin, a 4,000 sq m catacomb, 10 metres below ground, before the opening of *Roots*, his latest exhibition in the city at the neugerriemschneider gallery, a version of which will be shown at *Lisson Gallery* in London from October.



▲ *Roots* was inspired by visits Ai made to the Brazilian rainforests.

Photograph: Jens Ziehe/Courtesy of Ai Weiwei, Lisson Gallery and neugerriemschneider, Berlin



At its heart are seven large iron sculptures based on wax casts from trees native to the Brazilian rainforests, inspired by a poem by his father, Ai Qing, and visits the artist made to the forests.

“I had been working on this for years,” he said, “and now it has met its own purpose at a time when we are seeing the devastating effects of the rightist leader of Brazil, whose privatisation of those forests - which provide 20% of Earth’s oxygen - has prompted a money grab devoid of any moral or ecological judgment, leading to these huge fires which have been raging for two months.”



He said he could see the parallels between the destruction caused by rampant capitalism in Brazil and the attempts by Chinese authorities to crush the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, which he was following closely via contacts on the ground, including his own team of film-makers, and social media. “Those campaigning against these destructive forces are courageous and clever, but I fear they are very fragile compared to what they are up against.”

Ai has yet to have an official meeting with Merkel - only bumping into her by chance at a Chinese restaurant near her flat - but said he planned to write to thank her and explain his decision to leave. “I understand she couldn’t meet me, because she has to consider Germany’s dealings with China,” he said, noting she has travelled there 12 times during her chancellorship.

**British food is disastrous. There are so few fruits and vegetables**

“But she’s the first person I want to show my gratitude towards, because she helped with my release. Even if she’s being practical and shoring up Germany’s future by keeping good relations with China, she has the integrity to put a public issue - like Hong Kong or the refugees - in front of the world, and for that we really are very grateful.”

Despite his latest show being described as a “monumental final greeting” to Berlin by one art critic, Ai insisted he was not turning his back on the city. He will retain a strong presence in the form of his team and his studio - he has a 99-year lease on the building. “Berlin will always be one of my bases. I will keep coming back,” he said.

He remains hopeful that one day he and his family will be able to travel back to China. “My son is so interested in it. He knows I am missing China, and went back once to my studio and held my cats for me for half an hour. He wanted to do that for me. I have often taken him with me, to Brazil or Mexico, often dangerous places, sometimes to parties. But he’s so tired of my art, my propaganda. He once said to me, ‘No more Ai Weiwei.’”

Ten days in the UK led him to believe British food was “disastrous: there are so few fruits and vegetables, maybe because people start drinking in the morning”. But his experiences so far had shown people to be kind and helpful. “And I love the trees, there are so many of them. But most importantly, my son needs a nest and we hope that he will find it in Cambridge.”



# LISSON GALLERY

*British GQ*  
October 2019

# GQ

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**AI WEIWEI**

On the 30th anniversary of Tiananmen Square, the largest European exhibition by art's provocateur-in-chief asked, 'Where is the revolution?' From the riots in Hong Kong to Trump's second term, China's prodigious son has the answer

Story by **Dylan Jones**

Photographs by **Frederike Helwig**

Styling by **Angelo Mitakos**



**'To make a film is  
a natural act. I follow  
my instinct and  
see where it goes...'**

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He is the rock star of the art world, an activist whose relentless criticism of the Chinese government has turned him into a poster boy for creative militancy. He has been the victim of institutional censorship and was once held by the Chinese government for three months without charge (his crimes were considered "economic"). Since being allowed to leave China in 2015, Ai Weiwei has been based in Berlin, travelling the world as a kind of nomadic art terrorist, his extraordinary, complex work abutting his blunt and often caustic political proclamations. For the past few years he has continued to explore the inequities of the refugee crisis, shifting his work to the universal and the personal. "What does it mean to be human?" he asks. "That question sits at the core of human rights. To be human has specific implications: human self-awareness and the actions taken to uphold human dignity – these are what gives the concept of humanity a special meaning."

Ai's work has always been spread across diverse media and his current projects reflect his chameleonic tendencies. An accomplished documentarian since the early noughties, he is now working on a follow-up to his series on the migrant crisis, which includes *Human Flow* from 2017 and *The Rest*, released earlier this year. He is also set to direct an adaptation of *Turandot* that transports the opera's action to present-day China and that he promises will be characteristically critical of the Chinese government. Elsewhere, the largest ever exhibition of his work in Europe, *Where Is The Revolution?*, closed in Dusseldorf at the start of this month. Ai's work continues to focus on the most topical issues of the day, from refugees and the climate crisis to Chinese state oppression and mass surveillance.

**After making *Human Flow*, you narrowed your focus from the whole world to just the European refugee crisis (in *The Rest*). What difference did that make to the film and to the process of making it?**

I started the film by trying to understand world politics, including Europe and the Middle East, as it's a licence to understand something beyond Chinese society. So to make a film, for me, is a natural act, to record my experience and to have a chance to maybe extend my feelings to others so they can also share it. As artists you do that all the time. I start with some very simple decisions and then I start expanding the idea. I follow my instinct and see where it goes. It's not that I have some great goal to achieve. It's an intellectual struggle to conquer the idea.

**The mass movement of people is something many in China will remember from the Sixties and Seventies – do you see parallels between the refugee crisis and the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution?**

The current situation is much tougher, I should say, and I think the refugees are facing a much tougher situation. They will never figure out why they cannot approach that land when they are in the middle of the ocean, when there are hundreds of them, even children and women, crying in the boat, which is leaking and the water's coming in

and the rescue boat is right there but cannot push them to dry land...

**Have you been surprised by the reaction of so many European countries to the refugee crisis?**

I'm not really surprised by the ignorance about the situation. It's not as though Europe isn't rich enough to host a few refugees, which would almost certainly benefit Europe in general. You can't in the long run understand the culture, but, more importantly, it's about how we are losing our humanity. It's beyond my understanding.

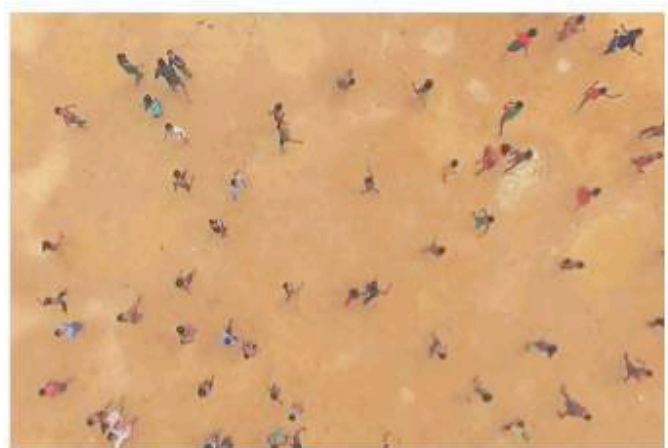
**Historically, your work has been quite wide-ranging, if always political. When and why did you decide to focus so specifically and in depth on the mass movement of people?**

For me, it's not a matter of choice. You know, I was exiled when I was born (communist officials sent his family to remote parts of China in 1957, claiming his father, a poet, was a rightist) and I never consciously knew about what it's like being pushed out of your home or living in a world where nobody is willing to understand you or where you are treated as some kind of enemy to society. I can never really leave China, but I have a chance to become a so-called free man, even though I realise it's not possible to be a free man. It's not a free world, even in the US or Europe. It's a relative illusion rather than truth because we cannot meet the challenges.

**When you make a film, who do you picture watching it in your head: people in China or people in the West or both? Is your audience something you consider and, if so, how do you adjust the tone of what you are making?**

There is no Chinese market, because there is now so much Chinese money in >>

**'In China, the West is facing a big monster. The West has lost its competitive edge'**



Artist, activist and director Ai Weiwei examines the migrant crisis in his 2017 documentary, *Human Flow*



>> Hollywood. And my films certainly cannot reach the Chinese market, as I am an enemy of the state. Even when it was announced that *[Human Flow]* was at the Venice Film Festival, the Chinese authorities refused to acknowledge my existence. China has made it clear they don't like people like me who show where there are moral challenges.

**You also compared the recent Hong Kong protests to those in Tiananmen Square in 1989. On the 30-year anniversary, do you think the authorities in China are nervous?**

The Hong Kong situation is obviously the most important challenge they've had since 1989, because the Chinese government is trying to destroy the concept of "One country, two systems". This is probably the worst moment for China to break its promise, because it simply doesn't have any credit. You can't be a legitimate government if you use tanks and military to maintain your status quo. But I can only see it getting worse, although the demonstrations will make it difficult for China to maintain their internal stability. In China, the West is facing a big monster in every respect. The West has lost its competitive edge, as China has a very clear vision, a clear strategy and a very clear idea of the fight ahead. They are killing through capitalism.

**Do you have faith in the protestors in Hong Kong? Do you think they will be successful in preventing the extradition law?**

Well, that bill will be put to sleep, but there are so many other decisions China could make to get what it wants. Hong Kong really needs an independent government, but China will never let it happen. So the struggle will go on.

**Do you believe the UK and the West is complicit in tolerating Chinese human rights abuses?**

Not only in the UK, but everywhere. Germany, France, the US, they are all complicit, because China is so far away and as long as we've got the cheap labour market, you're going to get good deals. I think the Chinese government must be laughing at the UK, because they know you are incapable of solving your problems. Brexit hasn't moved an inch, so why should they be worried about interference in Hong Kong? London has become more cosmopolitan and you see a greater mix of people here than in New York, for instance. The sense of liberty is so strong here, which is good, but at the same time you have the whole Brexit situation, which is quite strange.

**You're directing a production of *Turandot*. How are you planning to make it relate to modern China?**

It's very hard, but it's fascinating. I accepted it only because 30 years ago I was working

at the Metropolitan Opera [in New York], making \$3 an hour, serving hotdogs with ketchup. It's a completely different discipline, but I think any creation needs a restraint and I take obstacles as a new opportunity. I may fail. When I accept a project, I always ask myself what I'm going to learn from it. That's why I've worked in Mexico, Brazil, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Afghanistan and Turkey, because I want to meet new people with different energy, the human flow. The world is not very large, but is still too large for one individual's life. You know, it's really about myself. Also, if you're going to have a fight in the ring, you have to be very normal and enjoy daily life, spend time with your children and with your friends and have normal conversations. I like to play cards and poker.

**The young are feeding our future, now more than ever. How do young people affect your work?**

I think that generation is amazing. They have less of the burden of history, but a clear sense of right and wrong. They have more imagination than their parents and they are naive and

**'For sure [Trump] will get a second term. I made a bet he would get a first'**

full of inexperience. But naivety and inexperience are essential for braveness.

**Is it possible for an artist these days not to use social media?**

I don't think so. I don't think there is a place you can go and just be in another world. Social media makes the whole planet so flat and consequently everything is so clear. Even if you don't want transparency, people are listening and watching, people can identify you. Once again we've been put in a situation that challenges us and breaks the old sentiment about so-called individualism. You know, what is so individual? What really contends there? It is a challenge, but a true individual can find their own language. You also have no place to hide.

**So is social media ultimately a force for good or a force for evil?**

Both, I think, as any kind of liberation has its evil side.

**I know you visited Julian Assange recently. How was that?**

It was a sad moment. I don't believe Britain should lock up somebody who is defending freedom of speech and the freedom of press.

**Donald Trump continues to clatter around the globe and yet has just received his**

**highest approval rating domestically. Do you think he'll get a second term?**

For sure, he'll get a second term. I actually made a bet that he would get a first term. Everyone, including the *New York Times*, said he was a joke and that it would never happen. But I bet that he would win. I don't like Trump, but in a certain sense he's very attractive. He did break down the normal political players' style. He tweets in the middle of the night, regardless of what is on his mind and nobody knows if it's true or false. However, he's certainly a businessman and he's putting the Chinese government in quite a difficult situation, so let's see what happens. I think he's going to win because the so-called liberals or Democrats have not made any impressive moves.

**In the UK, Brexit is something that we talk about every five minutes and it's obviously a huge existential crisis, as well as a political crisis. However, I've started to think that if there is going to be any benefit from Brexit, it will be the fact that the knock-on effect will be a generation of very angry people. And actually, in terms of art and literature and music and fashion and every kind of art form, that will produce great work.**

That's very positive and I think it's true. If you put yourself in an extreme situation, you'll become much more clear-minded. Again, this comes back to the younger generation and as they are well informed they have a very different form of behaviour from the old generation. So I feel very positive about it.

**In terms of your news gathering, what do you read and how do you read? Do you ever read a newspaper?**

I only read everything on Twitter. On Twitter every second is a new news feed. You have the *Guardian*, you have the *Times*, you have the *New York Post* and everything is in there. And also, on social media, some are just like poetry, very touching. You see what people feel and what's important to them. With Twitter it's very much like being in a boxing ring. You've got a few punches and you punch a few back, but what's important is making sure you're not getting knocked down. It's only 12 rounds so somebody will beat you anyway.

**In London we have a very energetic, very socially aware young generation of fashion designers who use the industry in a very positive political way. Do you have any feeling about fashion as a force for activism?**

I know very little about names, but I see how the most effectively dressed-up ideas come through because it's not really about the form or shape or colour or the new technology. It's about human behaviour.



*The Telegraph*  
16 September 2019

## The Telegraph

### Ai Weiwei reminds us that Britain is poetic through the eyes of strangers

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JANE SHILLING



16 SEPTEMBER 2019 • 6:00AM



The Chinese artist is relocating to the UK CREDIT: PETER PARKS./ AFP

**O**ver the centuries, a carnivalesque medley of creative types have sought refuge in Britain, fleeing war, political persecution, or an unsympathetic artistic climate. Many of them recorded their impressions of their adoptive home in diaries and letters, marvelling at the eccentricities of the British.

It is always intriguing to see oneself through the eyes of strangers, not least because the aspects of British life that most delighted or dismayed the refugees are often the ones that the indigenous inhabitants find too ordinary to notice. The poet Verlaine, who kept a turbulent ménage in Camden Town with his fellow-poet, Rimbaud, from 1872-3, wrote that English life had “a poetry which I cannot yet see. I’m waiting, and ...collecting impressions.”

Both Rimbaud, and the artist, Monet, who fled to London in 1870 to escape the Franco-Prussian war, were unexpectedly keen on the misty British weather. “Without fog, London would not be beautiful,” Monet observed. The novelist Emile Zola, sentenced to a year’s imprisonment in France, settled in the London suburb of Norwood in 1898 and was charmed by the cabbages and robins of suburban British gardens. He was much less keen on our native cuisine, with its “abominable” gravy and “spongy” bread.

The latest artist to seek sanctuary on these shores is the Chinese dissident, Ai Weiwei, whose installation of 100 million ceramic sunflower seeds at Tate Modern in 2010 attracted large crowds. Detained without charge in China, his studios demolished, Ai moved to Berlin in 2015, but has recently relocated to Cambridge.

Apart from his enthusiasm for the Brexit debate (“I am an outsider, so I will listen to the arguments”), Ai’s impressions strikingly echo those of earlier artistic refugees. Like Zola, he loves our landscape - particularly the trees - but finds British food “disastrous: there are so few fruits and vegetables, maybe because people start drinking in the morning”. (The connection between a deficit of veg and morning drinking is opaque, but strangely telling.) And like Monet, Ai appreciates the unpredictable weather that is our national obsession.

Most touchingly, he cites as a reason for moving to Cambridge the hope that his son, Ai Lao, will find “a nest” here. In the midst of our current cuckoo-like political heavings, an observant outsider can still discern a poetry in British life. It’s a thought to cherish.

## **Blackberry season**

I wonder if anyone in Cambridge has considered introducing Ai and his family to the traditional British pastime of blackberrying. The hedges are so laden with fruit this year that the only problem is what to do with the surplus. Having made jam and filled the freezer with blackberries to enliven the scorbutic winter months, I find myself searching for alternatives. Here Theodora Fitzgibbon comes to the rescue.



A raffish figure of 1950s Fitzrovia, she was taught to cook by Queen Natalie of Serbia - who presumably wasn't the source for Fitzgibbon's "old Cornish recipe" for blackberry syrup. To 6lb (2.7kg) blackberries add 3lb (1.4kg) white sugar, 1 quart (1.1L) water and 2.5 oz (75g) tartaric acid. Cover and let stand for 48hrs, then mash slightly, strain and bottle. Apparently "it keeps for years". Watch this space...

*The Sunday Times*  
15 September 2019

THE  TIMES

INTERVIEW

## Ai Weiwei: art is child's play, but knotting a school tie is beyond me

Having swapped Berlin for Cambridge, the artist and activist Ai Weiwei refuses to keep quiet about Beijing's human rights abuses



Ai Weiwei in Cambridge  
FRANCESCO GUIDICINI

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China's most famous living artist, Ai Weiwei, is sitting in a hotel bar in Cambridge, drinking tea and talking about why, after four years in hipster Berlin, he has recently relocated to the chilly university city with his film-maker partner, Wang Fen, and their 10-year-old son, Ai Lao.

For a notorious agent provocateur — one of whose most famous artworks is a series of photographs of his left hand, its middle finger raised towards such famous structures as the White House and the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing's Tiananmen Square — Ai has a surprisingly bourgeois explanation: schools.

"I have friends who graduated from British schools who are perfect gentlemen and I want my son to have a very classical education," he says. Apparently, this wasn't being provided at Lao's international school in Berlin, where Ai and his family moved after years of intimidation from the Beijing authorities.

"It was very liberal and I was a bit worried they didn't have homework. Here, my son already says he is feeling the pressure, but he has had six positive grades, so he's very happy. And he loves wearing a uniform."

He scrolls through his phone to display a photo of Lao in a purple blazer. "He learnt to tie a tie from YouTube. On the first day, he asked me: 'Can you help?' But I have never tied a tie in my life."

A decent school isn't the only factor to lure Ai here. He was also disenchanted with Angela Merkel's purportedly refugee-friendly [Germany](#).

"Berlin received me warmly, but I realised, because of its language and culture, [it has a very exclusive nature](#)," he says softly in his excellent but still sometimes idiosyncratic English, acquired during 12 years living in New York, when he hung out with the late Beat poet Allen Ginsberg. "It doesn't allow someone like me to be in a discussion, so I would always stay as a foreigner and that made me feel I served no purpose in Germany."



Ai Weiwei in Munich with son Lao, who is now 10.  
MATTHIAS SCHRADER/AP

"But Britain, by its nature as the biggest colonial power, has to accept a lot of differences — at least that's my shallow impression. Germans follow the rules, they listen to the powerful, which I don't like much. Here people are motivated by ideas."

