# LISSON GALLERY

*London on the Inside*
30 January 2025

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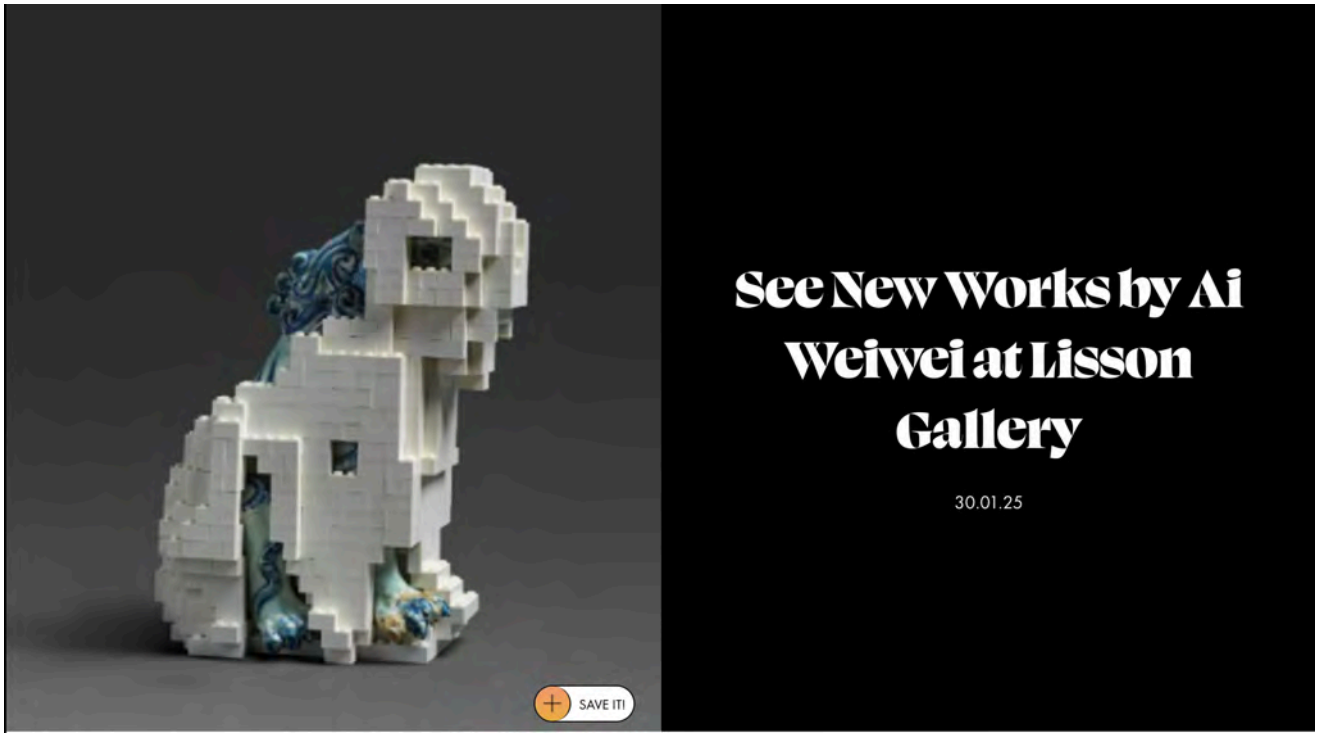
FEEDING THE CURIOUS




With the *Ai Weiwei: A New Chapter* exhibition, Lisson Gallery is showcasing new works by the celebrated artist, which present a dialogue between past and present. Alongside installations made out of buttons, WWII military stretchers and tents that reflect on themes of existence, disappearance and the weaving of historical narratives, there are numerous pieces made of out Lego. These reinterpretations of famous works, like Van Gogh's 'Wheatfield With Crows' and Paul Gauguin's 'Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?', with contemporary features like drones, show historical artworks can reflect current society.

*The Art Newspaper*
22 September 2025

THE ART NEWSPAPER

# Ai Weiwei: 'Nothing scares me anymore—being terrified does not help'

The Beijing-born artist and activist has recently spent time near the front line in Ukraine and is unveiling a major new commission in Kyiv—a large-scale installation responding to armed conflict—as well as a site-specific intervention made from Lego on a Ukrainian train

**Gareth Harris**

22 September 2025

Ai Weiwei's *Three Perfectly Proportioned Spheres and Camouflage Uniforms Painted White* (2025), commissioned by Ribbon International and on show at Pavilion 13 in Kyiv
Photo: Dmytro Prutkin and Ribbon International

The Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei continues to be at the heart of major political and world events. Born in Beijing in 1957, he is among the most famous artists in the world, principally due to the activism that led him to be incarcerated in his native China for months without charge in 2011. His most famous works include the photographic series *Study of Perspective* (1995-2017), showing middle-finger salutes to famous landmarks, and a vast sunflower seed installation at London's Tate Modern in 2010. Ai has recently unveiled a major new commission in Kyiv in Ukraine (until 30 November). The single work exhibition—*Three Perfectly Proportioned Spheres and Camouflage Uniforms Painted White*—comprises three spheres enveloped in camouflaged fabric dotted with images of animals. The fabric forms a connective structure across the spheres.

The work is "a site-specific response to the escalating armed conflicts threatening the world of today", according to a statement from Ribbon International, the non-profit cultural platform that commissioned the installation. In August, Ai travelled to the front line of the war in eastern Ukraine near Kharkiv, where he met Ukrainian fighters and cultural figures. We spoke to Ai ahead of his Ukrainian intervention at his studio in rural Portugal.

**The Art Newspaper: How long have you been in Portugal?**

**Ai Weiwei:** In a five-year period I've spent a year and a half here, maybe a year in Berlin, maybe a year in Cambridge [UK]. The rest of the time I'm in between. Obviously I've been forced out of my rooted land [China], but I don't feel sad about it because if you are on this road, you are not on that [other] road. I always accept my situation because my father [the poet Ai Qing] was exiled for 20 years and he's a perfect example of how a man can accept a situation. Together we lived in this black hole [an underground dugout in Xinjiang province where Ai and his father lived in forced exile in the 1960s].

**Is your mother still alive?**

My mother's still alive, she's 92. I haven't seen her for ten years, but I'm planning to go back to China. I still have a Chinese passport. I never changed it. I travelled over 300 times across different nations with a Chinese passport, which is very difficult.

**But won't you be arrested?**

I don't see the next step very often. I make some big decisions but cannot say what will come after. I enjoy just making one move—a solid move.

"I went to Ukraine to see the [battle] fields and the drones. It's just shocking": Ai with Ukrainian troops
Photo: courtesy Ai Weiwei, via Instagram

**Tell us about your experiences in Ukraine.**

I went to Ukraine to see the [battle] fields and the drones. It's just shocking. Standing in the middle of the wheat fields I saw all those strange, strange objects. You see the bomb just landed in the fields in a suburb of Kyiv. You see [the field] is burnt. That's a Russian bomb. I tried to do everything to understand this nation—what are they fighting for, who they're fighting with, and how they maintain this idea of dignity and protect their national pride. It is so harsh. I went to the front—the most dangerous front line. Now over 90% of casualties in war are carried out by drones; this is modern warfare.

[Ai shows an image of an ancient artefact with a piece of shrapnel]. So this is part of a bomb or a missile. I put it together with a piece of jade, which is from the Han Dynasty. I want to carry this artefact from 2,000 years ago to witness what happens to human society today.

**Did you also plant sunflower seeds in a field in Kharkiv?**

Yes, I did. It seems ridiculous. I buried some sunflower seeds and some buttons there. When you witness a serious act, you don't always realise the meaning behind it. I just think I have to act out a ceremony; you have to find a way to manage your emotions because you're getting too serious.

**Did you enjoy meeting the Ukrainian people?**

I love them. They're very sincere. They desperately need people to understand their situation, but at the same time they really see you as a friend. We all need someone.

I can show you how [the Ukrainian soldiers] work in a secret basement. They're trying to find the target. And they communicate with the control centre. You can see the images of drones. It is extremely dangerous as the Russians are using the same tactics. It's just a 10 sq. m space.

**Were you frightened in that room?**

Never. Nothing scares me any more. I think you should be scared because it seems if you're not so scared, very often people think you're not sincere. I understand. But being scared and being sincere are not on the same level. I wanted to know what's really going on. How do they kill each other? And I had to stay in the room; you cannot go out because the Russian drones can hit you any moment. Being terrified does not help.

**Which works will you show in Ukraine?**

I'm doing a work called the *Sunflower Train*. The trains [in Ukraine] are very impressive, this Russian-type train, it's the main way of travelling.
So I made a sunflower painting from Lego using Van Gogh's vocabulary. It's wrapped [around the train] and on top there is [an illustration of] a Russian drone. I'm so happy Ukrainian people want to make the train. Piece by piece, the work will be built in the railway stations. People can add things, making the meaning very different.

Inside there's a [reproduction of a] famous social realism painting by a [Ukrainian-born] Russian painter [*Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks* by Ilya Repin]. I saw this painting when I was ten years old, my father showed it to me. That's why I deeply love the painting. It relates to the war, art history and my personal experience. [The train will travel to all main stations in Ukraine, except for those in occupied areas].

Detail of Ai's installation in Kyiv, which consists of three interconnected spheres covered in uniforms
Photo: Dmytro Prutkin and Ribbon International

*Three Perfectly Proportioned Spheres and Camouflage Uniforms Painted White*—**the centrepiece in Ukraine—is based on a prototype you created several years ago entitled** *Divina Proportione*.

Those clothes [encasing the spheres] look like military clothing. But they shows cats. They are buttoned together to make a shape and painted white. The exhibition is in Pavilion 13, built in Soviet times in Kyiv. You can see the building is almost like a Mies van der Rohe building.

**Is your show in Ukraine a political statement?**

It is a highly political statement about war and peace, rationality and irrationality. We need to have peace to guarantee the integrity of the people. Because otherwise it's not peace. Peace is not slavery. I don't know when [the war] is going to finish. It is a long tunnel. I want the war to end because so many lives have been wasted. Eventually they [Russia and Ukraine] have to sit down to talk. Nobody wants to give up.

**Two years ago you posted a tweet about the Israel-Hamas war that was controversial [he was accused of antisemitism and deleted the tweet]. What do you feel about that situation now?**

I did what I should. And that sacrifice is very little compared to all of the lives lost and compared to those children who cannot talk about the future. They don't even exist. What I did is nothing. I feel I'm a little bit ahead of time. Everybody would say whatever I said was very conservative. It's not controversial at all.

"Freedom of speech is an essential element for human beings; we have something in our mind and we express it"
Photo: Adam Simons and Ribbon International

**Afterwards you told *The Art Newspaper*: "My father suffered unfair treatment and almost lost his life simply because of his attitude. If he'd lost his life, I would not exist. I've always regarded free expression as the value most worth fighting for."**

Freedom of speech is an essential element for human beings; we have something in our mind and we express it. It's not about right or wrong but really about how sincere an individual can be and also how much we can trust our environment. So of course, in many places people have learned that freedom of speech brings disaster. My father proved that.

**Are you sad about the increasingly authoritarian regime in Hong Kong?**

At the moment I feel a sense of loss. The people we interviewed in Hong Kong, when we made the film [*Cockroach*, 2020], they have all ended up in jail. I think it's the best film about Hong Kong but no film festival wants to show it. We made films about the pandemic. No film festival wants to show it because China is the biggest film market. China has a long-term strategy, it's playing the long game.

**When *The Art Newspaper* interviewed you in 2020, you were asked about the presence of European museums in China. You said that Western museums are in China purely for self-development reasons. There are still reportedly a million Uyghurs held in camps there—do you find that imbalance distressing?**

I never have high expectations about [such] museums. The culture sector in the West is pretty corrupt. If you don't fight for truth, how can you show moral justice—this is crazy.

• Ai Weiwei: Three Perfectly Proportioned Spheres and Camouflage Uniforms Painted White, *Pavilion 13, Expo Center of Ukraine, Kyiv, until 30 November*

*The Art Newspaper*
3 September 2025

THE ART NEWSPAPER

# Ai Weiwei's cat-mouflage takeover of New York City park

## Artist's cat silhouettes in Four Freedoms Park work reinterprets camouflage pattern used by the military

**Hilarie M. Sheets**

3 September 2025

Cat's out of the bag: Ai Weiwei's *Camouflage* is part of a new public art commission programme at Four Freedoms Park on Roosevelt Island
© Ai Weiwei. Rendering by Brooklyn Digital Foundry, courtesy of Camber Studio

Ai Weiwei's public art installation *Camouflage* goes on view 10 September at the southern tip of Roosevelt Island, directly across the East River from the United Nations and in tandem with its 2025 General Assembly—the 80th session since its founding at the end of the Second World War. At the Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms State Park, designed by the architect Louis Kahn in 1973 and realised posthumously in 2012, Ai is draping the memorial to President Roosevelt in fabric the artist designed with silhouettes of cats to reinterpret ubiquitous camouflage patterns used as a means of concealment in wartime.

"It is a deeply militarized symbol," Ai says of the tent-like structure, supported by scaffolding, that protects, or shrouds, the memorial celebrating Roosevelt's Four Freedoms—of speech, of religion, from want and from fear—espoused in his 1941 presidential address to the US Congress. "Presenting such an installation is necessary in a world marked by ongoing wars and the threat of even greater conflict."

**Art X Freedom**

*Camouflage* marks the launch of Art X Freedom, the Four Freedoms Park Conservancy's new annual commissioning programme of public art intended to inspire conversation around issues of social justice. "Let's try to add the power of public art at a park, close to the UN, that's dedicated to government for the good," says Howard Axel, the conservancy's chief executive, who is interested in compelling more people to make the short pilgrimage to the 3.5-acre park.

Ai Weiwei's *Camouflage* is part of a new public art commission programme at Four Freedoms Park on Roosevelt Island

© Ai Weiwei. Rendering by Brooklyn Digital Foundry, courtesy of Camber Studio

Like many New Yorkers, the acclaimed 68-year-old Chinese artist and activist, who now lives in Portugal, had never been to the park before touring it last November with Axel. On the triangular tip of the island, dramatically sited between Manhattan and Queens, Kahn designed two long alleys of Linden trees converging at a colossal bronze head of Roosevelt, poised within a granite niche. Carved on its backside is an excerpt from his Four Freedoms speech. This presides before a square open-air plaza, what Kahn called "the room", defined on facing sides by a series of 6ft by 6ft by 12ft-high granite blocks spaced one inch apart.

"Kahn was very aware of the fact that Roosevelt is considered the architect of the UN," says Gina Pollara, the executive director of the park who oversaw its building from the schematic plans Khan produced a year before his death. She describes this "room" as Kahn's interpretation of a Greek temple as well as of the UN as an organisation of individual member states that compose something larger. "Roosevelt used to say that all the problems of the world could be solved sitting around a dining room table talking."

**The disguise of truth**

Ai Weiwei's *Camouflage* is part of a new public art commission programme at Four Freedoms Park on Roosevelt Island

© Ai Weiwei. Rendering by Brooklyn Digital Foundry, courtesy of Camber Studio

Now Ai's camouflage fabric will cover the room and cast dappled light on visitors, prompting considerations of "what needs protection and what requires the removal of disguise to reveal truth", the artist says. Inside the tenting, LED lights spell out a proverb in Ukrainian that means: "Wars that bring misery to some may be 'dear mothers' to others." Ai has also collaborated with the artist-run organisation For Freedoms that is providing ribbons printed with each of the Four Freedoms, on which people can write their own messages. These will be affixed to the camouflage netting during the exhibition.

Ai's cat motif was inspired in part by seeing the outdoor Cat Sanctuary & Wildlife Rehabilitation Center just outside the entrance to the Four Freedoms park. In human disasters such as wars, pandemics and environmental crises, "cats are among the first to suffer", Ai says, seeing them as emblematic of life's most innocent and easily manipulated.

Embedded somewhere within his camouflage pattern is a single dog, which eagle-eyed viewers can have fun trying to find. "It is not only playful but also symbolic," Ai says. "Among all the animals we love, there are different kinds. If we cannot allow those who are different to exist, civilisation itself would cease to exist."

- Ai Weiwei: Camouflage, *10 September-10 November, Four Freedoms Park, Roosevelt Island, New York*

LISSON GALLERY

*Prospect Magazine*
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# Our critics

Art

## Ai versus AI

*There is much humanity on display in Ai Weiwei's latest exhibition—of a sort that artificial intelligence could never match, he tells us*

*by* DAVID MCALLISTER

On one wall hangs an old American military tent from the Second World War. Flattened, the tent looks like a paper party hat that is yet to be opened out. Positioned diagonally across this unlikely canvas, from bottom left to top right, are a series of brightly coloured letters; it is only when you are standing close up that you realise they are made from hundreds of stitched-in buttons. Together, the letters make a phrase: *Go fuck yourself*.

It might not seem like it, but with this work—as with the many others on display at London's Lisson Gallery this February—we find ourselves in classic Ai Weiwei territory. The irreverent defacing of a historical object; the elevation of mundane and mass-produced objects; profanity as political statement. These are the themes upon which Ai

has built his reputation, the constants in a body of work now spanning more than four decades and encompassing installations, architecture, opera, films, books and more.