The Germans weren't slow to point out that Britain had its own issues with Brexit, of which Ai has previously said he is no fan. He shrugs. "Maybe Britain has more troubles, but I love places that have troubles."

Burly in a sweatshirt and jogging pants, with his formerly wild beard now neatly trimmed, [Ai, 62, has always known political turmoil](#). He was just a year old when his poet father, Ai Qing, was accused of "rightist" views and the family were exiled, first to a labour camp, then to the remote desert region of Xinjiang, where they spent 16 years.



As [China](#) opened up economically, Ai's international reputation as the country's answer to Andy Warhol grew — and so did his unpopularity with the regime. Having collaborated with the designers of Beijing's 2008 Olympic "bird's nest" stadium, he later denounced the Games as "a stage for a political party to advertise its glory to the world".

In 2009, the state retaliated in the form of a savage police beating, said to have triggered a brain haemorrhage. In 2011, Ai was detained for three months for "economic crimes". On his release, he was placed under house arrest and monitored around the clock. Only in 2015 was his confiscated passport returned, allowing him to leave for Berlin.

While he estimates that art takes up just 15% of his time — the rest is dedicated to activism — virtually all his creations feature political commentary. These range from the 100m [porcelain "sunflower seeds"](#) he had scattered on the floor of the Tate Modern, representing both his country's vast population and the way China used mass-production methods to cater to the West, to his more recent documentaries — one of which was shortlisted for an Oscar — about the refugee crisis.

"When the police arrested me they said: 'Why can't you just be an artist?' That was also the German attitude, but it's not possible for me," he says.

He is a prolific Instagrammer, his feed packed with videos documenting the activities of Hong Kong's pro-democracy protesters. Theoretically, he says, the UK should be supporting them. "But I don't think so, because the West has benefited so much from China as a state that provides certain conditions the West can never have — low salaries, no human rights, no unions — and if China introduced [those things], life really would be very different, because all that is essential for the western boom. Yesterday, I bought an adapter; it's £6.50. I think that costs maybe less than 20 cents to make in China. People have accumulated a huge amount of money through things like that."

In return, China has no fear of the West, because capitalism couldn't survive without it acting as "the factory of the world. All these companies are so deeply rooted there, so China is very arrogant." Brexit has made Britain's status even weaker. "If you see British people debating in parliament for three years with nothing happening, you realise China is laughing. They are saying, 'Oh my God, their democracy is so paralysed', and they take so much advantage from that."

So could there be another Tiananmen? "We cannot be naive," says Ai. "China is capable of doing it, as has been proved, and the West is incapable of stopping it. The world is being manipulated by a state that ignores the western establishment: human rights, human dignity and the rule of law."

Such comments make it unlikely that Ai will return to China. "Two of my lawyers are in jail and they did nothing wrong compared with what I did. So I am sure I would be detained again. I wouldn't mind if I didn't have a son, but what would happen to him?"

Ai would like to see his 86-year-old mother again, but she leaves him daily voicemails, entreating him not to visit. "She says, 'You have accomplished so much, gone through so much, why don't you just relax and pay attention to your family?' But I wonder: what can we really achieve in life that's not just your personal property? We are all part of the larger humanity, we have to work together, and if you see that effort is lacking, immediately you see our society in spiritual collapse."

Still, Ai is clearly heeding his mother's request, appearing to be a paragon of domesticity. He has been busy furnishing his new flat, negotiating with the landlord about having a cat (he had 40 in Beijing) and gamely mastering British cuisine. He asked a local restaurant to show him typically English produce, before cooking roast lamb to share with his new neighbours.

"They are from Pakistan and said they had been in England for so long and had never had such a big feast. So that's nice."

Ai chose Cambridge over London as a more bucolic environment for Lao to grow up in. He ignored warnings about its bitter winters ("One good lesson I've learnt is don't listen to anybody") and the city's lack of a decent casino: Ai is regarded as a blackjack master (players all over the world protested at his arrest).

"Shamefully, I used to play for one hour a day. I liked to go to the Playboy Club in London. Blackjack gives my thinking a reboot. But here there are no facilities and I have to take my son to school in the morning.

"I will deeply regret it if I don't spend enough time with my son. I always say to him, 'I may be leaving you'. He says, 'That's ridiculous', but it's true. Many of my friends have disappeared: one morning they are not there any more. So, though it's a bit crude, I have to prepare him.

"Maybe I am getting old, I am getting more conservative," Ai continues. "I used to love the bright lights, big city, but now I need a moment of quiet and a beautiful tree. The strongest impression of Britain for me is still the garden and the flowers and the big trees. It's so special, I always think, 'What kind of nation lets its trees grow in that tremendous size and stand alone?', because in China we have 5,000 years of history but you couldn't find a single tree which is more than 50 years old — they have all been cut down and burnt. That shows us so much about the history of a nation."



*New York Times*  
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**The New York Times**

## Ai Weiwei: Can Hong Kong's Resistance Win?

A loss to Chinese authoritarianism would set a frightening precedent for the world.

**By Ai Weiwei**

Mr. Ai is an artist who was imprisoned by the Chinese government.

July 12, 2019

[f](#) [t](#) [e](#) [r](#) [b](#) 106



June 29. A 21-year-old woman writes something [on the wall](#) of a public housing stairwell in Fanling, a working-class suburb of Hong Kong:

Dear Hong Kong people: Our struggle is taking time, so we must guard that our will not wilt. We must insist that the bill be completely withdrawn, that the government's slander of our protests as "riots" be rescinded, that detained protesters be released, that Carrie Lam step down, and that the police be severely punished. My wish is to use one small life in support of these demands, which come from two million of you!

The message is painted in red, in an unsteady hand. The lines droop at their ends, as if determined but exhausted. Ms. Lo Hiu Yan then throws herself from the stairwell opening to the ground outside. Her wish is realized.

On June 9, about a million people in Hong Kong demonstrated against a Beijing-sponsored "[extradition bill](#)" that would allow citizens of Hong Kong to be sent to the People's Republic of China to stand trial. On [June 16](#) another protest drew an [estimated two million](#) — more than a quarter of the city's population. A majority of protesters were in their [teens or 20s](#). The size, ideals and good order of the demonstrations drew admiration from around the world. But in the end the Hong Kong police used [tear gas, rubber bullets and arrests](#) to disperse the protesters. The government called them "[thugs](#)."

On July 1, yet another demonstration, this one observing (essentially, bemoaning) the handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China 22 years earlier, drew more than 100,000 protesters, a few of whom broke into the city's legislative council building.

Should we wonder why the young people of Hong Kong are doing such things? To the world, the British handover of Hong Kong might seem only a footnote to history. To those young people, though, a return to China means everything.

What do they see in China today? A factory for the world, to be sure. China has much more wealth and influence than it had three decades ago. Its economy interlocks with the world's, and it aims to extend its reach through an ambitious "[Belt and Road Initiative](#)." But its wealth was built on the backs of low-wage labor by rural migrants, unprotected by safety regulations, unions, a [free press](#) or rule of law.



Political power in China operates in ways that resemble the underworld. The strengths of the system are the speed and efficiency of its governing machine, which is well oiled by corruption, protected by a vast police system and has no competitors. Human beings? They are but its cogs. If humans have other wants or needs — like independent thinking, free expression or personal happiness — well, those are things for our rivals, the Western democracies, to pursue. The West's production model is less efficient than ours. Ours has "Chinese characteristics."

At root, the confrontation with the West is not about trade. It is about two fundamentally incompatible political systems, two different understandings of what modern civilization is. The Chinese government's model of human sacrifice in service of the wealth and power of the state (and of the super-elite) inevitably conflicts with democratic ideals. Western governments and businesses that piggyback on China's system in search of their own profit should remind themselves: To know that your actions harm human dignity and to go ahead and continue them anyway is the essence of iniquity.

The youth of Hong Kong, who have grown up well informed by the internet, are keenly aware of the stark alternatives before them. They are accustomed to freedom, personal rights and access to information. They know what they want, what they are defending and the nature of the opposition they face. They have watched the freedoms of Hong Kong — in the media, education, housing, commerce and elsewhere — slowly slip away, and they know that the Communist Party stops at nothing in pursuing its interests.

Hong Kong's legal autonomy, which is at stake in the extradition bill, seems to them perhaps the last autumn leaf on their tree before a harsh winter sets in. They know what that winter looks like: arbitrary arrest, secret detention and contempt for facts, fairness and justice. Lose the present battle and all will be lost, they feel. Lose and they, like people in Tibet, Xinjiang and the mainland democracy movement, will live under persecution and attack and have no recourse.



Young people in Hong Kong are aware, too, that theirs is not just a local struggle. They know that Hong Kong, with its habits of civil freedoms inherited from British rule on one side and its confrontation with China's dictatorship on the other, is a laboratory for the world. Will — can? — a free populace that wishes to remain free be annexed by an authoritarian machine? That precedent would be a nightmare for the world. And perhaps a turning point.

Pushed to their limit, as they saw it, Lo Hiu Yan and at least three other young Hong Kong citizens have taken their own lives.

If the recent protests had taken place in Shenzhen, Shanghai or Beijing, the regime would have used lethal force, as it did 30 years ago in Beijing when troops with tanks and machine guns massacred pro-democracy demonstrators armed with nothing more than rocks, bricks and their courage. For now, “[one country, two systems](#)” still makes a difference in Hong Kong. But the Chinese foreign ministry has repeatedly [warned Britain to stay out](#). Hong Kong is not your business, it says. We are sovereign. We do as we see fit.

China is not alone in wanting to avoid “trouble” in Hong Kong. Many people in Western government and business circles who profit from the Chinese system of oppression concur. Hong Kong is a hub of this system, and both sides stand to lose if Hong Kong's role is damaged or lost.

One reason I empathize with people in Hong Kong is that I have been subjected to the kind of tactics that they fear. In 2011, plainclothes Chinese police, acting outside the law, grabbed and blindfolded me, and took me to a secret location. I could not contact my family (and they were not notified), and I had no lawyer. I felt a sudden loss of confidence and self-respect, a frightening sense of isolation and a loss of faith in society. In short I felt as if I had fallen into a deep black hole. What would come to me next would be mine alone to suffer. Alone.

I was abducted because I was raising uncomfortable questions with my art. I was asking, for example, how many children died in the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake when their shoddily constructed school buildings collapsed. What was in their backpacks — and their minds — when they died? To a regime protective of its power, questions like these amount to subversion of the state. The consequence for me was a beating that nearly cost my life.

I feel a duty to speak out because the young people of Hong Kong need to know that their fears of an encroaching authoritarian Chinese state are well founded: The Beijing-appointed officials in Hong Kong will sell out the region's precious freedoms the moment they are instructed to do it. Hundreds of [imprisoned dissidents](#) in China would be telling them this if they could. Muzzled, they cannot.

Some are asking: Can the Hong Kong protesters win? My answer is that if they persist, they cannot lose. This is a struggle over human values — freedom, justice, dignity — and in that realm the Hong Kong people have already won. Yes, if they give up, then the machine will take over. But while a brutal dictatorship might outlast them, it can never “win.” It is human nature to have ideals and to put them into action. A dictatorship cannot change those facts. Its defeat is only a matter of time.

*Translated from the Chinese by Perry Link.*

*The Times*  
19 June 2019



THE TIMES

ARTS

## Ai Weiwei: 'My life never has any certainty. It's very hard to see where is home'

As his second film on the refugee crisis, *The Rest*, screens in Sheffield, the Chinese artist explains his plans to move his family to London



Ai Weiwei: "It seems human beings always need tragedy to be alert"

CAMERA PRESS



It's a torrential day in Sheffield, and my umbrella collapses on the walk across the city to the hotel where the Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei is staying. He's waiting for me in a nondescript meeting room with a notebook in which he is drawing a luxurious umbrella. He is low-key in a grey jacket and dark blue sweatshirt, his greying beard positively well-mannered compared with some of its more unruly outings.

Ai is an artist who constantly responds to the world, whether with it's sketches, Instagram posts of everyone he meets or a personal and artistic engagement with injustices. It's for the last that he's in Sheffield for the documentary film festival Doc/Fest, at which he's presenting *The Rest*, his second film about the refugee crisis.



An image from Wang Fen's *The Rest*.

In contrast to his 2017 film *Human Flow*, with its A to Z of global hotspots and dizzying array of talking heads and statistics, the new documentary focuses on the horrific deadlock in 2015, as Europe began closing its borders to thousands of refugees from Africa and the Middle East. The cameras are pointed at the victims and their often heartbreaking stories.

The clue to the second film's content is in the title. Having shot 900 hours of footage for *Human Flow*, Ai felt that the material contained "a lot of other possibilities", so asked his fellow film-maker Wang Fen (who is also his partner and the mother of his son) if she would edit a new, different documentary. "So there is 'the rest' of the footage," he says, "but I also think the refugees are treated like the leftovers of society. They are not 'us'. We know they're there, but we try not to look."

With Ai and his team following refugees as they were driven from one unwelcoming country to another — Italy, Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, France — the result is an angrier, even more disturbing piece of work than the first. Among the many shocking scenes, the most appalling is the tear-gassing of hundreds of refugees, including children, on the Greek/Macedonian border.

Ai has spoken of feeling “deeply connected” to the refugee experience, having grown up in exile with his father, the poet Ai Qing, and experiencing extreme hardship alongside him in a labour camp. The family were exiled from Beijing when Ai was one — first to the labour camp in Beidahuang, Heilongjiang province, in northeast China, then to the desert region of Xinjiang in the northwest, where they remained for 16 years. They were allowed to return to Beijing in 1976. So was such deep immersion, involving two years filming in 40 camps, emotionally difficult for him?

On the contrary, Ai, 61, says. “As Nietzsche says, ‘All too human.’ As an artist, as someone from China, someone who has been active in defending human rights, freedom of speech, I’m very much trying to [experience] reality. How much do I know about the world — in the Middle East, in Afghanistan, in Bangladesh, in Gaza, on the Mexican border? I just want to expand my knowledge and my capacity for feeling.” Yes, he admits that it is “overwhelming”, but equally that “it’s not my choice”.

He suggests a quite terrifying exercise in empathy. “Maybe you’re a sportsman. You can swim 100m, with all kind of styles. But if you’re dropped in the ocean, what are you gonna do with your perfect skills? All you want to do is survive. So [imagine] those boys, never been put in the water, but suddenly the boat is sinking — 50 people, 100 people, 700 people are just like dumplings in boiling water.

“If they’re lucky, some will be rescued. But a lot of people refused to rescue them. This is a war crime.”



Ai Weiwei with Coloured Vases, one of his sculptures  
GETTY IMAGES

While he won't be drawn on Brexit ("I'd like to know more"), he does lament the European-wide tide of intolerance and the Continent's crackdown on accepting refugees. "By refusing these people, eventually you hurt yourself, your own understanding of society. We all know we're the same. What they want is very simple: safety, the right to work, some care about the community. If a society which is so prosperous, with such a privileged condition, cannot share or care or even understand those demands, that's a true tragedy for Europe."

He doesn't believe that his work influences politicians, but "the people who care and already have it in their heart to want to be influenced". Melanie Iredale, Doc/Fest's interim director, says that the festival's mostly young audience find Ai inspirational. "He's really significant as an artist and he's really significant as an activist, and, for me, documentary lies in the sweet spot in the middle."

Ai is about to finish a third film, which turns the spotlight on Burmese refugees in Bangladesh. The subject has dominated his time since he left China for Berlin in 2015, after years of intimidation. High-profile criticism of the Chinese government came at a cost, including a savage beating by police in 2009 (for his involvement in investigating the student death toll of the Sichuan earthquake) that was believed to be the cause of a brain haemorrhage, a highly controversial 81-day secret detention in 2011 and the withholding of his passport.

"When Chinese police arrested me," he recalls, "they said, 'You're not a lawyer, but you're doing a lawyer's job. You're not a reporter, but you're doing a reporter's job. You're just an artist, focus on your art. Why are you doing this? It has nothing to do with you.' "



Does he see any difference between his art and his activism? “It’s not the same thing, but I will say that without my experience, my sensitivity, my knowledge or my curiosity, I would not even have the desire to make so-called art. It gives me the courage to do what I do.”



Ai Weiwei meets some students with his design for the Fly the Flag project

It’s hardly surprising that Ai was chosen by a grouping of UK arts organisations and human-rights charities to create the signature work for Fly the Flag, a project marking the 70th anniversary of the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Between Monday and Sunday, June 30 people will display the flag that Ai has designed at events around the world, reaffirming the landmark international commitment in 1948.

Appropriately, Ai’s potent symbol — a footprint on a blue background — was inspired by his experience filming refugees. “These unfortunate people have lost everything,” he says. “And very often you see they are barefoot. Even at the poorest time when I was in China, we still had shoes. They might be totally broken — we’d have to repair them by hand — but still you had something under your skin. These people don’t even have that. This is skin directly on earth, on the rocks, on the seashore, on the mud, on the burning hot sand. You see babies like that. They’re no different from animals, with no protection at all.

“So this touched me, but we never really connected it to something that could be symbolic until I accepted the idea to design the flag. And, of course, I explained that the footprint was the image with which the first humans recognised themselves.”

The gesture is not a million miles from his symbolic use of lifejackets in exhibitions in Berlin and Vienna, and his *Sunflower Seeds* installation at Tate Modern in 2010, comprising millions of handmade porcelain seeds that resonated with ideas about China's huge population (the public were banned from walking through the installation when Tate identified a health risk in inhaling ceramic dust).

He points out that the UN declaration "was written only because we had been through such a tragic time. What they wrote was very profound and impressive, lightning through the dark sky. But time passes, Europe has been without war for the past 70 years, and China the same, two or three generations in peace. It seems human beings always need tragedy to be alert, otherwise we become lazy; we don't care any more, we don't consciously think of those values that unite us."

Having been "allowed" to leave his country four years ago, does he regard himself as an exile or a self-exile? "Both. I think artists, if they are fortunate, should be self-exiles. That's the general condition for the artist because you're seeking another path, you go through your own journey.

"But I was being forced out. I was under police surveillance all the time they followed me everywhere, they bugged my phone. Which is fine. If I could still tweet in China, I would never have come out; it doesn't matter how difficult it can be. But if they secretly detain me, put me away with no voice, that hurts me the most. That scares me."



Ai Weiwei with his son, Ai Lao  
AP

While professing himself content in Berlin, Ai seems to have an eye on London, a city whose continuing diversity he admires. “Tomorrow my son [ten-year-old Ai Lao] comes to London. We’re having school interviews,” Ai reveals. “He has been at international school in Berlin for five years, so this is the moment for him to change. And I want him to be in purely English-speaking surroundings, where he can understand many things. London is different, a fascinating city.

“If he gets into a school, I would be here more often,” he says. “You’ll see me on the street.”

Wang would join their son in London, while Ai would split his time between Berlin and London. Lao has already surprised Ai with his first English sentence. “He said, ‘No more Ai Weiwei.’ So I can see his attitude.” He pauses. “It’s a good title for a book.”



Ai accepts the difficulties that his life has imposed on his family. "My life never has any certainty. It's very hard for us to see where is home," he says. "When I was with my son in the park in China we had to struggle with police. It's too much. When I was detained, I sent him to Berlin. I tried to call him. He's very philosophical. He says, 'Daddy, I really think the people on the run' — like me — 'and the people trying to catch them are the same.' I say 'Why?' He says, 'Both are running.' "

As I'm leaving I ask if it's true that he recently bought 30 tonnes of buttons from a factory in south London that was closing down.

"Yes, I bought them," he confirms quite gleefully. "Very crazy. I don't know exactly how many, thousands and thousands. Some are mother of pearl, beautiful ones, some are plastic, some are wood."

They are stored in his Berlin warehouse. Does he know what he's going to do with them? "I don't. I don't. I really don't. Give me ideas."

Already his cogs are turning. "I have a little story. During the 1960s my brother departed from Beijing to try to see my father. When the train starts to move, my cousin runs after it and shoves something into his hand. And when my brother opened his hand there were a few buttons.

"You see, at that time in China, if you lost even one button, you couldn't buy another. It was like treasure to have a few different buttons to give to someone who's going to take a train, for three or four days, to go to the area my father was exiled. So my cousin thought it was important for my brother to have them.

"Now I have 30 tonnes of buttons. It's almost like revenge on life, right?"

**Ai Weiwei's flag for human rights will be flown by organisations and institutions across the UK from June 24-30 alongside a programme of events including talks, performances, tours and workshops ([flytheflag.org.uk](http://flytheflag.org.uk))**

*Deutsche Welle*  
20 May 2019



## Europe's largest Ai Weiwei show asks: 'Where is the revolution?'

For the Chinese-born, Berlin-based artist, art and politics are one and the same. A double exhibition in Dusseldorf shows off his work from the past 10 years, much of it focusing on migration and political repression.



### 'Laundromat' (2016)

This laundromat-styled installation features some 2,046 pieces of clothing hanging on 40 clothing racks, freshly cleaned and sorted. The pieces were left behind by refugees in 2016 when the so-called Balkan entry route into Europe was sealed off. Ai Weiwei gathered the clothes and gave them their current appearance, simultaneously giving recognition to their owners' perilous experiences.





© DW/S. Peschel

## 'Blue and white porcelain plates' (2017)

The artist also focused on human suffering of migrants in this series of porcelain plates. Made in Jingdezhen, the center of Chinese porcelain ware, the plates' decoration at first appears quite traditional. But in fact Ai Weiwei used his own photos and others found online that documented migration as the basis for the designs. The plates depict war, ruin, sea travel and refugee camps.



© DW/S. Peschel

## 'Camera with Plinth' (2015) and 'Odyssey' (2016)

The wallpaper pays stylistic tribute to Odysseus, the protagonist in Homer's epic poem who spent years far from home. But the motives actually depict flight and migration. In front stands a marble camera symbolizing state surveillance, a recurring theme of the artist. In 2011, he was arrested in Beijing and detained for 81 days and then kept under government surveillance for more than 20 years.





## 'Study of Perspective' (1995 to 2011/2014)

Ai Weiwei's Odyssey wall also includes numerous photos from a series. The photographs show cultural or governmental landmarks, with the artist holding up his middle finger before each one. The juxtaposition can be seen as a rejection of and protest against powerful political and social decision-makers.



## 'Study of Perspective' (1995 to 2011/2014)

These photos from locations in China are the only black-and-white ones in the series. They show Tiananmen Square, the site of the 1989 repression of students by the Chinese government, on the left, and the Hong Kong harbor on the right. With this year being the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen protests and many in Hong Kong today fearing greater Chinese control, the works are strongly resonant.





© DW/S. Peschel

## 'S.A.C.R.E.D.' (2011-2013)

This installation consists of six iron boxes that show scenes from Ai Weiwei's 81-day incarceration in 2011. Viewers can look through small openings to see the scenes that feature the artist and guards. It's a realistic portrayal of the human rights abuse he experienced. Above, a guard oversees the toilet entrance.

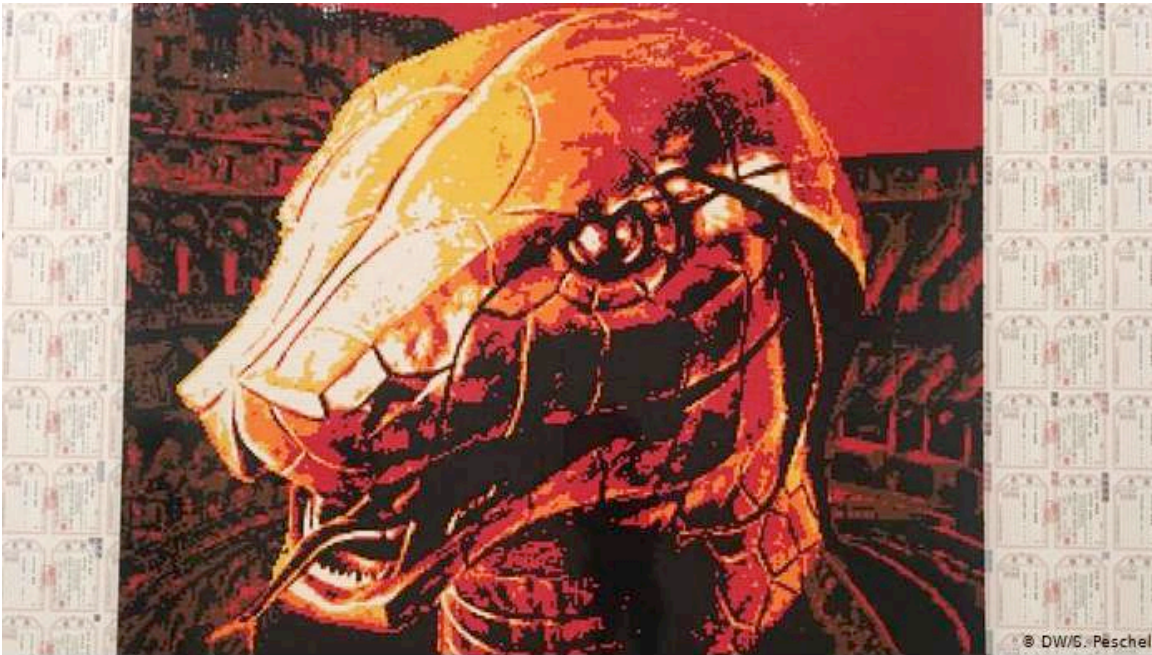


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## 'Straight' (2008-2012)

This work is another indictment of authority. A total of 142 coffin-like transport boxes made of reinforced steel hold straight steel rods that have been cleaned with cement. With this work, Ai Weiwei remembers the 70,000 people who died in the Sichuan earthquake in 2008. More than 5,000 children alone died in schools that collapsed because corrupt local politicians had cut building costs.





## 'Zodiac' (2018)

The 12 images in this series are made up of Lego pieces, which is why they look pixelated. The animal heads call forth a vision of eternal cycles and predestined destiny. In the background of the zodiac signs, Ai Weiwei shows representative buildings from his series "Study of Perspective," thus merging two series.



## 'Sunflower Seeds' (2010)

Millions of porcelain sunflower seeds were individually made by 1,600 artisans over two years in the Chinese porcelain capital Jingdezhen. The artwork has a deep political association: Chairman Mao Zedong was often portrayed as the "Sun," and the people were his seeds. In another more present-oriented interpretation, the installation also refers to Chinese mass-produced goods.





© DW/S. Peschel

## Video 'Sunflower Seeds' and 'I.O.U. Wallpaper' (2011-2013)

A video on the manufacturing process of the 100 million sunflower seeds is displayed in front of a billfold wallpaper. After his detention, Ai had to pay an alleged tax debt of €1.7 million. People sent him money, and he designed 13,719 IOU notes symbolizing their contributions. Ai Weiwei's largest European exhibition to date runs through September 1 at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen.

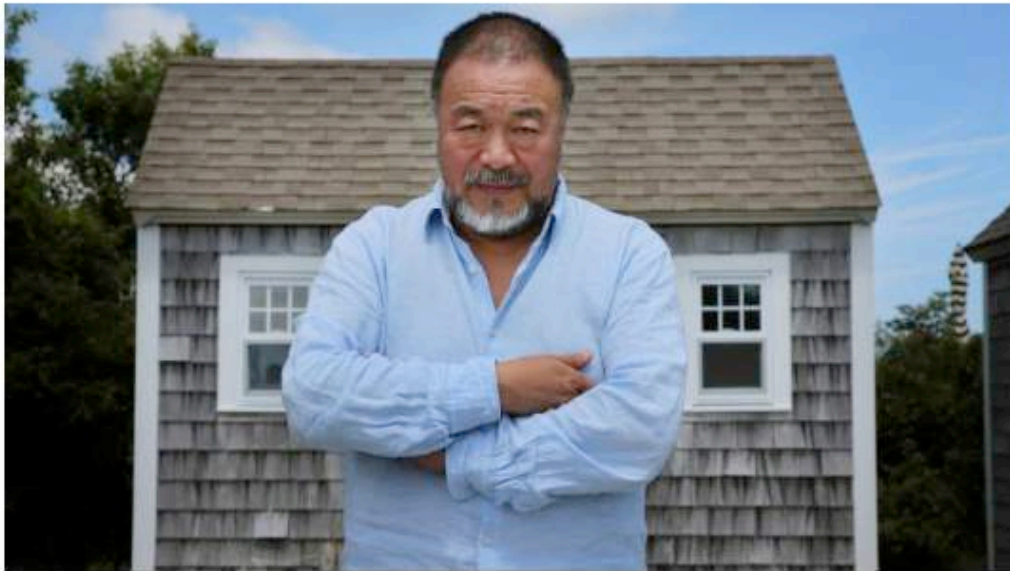
*The Times*  
22 March 2019

## THE TIMES

FILM REVIEW

### The Rest review

While some of the director Ai Weiwei's shortcomings remain (structure is not a strong point), so do his empathy and nose for character



The artist, activist and film-maker Ai Weiwei focuses on the refugee crisis in *The Rest*  
GETTY IMAGES

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★★★★☆

Anyone who has seen Ai Weiwei's epic 2017 documentary on the refugee crisis, *Human Flow*, might think that the Chinese artist, activist and film-maker had said and shown all he could on the subject. Far from it.

*The Rest* has likely been edited from the same mountain of footage Ai shot during his first globetrotting exploration of the issue, but rather than repeating himself he has made an astute companion piece, entirely different in scale, style and impact. Premiered on Friday at the Copenhagen documentary festival CPH:DOX, the film offers a potent reminder that this humanitarian crisis isn't going away any time soon.

Charting events in 2015-16, *Human Flow* was a sometimes bewilderingly ambitious production that considered migration across the globe, with Ai throwing everything into the pot — a majestic drone shot; artfully composed portraits; interviews with politicians alongside refugees; and a plethora of poetry and statistics.

In contrast, *The Rest* focuses on the appalling human logjam that took place as Europe closed its borders against thousands of refugees from Africa and the Middle East. Here, Ai simply listens to the refugees, their terrible testimonies and viscerally expressed emotions, and keeps his own charming but distracting presence out of the frame. The result is shorter, sharper and less pretty, its emotional uppercuts even more heart-breaking and shaming.

Among the stories are a man whose family have lost ten children at sea and who is desperate for their bodies to be retrieved; the Greek who has created a refugee cemetery for those dying in the attempt to reach his country; a wonderful storyteller whose laughter gives way to tears as he recalls the Turkish homeowners who shot at him as he asked for food and drink. “Who am I? Who am I? As if I were a dog.” A Syrian woman says she heard no music in her country for three years because of the bombing, another that she has forgotten how to play the piano, “because we keep getting displaced”.

There is fear, despair, confusion and anger, the last particularly and worryingly voiced by young men. After a tear-gassing of refugees on the Greek/Macedonian border, two Syrians compare the brutality with the “humanity” shown to European refugees by their country during the Second World War. Their words resonate as Ai’s images of barriers — wire fences, concrete walls — being erected and refugee camps destroyed underline how far the European project has slipped from its honourable foundations.

While some of the director’s shortcomings remain (structure is definitely not a strong point), so do his empathy and nose for character. This feels like war reporting, with a new kind of front line. Yet the principal theme is family — people seeking to protect, reunite and, ultimately, return home.

**79min**



L I S S O N   G A L L E R Y

*The Guardian*  
1 January 2019

# The Guardian

Human dignity is in danger. In 2019 we  
must stand as one to survive

*Ai Weiwei*



Persecution, censorship and environmental destruction are on  
the rise - but resistance is possible



▲ A footprint of a Rohingya refugee at a camp in Bangladesh, 2018, by Ai Weiwei. Photograph: Ai Weiwei Studio

W

hat does it mean to be human? That question sits at the core of human rights. To be human has specific implications: human self-awareness and the actions taken to uphold human dignity - these are what gives the concept of humanity a special meaning.

Human self-awareness and human actions determine the interplay between individual thought and language and the wider society. It is our actions as humans that deliver economic security, the right to education, the right to free association and free expression; and which create the conditions for protecting expression and encouraging bold thinking. When we abandon efforts to uphold human dignity, we forfeit the essential meaning of being human, and when we waver in our commitment to the idea of human rights, we abandon our moral principles. What follows is duplicity and folly, corruption and tyranny, and the endless stream of humanitarian crises that we see in the world today.

More than two centuries have passed since the concept of human rights was first developed. During that time humanity has gone through various stages of history and the world has seen enormous changes. In Europe, what was once a collection of colonialist, autocratic states has transformed into a democratic society with a capitalist orientation, establishing a mechanism that protects individual rights. Other societies are also seeing structural changes, and the concept of human rights is facing grave challenges.

In part these challenges stem from the disparate demands of countries in different stages of development, with contrasting economic situations and competing interests. But challenges also come from divergent conceptions and understandings of human rights, human dignity, morality and responsibility, and from different interpretations and applications of the core principles of human rights. In the contemporary world, as our grasp of the fundamental values and principles of human rights and humanitarianism weakens, we risk losing our rights, responsibilities and our power to uphold human dignity.

History shows that a moral failure is always accompanied by painful realities, visible everywhere. The global refugee crisis is worsening daily, and 70 million refugees have been forced to leave their homes by war and poverty. Our living environment is constantly being degraded, and the ecological balance is ever more fragile. Armed conflicts persist and potential political crises lurk; regional instabilities grow more acute; autocratic regimes brutally impose their will, while democratic governance is in decline. Unreasoning and unrestrained expansion under a nationalist, capitalist order is exacerbating the global gap between rich and poor. Our views of the world have become more divided and more conflicted than ever.





▲ Aung San Suu Kyi holds 'key' to freeing Reuters journalists, says Amal Clooney – video

Individuals in many countries and regions lack the opportunity to receive an education, to access information or communicate freely. They have no chance to exercise their imagination and creativity or fulfil their ideals; no chance to enjoy freedom of belief and freedom of association. Such rights and freedoms pose a fatal threat to autocracy and authoritarianism. This is why, in so many places, lawyers have been imprisoned, journalists have been **disappeared and murdered**, why censorship has become so pervasive, why religious and non-governmental organisations have been ruthlessly suppressed. Today, dictatorships and corrupt regimes continue to benefit from reckless arms sales, and enjoy the quiet support of capitalist nations. Religious divisions, ethnic contradictions and regional disputes all feed into primitive power plays. Their logic is simple: to weaken individual freedoms and strengthen the controls imposed by governments and dominant elites.

The end result is that individuals are deprived of the right to live, denied freedom from fear, and freedom of expression, or denied the rights to maintain their living environment and develop.

The concept of human rights needs to be revised. Discussions of human rights used to focus on the one-dimensional relationship between the state's rights and individual rights, but now human rights involve a variety of relationships. Today, whether demands are framed in terms of the rights of the individual or the goals pursued by political entities and interest groups, none of these agendas exists in isolation. Historically, the conditions governing human existence have never been more globally interdependent.



The right of children to grow up and be educated, the right of women to receive protection, the right to conserve nature, the right to survival of other lives intimately connected with the survival of the human race - all these have now become major elements in the concept of human rights. As science and technology develop, authoritarian states invade privacy and limit personal freedom in the name of counter-terrorism and maintaining stability, intensifying psychological manipulation at all levels. Through control of the internet and command of facial recognition technology, authoritarian states tighten their grip on people's thoughts and actions, threatening and even eliminating freedoms and political rights. Similar kinds of controls are being imposed to varying degrees within the global context. From this we can see that under these new conditions human rights have not gained a common understanding, and if discussion of human rights becomes narrow and shortsighted, it is bound to become nothing more than outdated, empty talk.

Today, Europe, the US, Russia, China and other governments manufacture, possess and sell arms. Pontificating about human rights is simply self-deluding if we fail to curb the dangerous practices that make armed conflict all the more likely. Likewise, if no limits are placed on capitalist global expansion and the pervasive penetration of capital power, if there is no effort to curb the sustained assault by authoritarian governments on natural human impulses, a discussion of human rights is just idle chatter. Such a blatant abdication of responsibility can lead to no good outcome.

Human rights are shared values. **Human rights** are our common possession. When abuses are committed against anyone in any society, the dignity of humanity as a whole is compromised. By the same token, it is only when the rights of any individual and rights of the people of any region receive our care and protection that humanity can achieve a shared redemption.

Such is the principle of human rights, in all its stark simplicity. But a shared understanding of that truth still eludes us. Why so? Could it be that we are too selfish, too benighted, too lacking in courage? Or, perhaps, we are insincere, we don't really love life enough: we con ourselves into imagining we can get away without discharging our obligation to institute fairness and justice, we fool ourselves into thinking that chaos is acceptable, we entertain the idea that the world may well collapse in ruin, all hopes and dreams shattered.