"I like to use historical objects for other purposes," Ai tells me one sunny winter's day at the Heong Gallery, part of Downing College in Cambridge. These objects, he says, are like his version of the readymade. Designed for a specific purpose and at a specific moment in time, they couldn't be further from a blank slate; already latent with so many assumptions about how they are meant to be used and what they are supposed to mean, they are instead a known quantity on to which other ideas—"a construct or a strong, sometimes even contradictory argument"—can be imposed.

At Lisson, the objects Ai has appropriated or reinterpreted range from Second World War paraphernalia and Chinese porcelain artefacts to works by Gauguin and van Gogh. But perhaps the most pervasive readymade in his recent work is something much more discreet. "I often buy materials which I associate with our human history," he tells me of his collection of buttons, which he acquired from the A Brown & Co factory in Croydon when it closed down in 2019. Buttons, he says, hark back to the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution, evidence of the repetitive perfection that could now be achieved at scale; as parts of our clothing, they are also more intimately related to our bodies than other mass-produced objects. By sewing them to fabrics other than clothes, Ai hopes to create narratives that might not otherwise have been possible or obvious—between words of this period with the connotations of another, for example. (The phrase on the tent, it turns out, is a reference to Elon Musk.)

*Unbuttoned: left, "China Flag" (2024) by Ai Weiwei; above, the artist at the Heong Gallery in Cambridge*

It took Ai many years to grasp the true scale and meaning of what he had acquired from A Brown & Co. "The buttons stayed there as a problem for a long time," he says, "but I often create a problem before I know how to solve it." After employing two people to individually categorise them—30 tonnes of them in all, taking up 60 cubic metres of studio space—Ai discovered he had around 9,000 unique varieties, made from bone, mother of pearl, plastic, metal and wood. Slowly, we begin to get a sense of the paradoxical nature of this unassuming object: something that is both diminutive in form yet collectively monumental, made by machine yet stitched by hand.

Unlike many contemporary artists, who seldom offer even an acknowledgement of the vast workshops of technicians and craftspeople that make their art possible, Ai frequently draws our attention to the human labour involved in his artistic process. Most of his artworks are painstakingly made by many hands over long periods of time. Just like his famous sunflower seeds—in which 1,600 artisans crafted each porcelain seed individually over two and a half years—one of his earliest efforts with the button collection involved former factory workers from Shandong province, in northeast China, making giant national flags by hand stitching the buttons to sheafs of fabric; one US flag, he tells me, consisted of 600,000 buttons. (In this Lisson show is the dragon flag of the Qing Dynasty, no doubt made up of a similar number.) In other instances, such human grind might remain invisible, at best reduced to a cold statistic on a gallery plaque. Here, however, you can't help but marvel. Oh my God, how long did *that* take? Just look at all that *work*!

**Unlike many artists, Ai draws our attention to the human labour involved in his artistic process**

The point of all this is to show how much we've done to dehumanise the manufacturing process—when, in fact, real human labour lies behind every product; nothing just "appears" on our shelves without human involvement or human consequences, even in this age of mass production and automation. With this in mind, some of Ai's thoughts on the future of art in the face of artificial intelligence can sound surprisingly upbeat. In a lengthy op-ed for the *Guardian* early last year, he argued that art was in no danger of being supplanted by machines. "AI, despite all the information it obtains from human experience, lacks the imagination and, most importantly, the human will," he wrote.

"The machine is always trying to perfect its outcome," he tells me at the Heong Gallery. "As humans, we never really want just a perfect answer. We want to give meaning and to insert a personal interpretation *into* the answer."

The reason for Ai's optimism comes down to his view of art itself, which can be split into two parts. One, that art is an expression of our individual humanity, a product born of an inner emotional truth. The other, that it is a means of subversion, a process of "unlearning" by which received wisdom may be picked apart and challenged. Both of these things are unachievable by AI, which possesses no individuality or interiority and, by definition, can only learn in more

elaborate ways, not unlearn. In sum, AI may well be able to match the technical prowess of many human hands, but that does not mean it can make or do art in any meaningful way. (It should be noted, at this point, that the title of Ai's Lisson show—"A New Chatpter"—and its press release were both written, tongue firmly in cheek, using generative AI.)

All the same, Ai believes that the climate for making art is more inhospitable now than it was when he was starting out. "Certainly, it will be a bigger challenge for someone wanting to be an artist in today's life," he says. "The world has become so flat. Existing values and judgements are becoming so solid, because we're living in a society not marked by philosophical thinking, but rather entertainment and comfort." But this, he sees, is the consequence of something more old-school than AI: specifically, the continued encroachment on our right to privacy by the powerful. (In that sense, AI may have a greater influence as a means of making surveillance more sophisticated, rather than as a direct competitor to artists.)

"Art exists only because we live in the world with some deep privacy," he says. "We have a curiosity to reveal or to solve. If there's no privacy, there's no guessing. If you don't guess anything, everything is obvious." We cannot reach that inner emotional truth that makes art meaningful without privacy, because it's while in the depths of a private thought that we probe them. And we cannot be subversive if we are afraid of making mistakes, which Ai argues is the root of all human intelligence. It's an omnipresent fear of exposure—of being judged or discriminated against for our mistakes in the public sphere—that engenders homogeneity and middling, meaningless art: "When there is no privacy, we are all the same," he says.

*Profanity as political statement: "Go Fuck Yourself" (2023) juxtaposes a Second World War tent with words used by Elon Musk*

All of this rings intuitively true. Though, with his emphasis on making mistakes—which was also present in his *Guardian* piece—I can't help but wonder if Ai might also be alluding to something more personal here.

"This exhibition was supposed to happen two years ago," he says, before referring to the onset of the war in Gaza in October 2023. Later that same autumn, Ai posted a comment on X in response to another user: "The sense of guilt around the persecution of the Jewish people has been, at times, transferred to offset the Arab world. Financially, culturally, and in terms of media influence, the Jewish community has had a significant presence in the United States. The annual $3bn aid package to Israel has, for decades, been touted as one of the most valuable investments the United States has ever made. This partnership is often described as one of shared destiny."

In response to the post, Lisson quickly postponed the London exhibition, as well as others planned for New York, Paris and Berlin. "There is no place for debate that can be characterised as anti-Semitic or Islamophobic at a time when all efforts should be on ending the tragic suffering in Israeli and Palestinian territories, as well as in communities internationally," the gallery said in a statement.

Later, the BBC reported Ai's own comments about the incident: "When discussing correctness or wrongness, I must be wrong. I have always regarded free expression as a value most worth fighting for and caring about, even if it brings me various misfortunes... Incorrect opinions should be especially encouraged. If free expression is limited to the same kind of opinions, it becomes an imprisonment of expression."

Although I do not broach the show's postponement directly with Ai, it seems to me that its fallout is still present between the lines. In a separate question about what he hopes to achieve with the work he is producing now, as compared to his earlier days, he says: "I don't want to achieve anything. I just want to make sure I understand what kind of mistakes I have made before, what has to be done, and what has to be spoken about more clearly."

As Ai's own work shows, technology has provided us with a steady stream of new ways in which we might estrange ourselves from each other, since as far back as the Industrial Revolution. But no matter how we use technology today or in the future—or how technology, increasingly, makes use of us—the job of art remains the same. In the face of forces that would prefer it if we were just fodder for algorithms or cogs in a machine, art must be there to assert our individual, complex human nature. "We have to accept we are different," Ai says. "We're just as different as mice and the bees. We don't want to become a creature that is all the same. Because that's against the law of nature." ♦

*"Ai Weiwei: A New Chatpter" is on display at the Lisson Gallery until 15th March*

*The Art Newspaper*
25 June 2025

THE ART NEWSPAPER

# ‘A dialogue about rationality and irrationality’: Ai Weiwei to present new installation in Ukraine

The Chinese artist’s work, which is inspired by Leonardo da Vinci illustrations, will be housed in a former Soviet-era exposition hall in Kyiv

Ai Weiwei in his studio working on *Three Perfectly Proportioned Spheres and Camouflage Uniforms Painted White*, commissioned by RIBBON International, 2025
Adam Simons and RIBBON International

The Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei will unveil a major new commission in Kyiv in Ukraine this autumn. The new piece, entitled *Three Perfectly Proportioned Spheres and Camouflage Uniforms Painted White,* is “a site-specific response to the escalating armed conflicts threatening the world of today”, says a statement from RIBBON International, the non-profit cultural platform that commissioned it.

The work will be housed in Pavilion 13 (14 September-30 November), a former Soviet-era exposition hall in Kyiv that has been renovated by ФОРМА (FORMA) architecture studio and RIBBON International. Pavilion of Culture, a Kyiv-based institution founded by a community of curators and researchers, is also supporting the project. The space will be free to enter.

“At its core, this exhibition is a dialogue about war and peace, rationality and irrationality,” Ai says in a statement, adding: “I think art is the only way to save humanity from authoritarian and other [kinds] of technical bureaucracy.”

Ai tells *The Art Newspaper* that the piece consists of three spheres, originally entitled *Divina Proportione*, which are inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's illustrations for a book on mathematics of the same name.

"I have been crafting such spheres for over 15 years [initially 2004-12]," he says. "Each sphere is covered in camouflage uniforms, fastened together with buttons and assembled into five-sided or six-sided shapes. The spheres vary in size, ranging from more than six metres to three metres, and are interconnected by camouflage trousers."

"The camouflage uniforms enveloping the spheres are painted white, creating the image of three interconnected white spheres resembling a large white bone," Ai continues. "Beneath this surface lies a deeper meaning, reflecting the history of civilisation's development, our collective memories, and the tragic reality that has become widely accepted and continues to unfold in the world today."

A sphere under construction in Ai Weiwei's studio
Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio

Every piece of camouflage clothing, from its production to its cutting, was designed using patterns inspired by abandoned cats that Ai and his team have rescued and raised. "These cats have lived with us for many years, some of whom have since passed away," Ai says. "In times of war, animals often suffer the greatest harm, becoming the first victims, yet they are frequently overlooked."

RIBBON International is also currently hosting the exhibition *Pairs Skating* (until 28 September) at the Yermilov Centre in Kharkiv, featuring photographs by Wolfgang Tillmans and Boris Mikhailov.

The total number of Ukrainian casualties since Russia's full-scale invasion began on 24 February 2022 has reached approximately 400,000, according to the US-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, while more than one million Russian troops have been killed or injured, according to the British Ministry of Defence.

*Artnet News*
25 June 2025

artnet

Art & Exhibitions

# Ai Weiwei Will Unveil a Major installation in Ukraine Amid Ongoing Conflict

## The new installation harkens back to earlier work by the Chinese artist as well as drawings by Leonardo da Vinci.

Ai Weiwei in his studio working on *Three Perfectly Proportioned Spheres and Camouflage Uniforms Painted White* (2025). Courtesy Adam Simons and Ribbon International.

Wars in Iran and Gaza may have distracted some of the attention from the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine, but that conflict rages on, with Russia sending deadly drones into the country and U.S. president Donald Trump criticizing the Group of 7 nations, recently convened in Canada, for expelling Russia after the country annexed Crimea in 2014.

Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei certainly hasn't forgotten, and this fall he will debut a major new installation at a Soviet-era, glass house-style exposition hall in the Ukrainian capital, newly reopened as a cultural venue.

“In this era, being invited to hold an exhibition in Kyiv, the capital of a country at war, I hope to express certain ideas and reflections through my work,” said the artist in press materials. “My artworks are not merely an aesthetic expression but also a reflection of my position as an individual navigating immense political shifts, international hegemonies, and conflicts. This exhibition provides a platform to articulate these concerns. At its core, this exhibition is a dialogue about war and peace, rationality and irrationality.”

Courtesy Ai Weiwei studio.

A metal structure at the heart of the new piece, titled *Three Perfectly Proportioned Spheres and Camouflage Uniforms Painted White* (2025), is made up of spherical forms taken from an earlier Ai work, *Divina Proportione* (2004–12), itself inspired by Leonardo da Vinci’s illustrations for an eponymous book on mathematics. That piece consisted of five-foot-wide orbs made of wood. The spheres, emblematic of ancient ideals of order and rationality, will be encased in fabric with a camouflage pattern, a system of concealment based in animals’ ability to hide themselves, which Ai has explored in his work for years. The camouflage will, in this case, be thinly covered in white paint, which he thinks of as another layer of camouflage.

“Of course, whenever you cover something there’s still something underneath,” said Ai. “So I give extra meaning to how we’re dealing with reality and which layer of reality we’re dealing with. And is reality just what we are seeing or what we understand?”

The piece was commissioned by cultural nonprofit Ribbon International, which supports arts in Ukraine through exhibitions, commissions, public programs, and grants.

Pavilion 13, Kyiv, in June 2025 following renovation works by Forma architectural office, commissioned by Ribbon International. Photo: Vitalii Halanzha.

The new work will be unveiled at Pavilion 13, a multidisciplinary art space in Kyiv, housed in a glass exposition hall from 1967 that reopened this month following a renovation led by Forma, an architectural office in the Ukrainian capital, run by Iryna Miroshnykova and Oleksii Petrov. The renovation was also commissioned by Ribbon; Ai’s project is realized in cooperation with Forma.

“Art is something related to humans’ most primitive reactions or emotions, fear or even fantasies or dreams,” said the artist. “Those are always deeply rooted, and it’s more profound than we can ever even understand. I think art is the only way to save humanity from authoritarian and other forms of technical bureaucracy and technical authoritarian push.”

The opening program at Pavilion 13 currently features a site-responsive intervention by Berlin-based artist Sam Lewitt titled *Shubin* and featuring a film, a neon sign on the building's facade, and sculptural reconstructions of the pavilion's original display furniture.

Three Perfectly Proportioned Spheres and Camouflage Uniforms Painted White *will be on view at Pavilion 13, 1 Akademika Glushkova Avenue, Kyiv, Ukraine, September 14–November 30, 2025.*

LISSON GALLERY

*The Glossary*
2 February 2025

The GLOSSARY
THE LONDON STYLE GUIDE

# 18 brilliant free exhibitions in London not to miss this spring

If you like your culture gratis, these art exhibitions and gallery shows in the capital won't cost you a penny

*By* **HARRIET COOPER**

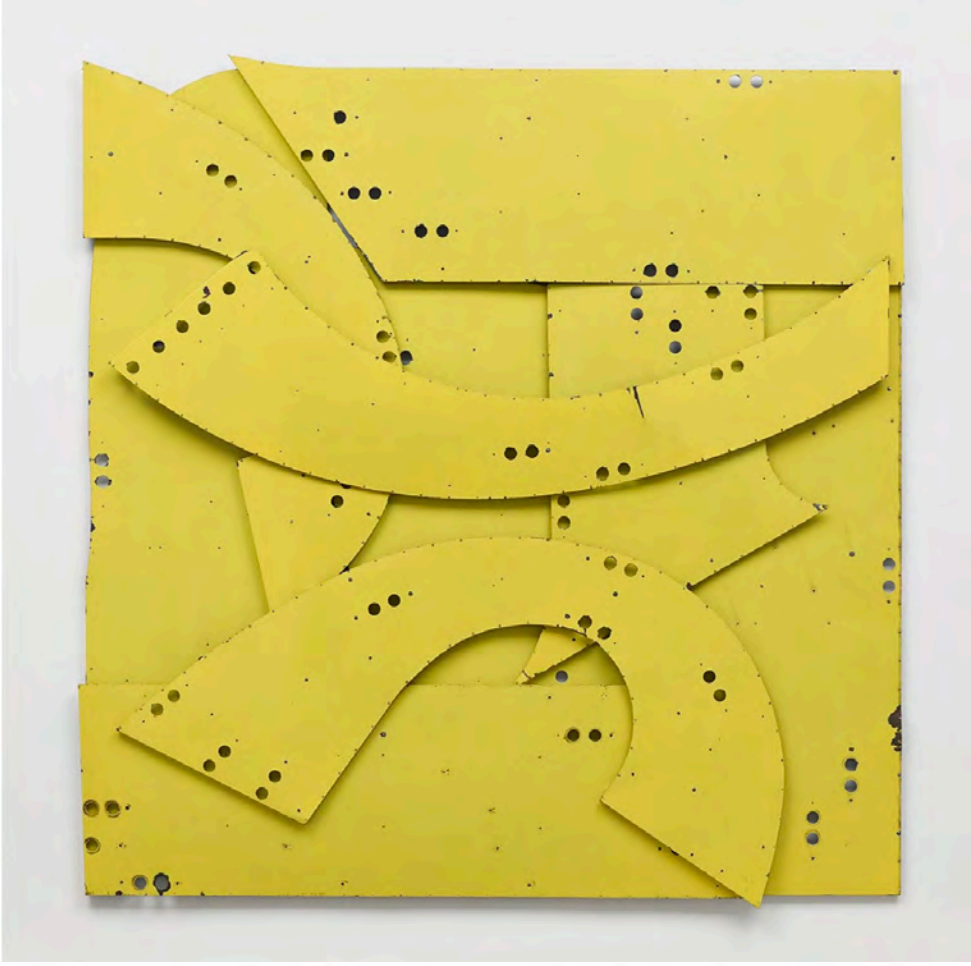
Amongst the many cultural offerings across our capital city, the free exhibitions in London are definitely worth bookmarking. Many of this season's must-see shows don't have an admission charge, meaning you can see a monumental Ai Weiwei piece, marvel at the Japanese craft of carpentry or discover never-before-seen Barbara Hepworth works – all without paying a thing. There's no shortage of free museums and art galleries in London – here's our guide to where to see free art in London and the best free exhibitions in London 2025.