If we truly believe in values that we can all identify with and aspire to - a recognition of truth, an understanding of science, an appreciation of the self, a respect for life and a faith in society - then we need to eliminate obstacles to understanding, uphold the fundamental definition of humanity, affirm the shared value of human lives and other lives, and acknowledge the symbiotic interdependency of human beings and the environment. A belief in ourselves and a belief in others, a trust in humanitarianism's power to do good, and an earnest recognition of the value of life - these form the foundation for all human values and all human efforts.

● Ai Weiwei is a leading contemporary artist, activist and advocate of political reform in China

# LISSON GALLERY

*theguardian.com*  
16 March 2018



## **Sydney Biennale review - Ai Weiwei anchors rewarding show that comes of age in its 21st year**



▲ Law of the Journey, Ai Weiwei's huge installation at Cockatoo Island which depicts the plight of refugees in Europe, is one of the key works of the 21st Sydney Biennale. Photograph: Peter Parks/AFP/Getty Images



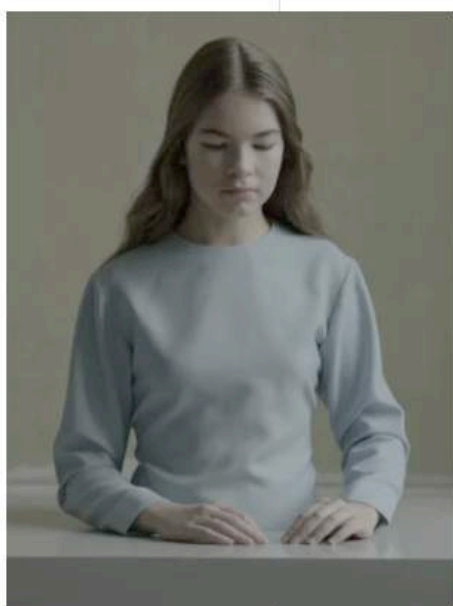
Quantum physics and contradictions unite the vast number of works on display for a biennale that goes beyond mere spectacle

There is a simple and quiet work by the Belgian artist Michaël Borremans called *The Bread* (2012) in this year's Biennale of Sydney. It recalls the work of Flemish 15th century portraits, close and intimate, but it's a modern picture too. It's of a girl's upper body, dressed in a blue top, her hands in front, her gaze downwards. I was fairly certain I was looking at a photo of a painting. On closer inspection, it appeared not to be a real person at all, perhaps a model ... And then the girl blinked.

Can something be two or more things at once? That's the curatorial question that unites the selection of art for *Superposition: Equilibrium & Engagement*, the 21st Biennale of Sydney.

Curated by Mami Kataoka and featuring about 70 artists and collectives from 35 countries whose work is sited across seven venues, BoS21 offers punters some spectacle, some immersive works, and plenty of opportunities for quiet reflection.

That question that unites BoS21, its ostensible theme, has been lifted from quantum physics, a theory that argues "that every quantum state can be represented as a sum of two or more other distinct states" (thanks Wikipedia). If you've ever heard of Schrödinger's cat - a thought experiment in which a cat in a box could equally be alive or dead - then you're halfway to understanding Kataoka's thinking.



▲ Can something be two or more things at once? Michaël Borremans' *The Bread*. Photograph: Biennale of Sydney



The other half of the idea is more elusive. Using a theory from quantum physics as a metaphor for thinking about the historical and cultural connections between art would normally be a full plate, but Kataoka also adds concepts from Taoism. This I do not fully understand as my understanding of eastern religions is limited, but I've been told that the two things, science and religious philosophy, can be reconciled. At any rate, it seems these things are two things that can be other things too, so we're off and running.

One recent trend of biennales is the inclusion of work by long dead or recently deceased artists held in the collections of host venues, and BoS21 has made an effort to create a dialogue between artists and their work, past and present. At the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the work of early Australian modernist Roy de Maistre is shown next to the work of Dutch contemporary abstractionist Riet Winjen. Nearby, a late 60s geometric abstraction by Australian painter Syd Ball is juxtaposed with a two-screen video work by British duo Semiconductor.

A curatorial gambit like this runs the risk of seeming too obvious but to Kataoka's credit, the joining of these pieces across time and space works brilliantly. The colour grid of de Maistre's wall work reflected in the pattern of Wijen's sculptural "paintings", and the juxtaposition of Ball's *Black Reveal* (1968-69) - a painting that plays with the viewer's perception of space - with Semiconductor's visualisation of data in dazzling graphics and augmented reality - connects

ideas and approaches beyond mere superficial visual similarities.



Which is not to say that some works in BoS21 don't meet the brief in an obvious way. Samson Young's *Muted Situations #22: Muted Tchaikovsky's Fifth* (2018) is a gorgeously produced video work with 12-channel sound wherein an orchestra plays the famous piece, except the musicians mute their instruments. What's left is a theatrical show to the sound of rustling of bows, damped strings, clothes moving. It's a simple idea, and in the context of the Biennale, it works almost as an illustration of the theme. Obvious perhaps, but captivating.

At the Museum of Contemporary Art, Danish artist Jacob Kirkegaard's *Through the West* (2013) offers another kind of theatricality in the form of a spotlight replica of the Israeli West Bank Barrier wall. Travelling to Palestine and Israel, Kirkegaard recorded the sound of the wall using vibration sensors and acoustic microphones. The effect is an odd reverberant noise that at moments sounds like a street recording, at others as though your ear is pressed against the concrete. As a listener - and viewer - you are both at the site, and not, the hugely suggestive reality of sound set against the schematic replica in the gallery space.



▲ Samson Young - *Muted Situations 22 Muted Tchaikovsky's 5th* 2018 at the 21st Biennale of Sydney. Photograph: Biennale of Sydney



Over at Cockatoo Island, another kind of political art is on display. Ai Weiwei's *Law of the Journey* (2018) is a gigantic, space-filling sculpture, an elongated and oversized life raft filled with huge bodies of adults and children, the entire thing mounted on a timber base inscribed with quotes attesting to the importance of a humane refugee policy. As a work of art, it is as blunt as a hammer blow, a ready-made Instagram meme that will travel the world with Ai's message.

Approaching the viewing platform, I caught a moment in an accompanying video where Ai, walking moodily in a park in Berlin, says in voiceover that he too is a refugee, exiled from China, and not knowing the German language, he is adrift. It was a moment where the two Ai's came together: the sincere activist artist with a noble cause, and the ego monster seen up close in the documentary *Never Sorry*. Can a rich, successful artist with his own art factory also be a principled campaigner for human rights? Apparently so.

If nothing else, BoS21 is about the art of masterful juxtapositions. In the adjacent Turbine Hall is Icarus Container (2018), an installation by Japanese artist Yukinori Yanagi. To say too much about it would spoil the experience, but essentially it is a walk-through maze through a series of shipping containers that masterfully confuses the senses. You think you're seeing one thing when you're seeing another. While it fits the curatorial theme to the letter, Icarus Container seems more than it is, the magical illusion of art producing an experience that is more than words. It was so compelling I came back to the work twice and then rushed on to see Yanagi's two other installations.



▲ Ai Weiwei's Law of the Journey: can a rich, successful artist also be a principled campaigner for human rights?  
Photograph: Biennale of Sydney

The idea of duality is a rich metaphor in Marco Fusinato's installation/performance work Constellations (2015-18) at Carriageworks. A gigantic white wall bisects a high ceilinged room. On one side is a baseball bat and the audience is invited to take a swing at the wall. The resulting sound is monumental, part gong crash, part dissonant clang, an amplified noise courtesy of microphones and speakers hidden in the wall. On the one hand, this act could be interpreted as a crude gesture against the gallery itself, the kind of anti-art gesture beloved of early 20th century avant-gardists. On the other, the act of creating sound from the environment is a generative one - positive in terms of art making and philosophy. Could it be both? Yes.

Down at Artspace in Woolloomooloo, I was taken with Borremans' installation that included the mysterious The Bread work. Usually his work is the kind of art one gives short shrift to after a long day of looking at art, but it rewards the time invested looking at it: there are sculptural maquettes proposing building a spaceship from two Gothic church towers; scale models of modernist buildings; two vitrines featuring small paintings and research material; a video projection with a scene like something from Twin Peaks; and The Bread, a video that is a painting, or maybe not. Here the superposition is ambiguity. Does it mean something? Probably.

This is just a small selection of the work in Superposition: Equilibrium & Engagement and there are two more venues too: 4A in the Haymarket, and the Opera House. I have to confess, I did not see everything and I was exhausted at the end - 9km walked, 13,423 steps, 13 floors of stairs, fuelled by a packed lunch, fruit, juice, coffee and lots of water. But really, any large show comes down to the works that speak to you.

Where many recent biennales have had overinflated or inexplicable curatorial themes, featuring banal showstoppers and little else, or were made up of inconsequential gestures of fake modesty, BoS21 is one of the better outings, certainly among the best of the last 10 years. My advice is to take your time, and pick what appeals as you go. And wear comfortable shoes.

● *The 21st Biennale of Sydney is showing at multiple locations across the city until 11 June*



*Folha de S. Paulo*  
29 August 2018

# FOLHA DE S. PAULO

DESDE 1921 ★ ★ ★ UM JORNAL A SERVIÇO DO BRASIL



Abacaxis e frutos de dendê feitos de porcelana em fábrica de São Caetano do Sul para projeto do chinês Ai Weiwei Rafael Roncato/Folhapress

## Made in Brazil

Artista chinês Ai Weiwei monta ateliês no país para criar obras que estarão em sua mostra na Oca, em outubro

João Perassolo

**SÃO CAETANO DO SUL.** Nas prateleiras cheias de objetos de porcelana em um galpão de São Caetano do Sul, no ABC, algumas peças parecem fora de contexto. Entre xícaras, cinzeiros e budas decorativos, repousam centenas de réplicas de frutas-do-con-

de, ostras, dendês e abacaxis. Os frutos aguardam o momento em que, pelas mãos de uma equipe coordenada pela designer Raquel Hoshino, serão diferenciadas de uma xícara de cafezinho para se tornarem obras assinadas pelo artista plástico Ai Weiwei.

A Porcelana Teixeira, fábrica fundada em 1949 por imigran-

tes portugueses, abriga atualmente um dos cinco ateliês que o famoso dissidente chinês montou no país este ano.

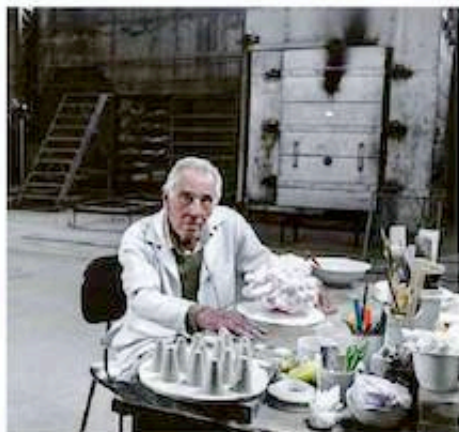
O objetivo da linha de montagem comandada por Hoshino é produzir um dos trabalhos que estarão na mostra "Ai Weiwei Raiz", a ser inaugurada em 20 de outubro, na Oca. Do galpão sairão os dois

exemplares de "F.O.D.A." (fruta-do-conde, ostra, dendê e abacaxi) que o público verá no prédio redondo do Ibirapuera, além de outros 300 múltiplos da mesma obra que serão vendidos pela sua galeria paulistana, a ArtEEdições. "Ai Weiwei eterniza as frutas da mesma forma que a burguesia europeia eternizava ca-

chorros em bibelôs de porcelana. A ideia do bibelô é manter presente algo que está em extinção", explica Hoshino. Sete pessoas se dedicam em tempo integral ao acabamento das frutas — são escultores, ceramistas e pintores ativos no mercado, pinçados especialmente para o projeto. A fabricação dos objetos

segue a linha de produção normal de outras peças que saem dali, com os mesmos operários e matérias-primas. Weiwei contratou Hoshino depois de se encantar com a verossimilhança de um protótipo de abacate realizado pelo artesão Miguel Anselmo, que integra a equipe da designer. *Continua na pág. C4*





## Made in Brazil

Continuação de pág. C1

A encomenda do artista chinês, que pediu a Hoshino e à fábrica a reprodução de uma fruta brasileira, para aferir a qualidade do trabalho e dos materiais, fez com que a designer oficializasse a criação de uma divisão dedicada ao desenvolvimento de peças de caráter mais experimental.

Ela conta ainda que Weiwei lhe mandou um recado —ele queria que as reproduções das frutas fossem "rústicas, mas bonitas". E parece ter gostado do resultado, a julgar pelas curtidas que dá nas imagens das peças prontas postadas no Instagram por um dos artesãos da fábrica.

O curador da mostra da Oca, Marcello Dantas, conta que a ideia para "F.O.D.A." surgiu há alguns meses, em Trancoso, na Bahia, onde Weiwei lhe perguntou como dizer "fuck" em português. Dantas respondeu, e então o artista disse que queria uma fruta correspondente a cada letra da palavra "foda" para realizar a obra.

As letras F, D e A foram relativamente fáceis. Mas não há no dicionário nenhuma fruta com O. Então sugeriu ostra, que é um fruto do mar, e ele amou. Além do mais, a ostra tem uma conotação sexual superforte", afirma Dantas.

A fábrica em São Caetano do Sul é só um dos lugares de produção do chinês no Brasil. Há mais três frentes de trabalho ativas espalhadas pelo país —uma em Cotia, na Grande São Paulo, outra em Juazeiro do Norte, no Ceará, e uma no presídio paulista de Tremembé. O quarto, que ficava em Trancoso, foi desativado após seis meses de operação.

O número de pessoas trabalhando em todos esses locais chegou a 150. Para a realização das obras, foram usados materiais como raízes, cerca de uma tonelada de sementes de olho-de-cabra e couro. "O volume de produção é grande. São uns sete, oito caminhões. É um processo quase industrial", conta Dantas.

Parte das obras vindas dos

ateliers, que devem finalizar seus trabalhos no início de setembro, estará na Oca.

O restante foi enviado à China e só virá a público em ocasiões futuras. É o caso do molde de um pé de pequi de 36 metros de altura tirado em Trancoso por uma equipe de chineses, que deve levar cerca de um ano para ser fundido.

Dantas nega que o interesse de produzir as peças de "F.O.D.A." no Brasil esteja relacionado à mudança nas taxas aeroportuárias para obras importadas; hoje elas não são mais cobradas de acordo com o peso da obra armazenada, e sim segundo seu valor.

"A razão de produzir essas peças aqui é o interesse em interpretar o Brasil que faz parte do imaginário do Ai Weiwei desde a infância, quando seu pai aqui esteve com Jorge Amado. É uma visita à tradição artesanal brasileira, assim como a obra do Weiwei é uma visita à tradição artesanal chinesa", justifica o curador.

Obras complexas realizadas com o auxílio de mão de obra local, aliás, não são uma novidade na carreira do dissidente.

Há alguns anos, Weiwei contratou oficinas de artesãos de Jingdezhen para que confeccionassem 100 milhões de sementes de girassol de porcelana —a cidade no sul da China tem tradição milenar na fabricação desse material.

O resultado foi "Sunflower Seeds", obra exibida há oito anos na Tate, em Londres, que estará também em São Paulo.

"Ai Weiwei Raiz" é a segunda mostra do artista no país. Em 2013, um conjunto de suas fotografias foi exibido no Museu da Imagem e do Som paulistano. Esta, contudo, terá uma dimensão maior, ocupando quatro andares da Oca.

Além das peças feitas aqui, estarão reunidos trabalhos marcantes de Weiwei, como "Forever Bicycles", "Moon Chest" e "Straight", além de uma obra exibida apenas uma vez, "Ordos 100", realizada em 2008 com os arquitetos suíços Herzog & de Meuron.



No alto, da esq. para a dir., moldes das peças de porcelana; José das Neves Teixeira, um dos principais responsáveis pela fábrica; e acabamento na linha de pintura do ateliê; acima, as peças de porcelana concluídas. Fotos: Rafael Romancini/Folhapress



LISSON GALLERY

*Dazed*

08 June 2018

**DAZED**



Ai Weiwei (2017) © Judith Benhamou-Huet

## **Ai Weiwei announces his most personal show yet, based on his father**

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY - LIGHTBOX

**The artist's new solo show bridges the east and the west in homage to the first time his father left China**

8th June 2018

Text Ashleigh Kane



Ai Weiwei's work has often centred around his identity as a Chinese person, detailing his abuse at the hands of the government, and the injustices dealt to his fellow citizens – such as the victims of the Sichuan earthquake. In recent years, he's extended his empathy, and his platform, to the plight of refugees looking to make new, safer lives in Europe. His latest show, however, is his most personal yet and centring his father, the acclaimed Chinese poet Ai Qing.

In China, Qing was considered a radical, a denounced traitor, and accused rightist. In 1933, he was tortured and imprisoned for "involvement in activities in the League of Left-wing Artists" (a group which promoted socialist realism), and in 1957 – when Ai Weiwei was a baby – the poet was exiled from Beijing for two decades. The family lived in Heilongjiang, followed by Xinjiang, and Qing was forced to clean public toilets. It not only cost him his dignity but it took his eyesight, as reported by Ai Weiwei, due to lack of nutrition. Weiwei was 18 when the family were allowed to return to Beijing, the seeds of rebellion and a distrust for the government sown in his mind.

The show uses Ai Qing's journey to Marseille, France, as a jump-off. In 1929, the poet landed on the docks of La Joliette, a stone's throw from the Mucem gallery where Ai Weiwei will host the show. It was Ai Qing's first time in the west. He had left China to study in Paris and would stay there until 1932, learning about artists such as Van Gogh, but also German philosophers, Emmanuel Kant and G.W.F Hegel (Kant and Hegel), and the poetry of Russia's Vladimir Mayakovsky and Belgian's Émile Verhaeren.



"Up Yours" (2017). Size 37 x 71 x 19 cm © Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

*Fan-Tan* will feature 50 artworks from Ai Weiwei, two of which are new. These will be juxtaposed with 50 objects from the Mucem's collection in an attempt to show the parallels between the east and the west, as well as ideas of 'original' and 'copy', 'art' and 'craft', 'destruction' and 'conservation'. The show release says that "above all, they challenge the relevance of our systems of interpretation". Works included are images from "Study of Perspective" (1995-2011), "Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn" (2015), as well as "Surveillance Camera with Plinth" (2015).

The show – his first large-scale solo show in France – will also hark back to Ai Weiwei's own artistic roots, by presenting some of his earliest pieces ("Safe Sex" and "Violin") which were realised in the 1980s, when he first left China to live in the west himself, in New York while in his 20s.

The Mucem says that in preparation for the show, Weiwei visited the La Joliette port in Marseille in an attempt to trace his father's footsteps, even finding the log book for the boat that Ai Qing had travelled from China to France on.

The title *Fan-Tan* also "refers to an English army tank which operated on French soil during the First World War", as well as the name of a local betting game in China, similar to roulette. With the Mucem explaining that Weiwei's choice to name the show *Fan-Tan* is in reference the "chaotic relations between France and China at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century".

*Fan-Tan – curated by Judith Benhamou-Huet – will run at France's Mucem from 20 June – 12 November 2018*

*Read our full-length interview with Ai Weiwei [here](#)*



"Surveillance Camera with Plinth" (2016), Marble. © Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

*The Art Newspaper*  
7 March 2018



## THE ART NEWSPAPER

### **Ai Weiwei: 'I'm impressed Qatar wants my show about refugees'**

The dissident Chinese artist on why he's tackling the global refugee crisis in his first exhibition in the Gulf

AIMEE DAWSON

7th March 2018 13:07 GMT



MORE



Ai Weiwei on Lesbos, 2016 © Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio



The exiled dissident Chinese artist Ai Weiwei will bring an exhibition of works about the refugee crisis to Qatar this month, for his first show in the Gulf region. Ai had his first experience of the plight facing refugees while on the Greek island of Lesbos in 2015 and has since focussed his work on the scale of the global crisis. He and his studio team have travelled to 40 refugee camps in 23 countries, producing works and actions responding to the crisis as well as the film *Human Flow* (2017).

For his exhibition at Doha's Fire Station art space (15 March-1 June), Ai will show the large-scale installation, *Laundromat* (2016), which is made from thousands of articles of clothing that were left behind after a refugee camp in Idomeni, a small village in northern Greece, was shut down in 2016.

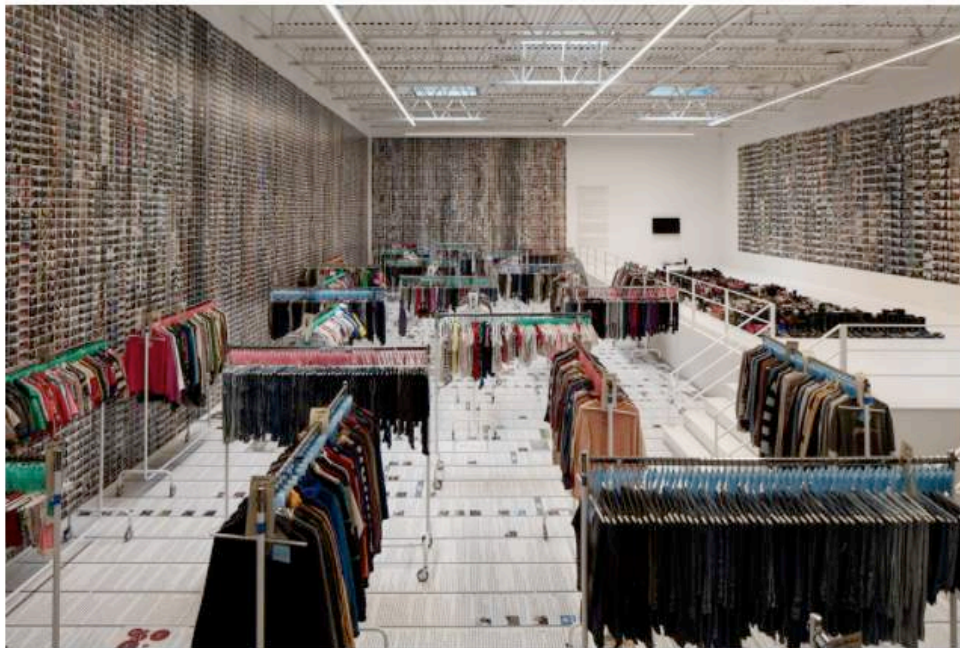
*Laundromat* also includes the film *Idomeni* (2016), which shows the everyday conditions of the refugees up to the moment when the camp was evacuated, and a work made from wallpaper of images that Ai took on his iPhone during the filming of *Human Flow*.

The Art Newspaper visited Ai at his studio in Berlin to talk about his experience of being in exile, and what it means to put on a show about refugees in the Gulf.

#### **The Art Newspaper: How did this show in Qatar come about?**

Ai Weiwei: I have been to the Gulf on several occasions but never to Qatar. Then Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani [the chairwoman of Qatar Museums] invited me a year ago. I visited the Fire Station, which is a very progressive facility for contemporary art. They had a show of Picasso and Giacometti [at the time]. But what gave me a stronger impression is their art programme where artists have studios in the Fire Station. I visited all of them and talked with the artists about what they've been doing. I got the impression that they were very open, very liberal and, in many senses, close to what has been practiced in other parts of the world. It's not exactly like other places in the Gulf.

Sheikha Al Mayassa saw my show in Jeffrey Dietch's [Wooster Street space] in Soho in 2016 and she had a strong impression and asked me if the show could be moved to Doha. I said it was possible and they followed up to ask to have the show.



Ai Weiwei's Laundromat (2016) © Ai Weiwei Studio

**Will you be going to Doha for the opening?**

I'd love to but I can't. I have many engagements and my schedule doesn't allow it.

**All the works you are showing relate to refugees. Qatar—and the Gulf region in general—has been criticised for not taking in more. How do you think a show on refugees will be received there?**

I am very impressed that [Qatar] wants to have a show like this. Sheikha Al Mayassa showed a strong understanding and had a clear impression about the issue. I think they are, in a way, quite supportive of the idea of human rights and the human conditions. They have tried to generate a social conscious about human condition globally, but especially in the Gulf states. We all know that the Gulf states don't bear enough responsibility for this global crisis and, because of that, are showing a very closed world view about their own position. Of course, it's not only them. In Europe, there are also states that haven't accepted any refugees.

**Do you think that a show like this will have a positive effect on public and state conscience about the issue?**

I can't imagine that an art show would affect a state's conscience or a mass concept about something political. But I am one individual and it deeply affects me and it makes me want to try and make this effort. I am just part of society and there must be many people just like me who want to be involved or want to have this kind of act. But how those can be turned into public policy or political progress is hard to say.





**You've recently had shows in Israel, Turkey and, now, Qatar, which are all countries that have been criticised for their crackdowns on human rights and freedom of speech. As an artist who has spent his life campaigning against a country that denies people human rights, how do you feel about exhibiting in such countries?**

We have two kinds of societies: one society has human rights and freedom of speech but where an individual's voices is not taken seriously, such as in Europe and the US. They still have strong human rights and freedom of speech problems, just at different levels. Then you have states where these rights cannot be protected, like in Turkey or Israel or some Gulf states. But still, I think human rights is one quality—it belongs to everyone and everywhere, so to defend human rights anywhere is to defend them everywhere. We have to separate the idea of state and territory and just talk about the issues: about the human condition and freedom of speech. Art can avoid this cold war thinking of these original ideologies and talk about common values and humanity in a much broader sense.

**You're currently a refugee of sorts, living in Berlin because it's unsafe for you and your son in China. Will you stay in Germany?**

I have a language and so many reasons to go back but I can't. That is not important to the world at large but still, once you think you cannot go back, you don't really know where you belong and you have no idea where you will go next. It is very hard to think conceptually, "I am settled here", because everything is so uncertain. Uncertainty gave me a clear understanding about the refugee condition. You cannot tell your children "you belong to here" and you cannot show them anything you are familiar with or you are really emotionally attached to—everything is just passing by. It's a new condition. For me, it is not so new. When I was born my father was exiled. So, I accepted the situation. My son accepts it because he doesn't know otherwise. If I tell him tomorrow we have to go then he would go and I think he is subconsciously prepared. We can always travel.



nytimes.com  
20 May 2018

## The New York Times

### Ai Weiwei Plans Three Los Angeles Exhibitions This Fall



"Cao" (2014), a marble floor sculpture, will appear in Ai Weiwei's exhibition at the new UTA Artist Space in Beverly Hills, a building he is helping to redesign. Ai Weiwei Studio

By Jori Finkel

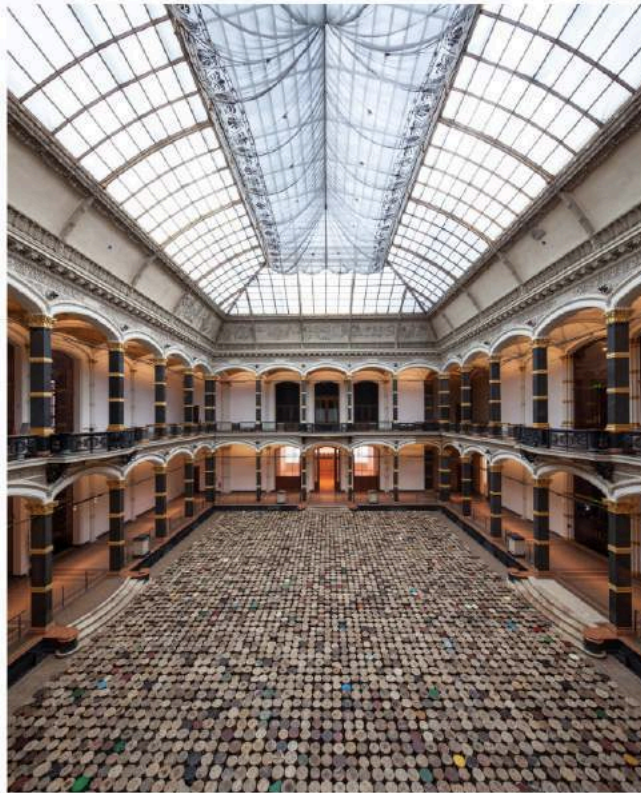
May 20, 2018



LOS ANGELES — While Ai Weiwei has had plenty of gallery shows and [public artworks in New York](#), he has not had a substantial exhibition in Los Angeles. In October, he will have three.

Mr. Ai is taking over Jeffrey Deitch's new Hollywood gallery for its inaugural show, opening Sept. 29; he will be the next artist after Olafur Eliasson to make use of the sprawling ground-floor project space of the Marciano Art Foundation, opening Sept. 28; and, starting Oct. 4, he will show marble sculpture at the new UTA Artist Space in Beverly Hills in a building that he is helping to redesign.

"This is how Weiwei likes to do things: when he comes to a city, he takes over a city," said Jamie Manné, deputy director of the Marciano Art Foundation. "It's definitely not a collaboration, but we're happy to coordinate with everyone."



Mr. Ai's "Stools" (2014) at the Gropius Bau in Berlin. The installation of more than 6,000 salvaged wooden stools will be shown at Jeffrey Deitch's new Hollywood gallery.  
Ai Weiwei Studio

"L.A. strongly represents America, both geographically and culturally," the artist said by email. "These are my first exhibitions in the city and I'm very excited about it."

The Marciano will feature at least three large-scale works, including a new installation [responding to the refugee crisis](#) with boats, humans and zodiac figures crafted out of traditional kite-making materials: bamboo, sisal and silk. Mr. Deitch's new gallery will feature what he called "a good introduction to the artist's work," including an accumulation of 6,000 wooden stools, flea-market finds that represent hundreds of years (and thousands of families) in Chinese history; it reprises an installation from the Gropius Bau in Berlin. A new series of 12 portraits of the Chinese zodiac built out of Legos will also be shown. The opening of Mr. Deitch's Los Angeles gallery was originally scheduled for fall 2017, but was delayed for "permitting reasons," he said.

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UTA Artist Space, a gallery overseen by Joshua Roth, the head of United Talent Agency's fine-art division, is showing a selection of Mr. Ai's work in marble, the highlight being a large field of grass rendered in a medium more often associated with monumental forms. The UTA gallery is in the process of relocating to Beverly Hills after less than two years in the Boyle Heights neighborhood, where it was one of the galleries [targeted by anti-gentrification protesters](#). Mr. Roth said the gallery's closing there in April was not prompted by protests but by his happening upon an available building half a block from UTA headquarters, a poured-concrete light industrial space with wooden bow-truss ceilings — "a unicorn in Beverly Hills," he said.

Mr. Ai, who stopped his architecture practice after designing the 2008 Beijing Olympic Stadium, said he also responded to the building at first sight during a visit with Mr. Roth, whose agency represents his work as a filmmaker. “My instincts as an architect naturally kicked in,” he said. He is now designing different elements of the space, including a new stairway and entry, with a goal of opening it by July 12. The gallery’s first show, “One Shot,” will feature Color Field painters such as Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and Helen Frankenthaler.

Mr. Ai will also have a public talk with Michael Govan, director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, at the museum on Sept. 28. Lacma showed Mr. Ai’s “Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads,” a group of bronze sculptures, in 2011-12.

A version of this article appears in print on May 21, 2018, on Page C3 of the New York edition with the headline: Ai Weiwei Plans Three Los Angeles Exhibitions. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe





theguardian

## Human Flow review – Ai Weiwei surveys shocking plight of migrants on the move

★★★★★

This documentary by the Chinese conceptual artist offers no easy answers, revealing instead a deeply affecting empathy for those caught up in a global crisis



Peter Bradshaw

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Thursday 7 December  
2017 15.30 GMT



501 76



Lives in limbo ... Human Flow. Photograph: AC Films/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock

The exiled Chinese conceptual artist **Ai Weiwei** has here created an ambitious, humane and often shocking cine-essay on the subject of **migrants** and the 21st century migrant condition. With his camera crew, he travels around the world, and finds a globalised story of desolation and desperation. These are people who are frantic enough to jettison everything in their lives and leave - and who by that token have become enigmatic, opaque, difficult to interview. It is not just the language barrier. They have detached themselves from the cultural context in which they have grown up and have not yet been granted admission to that context in which the privileged interviewer or film-maker exists. The connective tissue of conversation has not been cultivated. It puts a greater onus on imagery, on making pictures do the work.




Weiwei's approach is clearly not to furnish political explanations, still less political solutions - although these are touched on towards the end of the film - but rather to make the leap of empathy, to understand what being a migrant is like in human terms. With its heightened visual sense, and need to trace the contour of a certain type of experience, *Human Flow* is similar to Gianfranco Rosi's *Fire at Sea*, about migrants on the island of Lampedusa. It has points in common with Alejandro González Iñárritu's immersive VR installation-drama about immigrants, *Carne Y Arena*. And I have to mention again an excellent and under-recognised film about migrants: Daniel Mulloy's short *Home*, a through-the-looking-glass satire starring Jack O'Connell that imagines prosperous Europeans making the journey in the opposite direction. All too often, the media spectacle that we consume makes it look as if migrants' poverty and perceived inarticulacy is somehow their tribal identity - when of course they were in many cases as prosperous as educated as those people now interpreting their situation and deciding what to do about them.

Ai Weiwei's film is most potent when it is on the move, following this human flow as people trudge onwards. His camera appears to be mounted high above the stream of refugees, or evidently hovering in a drone. What is particularly striking are the scenes of migrants attempting to cross into Hungary, and heading for Germany. Perhaps it is because we are used to crowd scenes in fiction, and because the TV news does not show migrants en masse and at length, that the sight of this extraordinary crowd is not at first startling. The realisation sinks in after a few seconds. This is a real-life exodus, but one in which the Red Sea, once parted, is now closing up as it sees them approaching.

The most upsetting aspect is the shot of a dead body: perhaps a child or perhaps an adult, lying in the dust, and evidently mangled or decomposed in some way. It is framed and presented in a flat, unemotional way, almost like a statue that has been knocked over; in being shown this, briefly, the audience feels like one of the many people trudging on past it.



 Gesture of sympathy ... Ai Weiwei, left, in his film. Photograph: AC Films/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock



Clearly, [Human Flow](#) is vulnerable to the charge of fetishising or aestheticising the migrants as spectacle. This was also, at least potentially, an issue with *Carne Y Arena*. And it is an uncomfortable moment when the director, in an impulsive gesture of sympathy or solidarity, exchanges passports with a refugee, warmly talks about them being the same, and even gets involved in a jokey dialogue about them swapping homes - a tent in exchange for an artist's studio. Inevitably, and a little embarrassingly, that notion has to be wistfully dismissed as a fantasy and Weiwei must sheepishly get his passport back. It is a graphic demonstration of how his approach cannot work as a one-on-one engagement.

One commentator suggests the three main factors are social media, transportation and globalisation. The first mobilises dissent and indignation more quickly, the second is cheaper than ever, and the third has created greater inequality and greater awareness of inequality. Perhaps the fourth is the existence of the EU, which is now a beacon of hope and aspiration in the way the United States once was. [Ai Weiwei](#) doesn't arrive at answers, but he engages with the subject in fiercely human terms and he compellingly shows that migration is itself a new condition of global market forces, which have disrupted peoples the way world war did a century ago.



*International New York Times*  
8 June 2016

## International New York Times

# Ai Weiwei and Warhol, together again

PITTSBURGH

Years after paths crossed in New York, similarities become apparent

BY ANDREW JACOBS

One was a wildly successful artist, the son of Slovakian immigrants, whose alabaster complexion and shock of white hair made him instantly recognizable on the streets of Manhattan.

The other was a shy film school student from Beijing who toiled in anonymity, sketching \$20 sidewalk portraits to make the rent on his basement apartment.

And though their paths crossed at more than one downtown art opening in the 1980s, it is safe to say that Ai Weiwei, the young Chinese striver, made little impression on Andy Warhol as he flitted through the adoring throngs.

"I remember going to a gallery opening and hearing people say 'Andy is here, Andy is here,' and suddenly I saw him through the crowd," Mr. Ai recalled this week, walking through "Andy Warhol/Ai Weiwei" at the Warhol Museum here. "It was incredible to be in the same room, but I was a nobody."

In the 25 years since he abruptly left New York to tend to his ailing father in China, Mr. Ai has become a somebody. Wily provocateur, enemy of the state and media-savvy advocate for the disenfranchised, he is a darling of the global contemporary art world, a bona fide celebrity whose burly, bearded presence invariably draws admiring crowds.

Andy Warhol and Ai Weiwei, it turns out, have plenty in common.

Like Warhol, Mr. Ai surrounds himself with stray cats, has a fondness for neon-tinted floral arrangements and takes pleasure in subverting hallowed cultural touchstones.

Both men have also made a mint turning everyday objects into sought-after commodities. And Mr. Ai, like Warhol, compulsively records his life and surroundings — Warhol had his tape recorder; Mr. Ai always has his iPhone,

which he uses almost hourly to post a deluge of images to Instagram and Twitter.