*The Glossary Edit*

# Free Exhibitions In London

## Virginia Overton: Paintings
White Cube Mason's Yard
*17 January – 22 February*

There's a whole host of great free exhibitions in London taking place this winter, and this one at the White Cube Mason's Yard should be right near the top of your list. Entitled *Paintings*, the show is a solo exhibition of new works by American artist Virginia Overton.



Virginia Overton, Untitled (yellow square) 2024. © Virginia Overton. Photo © White Cube (Theo Christelis)

Overton's work, which includes installation, sculpture and photography, is often the result of her direct response to a specific space and her pieces make use of everyday materials such as wooden planks, bricks, metal and mud. In each case, the materials are always pushed to their physical limits. Keep an eye out for references to the visual iconography of America – Overton likes to incorporate pick-up trucks, decal trucker's motifs and commercial signage into her pieces.

# Louis Pohl Koseda: Christie's Award Exhibition 2025

## Christie's

*10 – 14 February*

When it comes to free art galleries in London, Christie's is always a great port of call. They host free exhibitions throughout the year, and their latest one centres around the works of Louis Pohl Koseda, an alumnus of the prestigious Royal Drawing School and the winner of the first Christie's Award, which supports one Drawing Year graduate by providing a studio space, practice development mentoring and a solo exhibition at the School's gallery in Shoreditch.

Louis Pohl Koseda, Venice Gang

Koseda's intricate works explore London's multifaceted social landscape, incorporating housing estates, homeless shelters, financial institutions and creative spaces into a series of detailed drawings. Inspired by his east London upbringing and ancient Hindu and Christian texts, the show offers up a turbulent yet interconnected portrait of modern London.

# Citra Sasmita: Into Eternal Land
## Barbican
### *Until 21 April*

Citra Sasmita has transformed The Curve at the Barbican, filling the length of the cornerless gallery with her first solo exhibition in the UK, *Into Eternal Land*. Working fluidly across painting, sculptural installation, embroidery and scent, the Indonesian artist invites visitors on a multi-sensory journey through the 90-metre-long gallery to explore ideas of ancestral memory, ritual and migration.

Citra Sasmita Exhibition. Photography by Jo Underhill

Sasmita's works defy categorisation and challenge fixed ideas in relation to gender roles, hierarchies of power and systems of oppression. For this exhibition she has brought together panoramic scroll paintings, shrine-like installations and textiles hanging from the ceiling like flags, each designed to connect with ancestral traditions and grapple with the power and precarity of the natural world.

# Last Night I Dreamt of Manderley
## Alison Jacques
### *Until 8 March*

Any Daphne du Maurier fan worth their salt will immediately recognise the title of this free exhibition in London, which is the first line of her seminal novel *Rebecca*. The show, held at the Alison Jacques gallery in Mayfair and curated by Daniel Malarkey, weaves together the works of over 30 different artists across generations, disciplines and geographies.

Maggi Hambling Sebastian Horsley I, 2010. Courtesy Alison Jacques. © Maggi Hambling

The show focuses on the themes of memory and transformation, as well as the dynamic interplay between past and present, heaven and hell – all of which lie at the heart of du Maurier's famed gothic fairy tale. Expect works by the likes of Maggi Hambling, Leonora Carrington and Dorothea Tanning alongside lesser-known names.

## **Ensemble**
## The Perimeter
### *Until 4 April*

The Perimeter is a non-profit exhibition space for contemporary art in Bloomsbury, with an emphasis on showcasing British and international contemporary artists at pivotal moments in their careers. Their latest show is *Ensemble*, a group exhibition that brings together 11 artists exploring staging as a methodology for examining history through its incompleteness.

Issy Wood, SSSSSRI, 2024. Courtesy the artist and Carlos/Ishikawa

All of the artists in the exhibition have taken part in a process of archival excavation, reimagining the ways in which we record and assign value to history – and in turn, determine which stories are told and remembered. Presenting a range of newly commissioned and recent works, the show offers up a fascinating insight into the study of historiography as a collective discipline.

## Theaster Gates: 1965: Malcolm in Winter: A Translation Exercise

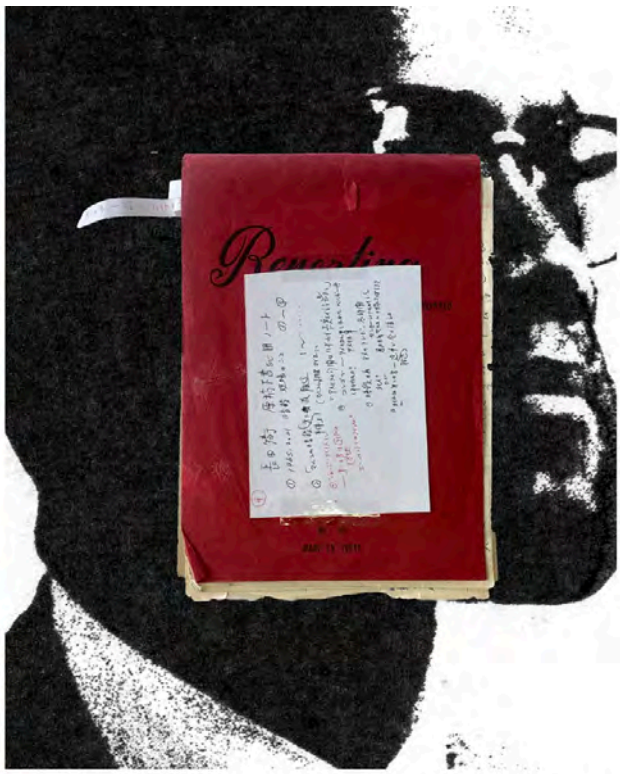
White Cube Bermondsey

*Until 6 April*

American artist Theaster Gates is known for pushing the boundaries with his art, whether that's a towering sculpture, a vast installation or the overhaul of an old building. Now the Chicago-based artist has returned to London with a major solo exhibition spanning the White Cube Bermondsey galleries.

Theaster Gates 1965 Malcolm in Winter A Translation Exercise, 2024. Courtesy of Theaster Gates Studio, Haruhi Ishitani, and Ei Nagata

Theaster Gates 1965 Malcolm in Winter A Translation Exercise, 2024. Courtesy of Theaster Gates Studio, Haruhi Ishitani, and Ei Nagata



Theaster Gates 1965 Malcolm in Winter A Translation Exercise, 2024. Courtesy of Theaster Gates Studio, Haruhi Ishitani, and Ei Nagata

A new Gates exhibition is always a hot ticket, and doubly so if it also happens to be free. Through a series of architectural interventions, large-scale installations, archival works and new film works, Gates engages with the methods of care and preservation nurtured in Japanese philosophy and craftsmanship in this show, drawing on them as a framework to consider the role of art and aesthetics in shaping political, ideological and cultural legacies.

## Jake Grewal: Under the Same Sky
### Studio Voltaire
*Until 13 April*

Despite being born in London, this show at Studio Voltaire marks Jake Grewal's first institutional exhibition in the capital. Grewal draws from the Western canons of painting in his works, referencing the language of Romanticism and suffusing them with a queer gaze. His dreamy landscapes featuring naked figures have made him a rising star of the art world, recently ending up in special posters for Luca Guadagnino's latest film, *Queer*, starring Daniel Craig.

Jake Grewal, Under The Same Sky 2025. Image courtesy of the artist and Studio Voltaire. Photo: Sarah Rainer

Entitled *Under the Same Sky*, at the heart of the exhibition sits a brand-new panoramic painting – *The Ceaseless Cycle of Erosion* – which is Grewal's most ambitiously scaled work to date. The curved canvas, which stretches almost six metres in length, beautifully expands on his painterly explorations of transformation and time.

## Ai Weiwei: A New Chatpter
### Lisson Gallery
*Until 15 March*

This new Ai Weiwei show at the Lisson Gallery is a great way to see works by one of the world's most important living artists completely gratis. As ever, the controversial artist doesn't shy away from provocative topics, with *A New Chatpter* revealing Weiwei's relentless inquiry into the complexities of identity, politics and cultural heritage. At the heart of the exhibition is *F.U.C.K.*, a striking installation that features buttons stuck to four Second World War military stretchers to spell out the provocative word.

Ai Weiwei LET ME GET MY SHOES (2024) Buttons, shoes © Ai Weiwei Studio, courtesy Lisson Gallery

The exhibition also features *Wheat Field with Crows*, where the crows of Van Gogh's original painting are replaced with drones rendered in toy bricks, drawing parallels between the artist's tumultuous mental state and the chaos of today's world. As for the typo in the show's title, that's not a mistake – it's taken from an old version of the show's press release, which was written by AI chatbot Google Gemini at Weiwei's request. The typo was added in for effect.

## Keeping Time: Clocks by Boulle
### Wallace Collection
*Until 2 March*

It's high times at the Wallace Collection this winter with the museum's new free exhibition in London, *Keeping Time*. The display in the Housekeeper's Room comprises five super-rare timepieces by André-Charles Boulle (1642–1732), who worked for the court of the Sun King, Louis XIV.

Attributed to André-Charles Boulle, movement by Jean Jolly Mantel clock About 1715 © The Trustees of the Wallace Collection

The quintet tells the story of how Boulle delved into science to create clock designs in his signature baroque style. Seeing them up close, we will also be able to appreciate the incredible artistry in every design, the work of many artists and craftspeople across 18th century Paris. Running concurrently in the Billiard Room is a display showcasing Boulle's contemporary creatives, and how they also drew on the concept of time in their oeuvre.

## Soane and Modernism: Make It New
## Sir John Soane's Museum
### *Until 18 May*

We're spoilt for choice when it comes to free London museums and art galleries, and Sir John Soane's Museum in Holborn is one of the finest in the capital. Their latest show to look out for is *Soane and Modernism: Make It New*, which is the first exhibition to investigate the claim that Sir John Soane was the first modernist architect due to his emphasis on light, open space, abstract forms and restrained use of ornament.

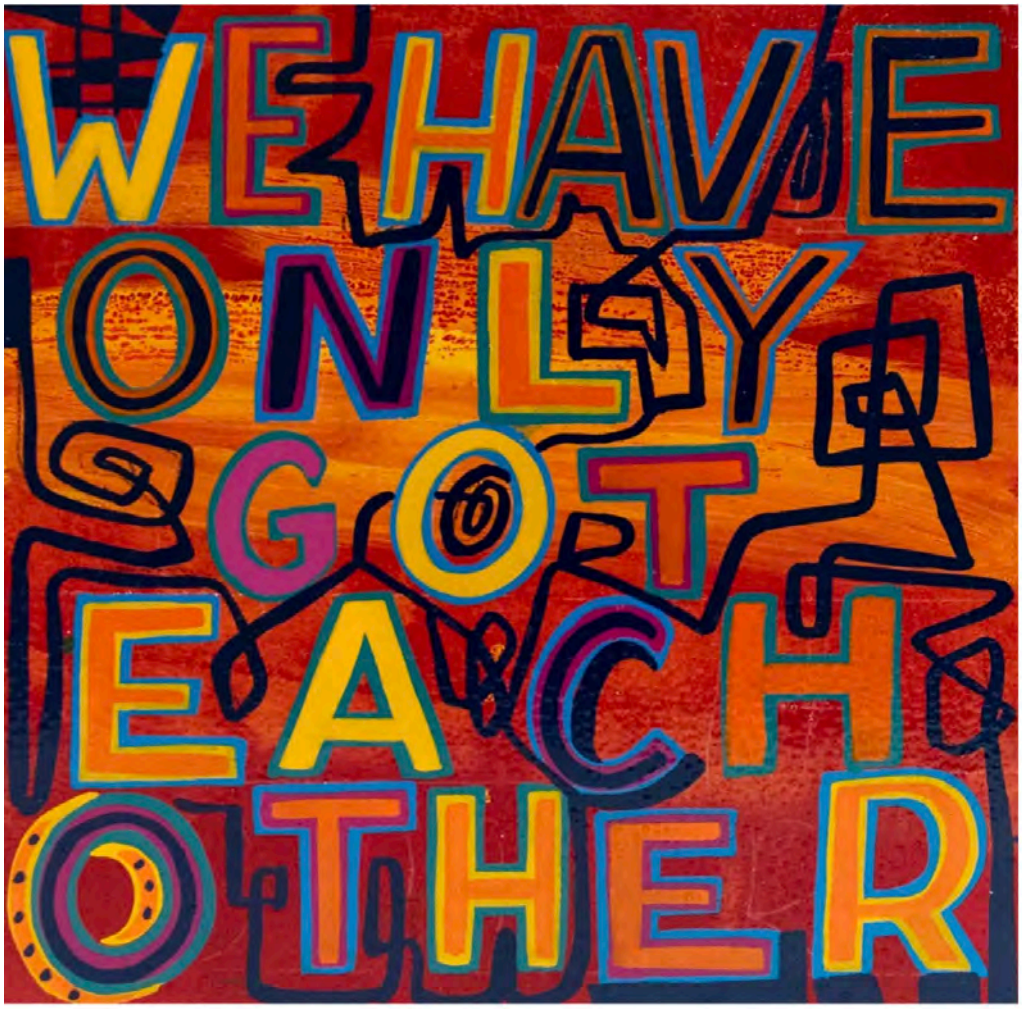
Come to see drawings from Soane's collection, some on display for the first time ever, in dialogue with work by modernist architects such as Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright and Ernő Goldfinger. With a Giles Gilbert Scott drawing of the red telephone box brought together with a Soane drawing of the Soane Family tomb, the inspiration behind the telephone box, it offers a captivating insight into the renowned architect's life and work.

## Bob and Roberta Smith RA: We Have Only Got Each Other

Royal Academy

*Until 23 March*

It's always a treat to spend some time at the Royal Academy, and though many of their exhibitions come with ticket prices, they also host plenty of great free art exhibitions. Case in point, this show from Bob and Roberta Smith RA, which invites us to experience the world through contemplative art.




Bob and Roberta Smith RA, We Have Only Got Each Other © The Artists. Photo © Royal Academy of Arts, London

*We Have Only Got Each Other* features a range of the London-born artists' striking works, featuring small panels and placards featuring their recognisable bold words displayed alongside new paintings of Ramsgate port, where they have their studio. Each painting has been created to talk to the other across the borders of their individual edges, poetically looking out across the border of the English Channel.

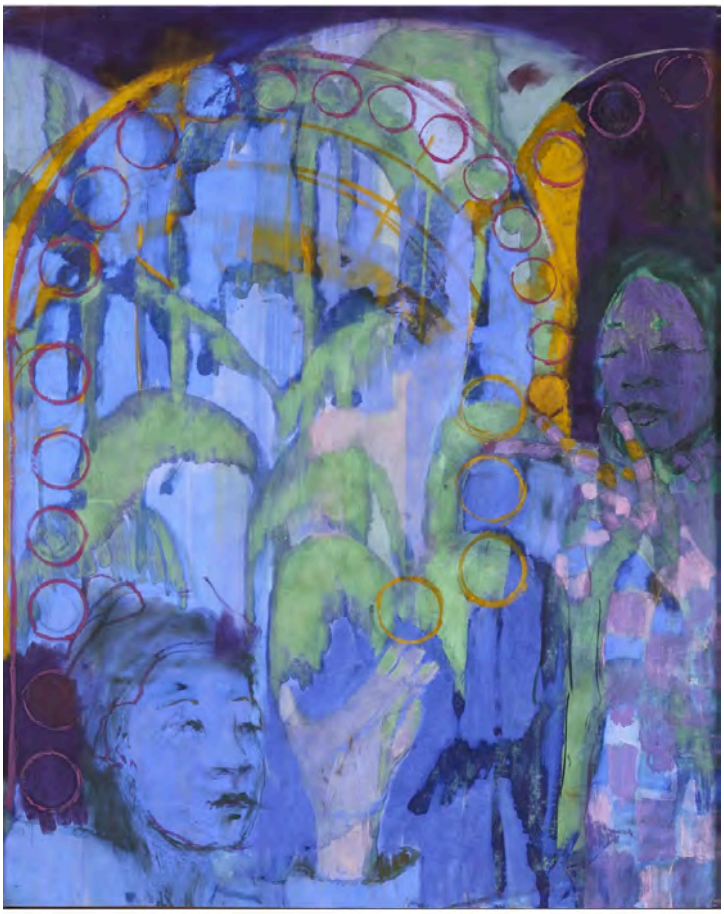
## Christina Kimeze: Between Wood and Wheel

### South London Gallery

*Until 11 May*

The South London Gallery, which is in the vibrant borough of Peckham and has been free and open to the public for more than 125 years, is one of the finest free art galleries in London. And the show to see there this year is *Between Wood and Wheel*, Christina Kimeze's debut solo exhibition in the UK.

Christina Kimeze, Soaring I, 2024 © Christina Kimeze, image courtesy of the artist. Photo Matthew Hollow



Christina Kimeze, Screen I, 2024 © Christina Kimeze, image courtesy of the artist. Photo Matthew Hollow

The London-based artist is known for her radiant, textured paintings, which are on full display here. Drawing on themes of interiority, belonging and ideas of home, her works often depict lone female figures, based on her friends, family, and sometimes herself. Her mysterious, dreamlike scenes take references from Black, feminist 20th-century writers, as well as her memories of visiting her father's home country of Uganda.

## Abi Morocco Photos: Spirit of Lagos

Autograph

*Until 22 March*

Autograph in Shoreditch is known for its bold photography exhibitions, which explore issues of race, identity, representation, human rights and social justice. Their latest is *Spirit of Lagos*, a show dedicated to the story of Abi Morocco Photos, one of the most vibrant photographic studios operating in Lagos.

Abi Morocco Photos, Ago Owu Street, Shogunle, Lagos, 1976. Courtesy Lagos Studio Archives

Abi Morocco Photos, Shogunle, Lagos, 1979. Courtesy Lagos Studio Archives

Run by husband-and-wife duo John Abe and Funmilayo Abe, the studio thrived from the 1970s to 2006 and was frequented by Lagosians of many walks of life, including those who had reached economic prosperity during Nigeria's rapid transformation following the oil boom. This show marks the first exhibition of these remarkable black-and-white portraits, which capture the rich style and joyous spirit of Lagos in the 1970s.

# Hyundai Commission: Mire Lee: Open Wound

## Tate Modern

### *Until 16 March*

While you need to book and pay for tickets to many of the Tate Modern's exhibitions, the ones on show in the vast Turbine Hall are always free. Currently Korean artist Mire Lee has taken over the gargantuan space, filling it with her visceral sculptures as part of her new show, *Open Wound*.

Hyundai Commission Mire Lee Open Wound, Installation View, Photo © Tate / Larina Fernandes

Drawing inspiration from Tate Modern's history as a power station, the awe-inspiring installation combines hanging sculptures and epic mechanical installations to reimagine the space as a living factory. Lee uses a fascinating mix of materials such as silicone and chains to bring her creations to life and challenge our ideas of what is beautiful or perverse, provocative or desirable.

## Lauren Halsey: emajendat
Serpentine South
*Until 2 March*

Lauren Halsey brings her first solo exhibition *emajendat* to the UK, transforming Serpentine South Garden into an immersive 'funk garden' that responds to the building's location in Kensington Gardens. The Los Angeles-based artist is known for her distinct visual language, which draws on and celebrates the vitality of her LA neighbourhood South Central.

For this she uses iconography connected to the African diaspora, Black and queer icons and architecture, as a creative form of resistance to the area's evolving gentrification. Central to the exhibition is a life-size version of Halsey's signature vignettes (usually seen in miniature in her works), with the walls and floor made from CDs providing the setting for scaled-up figurines, funkmounds and a live water fountain.

## Hard Graft: Work, Health and Rights
Wellcome Collection
*Until 27 April*

*Hard Graft: Work, Health and Rights* explores the experiences of physical work and its profound impacts on health and workers' rights, focusing on those who are most

marginalised in society. The show is divided into three sections – The Plantation, The Street and The Home – shining a light not just on the gruelling physical labour and the precarious working conditions in these locations, but also the workers who have little to no access to healthcare, a stable income or basic rights.

Sanitation Workers assemble in front of Clayborn Temple for a solidarity march in Memphis, Tennessee, Ernest C Withers, 1968 © Dr. Ernest C. Withers, Sr.

The show features contemporary artworks from around the globe, by Turner Prize-winner Lubaina Himid, Adelita Husni-Bey, Vivian Cacurri, Ibrahim El-Salahi, Shannon Alonzo and Daniela Ortiz, to name a few. Two new commissions by Lindsey Mendick and Moi Tran will explore the stories of sex workers and domestic workers respectively, plus there'll be artefacts from Wellcome's archives. All encourage the viewer to consider questions around undervalued labour, the people who do it and the spaces where it happens.

## Keith Piper and Rex Whistler

### Tate Britain

*Ongoing*

This is an opportunity to see two artworks made for the same room in Tate Britain, but almost a century apart. In 1926, Rex Whistler was commissioned to create a mural as a decoration for the refreshment room. The artist spent 18 months painting *The Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats*, a panoramic display that follows an imagined hunting expedition on a journey through European art and architectural styles.

Keith Piper's film installation *Viva Voce* was commissioned by the gallery in response to the mural. Based on the Latin phrase meaning 'word of mouth' the film stages an imagined conversation between Whistler and a fictional academic Professor Shepherd. During the screening, Shepherd challenges Whistler about the mural's racist narrative and imagery, inviting the viewer to not only examine historic images, but also consider the motives of those who made them and the context in which they were created.

## Looks Delicious! Exploring Japan's Food Replica Culture

Japan House

*Until 16 February*

This is the first ever UK exhibition to take a deep-dive into Japanese food replicas aka *sampuru* (from the word 'sample'). These hyper-realistic three-dimensional sculptures of dishes – often mistaken for the real thing – are created to go on display outside restaurants. The practice began in the early 20th century when the department stores in Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka and beyond began to regularly use food replicas to showcase their menus.

Example food replicas on display (© Masuda Yoshirō for Japan House)

Historically made from candle wax and now frequently created using PVC, the process is incredibly bespoke. This exhibition highlights this highly skilled craft that's unique to Japan, featuring 47 food replicas – one speciality for every prefecture of the country from Okinawa's *goya chanpuru* (bitter melon stir-fry) to Hokkaido's succulent seafood. An interactive area invites visitors to create their own bento box of replica food.

LISSON GALLERY

*Londonist*
29 January 2025

# The Top Exhibitions To See In London: February 2025

By Tabish Khan

## Blooming Brilliant: Orchids at Kew Gardens

© RBG Kew.

The annual Orchids exhibition at Kew Gardens always makes it feel like summer's come early. This year it's the turn of Peru to showcase over 3,000 species of its orchids in the Princess of Wales glasshouse. References to local wildlife, such as alpaca and flamingos, along with Machu Picchu, are woven into the floral arrangements — forming a vibrant microcosm of the South American country.

# What the Dickens: 100 years of the Charles Dickens Museum

The blubber-stained copy of David Copperfield taken to Antarctica by Captain Scott

48 Doughty Street is the only surviving London house in which Charles Dickens lived, and is also where he completed The Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby. 100 years on, the museum marks its centenary of being open to the public with a special exhibition featuring previously unseen items, as well as some of the museum's greatest treasures.

# American history: Noah Davis at Barbican Art Gallery

© The Estate of Noah Davis. Courtesy The Estate of Noah Davis and David Zwirner. Photo: Kerry McFate

Whether referencing recent elections, the American Civil War or daytime television, Noah Davis' paintings capture both the everyday and historic milestones of the US from his viewpoint — highlighting those close to him, but also the wider racist and misogynistic portrayal of Black subjects for the sake of entertainment. Davis' works were one of the highlights of 2024's The Time is Always Now at the National Portrait Gallery, and an exhibition dedicated to his works promises to be powerful.

## AI Ai: Ai Weiwei at Lisson Gallery

© Ai Weiwei Studio, courtesy Lisson Gallery

Political artist Ai Weiwei presents new works, including military stretchers covered in obscenities made from buttons, in a look at how language and national identity are related. He also recreates historical masterpiece using Lego bricks, with Van Gogh's crows reimagined as drones. Ai Weiwei's embrace of technology stretches to the exhibition press release, which is written by ChatGPT, and the exhibition title decided by Google Gemini.

## Living with illness: Donald Rodney at Whitechapel Gallery

© Donald Rodney.

Donald Rodney was born to Jamaican parents in the West Midlands in the 1960s, at a time of extreme racial prejudice, and this exhibition charts his bright but fleeting career shortened by illness. Rodney lived with sickle cell anaemia and harnessed the condition to confront the prejudices and injustices surrounding racial identity, Black masculinity, chronic illness and Britain's colonial past.

## Stop and smell the ... : Flowers at Saatchi Gallery

Image © Rebecca Louise Law.

They look and smell beautiful, but in the hands of artists, flowers can become so much more. Flowers: Flora in Contemporary Art and Culture stretches from symbolism in Renaissance and the hyper-real Dutch paintings, through to contemporary artists such as Rebecca Louise Law, who creates immersive hanging installations from dried flowers. Fashion and jewellery are covered too — and there's a scientific look at the medicinal and poisonous qualities of some flowers. Altogether, the show blossoms with over 500 artworks and objects.

# Impressive Impressionism: Goya to Impressionism at the Courtauld

Vincent van Gogh's 'A Ward in the Hospital at Arles' , 1889. Image: The Swiss Confederation, Federal Office of Culture, Oskar Reinhart Collection "Am Römerholz", Winterthur

Van Gogh's painting of patients at a hospital in Arles, Toulouse-Lautrec's portrait of the female clown Cha-U-Kao, and Goya's still life of three salmon steaks are three of many Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces usually on display at the Oskar Reinhart Collection in Switzerland, which travel to the UK for the first time, in 2025. Their destination: the Courtauld, which boasts its own trove of Impressionist masterpieces.

# Mech-animals: Robot Zoo at Horniman Museum

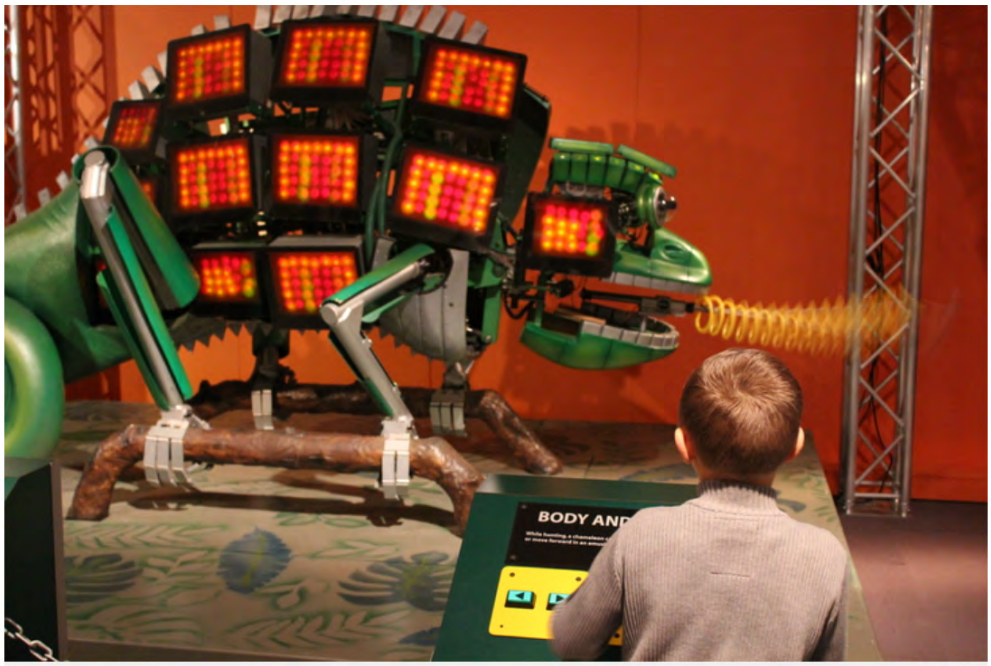


Image courtesy Horniman Museum and Gardens.

Everyone loves animals and robots, so how about some robot animals? Using pistons for muscles, pipes instead of intestines, and computerised 'brains', the robot animals at Horniman Museum show how their real-life counterparts see, hear, hunt, hide and move. How do chameleons change colour? What makes grasshoppers leap so high? How do bats see at night? Through other interactive exhibits, visitors can try their hand at squid racing and fire a chameleon's 'tongue-gun'. We saw it when it was last at Horniman in 2017, and you're in for a fun and fascinating show.

# Gods & Minecraft: Making Egypt at Young V&A

Wooden Funerary Boat approx. 3,000 years old. Courtesy of Chiddingstone Castle

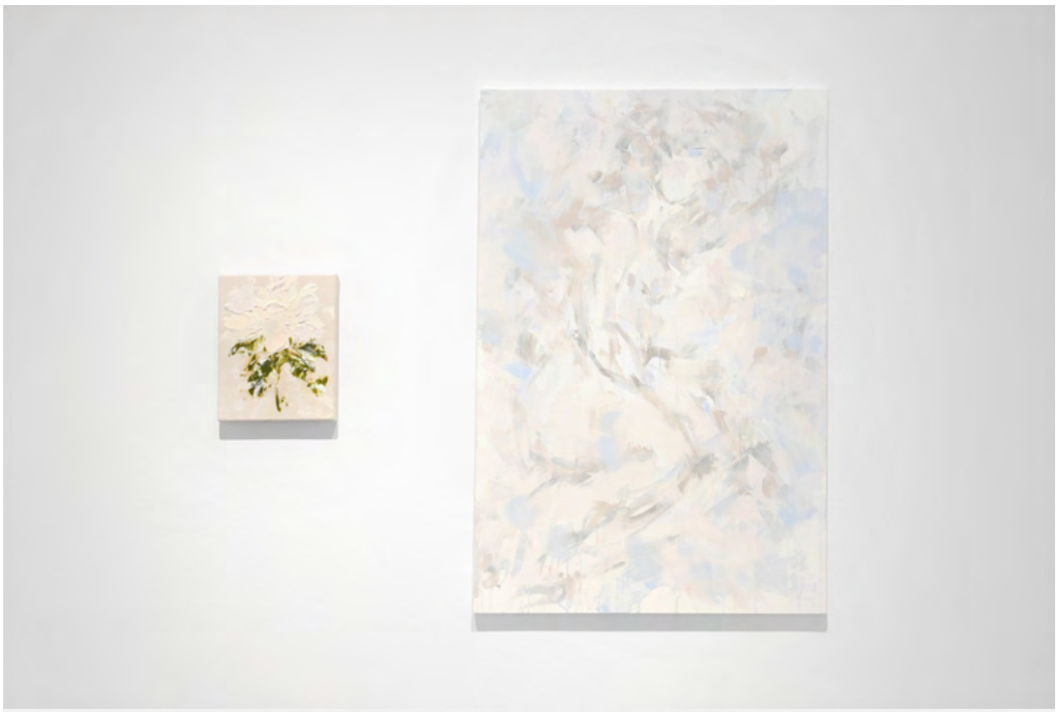
Pyramids, mummification, Egyptian Gods... ancient Egypt is a topic that adults and children can never get enough of. For aspiring Egyptologists, Young V&A has a family focused exhibition that includes ancient artefacts such as a sarcophagus and decorative funerary masks, and a look at how stories and images from the Egypt of yore continue to influence art, design and popular culture — from Hollywood movie The Mummy to Minecraft.

# Prepare to be dazzled: Leigh Bowery at Tate Modern

© Fergus Greer. Courtesy Michael Hoppen Gallery.

It's time to celebrate the audacious life and groundbreaking work of Leigh Bowery — artist, performer, model, designer and musician. From his suburban Melbourne roots to transformation into a global icon, the exhibition showcases the artist's dazzling costumes, collaborations, and provocative performances. It includes Bowery's portrait by Lucian Freud and explores his enduring impact on aesthetics, gender and popular culture.

# Short run exhibitions



Bianca Rafaella's previous show at Flowers Gallery. Photo Sam Campbell, courtesy Flowers Gallery.

Art reflects the world around us, and for visually impaired artist Bianca Raffaella that's a very different world to many. In her latest paintings at Flowers Gallery (12 February - 15 March, free) Raffaella captures fleeting moments suspended in "persistent vision," where her sight is in constant motion, and images appear only briefly as faint shadows or flickers of light.

Esra Kizir Gokcen's exhibition at 54 The Gallery, in Shepherd Market (26 February - 9 March, free), is about the migratory experience and ultimately the hope of travelling for a better life. She imagines this through paintings and an installation of boats filling the space.

In terms of art fairs, Collect 2025 at Somerset House (28 February - 2 March, £23) has all things contemporary craft and design on display and available to buy. It's always filled with intricate and spectacular objects and artworks.

# Exhibitions outside London

© Joy Labinjo. Courtesy of the Artist and Tiwani Contemporary

Rise Up: Resistance, Revolution, Abolition at the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge (21 February - 1 June, pay what you wish) tells the story of the fight to end transatlantic slavery, its aftermath, and its ongoing legacies. Focusing on the period from 1750 to 1850, this history is told through the stories of individuals and communities from across the Caribbean, Europe and the Americas, as well as through historic objects and works by contemporary artists.