But the two men are conjoined by something more significant: They are both unrepentant iconoclasts and gleeful disrupters of art world conventions. Warhol scandalized with his soup cans in 1962; three decades later, Mr. Ai defiled neolithic Chinese pottery with tutti frutti-colored paint, and he once famously smashed a Han dynasty urn just for the heck of it.

"The things said about Warhol are intriguingly similar to what was said about Ai Weiwei today — that he desecrated art," said Eric Shiner, director of the museum, which is staging a dialogue show of the two men's works that runs through August. "Yet in reality, both artists changed, and are changing, how the world understands art and how art penetrates the world."

Such commonalities are on full display at the museum. One room juxtaposes Warhol's garishly tinted Mao Zedong with Mr. Ai's own vaguely sardonic portraits of the Great Helmsman; another places the Warhol Coca-Cola paintings alongside a centuries-old Chinese vase that Mr. Ai scrawled with the Coke trademark logo.

As he glimpsed the galleries on Thursday for the first time, Mr. Ai seemed genuinely taken aback by how Warhol had influenced his work, often unconsciously. (Mr. Ai was first exposed to the artist after arriving in New York, when he bought a dog-eared copy of Warhol's ironic quotations at The Strand.)

"It's as if we were brothers," he said, noting the similarities of Warhol's early bird's-eye ink sketches of the Manhattan skyline to his own youthful renderings of Shanghai's rooftops. "Who could imagine that a poor Chinese kid would one day be showing his work alongside Andy's?"

The past few days have been especially emotional for Mr. Ai, who has not been here in eight years. He spent several years in internal exile after the Chinese authorities jailed him for 81 days

on spurious charges of tax evasion and then refused to relinquish his passport.

Last July, the police finally relented, and Mr. Ai promptly decamped to Berlin, joining his partner and their 7-year-old son, who live there. In addition to lecturing at Berlin's University of the Arts — a position he was offered just before his arrest — he has spent the past year working at a feverish pace.

His studio, which occupies an old brewery in what once was East Berlin, has become a frenetic hub, staffed by an international coterie of assistants — not unlike Warhol's Factory. Mr. Ai also opened a studio on the Greek island of Lesbos, where he plans to build a memorial to the thousands of refugees who have died crossing the Mediterranean. And every month, it seems, there is a new exhibition of his work — in Australia, England, Austria, and in New York.

Mr. Ai has spent much of the year immersed in the migrant crisis. He has handed out solar-powered lamps to children in refugee camps, delivered a white grand piano to a traumatized Syrian pianist and photographed the freshly arrived as they scrambled off boats in Lesbos.

Last month, he traveled to the West Bank and Gaza for a documentary film he is making about refugees.

Mr. Ai, 58, appeared exhausted by the travel, but said he wouldn't have it any other way. "You have to work when the light bulb is bright," he said, pointing to his head, "because over time, it will dim."

His work has not been without controversy. In February, he was widely

skewered after he posed for a photograph lying on a pebble beach — an im-  
*WARHOL, PAGE 11*

**Both men are conjoined by something significant: They are unrepentant iconoclasts and gleeful disrupters of art world conventions.**



Clockwise from right: Ai Weiwei at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh; Andy Warhol's "Elvis 11 Times" and Mr. Ai's "Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn"; "Neolithic Pottery With Coca-Cola Logo" (Ai) and Warhol's "Coca-Cola."; "Map of China" (Ai) and a Warhol self-portrait.

## NEW WORLD ORDER

Controversial Chinese artist AI WEIWEI, whose proud stand against the authorities saw him incarcerated, has turned his art to jewelry in a delicate memorial to the victims of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. Here, he reminds us of the power of culture

### ON BRAVERY

I don't see myself as brave, but as having an understanding of what life is about. Defending human rights and freedom of speech is a sign of life and does not require any extra effort.

### ON HIS UPBRINGING

I think the early experience of my father being exiled for about 20 years was a very important way for me to understand society – particularly the unjust conditions in a Communist environment. It taught me that you cannot trust your surroundings or the authorities, and to only rely on yourself. I was born into such uncertain conditions, which meant I became independent long before I became an artist.

### ON TRAVELING TO THE WEST

The first thing that I noticed is that the West is also a constrained society – by a different kind of system and power. In many ways, it is still a breach of an individual's rights.

### ON THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF THE 2008 SICHUAN EARTHQUAKE

The Sichuan earthquake [where several thousand children died as a result of corrupt building practice] was not only a natural disaster, it was wrapped up in mankind's ignorance, negligence and corruption. To dig out the truth and to state this truth to the public is very difficult in a society that never admits its mistakes. In my art, I am trying to use my knowledge of human judgment, values and

memory – and what is precious, such as gold [in his wearable art made with jeweler Elisabetta Cipriani made in response to the earthquake; he also made large-scale art works] – in order to insist on a respect for those lives.

### ON HIS WEARABLE ART

I have seen my best friends wearing them, which gives me a great satisfaction, but I did the work for myself. I think that we need objects to remind us of what happened [after the Sichuan Earthquake].

### ON SOCIAL MEDIA

I think it is a very direct and efficient tool for learning and communication. Yet, I think true knowledge comes from doing things and learning from reality, and social media is only a reflection of the reality.

### ON BECOMING A FATHER

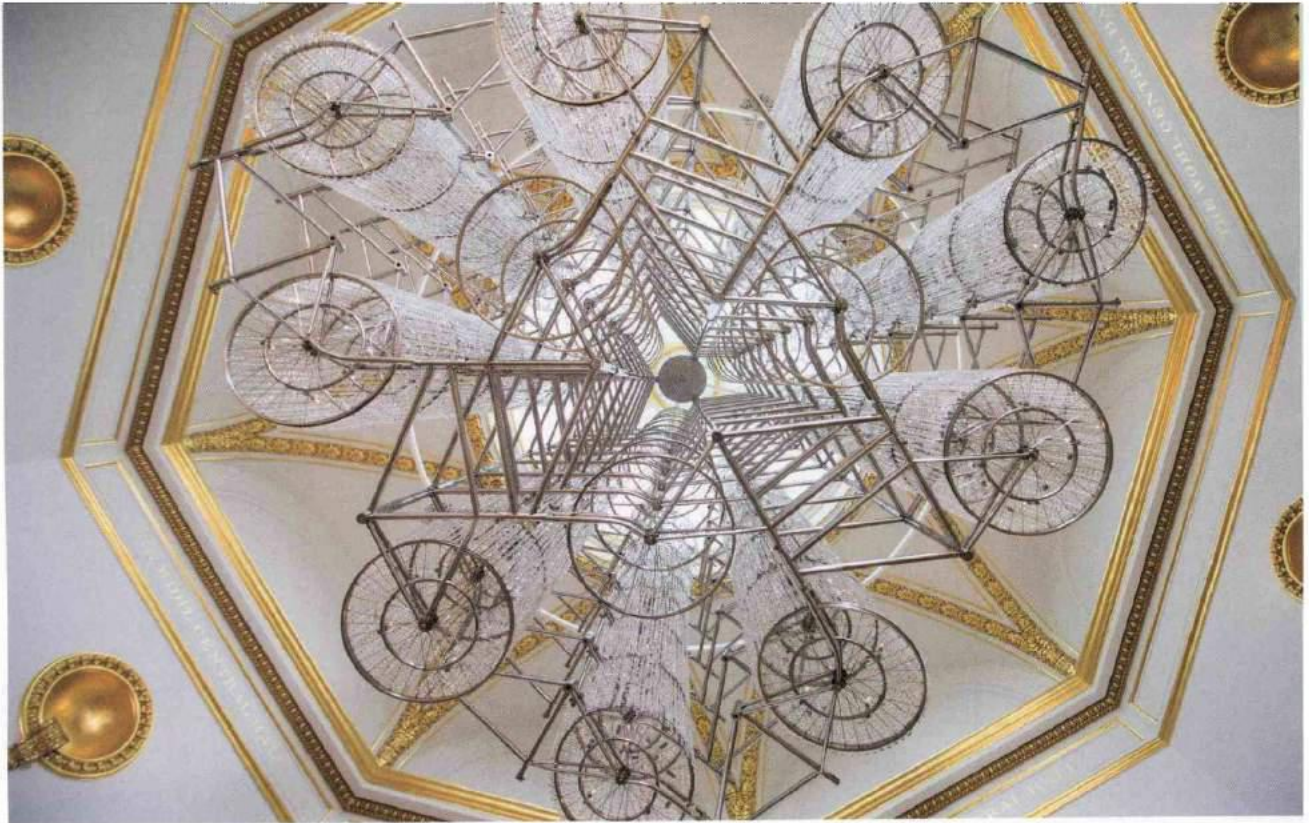
I never think of an artist as an abstract form, it could be a mother, a father or a prisoner. But, of course, becoming a father brings different meanings.

### ON ACTIVISM

My activism began once I realized that it is a necessary part of life to announce to others what you believe in and to reach out to the people who share the same beliefs. Activism is essential for society as well as for individual artists.

*Ai Weiwei and Elisabetta Cipriani's jewelry collection, Rebar in Gold, is at Elisabetta Cipriani, London, until January 16, 2016; [elisabettacipriani.com](http://elisabettacipriani.com)*





ALL THAT  
GLITTERS  
Clockwise  
from above:  
Ai Weiwei's  
*Bicycle Chandelier*  
(2015); shot  
from the artist's  
Instagram;  
Ai with his son



# LISSON GALLERY

Royal Academy Magazine  
Autumn 2015









Fearless and uncompromising, Ai Weiwei's art challenges cultural values, confronts injustices and pushes materials to their limit. Sam Phillips travelled to Ai's Beijing studio as the artist prepared to mount a show at the RA that he was not expecting to be able to attend. Photograph by Harry Pearce

# Ai of the tiger

It's spring in Ai Weiwei's Beijing studio. Assistants are bringing plants out of hibernation, working as a group to manoeuvre large bamboos and ferns into a bright internal courtyard. Stepping inside, the artist leads Tim Marlow, the RA's Artistic Director, and I through a deep studio space full of both flora and artworks.

Ceramic vases, some more than two millennia old, sit in grids on the floor, surrounded by white plastic containers filled with paint in every colour of the rainbow. Soon the pots will be covered in the bright yellows, reds, pinks and purples, and a selection sent to London, to form a work for the artist's expansive RA retrospective this autumn (*Coloured Vases*, 2015; see page 91). Opposite the vats of paint, overlooked by greenery and flanked by a bank of video screens, sits a metre-wide wooden cube, formed from honey-toned *huali*, from which luxury Chinese furniture has been made since the Ming period (*Treasure Box*, 2014).

The cube's sides are crafted from small parallelograms of wood in different shades, which create cube patterns across the surface: the cube appears to be wittily comprised of cubes. But some of the parallelograms are missing, hinting at internal spaces, and Ai asks an assistant to remove one of the sides (see page 56). Intricate modular shelves are revealed, set in an irregular pattern traditional of Chinese cabinets, and the cube deconstructs further, the top half removed to disclose a cylindrical core. The work is three in one: a metric structure that echoes post-war American Minimalism; a giant Rubik's Cube that plays with traditions of *trompe-l'oeil*; and a functional piece of furniture, its seamless joinery in highly polished hardwood emblematic of Chinese craft.

Such multiple identities characterise the artist as much as they do his artworks. Ai is a global superstar, but both as an artist and an activist. His ever-broadening output – which, as visitors to the RA will discover, ranges magnificently from small-scale ceramics to large-scale sculptures, from videos,

photographs, books, wallpaper and furniture to performances, installations and architecture – has become indivisible from his politics, in particular his campaign for human rights, transparency and justice in his homeland. The most powerful manifestation of his activism was the 'Citizens Investigation' he led in 2009 to publish the names of more than 5,000 students who perished, due to shoddy school construction, in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake.

It's my first visit to his studio, Marlow's third – as one of the show's curators, he has scheduled an in-depth interview with Ai for the exhibition catalogue. Co-curator Adrian Locke has made the journey from London twice to Caochangdi, this corner of the Chinese capital where Ai has lived and worked for 15 years (see page 86). 'This studio feels like a refuge,' says Marlow. 'I love the fact there's an allotment here, tucked away, and then this open courtyard, the faint aroma of cats, the delicious aroma of food being cooked as lunchtime approaches, and the discrete sense of activity, as people catalogue and research materials, and make technical explorations, alongside the mass of administration that takes place, necessary for every successful artist.'

When the artist designed this elegant, grey-brick studio in 1999, Caochangdi was a village on the outskirts of the city whose farmers leased land to companies and individuals. A new work for the Academy's exhibition – a lawn of grass rendered in marble – relates tangentially to the area's history (*Cao*, 2015; see detail page 57).

'Caochangdi means "grass field",' Ai explains. 'During the Qing Dynasty [1644-1912], this grass field was used to feed the emperors' horses. In Chinese poetry and literature, *cao*, or grass, is a frequently used reference to the common people, the masses. Grass is a force of nature, wild and everlasting. I thought it would be interesting, and a bit ironic, to create a monument of this common thing.' In 1755, the Qianlong emperor commissioned a boat to be made from marble, an imitation of which sits on the lake in the city's





**PREVIOUS SPREAD**  
Ai Weiwei photographed  
in one of his studios in  
Beijing in April 2015

**THIS PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM**  
Four views of *Treasure  
Box*, 2014, a cube  
sculpture made from  
rare *huali* wood  
**OPPOSITE PAGE** Detail of  
*Cao*, 2015, a sculpture  
of grass made from  
770 pieces of marble



Summer Palace. Ai sources marble today from the Fangshan imperial quarries, the material hand-carved not only into grass but objects such as sofas and surveillance cameras (see page 11).

Ai was soon joined in Caochangdi by fellow artists as well as designers and galleries, many of whom commissioned the artist to create their buildings in the same understated fashion as his own. Today the area is a tranquil, low-rise cultural hub in the city's expanding suburbs, or what a government mural nearby proclaims as 'Caochangdi Art Zone' (underneath this text run the words 'Art, Harmony, Joy, Justice, Abundance, Peace'). In 2011, the year Ai's studio in Shanghai was bulldozed by the authorities, a campaign had to be mobilised to prevent Caochangdi's demolition. The artist fabricates his largest works – huge chandeliers, accumulations of chairs, reconstructions of trees – in other sites across Beijing, including an enormous former tractor factory, the location he chose for his photoshoot for the RA (see pages 54 and 55).

Curators, collectors, journalists, academics and students from across the world have been visiting Ai in Caochangdi for over a decade. However, since 2011 the number of visits has increased, after the Chinese government withheld Ai's passport following his detention for 81 days in a secret prison. 'I cannot travel and this is an undesirable condition for any individual,' Ai tells us. 'The situation I am in is not unique to myself. In China, there is a large population that cannot travel, either for economic or political reasons. I feel privileged to share this condition with these others, whose rights have never fully been what they should be.'



'This is not a new condition for me. When I was growing up, my father, the poet Ai Qing, was in exile for almost 20 years. Our family never thought about travelling or leaving our small unit, and it made our lives unbearable. Today is very different. I still have the internet and I can still manage to organise exhibitions with established institutions. In today's condition, I do not think that anybody can stop the exchange of ideas.'

As Ai was not going to be able to fly to London, Locke sent him a short film last year that showed the spaces in the Academy in which he would be working. 'The film did communicate the grandeur of the Main Galleries, but they were full of the Anselm Kiefer paintings that were on display at the time,' says Locke. 'Nevertheless, Ai was able to use the footage and some architectural plans to figure out quickly and exactly where each work would go. Some artists are insecure about what to do and can't make up their mind. Ai has an innate understanding of space: he could imagine the volume of each gallery and project a vision for each without hesitation.'

The challenge has been less geographical distance, more the need to do justice to the variety of work in his career, in what will be his first major survey show in a UK public institution. 'Ai works on such a huge range of scales, from small pieces to spectacular works that have employed hundreds of artisans and labourers,' continues Locke. 'The exhibition aims to represent his great ambition over the last 20 years, without losing a sense of the very fine detail of his works, their subtleties, and his amazingly close control

of quality. Ai is misunderstood in Britain to some extent, because people who know his name do not always know his art. They know him as an activist, and rightly, of course – after his detention he had massive exposure here: magazine covers, newspapers, television. That coverage, though, was more about him than about what he makes, and this exhibition is a chance for us to understand him as an artist.'

But as our morning in Beijing turns to afternoon, we are given a grim reminder of Ai's particular circumstances as a dissident. As we plan to head out to a restaurant, Ai is contacted by the local police force – he has to report to the police station. He explains that happens regularly, perhaps once a week without warning, 'a kind of psychological torture' that sometimes involves going for a walk with one of the policemen, who will use the time to try to persuade Ai to stay off politics. For the years directly after his imprisonment, it was worse.

'I was then under tight surveillance by the secret police,' he says. 'They tapped my phones, they followed my car, they followed me even when I went to dinner or when I took my son to the park. One day, I caught a person who was hiding behind a bush and taking photographs of me. I grabbed the memory card from his camera. When I returned home and plugged the memory card into my computer, I was shocked by what appeared on my screen. It not only contained images of the restaurants I was in during the previous days, but also images of my son's stroller. That image has stayed in my mind and it is indicative of how authoritarian states try

to manage their control of individuals. Even the details of a child's stroller are in their records.'