Photo by Eddie Worth. An anti-fascist demonstrator is taken away under arrest after a mounted baton charge during the Battle of Cable Street, London, 4 October 1936. © Alamy

Resistance at Turner Contemporary, Margate (22 February - 1 June, free) is the brainchild of artist and filmmaker Steve McQueen. The exhibition explores how acts of resistance have shaped life in the UK and the powerful role of photography in documenting and driving change. It spans from the radical suffrage movement in 1903 to the largest-ever protest in Britain's history — the Anti-Iraq War Protest of 2003.

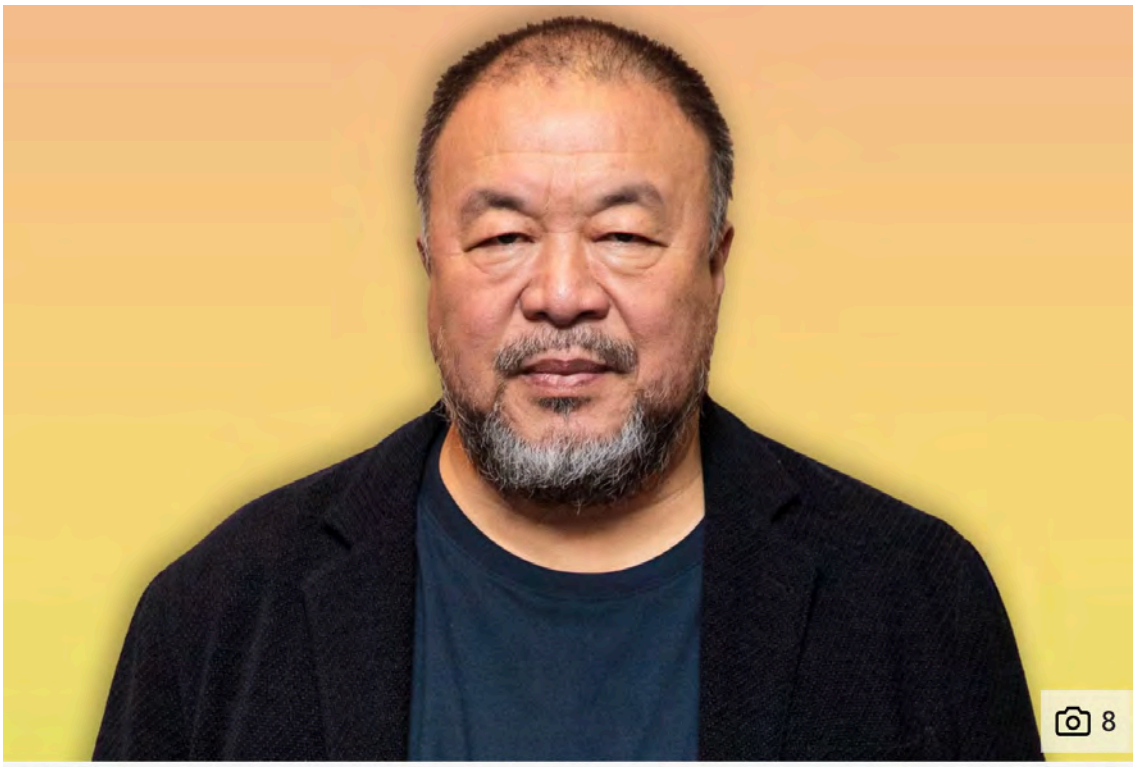
Independent
3 February 2025

INDEPENDENT

# Ai Weiwei on free speech and the fragility of civilisation: 'Democracy is a failed joke'

**Mark Hudson** talks to China's most provocative exile about his new exhibition, the triple standards of the West, the crisis of AI and the certainty of nuclear war

Monday 03 February 2025 15:20 GMT




Ai is 'still a frustrated person trying to work out what the world can really mean' *(Getty)*

The seizing of Ai Weiwei at Beijing airport by Chinese police on 3 April 2011 must count as the most famous arrest of any artist ever. While the ostensible charge was tax evasion, Ai's provocative "citizens' investigations" into state corruption had already earned him local notoriety and a near-fatal beating by police in 2009. But the 83 days of solitary confinement without trial that were to become a global news story, turning Ai into one of the world's best-known artists, were yet to come. Yet the artist's reaction as he sat alone in a cell, a black mask over his head as he awaited his fate, wasn't what you might expect.

“It felt a little bit ironic,” Ai tells me as we sit talking in the Heong Gallery at Downing College, Cambridge. “Because what they were doing to me was exactly what happened to my father 80 years before.”

Only someone who has seen the wheel of historical fortune turn at least once could view such utterly dire circumstances as “ironic” or maintain such an unflappable tone when describing them. Ai’s father, the leading Chinese modernist poet Ai Qing, was arrested and imprisoned as a “leftist” by China’s Nationalist authorities on his return from studies in Paris in 1932, and later persecuted as a “rightist” during the Communist Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. From the age of 10 to 15, Ai lived in an unventilated bunker in a village in the remote Xinjiang province, where his father was forced to clean the communal toilets every day as part of his “political re-education”.

‘What the Chinese police were doing to me was exactly what happened to my father 80 years before’ *(Getty)*

“He must have had a lot of good memories of encountering great people and ideas in Paris and elsewhere. But he put that behind him, because when you have no hope, you have to forget, or you will [try to take your own life] – which he tried several times.”

All this, and the story of his father's rehabilitation after the death of Mao Tse Tung in 1976, is described with a gently smiling matter-of-factness that belies Ai's formidable energy as an artist. He works across a mind-boggling range of forms, from bronze sculpture to internet blogging, films and architecture, and is ready to take a swipe at anything that offends his moral sensibilities. These days, that is as likely to be "fast-paced, globalised capitalism" and the contradictions of the self-satisfied West as state repression in China.

Given those formative experiences of lived history, and the long view they've given him on human affairs, it's hardly surprising that the material fabric of history should have become the essential subject of Ai's art, viewed through vast accumulations of material objects, from mass-produced children's backpacks to entire historic buildings. Most moving perhaps was *Straight*, a numbing meditation on loss, comprising 96 tonnes of rusting steel salvaged from schools in which thousands of children were killed in the Sichuan earthquake of 2008. And most notorious was *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, in which Ai was photographed dropping a 2,000-year-old vessel, to "question the value and power we bestow on certain cultural objects".

Ai Weiwei's 'Straight' was made with the remnants of buildings damaged in an earthquake, weighing in at 96 tonnes *(Ai Weiwei)*

His forthcoming exhibition at London's Lisson Gallery gives pride of place to the bluntest expletive in the English language, spelled out across four Second World War military stretchers using thousands of vintage buttons purchased from a defunct factory in Croydon in 2019.

"Really?" says Ai, with a look of mild perplexity, his glass of water paused halfway to his lips, when I express surprise at his readiness with the f-word. But it's there as clear as daylight in the show's most prominent work, *F.U.C.K.*.

Ai laughs as though everything is suddenly crystal clear.

"F.U.C.K. is quite different from fuck."

Yet isn't the word used pretty straight in the titles of other works: *Go Fuck Yourself* and *Fuck 'Em All*?

Go Fuck Yourself ( 2024), from Ai Weiwei's new exhibition *(© Ai Weiwei Studio, courtesy Lisson Gallery)*

“We have a lot of this kind of language right now. There’s a polarisation and a disdain in modern dialogue.”

More than usual?

“I think so. The word is used so often to reflect so many meanings – surprise, happiness, anger, or in a completely senseless way – it’s become abstract. So it’s a perfect readymade.”

That’s an interesting choice of word. Equating his use of the most provocative syllable in the English language with the anti-art gestures of early 20th century modernists such as Marcel Duchamp, who famously exhibited a “readymade” urinal as a work of art, shows that Ai has lost none of his readiness to provoke. And it’s an indication that he’s none too happy with the state of the world, as I discover within minutes of my arrival.

“We’ve never been so deeply challenged by information and technology, with the comfort and protection of globalised capitalism on the one hand, and unthinkable horrors on the other,” he says. “There’s the hidden crisis of racism, wars in Europe and the Middle East. The power of our rationality in this so-called civilised world is so fragile it doesn’t protect anybody, and democracy is a failed joke.”

And which democracies is he thinking of? Not here surely.

“Here!”

This remark takes on an uncomfortable resonance a few days later when a poll suggests that half of Britain’s Generation Z has given up on democracy and would prefer to be ruled by a dictator. Is this the tragic punchline to the failed joke?

I wanted to meet Ai in Cambridge because it seemed such an unlikely place to encounter a global art player of his stature, let alone find him living. While Ai seems to deliberately eschew the snooty gloss that galleries seem to cultivate in artists these days, he could live absolutely anywhere, and these days do pretty much anything he wants. So why would he choose somewhere as small and, for all its mighty academic credentials, as parochial and Middle England-ish as Cambridge?

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> ***The power of our rationality in this so-called civilised world is so fragile it doesn't protect anybody***

Having based himself in Berlin after his definitive departure from China in 2015, he declared that Germany was "not an open society" and moved to Cambridge in 2019. He is now settled in Portugal, where he is building a large studio complex, but with a son still at school in Cambridge, he maintains his base here and still makes regular visits. He has chosen to meet in the neutral territory of the Heong Gallery, a contemporary art space, funded by Hong Kong financier Alwyn Heong, within the stately portals of Downing College, which happens to be closed today. I suppose he must just like this quaint fenland city.

"I like it. It's a place where there's still a focus on science, rational thinking and liberal ideas. But taking a larger perspective, how much is it detached from other realities? Here, of course, you have the guarantees – family, society, resources – to build these generations of people who become the professional class and the elite. And that also has a potential danger."

And what's that?

"Ignoring or refusing to recognise that human societies develop in different ways, some of which may be slower paced. And when AI is fully developed, it will make connections in seconds that it takes a professor a lifetime to achieve. So 80 per cent of our current education will be of questionable value."

Ai Weiwei: ‘80 per cent of our current education will be of questionable value’ *(Getty)*

You don’t have to spend long listening to Ai’s overarching pronouncements to realise that each relates to some highly specific material circumstance. His theme today is the hypocrisies of the application of the principles of free speech and human rights in the West’s “so-called democracies”.

“You cannot talk about human rights in Russia or China and then apply different rights in the Middle East,” he says. “You’re just using too many double or triple standards. The West has totally lost the moral high ground.”

Ai is clearly referring to the furore surrounding his autumn 2023 exhibition at the Lisson, which was “postponed indefinitely” by the London gallery following a tweet in which Ai claimed that the “sense of guilt around the persecution of the Jewish people has been at times transferred to the Arab world” and that America’s $3bn annual subsidy to Israeli defence means the two countries have a “shared destiny”.

While the brief tweet, written in response to a question from one of his social media followers, wasn't saying anything that millions haven't thought and said over the intervening period, it was posted only five weeks after Hamas's incursion into Israel, when feelings across the board were at their most intense. There was a danger, his gallery felt, that this casual comment might capsize his career. Three further exhibitions in New York, Paris and Berlin were also "effectively cancelled", as Ai put it at the time. While he conceded that the gallery was "acting to protect him", the incident clearly stuck in the craw, and seems to have coloured his entire experience of living and working in the West.

"The problem is not about whether the content of the statement was right or wrong, but do we have the right to speak even when we are saying things that are wrong? If a society says, you cannot say wrong things, I would say that is an authoritarian society. Because that's a Nazi idea, that you want to be absolutely right and the only right and right above all."

Ai's forthcoming London exhibition will be a modified version of that postponed show, with the "fuck" works accompanied by his recreations of great modern paintings in Lego, including Van Gogh's *Wheatfield with Crows*, the artist's last painting before he died by suicide, with the ominous crows in the original accompanied by sinister drones. The pixellated quality created by the tiny toy bricks represents for Ai the interface of the two-dimensional plane of the painting, and the digital plane in which we increasingly spend our lives.

Ai Weiwei's Wheat Field with Crows (2024) *(© Ai Weiwei Studio, c ourtesy Lisson Gallery)*

The show, Ai Weiwei: A New Chatpter, is preceded by a press release that I read with some dismay on the train from London. It's larded with airy truisms that felt painfully specious, even by the vexed standards of contemporary art press releases, with their endless parroting of current buzz phrases. So I was to a degree reassured to learn that the document was written "at the artist's request" by the generative AI ChatGPT4, hence the show's title.

But what was he hoping to achieve by framing his work in a way that invites ridicule? Was it a kind of satire on the way art is packaged, or a prankster-ish gesture, throwing it out there to see what would happen?

"You felt uncomfortable when you read it. But don't we already feel uncomfortable in so many situations, when we walk into a supermarket and see all these packaged foods that don't taste like the things they're supposed to be," he responds. "Our receiving systems are being manipulated in the pursuit of profit. We tell ourselves it's different with art and literature, but these things still have to be received through galleries, art fairs, newspapers and magazines."

Ai Weiwei at an anti-censorship rotest supporting Julian Assange *(PA)*

But I'm still trying to pin down Ai's approach to AI itself, which ranges from the apparently celebratory (his massive video installation *81 Questions to AI* in Piccadilly Circus) to the frankly dismissive.

“The rise of AI is one of the greatest crises we face today. What AI can accomplish is similar to mathematics or geometry – a method of calculation that can achieve a level of precision beyond human capability. Yet precision and computational ability have no direct connection to art. The very essence of art lies in its inability to be replicated or predicted. This unpredictability and uniqueness are fundamental human qualities rooted in individual expression.”

One of the most talked about works in the exhibition looks set to be a life-size Lego rendering of Gauguin’s symbolist masterpiece, *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?,* to which AI has added the nuclear mushroom cloud from Hiroshima rising above the luxuriant tropical foliage.

Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going? (2023) *(© Ai Weiwei Studio, courtesy Lisson Gallery)*

“That’s something that’s still hanging over our heads,” says Ai. “Definitely, we are going to use it. The US used it 70 years ago when there was very little justification, with the war already over, so why not again?”

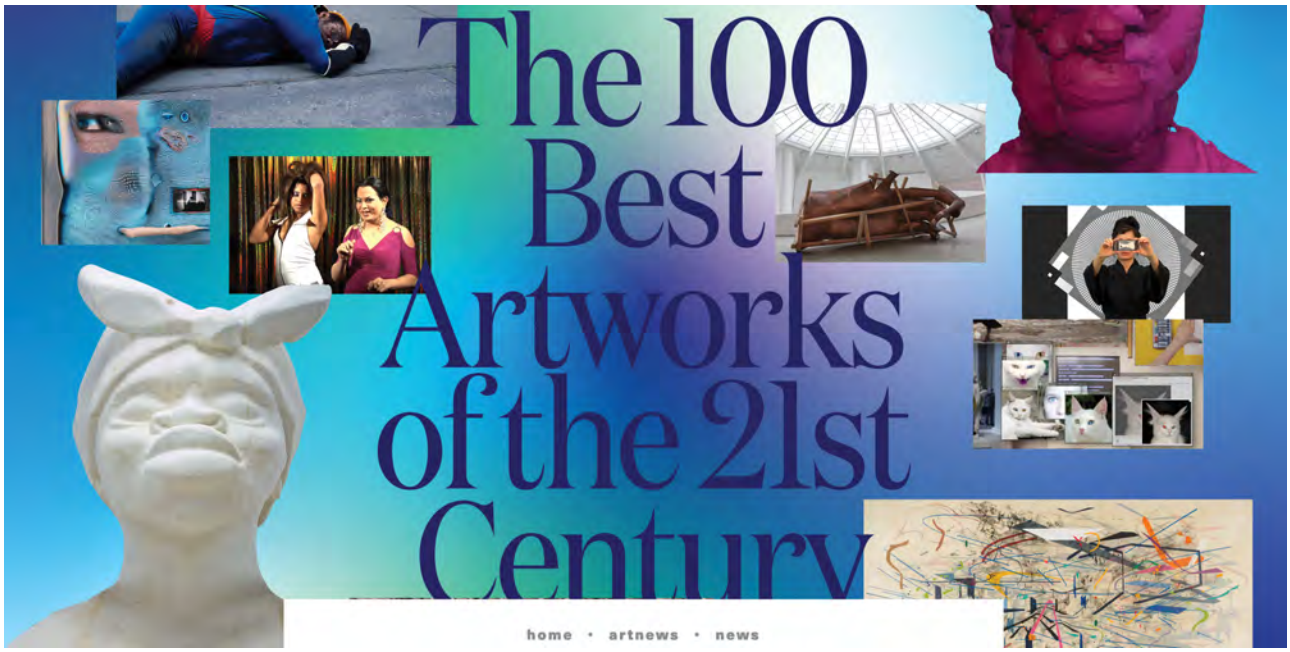
And in the bottom left corner of the painting the features of an elderly woman have been modified into those of a grey-bearded man, representing Ai himself in the role of an “aboriginal man”.

“That’s me”, he says, “showing that I’m still a frustrated person trying to work out what the world can really mean.”

*Ai Weiwei: A New Chatpter is open at the Lisson Gallery in London from 7 February–15 March 2025*

*ARTnews*
5 March 2025

ARTnews Est. 1902




# The 100 Best Artworks of the 21st Century

BY The Editors of ARTnews, Art in America March 5, 2025 8:00am

A global recession, a pandemic, 9/11, the Arab Spring, Brexit, the rise of Web 2.0, unrest in the face of economic stability, wars in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Gaza, and elsewhere: these were but a few of the many events that have defined the past 25 years, a period characterized by tumult and uncertainty. That all may explain why art appeared to change faster than ever all the while, with artists burning through styles and tendencies with each coming year.

With the 21st century now at the quarter point, we've taken the opportunity to pinpoint the greatest artworks of the past 25 years. Even though we set down some parameters for ourselves (**more on that here**), it was no small task—one made more difficult by the restless creativity of artists during this period.

The joy of an epic list like this one is that it can't encapsulate everything: we know we've left some artworks off, simply because there was no shortage to choose from. We hope you'll discover some amazing pieces here, reflect on some that are much-loved already, and debate the merits of others. And moreover, we hope to learn of new artworks through the conversations we hope our list inspires.

Below, a look back at the greatest 100 artworks of the 21st century so far, as selected by the editors of *ARTnews* and *Art in America*.

*This article features contributions from the following writers: Francesca Aton, Andy Battaglia, Daniel Cassady, Anne Doran, Sarah Douglas, Maximilíano Durón, Alex Greenberger, Harrison Jacobs, Tessa Solomon, and Emily Watlington.*

## 71 Ai Weiwei, *Straight*, 2008–12

Ai Weiwei: *Straight*, 2008-12.
Photo : ©Ai Weiwei Studio/Courtesy Lisson Gallery

It would be easy, in 2025, as Ai Weiwei produces countless LEGO re-creations of art history, to forget just how revolutionary the Chinese artist-activist's work has been. Travel back to 2008, however, and Ai was in a very different place in his career. That year, a devastating earthquake hit China's Sichuan province, killing nearly 90,000 people. It was a national tragedy made more devastating by the government's censorship of information about it. No one truly knew the scope—no one outside the immediate area, that is—until Ai created "a citizen investigation team" to interview survivors, uncovering widespread corruption in building construction, which was to blame for many of the deaths. That effort resulted in *Straight*. For the installation, Ai and his team collected 200 tons of mangled rebar rods from schools that had collapsed and meticulously straightened them by hand. The rods were then laid out to resemble tectonic plates in a gallery where the names of 5,000 schoolchildren who had died in the quake were displayed on the walls. A tribute to those lost, the installation is a crushing emotional experience to walk through. And, as Ai **recalled in 2018**, *Straight* and his other works around the earthquake made him "the most dangerous person in China." — *H.J.*

*The New York Times Style Magazine*
10 March 2025

The New York Times Style Magazine

ARTIST'S QUESTIONNAIRE

# Inside the Former 'Underworld' Where Ai Weiwei Makes Art

## Ahead of his largest-ever exhibition in the U.S., the dissident artist reflects on collecting jade and living below ground.

The artist and activist Ai Weiwei in his Berlin studio, photographed behind textile samples from an in-progress work. Kathrin Tschirner

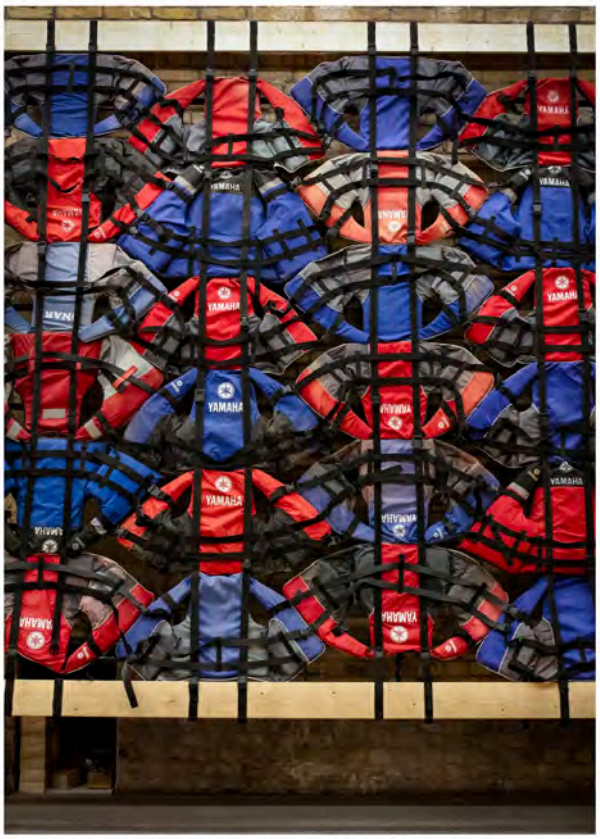
By Zoey Poll
March 10, 2025

For part of the year, the artist and activist Ai Weiwei works in a cavernous 30,000-square-foot studio on the underground levels of a former 19th-century brewery in Berlin. Its triple-height vaulted cellars, which Ai, a self-taught architect, renovated himself after leaving his native China in 2015, are now pristine and well-lit, but when he first visited the long-abandoned subterranean space, it was "completely dark," he says, "like an underworld." In that way, it recalls the underground home where the artist lived for five years as a child, a place he calls "the black hole": a bare shelter on the edge of the Gurbantünggüt Desert in the remote Xinjiang region, one of the sites where Ai's father, the renowned poet Ai Qing, was exiled following China's Anti-Rightist Campaign in the late 1950s. In that half-buried home, Ai first encountered the authoritarianism and censorship that he has now spent four decades resisting, ridiculing and at times enduring again, as a defender of human rights and self-proclaimed political "troublemaker." Today, he travels frequently, stopping in Berlin; Cambridge, England, where his sixteen-year-old son, Lao, his only child, attends school; and Montemor-o-Novo, a town in the countryside of southern Portugal whose sunny climate reminds him of his childhood in the desert. That approximately 20-acre property hosts a few assistants, as well as many cats, dogs, birds and fish and a reconstruction of his wooden Shanghai studio that was demolished by local authorities in 2011. Ai is used to constant movement, and to the possibility of displacement. "The concept of a home has never been truly established for me," he says.

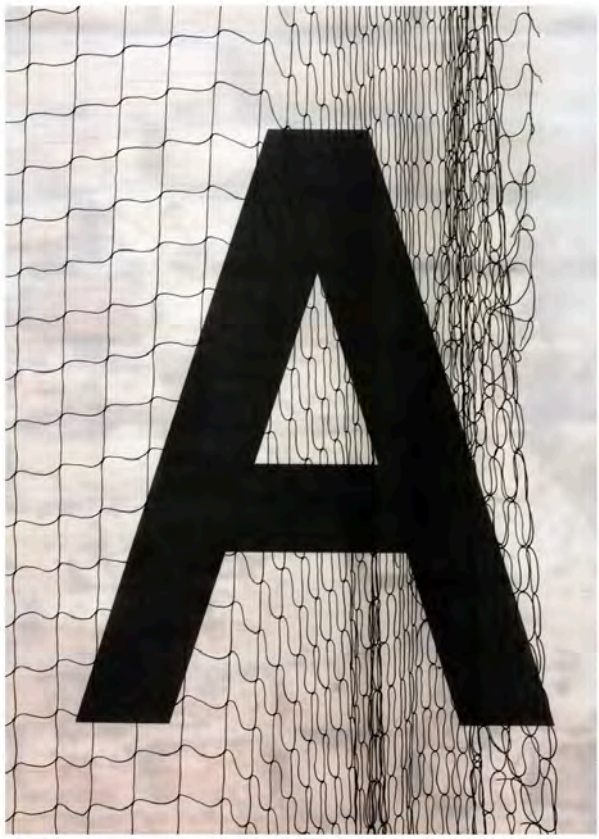
Ai was first drawn to this once-derelict space as a creative challenge. "I'm more interested in problem-solving than in getting a beautiful studio," he says. Kathrin Tschirner

A detail of a work for an upcoming public installation in New York. Kathrin Tschirner

On a recent visit to his Berlin studio, I followed Ai, 67, down a narrow staircase into an austere, windowless alcove. Its concrete floor was scattered with twisted steel rods from the installation work "Rebar," which Ai made in China between 2008 and 2012, sourcing the metal from school buildings flattened by the devastating Sichuan earthquake. "Rebar" and similar works made in response to the earthquake critique the government's corrupt construction regulations and lack of transparency in the tragedy's aftermath. This is one of the projects that, in addition to his prolific online writings, helped turn Ai into one of the most famous dissident artists of the past few decades. The resulting surveillance and a government-ordered detention eventually drove him to leave Beijing for Berlin, a city he says appealed to him for its mix of "ruin" and "new life." In Ai's archival room, a large world map that helped him plan his documentary on refugees, "Human Flow" (2017), leaned against a wall beside an overgrown fiddle-leaf fig tree. On display elsewhere were dozens of antique Qing dynasty wooden chairs, from the participatory project "Fairytale" (2007), for which Ai conveyed 1,001 volunteers from China to the Documenta art exhibition in Kassel, Germany.

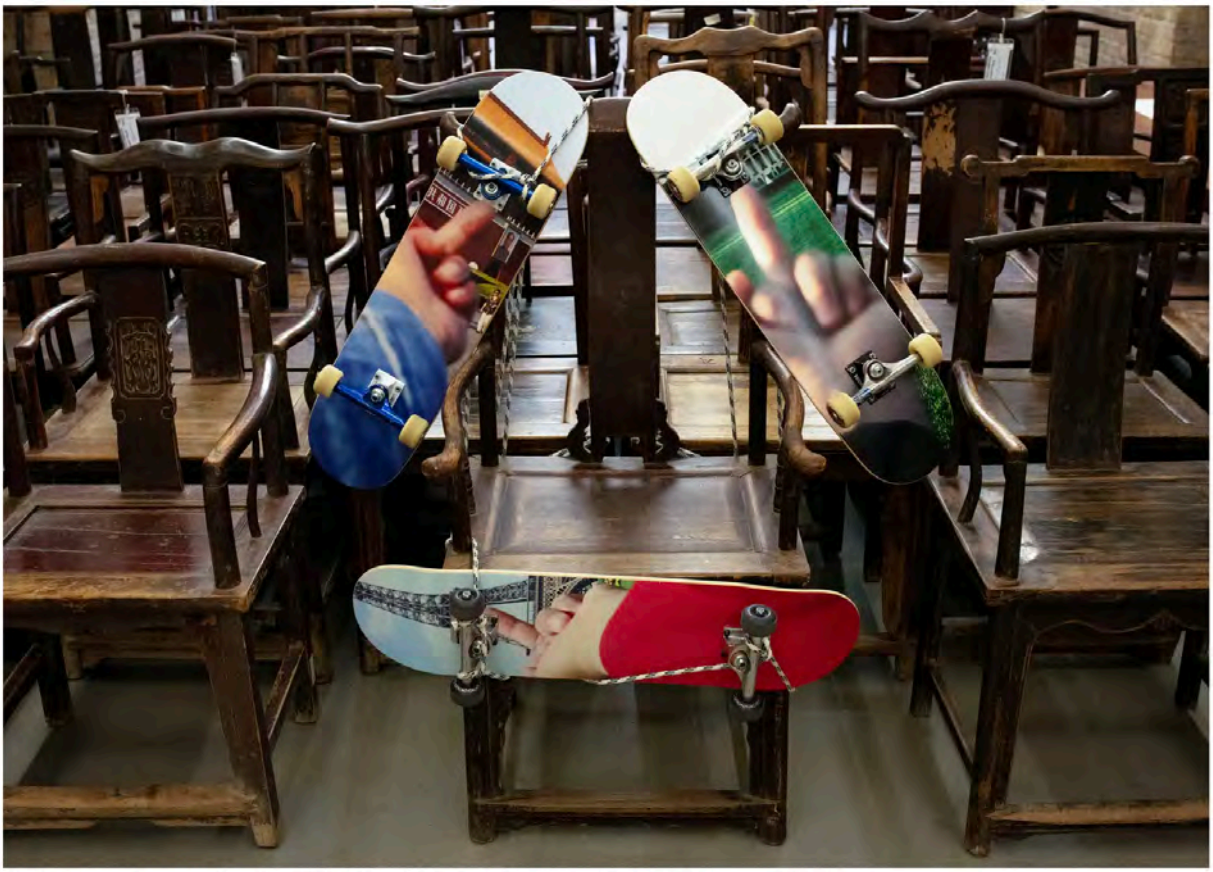



Life jackets left behind by refugees who arrived by boat in Lesbos, Greece, in 2016. Nearly a decade ago, Ai affixed thousands of the jackets to the facade of Berlin's Konzerthaus as a humanitarian call to action. Kathrin Tschirner



Detail of an in-progress installation. Kathrin Tschirner

Accumulation — the head-spinning accrual of hundreds, thousands or millions of identical objects — is fundamental to Ai's interventions, which often comment on both collective action and consumer culture. Sometimes he finds items that speak directly to a predetermined theme or event, as with his headline-making installation of discarded refugee life jackets affixed to the facade of Berlin's Konzerthaus in 2016. But if he finds the right object, he may conceive of a whole project around it. Ai began collecting flea-market antiquities in the mid-1990s, when he lived in China, and now acquaintances and strangers alike frequently tip him off about underappreciated goods that are available in astronomical quantities. One such message is how he came into possession of 30 tons of clothing buttons from a defunct British factory. ("'No' is not in my vocabulary," he says.) After years spent classifying the buttons into 9,000 different categories, his team has begun sewing them into new, textile-based works. Some of these are currently on display at Lisson Gallery in London, which had canceled his 2023 show after the artist's public comments about the Israel-Hamas war. In this exhibit, Ai continues his defense of free speech, with button-adorned block letters spelling out profanity-laden catchphrases across World War II military stretchers and tents. Alongside these works are re-creations of pieces from the Western art historical canon made out of Legos, a material that's become his trademark in recent years.



Skateboards, produced in collaboration with the Brussels-based art and social impact company The Skateroom, bearing images from Ai's "Study of Perspective" series (1995-2017), affixed to an antique Chinese wooden chair from the artist's conceptual work "Fairytale" (2007). Kathrin Tschirner

This week, a retrospective of Ai's work will open at the Seattle Art Museum. The show, his largest ever in the U.S., will also be one of the first to spotlight his early works. Ai lived in New York from 1982 to 1993, working a slew of odd jobs — including as a street portrait artist, a babysitter, a house cleaner and an extra at the Metropolitan Opera — all while creating his first minimalist, Dada-inspired sculptures and intimate black-and-white images of Chinese artists and intellectuals in the East Village. Ai says he feels shy about sharing his lesser-known early projects, but he does so in the hopes that they'll be instructive. "We all have a beginning," he says. "The beginning is always pretty clumsy and unprepared. But if you keep working, you may reach some unknown."

Ai answered T's Artist's Questionnaire in his Berlin studio office in February. He sat at a long wooden table, beside a pot of green tea and his iPhone, which he uses to take a snapshot of nearly every visitor to his studio — a longstanding practice that he famously deployed to mock the state's surveillance of his Beijing home and studio. In the course of our conversation, Ai, who had a trim beard and wore all black, was by turns mischievous, cryptic and disarmingly earnest.

A work in progress for the artist's upcoming "Pavilion 13" exhibition in Kyiv, Ukraine. The planned installation will feature a large geometric structure wrapped in Ukrainian military uniforms. Kathrin Tschirner

At right, a glass vitrine containing Ai's "Merry Christmas" (2024), made from a broom that Ai used to clear snow outside New York's Rockefeller Center on Christmas Day last year. Kathrin Tschirner

**What's your day like? How much do you sleep, and what's your work schedule?**

I've always been a morning person. When I was young, I'd hear my father cutting his beard with scissors — *ch, ch, ch, ch* — before dawn. He had no tools, just those scissors. He went to sleep at 9 p.m. and woke at 4 a.m. to write.

Before getting dressed, I get online. Too many things are going on these days, and every day has a surprise. I mostly look at political news, not art. There aren't any arguments happening in art today. Art is basically dead. I look at what's really affecting our society: technical developments, craziness about geopolitics.

Coming to the studio is a daily matter. My team and I manage about 10 exhibitions a year — five ongoing, five ahead. I'm not just an artist; I also often curate my own shows. There are too many materials, back stories and ideas for someone else to handle alone.

I don't engage in any social life — no art openings, no circles. I try to keep a few close friends, who feel more like relatives. I usually have dinner with a friend and discuss ideas. I go to sleep around 10 or 11, when my battery runs out. I sleep about six hours a night, which I think is good for someone who's almost 70.

I asked my studio how many times I traveled during the past nearly 10 years since I was forced out of China. They gave me a number I would not believe: 318 times across an international border. I have jet lag very often.