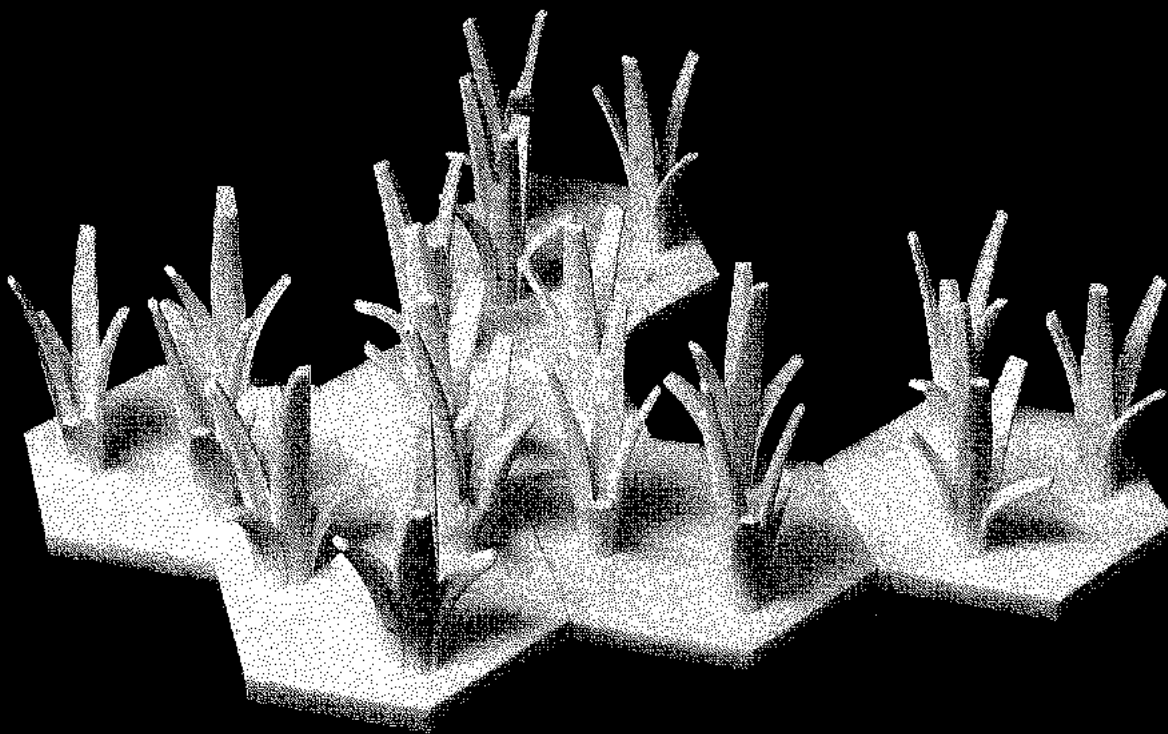
Ai Lao, the artist's six-year-old son, now lives in Berlin. In May, two months after our visit to Caochangdi, Lao accepted an Amnesty International award in the city on his father's behalf. *Marble Stroller* (2015), a replica of Lao's pushchair, hand-cut from marble, travels to the Academy.

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If *Marble Stroller* has a connection to Ai's son, it finds an echo in another new work, *Remains* (2015), which concerns Ai's father and, more broadly, the context into which Ai was born and raised.

Ai Qing was one of China's pioneers of modern poetry, renowned for his powers of description and a social conscience that led him to the Maoist revolutionary cause; by the time the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, he was a cadre in the government, and consulted on literary matters by Mao. But by 1957, when his son Weiwei was born, Ai Qing had gone from literary celebrity to enemy of the state, as Mao's early encouragement of free expression was replaced by a campaign against 'Rightists' – intellectuals whose work could be deemed critical of the government. Ai Qing and his young family were exiled from Beijing and, in 1960, sent to a remote settlement in Xinjiang, in the Gobi Desert of northwest China.

'*Remains* is a work in porcelain replicating a set of bones,' Ai explains. 'A year ago, I was brought



**THIS PAGE** *Coca-Cola Vase*, 2014, a Han Dynasty vase with paint

**OPPOSITE PAGE** *He Xie* (detail), 2011, an installation comprising 3,000 porcelain crabs

## 'Signifiers of Chinese culture are, in Ai's hands, carefully recalibrated, their meanings made molten, fluid and open for interpretation'

these remnants and told that they had belonged to a group accused of being so-called "Rightists". My father and thousands of other intellectuals were severely punished during 1957's Anti-Rightist campaign, the effects of which are still felt to this day. Thousands more lost their lives; the direct cause of death for many was hunger, as a result of famine. This was a part of the severe life conditions in the desert regions of north-west China, where they were exiled. It is a part of modern Chinese history and still has a direct impact on today's political landscape. I had my craftsmen in Jingdezhen replicate the bones to memorialise this historic event. My father once wrote, "I do not believe archaeologists... After a thousand years, if they discovered a set of bones – my bones – how could they know my bones had burned in the flames of the 21st century?"

In Xinjiang, Ai's father endured hard labour, forced to clean public toilets, and his family of five had to survive in a small subterranean shed, sharing a bed in a 12-square-metre-large space prone to rats. But in 1976, the year of Mao's death, Ai Qing and his family were allowed to resettle in Beijing, and the poet was rehabilitated almost as quickly as he had been damned two decades earlier. Soon his verses were being taught in schools. In 1978 his son Weiwei enrolled in the Beijing Film Academy, the closest thing that the city had to an art school.

'Weiwei's work has a very different aesthetic from his father's, of course,' says Greg Hilty, the

Curatorial Director of Lisson Gallery, which represents the artist in London. 'But his father's persecution and his own childhood have been a huge influence. It has helped him to act fearlessly. On one level he is cultural aristocracy – the son of a great man of letters and a friend of Mao's – and on the other hand he has seen the depths, having grown up in a very compromised situation. So he has seen all sides and, in a sense, has nothing to prove and nothing to lose. He just does what he thinks is right. It's not like a cliché of a naïve rock star or artist who meddles in politics. Because of his family history he knows how China works, and feels deeply about the issues he writes about, speaks about and makes art about.'

After Mao's death, aspiring artists such as Ai Weiwei were finding their feet in a culture in which avant-garde art had been suppressed for decades, with Socialist Realism the only acceptable form. In 1979, Ai became a principle member of a bold group of painters known as the Stars, who set about testing the boundaries of post-Mao society. Their canvases were in the vein of European Post-Impressionist art, and privileged personal expression over Party ideals. Although the subject of official criticism, the group was able to stage influential exhibitions, drawing large crowds. But Ai – like his father, who studied painting in Paris as a young man – believed that he would have to leave China in order to develop further, and in 1981 he travelled to America.



From the few art books that could be found in China, Ai had soaked up Cézanne, Van Gogh and Munch. In New York, he fed on Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, artists of ideas rather than emotions. During the early 1980s, he replaced his sketchbook with a camera, taking thousands of photographs of himself, his friends and the streets of Manhattan, and then threw away his paintbrushes, working with found objects, producing Duchampian 'readymade' sculptures by combining everyday objects. The earliest work in the RA show is Ai's fond portrait of Duchamp, a clothes hanger deftly bent to resemble the French artist's profile (*Hanging Man*, 1985).

If this work declared that Ai's hopes were hung on conceptual art, then *Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo* (1994) – one of the first significant pieces he completed on his return to China after his father fell ill in 1993 – was the signpost for his singular direction of travel. Here the readymade is not a mass-produced modern item but a ceramic dating back to China's first long-lasting imperial dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), and it has been painted by Ai with the serif script of one of the brand's most closely associated with capitalism. 'The Coca-Cola logo is a clear announcement of property, and of cultural and political identity,' Ai has commented, 'but it's also a clear sign to stop thinking. It's full of ignorance, but it's also a redefinition.'

Is this work telling us that authentic Chinese culture has been blighted by Western capitalism?







Or does it suggest that tropes of that culture, such as ancient urns, are in many ways the same as Western brands? In Han China, ceramics were as commonplace as Coca-Cola bottles. Is it about vandalism, and if so, does it relate to the Cultural Revolution, when ancient artefacts were vandalised *en masse*? And is the urn still as valuable when painted by Ai, or is it now more valuable? A recent version of the work (*Coca-Cola Vase*, 2014; page 58) is presented in the RA show alongside the paint-covered pots I saw in his studio. Why has Ai chosen continually to mark such ceramics with paint for the last 20 years? Is this series of artworks itself now mass-produced?

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While other contemporary Chinese artists also use traditional materials for modern ends, none has been able to pose such complex questions so succinctly. 'Ai has carved himself a place which is unique to him,' explains Uli Sigg, the world's foremost collector of contemporary Chinese art (see page 94) and a long-time friend of Ai's. 'His work is very focused on the dramatic clash between tradition and consumerism, as well as tradition and the industrial culture that has recently so overpowered China.' Bikes, once so ubiquitous on the nation's streets, are stacked in spectacular chandeliers (*Very Yao*, 2009-14; see cover); gymnastic parallel bars, seen in every Chinese school, are compacted with wood from dismantled Qing temples (*Kippe*, 2006); a ton

of black tea leaves, sourced from the famous tea-growing province of Yunnan, is compressed into a tight cube (*Ton of Tea*, 2008). Signifiers of Chinese culture are, in Ai's hands, carefully recalibrated, their meanings made molten, fluid and open for interpretation.

'There's a lightness of touch to these works, even humour, as well as great knowledge and great clarity,' says Hilty. The knowledge comes from Ai's experience as a collector of Chinese art and antiques, who works closely with artisans to fabricate works in relation to, and often from, his acquisitions, helping to preserve traditional forms of craft in the process. 'Collecting and creating are probably the most related acts,' Ai claims, when I ask him about his two loves. 'In some instances, there may be no separation at all. Both require reason, aesthetic judgement and choice. Those decisions reflect the attitude or character of a person who either collects or creates.'

While knowledge about antiquities can be acquired, the clarity Hilty mentions is something more ingrained, according to Sigg. 'Ai is a brilliant individual who probably would succeed in many disciplines, not just in art, because he has a very clear and sharp mind, and he can express himself in a very precise way,' he says. 'The way he is wired is very creative, allowing him to come up with things that we wouldn't. He's a kind of contrarian in my mind – he puts everything on its head in a very strange process that produces a surprising result.'

'And, of course, this contrarian side is seen in his activism, which is uncompromising and very much to do with his personality, which is authentic in its expression. He is the most daring and aggressive artist in the stand against official China. He is not the only artist who does political work, but other Chinese artists are subtle in their subversion, or avoid directly speaking out. In his directness and fearlessness he is set apart.'

Ai's activism matured in 2008 in response to two events, the Sichuan earthquake and the Beijing Olympics. Although he had collaborated with the Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron on the National Stadium, nicknamed the Bird's Nest, the distance between the government's proud rhetoric in the run-up to the Olympics and the continued lack of human rights led him to boycott the Games publicly.

Since 2005 he had been avidly blogging, sharing his life with thousands of readers through text and images and, increasingly, facilitating artworks through the internet; in 2007, for example, he used his blog to organise *Fairytale*, a performance work in which 1,001 Chinese citizens descended on the Documenta 12 art festival in Kassel, Germany. But by 2008 his blog turned its attention to condemning what he saw as the sham Olympic celebrations, and by 2009 the blog was shut down, after it mobilised volunteers to name the victims of the Sichuan earthquake. In August of that year, in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, Ai was beaten by police and then held in a hotel room to prevent him from





**BELOW** Installation view of *Straight*, 2008-12, steel reinforcing bars reclaimed from buildings collapsed in the Sichuan earthquake; and on the wall *The names of the student earthquake victims found by the Citizens' Investigation*, 2008-11

**'The thousands of rods had once held up buildings, before being twisted and mangled in the force of the quake... Ai has said the materials are history, stories, blood tears and labour'**

attending the trial of Tan Zuoren, a fellow activist also investigating the collapse of school buildings during the earthquake. Four weeks later, while in Munich, the artist had to undergo surgery for a cerebral haemorrhage that can be linked to the beating.

The largest gallery in the RA exhibition focuses on Ai's art in response to Sichuan. As well as displaying the names of the students who died, and photographs of the destruction the earthquake wrought, the artist has installed *Straight* (2008-12; below), a monumental floor-based sculpture formed from 90 tons of steel rebars found at the site. The thousands of rods had once held up buildings, before being twisted and mangled in the force of the quake. Ai employed labourers to straighten them by hand by striking each one up to 200 times. These have been aligned across the gallery in a shape like a giant seismogram. He has said that the materials for this sculpture are 'history, individual stories, blood, tears and labour'.

Ai's beating in Chengdu not only convinced him of the powerlessness of Chinese citizens. It emboldened him to make his own experiences the subject of his art. A smartphone snap of Ai and musician Zuoxiao Zuzhou in an elevator with Chengdu police quickly became one of the artist's most widely reproduced photographs, while the brain scan that showed his haemorrhage was used as powerful pictorial material, painted on editions of porcelain plates. Before his Shanghai studio was demolished in January 2011, he threw a party

where hundreds of guests fed on of river crabs (their name in Chinese being a homonym for 'harmony', a word often used by the government). Ai was put under house arrest in Beijing and prevented from attending, but a video was made and is shown in the RA show, alongside an accumulation of porcelain crustacea (*He Xie*, 2011; see page 59).

And it was later in 2011, while his installation *Sunflower Seeds* was still drawing crowds to Tate Modern, when Ai disappeared. There was no explanation for his detention that April, and no explanation for his release on bail in June. While he was detained, the RA elected Ai an Honorary Royal Academician, in solidarity. In November, after a closed hearing, the company that Ai was associated with – Fake Design – was imposed with a bill of RMB 12m for unsubstantiated tax evasion charges. His many supporters donated cash of RMB 9m, leaving notes at his door in Caochangdi, allowing him to appeal. The appeal went ahead, but Ai was not allowed to attend, and Fake Design was closed down by the authorities.

His experiences while being detained are the subject of *S.A.C.R.E.D* (2011-13). This work appears as six shoulder-height iron cuboids, as if a paean to austere Minimalism. But through apertures, one can see dioramas inside each cuboid that stage different situations that Ai had to endure. The artist and his guards are replicated in fibreglass, in miniature (see page 62). 'One reason why the outsides of these boxes are minimal is that Ai never saw the place







LEFT Detail of  
*S.A.C.R.E.D.*, 2011-13

outside the room in which he was imprisoned – he only saw the inside,’ explains Hilty. ‘He saw the room in hyper-detail and remembered it, as the room was the nature of his existence during those 81 days. Recreating that detail six times, but to have the outside empty, is a powerful psychological statement.’

‘People think maybe he’s placing himself here as Jesus, or some other martyr. He isn’t. He’s an everyman and he’s been in this situation. However well known and important an artist he may seem, at that moment he was hugely vulnerable. He has conveyed that, and he has turned it into an existential study.’

Although detention was intended to clip Ai’s wings, the publicity it brought boosted his reputation further. To mimic the surveillance cameras outside his Caochangdi studio, he set up four of his own in his Beijing home after his release, broadcasting live online – the site received 5 million hits in two days before the government shut it down (*WeiweiCam*, 2012). He became the world’s most active artist on social media, his Instagram and Twitter posts vaulting over the ‘Great Firewall of China’, the country’s sophisticated online censorship structure.

Most significantly, he continued to make art at an increasing rate, to show abroad but also this year for several summer exhibitions in Beijing, his first solo shows in China. ‘He lives to make art,’ says Hilty. ‘He has a strong moral compass, and he is very sure that he is able to represent people who don’t have a voice, but he is an artist above all – and his drive is to make art. Some people have seen his art as calculating, but it’s

not – it’s driven by a real compulsion to make new things, new forms that take culture forward, and get them out into the world.’

The Chinese public, just like the British public, needs to see his works in person if they are to go beyond their preconceptions. ‘The internet community in China has some understanding about what Ai is doing because of social media,’ says Sigg. ‘But they lack knowledge about the art he makes, as in China it hasn’t been easy for him to show work in public. The majority in China are badly informed about who he is and his role. The government and the state-controlled media have succeeded in discrediting his image – their accusations of tax fraud did have an effect, although those claims were never substantiated.’

‘Some young people in China are willing to sacrifice freedoms for prosperity,’ suggests Locke. ‘The country’s boom has given access to jobs, apartments, restaurants, holidays and so on, and they see censorship and other injustices as a quid pro quo. In that context, Ai might seem a bit of a maverick. They might think, “We’re living so much better than our parents did.” But then there are many others who see him as someone who can represent them when they can’t represent themselves, someone who has the audacity, confidence and international profile to challenge the status quo on their behalf.’

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In the run-up to the Beijing exhibitions, I email Ai from London with questions about his hopes for the future. ‘I hope my effort will be a part

of making young people’s lives better, to give them hope and to support the activities of future generations,’ replies Ai, adding that he remains ‘full of optimism’ for both himself and China. ‘The young people in China are, more than ever, experiencing a life in the new, globalized world. They have experienced much better life conditions and have more freedom than ever before. I think that will grow rapidly.’

In June, Marlow travels back to Beijing to see Ai’s exhibitions. ‘They do feel like a step forward,’ he tells me on his return. ‘When I first visited Ai, we went to see the Bird’s Nest Stadium, and his name wasn’t mentioned in connection with it – it was like he had been written out of history. Now his name is all over the 798 Art District, where he has an exhibition across Galleria Continua and Tang Contemporary Art Center, and there are articles about the shows published in China’s media. You think, “There’s a change here.”’

At the show’s centre was Ai’s largest readymade so far: a 400-year-old Ming temple that he disassembled and then rebuilt across the two adjacent galleries. Each gallery contains half the temple, with the two halves connected through the party wall – the viewer can only comprehend one section at a time. While not as explicitly political as *Straight* and *S.A.C.R.E.D.*, the temple, in Marlow’s words, ‘makes very strong points about the decimation of the cultural fabric of Chinese society... it’s a very effective, very dramatic piece of archaeology, but a work of intellectual as much as physical archaeology.’

On the 22 July, six weeks after the Beijing shows opened, my first email of the day has ‘Fwd: Great news from BJ!’ as its subject. It is an email from Hilty with no text, just an attachment. An image pops up of Ai holding a passport, the words ‘People’s Republic of China’ inscribed in gold on its burgundy cover. Logging on to Instagram, the image is there again, alongside hundreds of congratulations in Chinese and in English. Later that day we discover that Ai will come to London during the installation of his exhibition.

Only the day before, *The Guardian* reported that over 200 Chinese citizens, including lawyers and human rights campaigners, had been detained in the previous fortnight. ‘The Chinese authorities are not softening their attitude to artists and dissidents,’ says Marlow. ‘Ai Weiwei poses them a particular problem, a case that they have to deal with specifically, and the returning of his passport is only part of that rapprochement.’

Ai’s passport was returned to him as arbitrarily as it had been withheld. At the time of going to press, it is not known whether he will have problems returning to China after travelling abroad – other activists, including novelist Ma Jian (see page 85), have found themselves barred from re-entering the country. What is certain is that, unlike the steel rebars spread out on the Royal Academy floor, Ai Weiwei cannot be bent into shape.

**Ai Weiwei** Main Galleries, Royal Academy of Arts, London, [www.royalacademy.org.uk](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk), 020 7300 8000, 19 Sep–13 Dec. Supported by David Morris; The London Jeweller. Supported by Lisson Gallery. See **Events & Lectures** page 90

**+** To watch videos about the Ai Weiwei exhibition, visit <http://roy.ac/aiweiwei>



# THE ART OF RESISTANCE

BY KELLY CROW PHOTOGRAPH BY RALPH GIBSON

**This year, AI WEIWEI went from being a great Chinese artist to the voice of free expression for the entire world**

**O**N THE AFTERNOON OF APRIL 3, SWISS DEALER Urs Meile called the Beijing home and studio of Ai Weiwei, one of China's top contemporary artists who is best known for helping design the "Bird's Nest" Olympic stadium three years ago.