Technical sketches on a table. Kathrin Tschirner

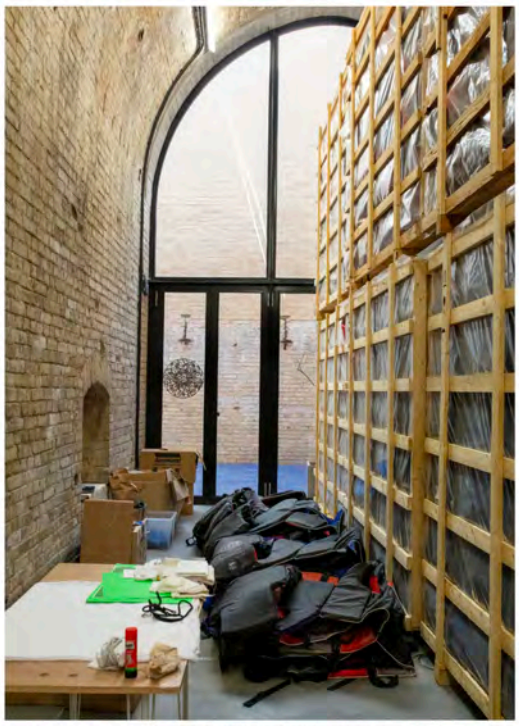
**How many hours of creative work do you think you do in a day?**

My work is trying to break the boundary of what is normally called “creative.” I avoid trying to be creative. I try to push myself into normal life and bring the integrity of a normal life into the so-called art world. That makes me very busy. So I should say I’m working all the time, as long as I’m awake.

**What’s the first piece of art you ever made?**

I was 10. We were living underground. There was no window, only a hole in the roof. Pigs ran outside and you’d see their legs from below. We didn’t have a light. So I made a lamp from the metal cap of a medicine bottle. I drilled a hole, used a [shoelace as the wick] and lit it with oil. This kind of thing deeply influenced me to say you can always make a change.

Finding a good solution for an idea, developing a form and the skill to achieve it — that should be called art. My practice started early, when I was trying to survive.



A workstation in one of the studio's 20 domed spaces. Kathrin Tschirner

A handful of the thousands of buttons in Ai's collection, stored in Neolithic Chinese vases. The ongoing sorting process has lasted over five years and involved at least six members of Ai's team. Kathrin Tschirner

**What's the worst studio you ever had?**

The worst studio was the one that was torn down after I built it — not even used for one day. The regional government asked me to build a studio [in the Jiading district of Shanghai] and I did. The minute I finished and furnished it [in 2011], they tore it down.

**What's the first work you ever sold? For how much?**

A portrait of Marcel Duchamp made from a wire coat hanger ["Hanging Man" (1985)]. I had a show in SoHo [in 1988] in a friend's gallery. After the show, of course, nobody bought the work, except the gallery owner, who bought three pieces for $300.

**When you start a new piece, where do you begin?**

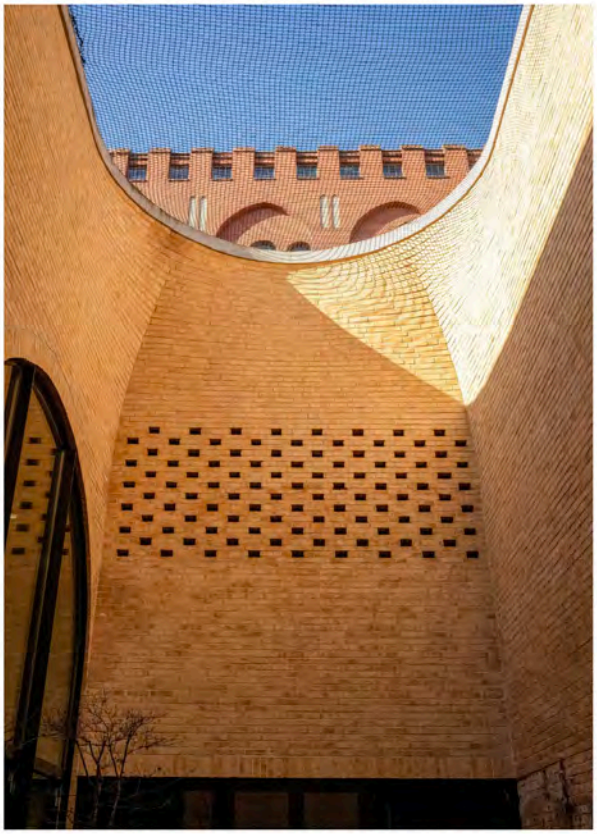
The first step is to seduce myself into curiosity. If I can't establish a strong curiosity, I won't feel any interest. The work will be too dry.

**How do you know when you're done?**

It's very much like a love affair. You have to be attracted to the work for a reason you can't even figure out. And if you totally figure it out, that means you've already lost the attraction. And there's always a new attraction.

**How many assistants do you have?**

I have a core team that has been with me for the past 10 to 20 years. There are also always newcomers, in and out depending on the project. For a project like “Sunflower Seeds,” we had to hire 1,600 women to work together. [In 2010, Ai covered the floor of Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall with 100 million handcrafted porcelain sunflower seeds.] But sometimes I just do it myself. By myself is fine.



A view of the Pfefferberg complex where Ai’s studio is located, in Berlin’s northern Prenzlauer Berg district. Kathrin Tschirner

In the foreground, some of the life jackets that Ai and his team collected in Lesbos. Kathrin Tschirner

**What music do you listen to when you're making art?**

I have a distant relationship with music, because when I was growing up, there was no music besides birds or insects singing. I think an appreciation for music needs to be built up in a particular kind of environment.

**So you work in silence?**

For me, silence is music.

**When did you first feel comfortable saying you're a professional artist?**

I would never consider myself a professional artist.

**Is there a meal you eat on repeat when you're working?**

I used to like eating candies. But now I shouldn't eat them, so I don't anymore.

**Are you watching any shows right now?**

I haven't had a TV for the past thirty years.

**What's the weirdest object in your studio?**

Me.

Ai's "Paper Cut of the Zodiac" (2016) hangs in the courtyard window. Behind it are indigo tiles with a hand-painted sunflower seed motif. Kathrin Tschirner

**How often do you talk to other artists?**

I don't. Almost no need.

**What about Olafur Eliasson, whose studio is upstairs?**

We don't talk about art. He often invites me for dinner. But sometimes he invites me for this kind of society-people event. I'm a little bit scared, so I don't go that often. I love him, he's my little brother, but I don't like social life.

**What do you do when you're procrastinating?**

My hobby is playing in the casino. It's not easy to survive because the casinos are designed to rob you. I like the game blackjack, which is almost impossible. I sit at the table, any table near the door, and I just start to play.

**What's the last thing that made you cry?**

The last time I remember crying was when I was detained [by Chinese authorities in 2011]. The interrogator told me, "With your crime, you have to be sentenced to over 10 years. When you come out, your son will never recognize you."

**Do you usually wear all black when you work?**

But what else? It's part of the city in New York or Berlin. Then when I'm in the studio in Portugal, I wear all white. Or sometimes I don't wear anything at all, because it's my land. There are no neighbors. I wear sunshine.

**What do you pay for rent?**

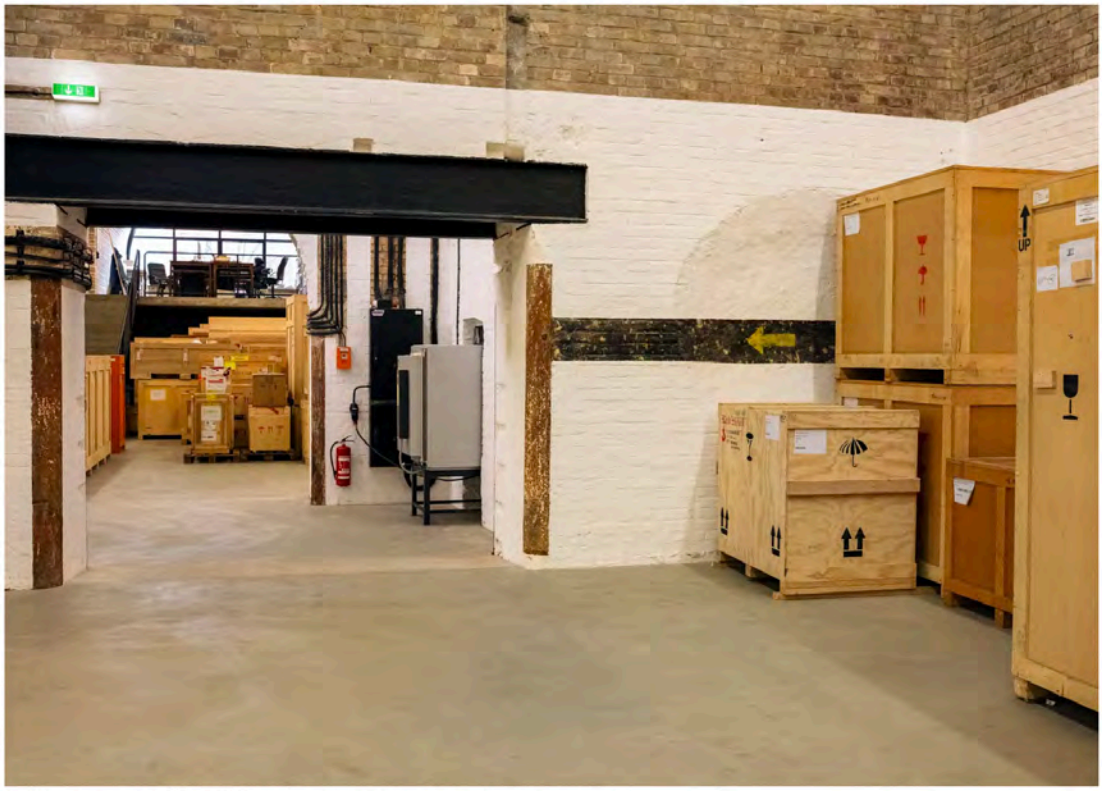
I think I paid very little to buy this Berlin studio because it had been abandoned for decades. Nobody wanted a space like this. I paid just over a million euros. The renovation costs were about triple.

**What do you bulk buy with the most frequency?**

I keep buying Legos because I keep making work with them. One work can consist of 600,000 pieces, [like my 2022 reconstruction of] Monet's "Water Lilies." We have millions of Legos. That's out of necessity.

There's only one thing I bulk buy out of personal interest — jade. It's very, very rare and expensive. I have a few thousand pieces of ancient Chinese jade. Any extra money I can spend, I spend on jade. I want to destroy the money from this stupid art I'm making. I don't think I deserve to sell any of my artworks. So I use the money to protect these works from earlier civilizations.

Very soon, I'll pass away. My family doesn't need the jade collection. Maybe nobody needs it. That's the sad thing about it. Only a few people care. I don't know where to put it. Maybe I should cast it into a huge concrete block, buried underground.



Past the entryway, against the right wall, is Ai's recently installed ceramics kiln. Kathrin Tschirner

**What's your worst habit?**

My worst habit is that I'm too clean. I don't smoke. I don't drink alcohol.

**What embarrasses you?**

I don't speak German. I don't speak Portuguese. I don't speak many, many beautiful languages in the world.

**Do you exercise?**

I walk more than 10,000 steps every day. Even during my detention, the doctor told me, Weiwei, you have to walk at least 5,000 steps a day in this room to keep your heart working. I walked back and forth on six tiles, each fifty centimeters long, for five hours a day. That kept me healthy. Otherwise it would've crushed me.

**What's your favorite artwork by someone else?**

I love Marcel Duchamp's "The Large Glass" [a sculptural piece between two panes of glass, officially titled "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even" (1915-23)]. The beauty of it is that everyone who looks at it will see something different because it's transparent. It took him about eight years to make. And then the glass cracked. People said, "Oh my God, it's cracked!" But he loved the cracks.

**Which work of your own do you regret, or would you do over in a different way now?**

I consider my life as one work. And I don't regret it because I have to finish the work before I regret. Though very soon, I will finish this work.

*This interview has been edited and condensed.*

A version of this article appears in print on March 20, 2025, Section D, Page 3 of the National edition with the headline: People Places Things. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe

*ARTnews*
25 June 2025

ARTnews Est. 1902

# Ai Weiwei to Stage New Work About 'War and Peace' in Ukraine

Ai Weiwei in his studio.
PHOTO ADAM SIMONS/COURTESY RIBBON INTERNATIONAL

This fall, Ai Weiwei will realize a new work in the Ukraine about the country's ongoing war with Russia.

Titled *Three Perfectly Proportioned Spheres and Camouflage Uniforms Painted White*, the work will be on view at Pavilion 13, a Soviet-era exhibition space in Kyiv, from September 14 to November 30. The site-specific work is commissioned by Ribbon International, a nonprofit focused on supporting contemporary and historic Ukrainian art and culture.

"In this era, being invited to hold an exhibition in Kyiv, the capital of a country at war, I hope to express certain ideas and reflections through my work," Ai said in a statement. "My artworks are not merely an aesthetic expression but also a reflection of my position as an individual navigating immense political shifts, international hegemonies, and conflicts. This exhibition provides a platform to articulate these concerns. At its core, this exhibition is a dialogue about war and peace, rationality and irrationality."

According to the release, the work will resemble the sphere-like icosahedron sculptures of his "Divina Proportione" series (2004–12), which was inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's mathematic illustrations. A 2006 edition was made of sought-after huanghuali wood, with one version **now belonging** to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and another **coming to auction** in 2022.

For the Kyiv presentation, Ai will exhibit three of these works, which will be made of metal and encased in a modified camouflage fabric that will include animal motifs. The fabric will then be "painted over in thin white paint, a second layer of camouflage," according to a release.

"Of course, whenever you cover something there's still something underneath," Ai's statement continues. "So I give extra meaning to how we're dealing with reality and which layer of reality we're dealing with. And is reality just what are we seeing or what we understand?"

Ai is currently the subject of a retrospective, "Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of Ai Weiwei," at the Seattle Art Museum. In a review for *Art in America*, critic Louis Bury **wrote** that the exhibition "holds a mirror up to recent liberal paradigms of political art, and unwittingly suggests their symbolism is in part compensatory, offering an aesthetic outlet for feelings of powerlessness."

*The Seattle Times*
Date 11 March 2025

The Seattle Times

Entertainment | Visual Arts

# Ai Weiwei's Seattle Art Museum takeover begins with 'Ai, Rebel'

March 11, 2025 at 6:00 am | *Updated March 11, 2025 at 6:01 pm*

Ai Weiwei stands next to "Forge" (2008-12), made out of 100 steel reinforcing bars and ink on canvas, at Seattle Art Museum on March 7. SAM's "Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of Ai Weiwei" is the central exhibit in an extended run for the artist at SAM's three locations. (Ken Lambert / The Seattle Times)

By Gayle Clemans

*Special to The Seattle Times*

You might expect a world-famous artist like Ai Weiwei — who has poked critically at value systems and institutions for decades with his provocative, interrogating art — to be more bombastic. But in a recent conversation ahead of a major exhibition at Seattle Art Museum, a soft-spoken Ai spoke of vulnerability, humor and whether a tomato tastes like a tomato. (More on that later.)

Born in 1957, Ai is the artist we need in 2025: someone unafraid to shed light on devastating world events, to speak truth to power. He is renowned globally for his conceptual work, which uses found and fabricated objects and a wide array of other media — photography, video, painting, porcelain, sculpture, woodworking, wallpaper, installation art, even Legos — to deliver messages about history, culture and the abuse or neglect of humanity.

A detail from "Sunflower Seeds," a 2010 porcelain work that weighs 1 ton. (Ken Lambert / The Seattle Times)

With "Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of Ai Weiwei" (March 12-Sept. 7), SAM is mounting the largest-ever U.S. exhibition of Ai's art, gathering work from across four decades. Iconic pieces will be on view, like a 2,000-pound sampling of his porcelain sunflower seeds, along with never-before-displayed work (like a new installation of porcelain sunflower shells).

Foong Ping, Seattle Art Museum's Foster Foundation Curator of Chinese Art, at a press preview for the restrospective "Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of Ai Weiwei," Friday, March 7, 2025, in Seattle. In the... (Ken Lambert / The Seattle Times) **More**

It's a powerful, thought-provoking exhibition, grounded in works of art that are beautiful, cleverly funny and heart-wrenching, sometimes all at once. Foong Ping, SAM's curator of Chinese art, organized the exhibition with the perspective of a historian and an eye for dramatic installation, resulting in visually arresting thematic clusters that allow rich readings of this legendary artist's work.

The exhibition opens with photographs, including the "Study of Perspective" series, in which Ai gives the middle finger to buildings and monuments, symbols of institutional control and influence around the world. The first photo in the series was taken in 1995 in Tiananmen Square, where hundreds of unarmed protesters had been killed during protests a half-decade before.

You'll also be greeted by a big neon sign of the f-word, a phonetic play on the name of Ai's company, FAKE Design Studio. When pronounced in Mandarin ("fah-kuh"), it sounds like that expletive, which appears in some of the artist's early work. This kind of playful double or triple entendre is classic Ai Weiwei.

"Humor is crucial," Ai said at SAM on March 7. "It's in every part of my work, which always has a double language or heightened meaning. Humor also questions what is questioned and who asks the questions."

1 of 2 | The artist Ai Weiwei is shown in Seattle on March 7 with "Grapes." This 2011 piece, made from 40 wood stools, is part of Seattle Art Museum's major retrospective exhibit, "Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of... (Ken Lambert / The Seattle Times) More

History is vitally important to the artist, too.