Right away, Meile could tell something was wrong. He and the artist have been friends for years and talk once a week, but this time Ai wouldn't say much at all and there was a strange strain in his voice. "I'm flying to Hong Kong tonight," Ai told him, before mumbling, "It's so crazy, so crazy here."

The next morning, Meile got a frantic call from collector Uli Sigg, a former Swiss ambassador to China who had planned to meet the artist upon arrival. "You'll never believe it," Sigg told the dealer. "Weiwei got arrested."

Nothing has shaken up the art world this year like the arrest and nearly three-month detention of Ai Weiwei (pronounced "Eye Way-Way"), the 54-year-old son of a poet whose irreverent photographs and conceptual sculptures—often made from porcelain, tea or temple wood—have earned him a coveted spot among China's pivotal, post-Mao generation of artists. Major museums like New York's Museum of Modern Art and London's Tate Modern collect Ai's work, and his pieces

have sold at auction for as much as \$657,000.

This year Ai pulled off something even rarer: He became more important than his art, thrust by his arrest into a global diplomatic firestorm few major artists have ever experienced. After police detained him at the Beijing airport, information about his whereabouts and alleged misconduct were kept secret for weeks, stoking fears in the human-rights community that he had been jailed for his habit of openly criticizing his Communist government. (Authorities shut down Ai's popular blog two years earlier, ostensibly for similar reasons.)

Repression has only made him more famous. Within days of his disappearance, artists and human-rights advocates were protesting outside Chinese embassies around the world. The Tate Modern painted "Release Ai Weiwei" on the exterior of its building, and Anish Kapoor canceled a planned exhibit at Beijing's National Museum of China in a gesture of solidarity. By the time Chinese authorities said they were investigating Ai for alleged tax evasion, over 140,000 people had signed Change.org's online petition seeking his release.

In a season when democratic uprisings swept from Syria to Sudan, here was an artist from another tightly controlled nation-state who seemed to stand for something greater than his asking prices, who turned everything he touched into a bid for self-expression, including the Internet. To his more than 100,000 followers on Twitter, he was Teacher Ai, Uncle Ai—the "fat guy" with the trickster grin and Santa Claus paunch who could be counted upon to post truth-to-power tirades all day long. On January 10, he wrote: "In an environment without public platform or protection for associations, the individual is the most powerful and most responsible." On March 30, four days before his arrest, he wrote: "You have to act or the danger becomes stronger."

On June 22, Ai was released from his detention on the condition he pay roughly \$2 million in allegedly owed back taxes. He was also ordered not to travel, post to Twitter or talk to the media for a year. He has already

tested these waters a few times, notably publishing an angry editorial in *Newsweek* over the summer in which he described Beijing as a "constant nightmare." Local authorities later made him sign a tougher gag order.

What happens when you become the modern-day, artistic equivalent of that young man who once stood before the tanks of Tiananmen Square? For one thing, people take a closer look at your art. And what the collectors and curiosity-seekers are discovering now is how remarkably different Ai's art is compared with that of his peers in Asia, or anywhere else. Two decades ago, China's avant-garde was mainly painting neo-Pop portraits of the Chairman. Ai spent those same years scavenging Beijing's back alleys and antique shops for Silk Road materials he could transfigure into art, like Marcel Duchamp once did with a urinal or Andy Warhol did with a soup can.

In one seminal trio of photographs from 1995, "Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn," Ai stands before a camera, eyes defiant, as he lets the urn slip through his fingers to shatter at his feet. (The Hans ruled when the Romans did.) He has also slathered Stone Age vessels in soda-pop slogans and garish house paints, the visual embodiment of an ancient culture fumbling with its changing values.

"His attitude, more than any other work, makes him unique," says Roxana Marcoci, MoMA's photography curator. "He's not only one of the strongest artists to come out of China—he's one of the world's best cultural thinkers."

His stay in jail and the ongoing police monitoring are taking a toll, though, friends say. During his detention, guards stood inches away from him around the clock, even as he showered and slept. He was interrogated about his dissident activities at least 50 times, friends add. Even now, officers in black uniforms visit his home daily, often lingering for hours. When New York dealer Mary Boone visited in late summer, she said Ai had to call authorities whenever he wanted to step out. Surveillance cameras remain trained on his front door. "He still teases me, but he's quieter now," Boone says of the artist.

Moving forward, Belgian artist and longtime friend Wim Delvoye says Ai must find some way to create pieces that won't be overshadowed by Kafkaesque circumstances. "It must be paralyzing," he says. "What kind of work can you do with the entire world watching?"

On the other hand, Meile, the dealer who called him moments before his arrest, says the artist has spent over three decades embedding elements of his storied past into his artworks. "His work is about China, but it's also about him—sometimes you just have to look for his clues."



**A**I WEIWEI WAS BORN IN 1957, A CHILD OF revolution and exile. His thin, quick-witted father, Ai Qing, had studied art in Paris in the 1930s but had switched to poetry in the patriotic upsurge surrounding Mao Zedong's founding of the People's Repub-

lic of China in 1949. Ai Qing's poems earned him fame but also suspicion, and in 1958 he was tacitly accused of championing free speech, an anti-revolutionary offense.

His sentence: Sixteen years of cleaning public toilets for a village of 200 people in the arid, northwestern province of Xinjiang near the Russian border. Ai Qing was nearly 60 years old at the time. His second wife, Gao Ying, joined him with their young son, and for years **Ai Weiwei** grew up watching his father seethe over the situation.

"Weiwei heard all his father's stories, and his disdain for the Party apparatus comes out of that complex history," says Christopher Phillips, a curator at New York's International Center of Photography who has known the artist for a decade.

Yet it was through his father that Ai also learned about Auguste Rodin, Vincent van Gogh and a slew of Western artists whose works were never discussed during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76, when Mao sought to purge the country of any elitist or foreign influences.

By the time Ai graduated high school, his father had been forgiven and recalled to Beijing. Ai hung out in train stations and the local zoo, sketching and painting whatever he saw. He also befriended a small group of young artists who began hanging their Cubist-style paintings on a fence near the Forbidden City complex. They dubbed it the Democratic Wall. On September 27, 1979, he and this loose collective known as the Stars Group (as opposed to Mao, China's late "Sun") mounted what became the country's first organized show of experimental art. Authorities shut it down the following day.

Two years later, frustrated and ambitious, Ai, now 24, quit art school and moved to New York with \$30 in his pocket. He couldn't speak a word of English. In a later interview with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, he said he told his classmates, "Maybe 10 years later, when I come back, you'll see another Picasso!"

This past summer, New York's Asia Society exhibited some of the 10,000 photos he took to document the heady decade that followed his move. Ai initially took on housekeeping and carpentry jobs to afford his East Village apartment, which became a way station for young Chinese expats like "Farewell My Concubine" filmmaker Chen Kaige and artist Xu Bing, now vice president of China's Central Academy of Fine Arts. His snapshots of friends commingle with images of tenant protests in Tompkins Square Park, Greenwich Village drag queens and surreptitious shots of museum artworks that Ai came to idolize, like Warhol's "Self-Portrait."

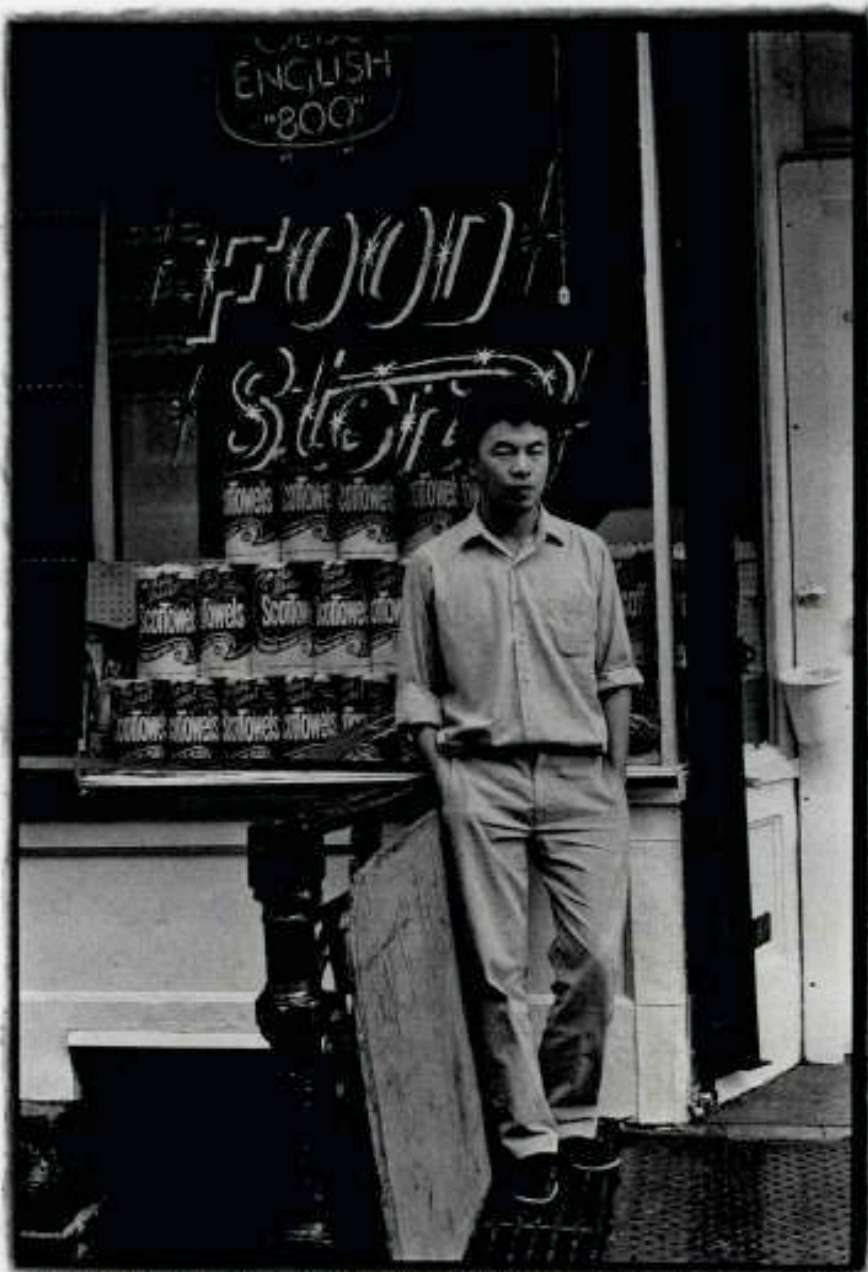
At some point during these years Ai's camera became his de facto sketchbook, says Stephanie Tung, a former junior curator at Beijing's Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, which originated the Asia Society show. "Through his photos, we see how he sees the world," she says.

In 1988, a young dealer, Ethan Cohen, gave Ai his first solo show in New York. What Ai produced amounted to



# FUN WITH URNS

The artist has been subverting everyday objects since early in his career. In 1995, he photographed himself dropping a Han Dynasty urn (below); in 2010 he splashed ancient vases with industrial paint (far left); for "Kui Hua 2" (2009, left), he hand-painted porcelain "seeds"; a self-portrait of the then-26-year-old artist in New York City.



布魯克林區新街 史丹 1995 *Brooklyn, New York, 1995*



an elegant mix of everyday objects whose functions had been reworked into the absurd: a shovel handle attached to the neck of a violin, a pair of men's shoes cut in half, with their front halves reattached back to back. Jerome Cohen, the dealer's father and a law professor at New York University, said he paid \$500 for a coat hanger that Ai had bent into the profile of Duchamp. "It's still hanging in my living room."

Looking back, Ai's political consciousness may have been honed in New York, but he didn't really find his artistic vein until after he moved back to Beijing in 1993 upon learning that his father was ill. By then a group of younger artists like Ma Liuming and Zhang Huan were hanging out on the city's fringes and doing edgy art performances—running naked atop the Great Wall, say, or sitting naked in a public restroom, coated in fish guts and flies. Ai and his photographer pal RongRong chronicled it all in a trio of 'zine-like books they published over several years. Only a handful of collectors, like the Swiss ambassador, Uli Sigg, paid any attention.

In 1997, Sigg took Meile, the Swiss dealer, to meet several of these artists, including Ai. Meile says he remembers walking down a narrow alley, or *hutong*, into a house Ai shared with his mother. His first thought upon looking around was, "Where's the art?" In many of the other artists' homes and studios, he'd seen leaning piles of paintings whose technique blended Soviet Realism with Pop, but Ai had nothing to show for himself except a small, dim bedroom and a bookshelf containing rows of muddy-colored pottery.

"Then he started talking," Meile says of the artist, "and I realized he was the only Chinese artist I'd met who could put the country's own traditions up against everything that had happened in the modern art world."

Ai told him he was fascinated by objects China seemed eager to shunt aside in the name of modernization, including the Ming-era chairs, tables and latticed shutters that went into the trash heap whenever a new luxury high-rise went up. With these he began playing the misfit carpenter, reconfiguring 400-year-old tables into perpendicular shapes so they could appear to creep up walls or splaying their legs so they seemed to crouch like crabs. The pots and porcelain cups he amassed often ended up in shards; the glistening pearls he gathered into a pair of coffee-table-size bowls were brownish-yellow. Rejects, all. (In another ironic riff, he named his architectural atelier FAKE Design.)

Philip Tinari, an art historian and incoming director of Beijing's Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, once joined Ai to troll for materials in Jingdezhen, a city south-

west of Shanghai renowned for its porcelain industry. Along the roads, they spotted several dealers hawking refrigerator-size pieces of local trees, specifically their stumps and root systems. Craftsmen often turn these gnarled masses into kitschy restaurant decor by carving their stumps into the shape of a peacock's head with the roots trailing out like feathers. But Ai pounced on the goods like he was "saving" historic artifacts, Tinari says. Months later, Ai arranged them like some "weird forest" in a German museum survey of his work.

"China is his ready-made," Tinari says. "The country has all these superskilled workers who spend their lives making reproductions of the same old art. What they need is an artist like Weiwei to come in and tweak."

His "Sunflower Seeds" project last fall involved hiring 1,600 workers in Jingdezhen to create and hand-paint 100 million life-size porcelain "seeds," which he scattered like a rocky shore across the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. (Visitors were allowed to walk on the piece until concerns were raised about the potential dangers of breathing in the dust churned up by the activity.)

Three years before that, he turned his own countrymen into a piece of performance art when he paid to send 1,001 Chinese participants, many hailing from rural provinces, to an art exhibition called "Documenta" in Kassel, Germany, the historic home of the Brothers Grimm. He titled the project "Fairytale."

Delvoye, the Belgian artist, went to Kassel as well and marveled at how many Germans treated Ai like a celebrity, spotting him on the street and calling out "Weiwei!" Delvoye expected Ai to revel in the attention, but whenever the pair hung out, he said their conversations more often steered toward societal and political problems Ai still perceived back home: "His anger is always bigger than his pleasure at being famous."

**I**N THE SPRING OF 2008, A DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE in Sichuan in central China further ratcheted up Ai's political activism. The disaster killed an estimated 70,000 people and left over 4 million without homes, according to official figures. Yet the one thing Ai wanted to know—a reckoning of the children who died inside earthquake-stricken public schools—wasn't immediately forthcoming. So, he marshaled the readers of his blog to pitch in and canvass the affected areas. Eventually, he posted the names of more than 5,400 children; the government later divulged its own, slightly bigger tally.

Ai also leveraged these activities to make artworks—he papered the front wall of Munich's Haus der Kunst





museum in tiny backpacks two years ago—but his stature within China's artistic elite seems to have suffered as a result. Melissa Chiu, the Asia Society's director, says some began to question whether his political activism mattered more to him than his artistic practice. "Those who knew him for a long time still appreciated the work, but some felt like he was sucking all the oxygen from the room," she adds.

In 2009, Tinari turned up at a picnic Ai threw to protest Internet censorship and was surprised to find that he was one of the only art-world characters there; the rest of the crowd was human-rights lawyers and dissidents. From there on out, events seemed to snowball: Ai's blog was shut down in May of that year; surveillance cameras turned up outside his studio door that June; he was struck on the head by police during an August trip to support a dissident on trial in Chengdu and had to have emergency surgery a few weeks later because the injury led to internal bleeding in his brain. By the following November, Ai learned that his newly built studio and artist's residence in Shanghai would, for complicated development reasons, be torn down.

Ai's response? He threw another party, this time serving up river crabs for roughly 100 people at the ill-fated studio. (River crabs are a Chinese euphemism for censorship.) Franklin Sirmans, who heads the contemporary-art department at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, was among the partygoers who tried to make the best of the situation, but Ai's absence—he was forbidden to travel to Shanghai to play host—put a damper on the event. "It felt really odd that he wasn't there," Sirmans says. The studio was razed two months later.

she wasn't exactly surprised. She even says she had "mixed feelings" about his arrest in large part because she worried his activism would "overwhelm his art."

In fact, it all served to pique collectors' curiosity, especially during the weeks of his disappearance. Ai's gallery in London, Lisson, went ahead with a long-planned show of his work in May and 6,000 people stopped in, triple the usual traffic, says curatorial director Greg Hilty. The gallery said it even set a moratorium on sales of his work until after his release, in part because people were offering up such wildly varied amounts for pieces. Over in Lucerne, Meile said strangers were emailing him as well, some with messages that read, "Please forward us a work by Ai Weiwei." He didn't.

When the artist emerged from his detainment after 81 days, he was thinner but "not broken," Meile says. These days, Ai is trying to refocus his attention on pieces he already had in the works, like a set of ceramic river crabs. He's also tracking his suite of bronze zodiac heads, his first major public sculptures. The animal heads toured New York during his detainment; they're currently at the Taipei Museum of Art. And on August 5, he resurfaced suddenly on Twitter, posting, "What's up?" Days later, a follower asked him arguably the biggest burning question in Chinese art today, specifically whether people there should "deal with everything by describing the actual facts or just live our lives satirically?" His reply: "Either confront things clearly or leave quietly."

Larry Warsh, a major New York collector of Ai's work, who helped sponsor the zodiac sculptures, says he can't imagine Ai ever resettling anywhere else. "In spite of