“Any meaningful learning for me is from history,” he said. “History is human memory. It’s where we come from. Without some understanding of history, we become disassociated from humanity. And disassociated with the fundamental question of who we are.”

Across his career, Ai has questioned and challenged the international treatment of refugees as well as corruption and human rights abuses within the Chinese government. These relentless inquiries have led to his imprisonment, the confiscation of his passport and the destruction of his art studio. Ai left China in 2015, settling in Berlin, then London and now Portugal. He hasn’t been to China since.

“I do not miss China as a government, a state that does not protect my basic values, human rights, freedom of speech,” Ai said. “I will never miss it.” Pausing to chuckle as if recognizing a forthcoming understatement, he continued, “You know, I had a problem with it. And that’s why I was forced out.”

The retrospective exhibition at SAM includes many references to personal and societal altercations with power, including a life-size replica of the room in which Ai was held after being detained by Chinese authorities in 2011.

Human suffering from oppression, immigration and natural disasters is another common thread. A giant snake hangs from the ceiling in one room, its scales made of small backpacks in memory of thousands of children who were killed in the devastating 2008 earthquake in Sichuan.

1 of 3 | The entryway to Seattle Art Museum's "Ai, Rebel" includes this recomposed tree, shown March 7 in Seattle. (Ken Lambert / The Seattle Times)

Ai said life's path, with desolate news around every corner, brings him to the topics that he reflects with his art. He gravitates toward issues that reveal his own ignorance and vulnerability.

"You have to put yourself in a very vulnerable position," he said. And then, after studying the problem, "something new will come out for yourself, and if something is important — crucial for you — you have to believe that it will be relevant for other people, too."

Ai returns to immigration repeatedly, both to learn more about crises around the world and because of his personal experiences. "I was a child refugee," he wrote in a 2019 article in The Guardian. "I know how it feels to live in a camp, robbed of my humanity."

In a 1985 sculpture, sturdy boots frame a violin, suggesting the forced transformation of artists into laborers during the Cultural Revolution. Ai Weiwei's father, famous poet Ai Qing, was exiled (with his young son) to a remote region of China, where he did hard labor in a re-education camp.

The sculpture was also inspired by the way Marcel Duchamp and other Dada artists manipulated found objects in the early 20th century as a deliberately absurd form of protest against World War I. Throughout Ai's work runs a vein of deep and respectful knowledge of art history, along with an irreverent insistence on exposing and poking fun at rigid value systems. After all, art history and cultural organizations uphold values, too, sometimes blindly and with bias, just like any other institution.

Fascinated with Chinese philosophy, Ai believes that it's necessary to understand the nature of everything, from the human condition to the qualities of the materials that he uses to make his work.

"I am not choosing the material. It is choosing me," he said. "You're not forcing your idea on the materials. It's in the nature of the material to force you to understand it. It's communication."

1 of 3 | "Surveillance Camera" (marble, 2010) by Ai Weiwei. (Ken Lambert / The Seattle Times)

Which brings us back to tomatoes. Ai believes that we should always ask what we're truly experiencing, what we're truly talking about. Are things what they appear to be? What they should be?

"When we eat tomatoes, we can say, 'Does that have a tomato taste or a potato taste? What is this, *really*?' " he said. "This always remains our first question. And our last question."

In addition to "Ai, Rebel," Seattle Asian Art Museum will host "Ai Weiwei: Water Lilies" from March 19 of this year through March 15, 2026, featuring Ai's Lego take on Monet's lilies, while Olympic Sculpture Park welcomes "Ai Weiwei: Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads (Bronze)" from May 17, 2025, through May 17, 2027. It's the first time SAM has presented the work of a single artist at all three of its locations at the same time.

**“Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of Ai Weiwei”**

March 12-Sept. 7; Seattle Art Museum, 1300 First Ave., Seattle; $19.99-$32.99, free for SAM members and children 14 and younger; 206-654-3100, details on “Ai, Rebel” and other Weiwei events: seattleartmuseum.org

***Gayle Clemans**: is an art historian, writer and professor at Cornish College of the Arts. Connect with her on Instagram @gayleclemans.*

*W Magazine*
12 March 2025

W

# Ai Weiwei Reflects on 40 Years of Rebellion With His First U.S. Retrospective in 10 Years

The Seattle Art Museum's *Ai, Rebel* exhibition features 130 works from the artist's prolific, provocative career.

*by* **Claire Valentine**
*March 12, 2025*

Photo by Gao Yuan, courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio

"I'm like a shattered mirror," the artist Ai Weiwei tells *W* one morning in a cozy corner of the Seattle Art Museum (SAM), where he's mounting his first U.S. retrospective in over a decade. "A mirror can see a perfect image, but once you shatter it, the pieces reflect reality, with all its cracks."

This mission statement is on full display with *Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of Ai Weiwei*, which will be on view through September 7. The exhibition features 130 works spanning 40 years of the 67-year-old artist's provocative, humorous, and at times devastating artistic practice. "Either you do all of Ai Weiwei or nothing at all," the show's curator, Foong Ping, said. Foong, who typically focuses on ancient rather than contemporary Chinese art, was interested in putting Ai's works into the context of the current historical moment, which "calls for such an artist."

"We watch Ai's commitment to watching those in power and are reminded of our own agency for collective resistance," Foong added.

*Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, 1995, AiWeiwei, Chinese, b. 1957, black-and-white photographs (triptych), each: 58 x 48 in.
Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio, ©Ai Weiwei

Right away, that sense of irreverent resistance greets visitors, whom Foong notes are "immediately flipped off by the show." Divided into three chapters roughly outlining his career, *Ai, Rebel* opens with the neon piece *F.U.C.K.* (2000), a nod to Ai's penchant for wordplay, as the sign also refers to his FAKE Design Studio in Beijing (but can be pronounced like the English expletive when said in Mandarin). This section, "Introducing the Rebel," features many of Ai's early works that take direct aim at authoritarianism, government, and empire in general—like the eight photographs from his *Study of Perspective* (1995-2011) series, which show him giving the middle finger to historically significant places like the White House and Tiananmen Square. It also features works from Ai's early career, including the now-iconic (and once highly controversial) triptych *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995), plus 25 black-and-white photographs taken when a young Ai lived in New York City in the 1980s, where he was among the first generation of Chinese students to study abroad following the end of the Cultural Revolution.

"Introducing the Rebel" also includes a poem by Ai's father, the famous poet Ai Qing. Art, like poetry, "uses a limited language to explain complex elements or situations," Ai notes. Ai's family was sent to a labor camp and exiled for nearly two decades due to Ai Qing's work and influence; they returned home to Beijing in 1976 following Mao Zedong's death. The impact of this formative experience is evident in nearly every work by Ai, who would go on to become a dissident himself, thanks to his artistic challenges of state power and surveillance.

"I spent about 40 years under a clear authoritarian state, and I'm maybe one of the first people to announce the West has become a new [type of] authoritarianism, which is capital or corporate," Ai tells *W*. "There's huge money accumulating in a few people's hands. This is no different from the authoritarianism we normally see in other countries." But, the artist adds, "history always moves like a river. There's a rock or a mountain that changes our course, but the water has to keep moving under pressure. Hopefully, during this moment of history, we can still protect freedom of speech, which is essential for a healthy society. Art is that freedom of expression."

Ai Weiwei with the word "FUCK" sunburned onto his chest, Tiananmen Square, Beijing, 2000, part of the Beijing Photographs series, 1993-2003, Ai Weiwei, Chinese, b. 1957, black and white photograph.

Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio, © Ai Weiwei

The second chapter of *Ai, Rebel*, "Material Disruptions," focuses on the artist's unconventional use of emotionally evocative or historically significant materials like marble, Qing Dynastry-era pottery, and everyday objects like bicycles, furniture, and shoes. Works like *Mao (Facing Forward)*—among the last oil paintings he ever made in 1986—and the Chinese army raincoat repurposed for *Safe Sex* (1988) show him grappling with his native country's legacy while living away from it for the first time.

"Material Disruptions" contains several of Ai's most famous works, and the effect of their inclusion is a reminder of just how long and significant his career has been. It's delightful to turn a corner and come across a portion of *Sunflower Seeds* (2010), for instance—the piece for which he enlisted artisans to handcraft millions of porcelain sunflower seeds in reference to both Mao-era propaganda and the power of the individual within the collective.

Installation view of *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads (Gold)*, 2010, Ai Weiwei, Chinese, b. 1957, bronze with gold plating and wood bases. Courtesy of The Albertina Museum, Vienna / Lisa Rastl and Reiner Riedler and Ai Weiwei Studio, © Ai Weiwei

The final section, "Watching Ai Watching Power," introduces the artist's turn from pure creative to true activist once he began leveraging the power of public works, collective community action, and the Internet. Most famous, perhaps, is Ai's investigation of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, which killed nearly 100,000 people, many of whom were schoolchildren. Ai and a group of concerned citizens painstakingly collected the names of many of those children, resulting in the sobering *Names of the Student Earthquake Victims Found by the Citizens' Investigation* (2008-2011), which starkly and frankly captures the enormity of the catastrophe.

Two other pieces in this area of the show, *Snake Ceiling* (2008) and *81* (2013), refer to Ai's investigation and the fallout that led to his imprisonment. In any other context, *Snake Ceiling*, comprised of dozens of small backpacks, could be a visually arresting tribute to the Year of the Snake—not the tens of thousands of students who died in the earthquake. Visitors can walk through *81*, a life-size recreation of the padded cell Ai was held in for as many days following his efforts to expose the corruption behind the shoddy, so-called "tofu-dreg" school construction that caused the deaths. (After his arrest, Ai collaborated with this magazine on a cover shoot referencing his detention.)

But the exhibition extends beyond SAM; a bronze rendition of Ai's zodiac head sculptures will be on view at Seattle's Olympic Sculpture Park beginning May 17, and a giant sculptural reinterpretation of Claude Monet's water lilies, made in Ai's current favorite medium of Lego bricks, will be at the Seattle Asian Art Museum later this month.

New SAM director and CEO Scott Stulen, who had great success in his last role turning the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma into a community fixture, says having Ai Weiwei's works spread across three places in Seattle offers even more opportunity for people to engage with his message. "This could not be a more timely and urgent exhibition," he said.

For Ai, who currently lives in Portugal but has several studios around the world, the moment is a quietly triumphant one. "After so many years of effort in the art world," he says, "I still appreciate not being forgotten."

*The Art Newspaper*
18 August 2025

THE ART NEWSPAPER

# ‘Their resolve is incredibly strong’: Ai Weiwei visits soldiers on Ukrainian front lines

As Ukraine’s president prepared for a high-stakes visit to Washington, DC, the Chinese artist and activist visited Eastern Ukraine

**Sophia Kishkovsky**

18 August 2025

Ai Weiwei with Ukrainian troops
Photo courtesy Ai Weiwei, via Instagram

Ai Weiwei, the Chinese artist and activist, has travelled to the front lines of Ukraine’s war against Russia’s full-scale invasion just weeks before unveiling a new commission in Kyiv. In eastern Ukraine, near Kharkiv, Ai met with Ukrainian fighters and cultural figures as well as Pyotr Verzilov, a member of Pussy Riot who is fighting against Russia for Ukraine.

In a series of photographs and videos posted on Instagram without any commentary over the weekend, Ai documented his meetings with Ukrainian soldiers in forests and trenches, cultural figures and landmark Constructivist architecture in Kharkiv—which is under regular Russian attack—and images of support including the blue and yellow national flag, fields of sunflowers and a puzzle of *Reply of the Zaporizhzhian Cossacks* (1880-91), a painting by the Ukrainian-born artist Ilya Repin.

At least ten people were killed in Kharkiv and in Zaporizhzhia by Russian drone strikes on Sunday night and Monday morning (17-18 August), just hours before Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and European leaders were scheduled to meet at the White House with US President Donald Trump. Following a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska on 15 August, Trump is pressuring for a trilateral meeting with Putin and Zelensky.

In some posts, Ai is shown wearing a black shirt with the Ukrainian word *Khartiia* in white, denoting a volunteer unit that has become the 13th Brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine. Khartiia's fighters include Serhiy Zhadan, a well-known Ukrainian poet and musician from Kharkiv, and Verzilov, the Pussy Riot member who has joined the Ukrainian military and been declared a terrorist and charged with state treason by Russia.

"I went to Kharkiv and spent a few days with Ukrainian soldiers on the front lines," Ai tells *The Art Newspaper*. "I saw how extremely difficult their lives are from my interactions with them, but their resolve is also incredibly strong. I met many Ukrainians, from high-ranking military leaders to drone operators and ordinary soldiers. Their attitudes and understanding of their situation were consistent: they cannot accept their country and culture falling under the control of an invading military power. My impression is that they will never accept this. At the same time, they believe that regardless of the outcome of negotiations, no country or state leader can sway the will or decide the fate of the Ukrainian people."

Verzilov documented Ai's visit to the front on Instagram as well, including photos and a video of them together in camouflage body armour. He wrote in his post: "The chief artist of modernity, one of the pillars of world culture, the symbol of modern art Ai Weiwei came to us at the frontline in the very heart of the war, on combat positions north of the beautiful city of Kharkiv."

Ai's forthcoming installation, *Three Perfectly Proportioned Spheres and Camouflage Uniforms Painted White,* was commissioned by the non-profit Ribbon International and inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's mathematical illustrations. It will be on view in Kyiv at Pavilion 13, a renovated Soviet-era venue, from 14 September until 30 November.

*The Brooklyn Rail*
April 2025

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
ARTSEEN | APRIL 2025

# *Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of Ai Weiwei*

By Eana Kim

Ai Weiwei, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, 1995. Black-and-white photographs (triptych), each: 58 x 48 inches. © Ai Weiwei. Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio.

At this time of social upheaval, artist Ai Weiwei's presence in all his works spanning his four-decade career reverberates more powerfully than ever. Given his fame, *Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of Ai Weiwei*, his first US retrospective in over a decade on view at the Seattle Art Museum (SAM), which features his work in all mediums—crafts, voice, film, sculpture, and activism—feels late, but perhaps has arrived at the most relevant time.

Weiwei's objects are found, familiar, and simultaneously personal and universal. More than 130 objects included in the exhibition range from dust to bricks, stools to bicycles, and porcelains to a mailbox. Their very familiarity holds a profound impact when one reads their social implications. Developing upon Duchampian readymades, his objects are culturally specific embodiments, representing Chinese craft and culture. Divided sectionally, the exhibition's first chapter, "Introducing the Rebel," opens with a neon sign, *F.U.C.K.* (2000), greeting visitors with a sense of humor. The word is a pun on the word "fake," which is pronounced as "fah-kuh" in Mandarin, and also refers to Weiwei's studio name, FAKE Design Studio, in Beijing. The defiant messaging of the sign echoes in an adjacent photographic series, "Study of Perspective" (1995–2011), in which the artist is pictured pointing his middle finger toward various landmarks around the world, including the Forbidden City, the Eiffel Tower, and the White House. Playfully, he twists the measuring gesture according to a single-point perspective. Finally, a bronze series, including the sculpture *Arm with the Finger in Bronze* (2000) is installed in the center of the gallery, solidifying and amplifying Weiwei's rebellion against authority and power.

Ai Weiwei, *Arm with the Finger in Bronze*, 2000. Gilt bronze, 14 x 27 1/2 x 9 inches. Courtesy the Albertina Museum, Vienna / Lisa Rastl and Reiner Riedler and Ai Weiwei Studio, Ai Weiwei.

The first gallery also includes one of his iconic photographs, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995), which prefigured his recurring and overarching subject—destruction and resistance. The photo triptych captures Weiwei smashing a two-thousand-year-old artifact—an emblem of Chinese history—which at the time of its making drew much controversy. However, unlike iconoclasm, his provocative act was intended to challenge the cultural values and traditions that have been imposed and shaped by all forms of power. The following section of the show, "Material Disruptions," continues exploring Weiwei's witty intervention of existing concepts and everyday materials influenced by Marcel Duchamp, Dadaism, and Andy Warhol. Yet, Weiwei's readymades are charged with emotionality and criticality. His *Shovel with Fur* (1986)—reminiscent of Duchamp's *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915)—evokes the arms of his father Ai Qing, who was a famous, revolutionary poet, exiled, and forced to hard labor shoveling excrement from communal toilets. *Violin Shoe* (1985) portrays the hindrance of intellectual and artistic activities under the Communist ideology that urged for labor. Among these Dada-inspired objects, another ancient urn appears with a Coca-Cola logo overpainted on its surface, representing the convoluted entanglement of antiquity and modernity, and the West and East. The daring superimposition of the print on such a historical artifact disturbs the viewer.

The subsequent galleries survey the ways in which Weiwei develops his readymades (stools, porcelains, bicycles, and the like) into multiples. Proliferate in uniformity and repetition, his readymades often symbolize the people of China and the "Made in China" phenomenon. Most notably, *Sunflower Seeds*—his most celebrated work, first installed at the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in 2010—is reinterpreted at SAM, featuring one ton of tiny, handmade porcelain sunflower seeds made by numerous artisans in a pyramidal stack. (The original iteration comprised more than one hundred million handmade seeds). The mass subdues each seed's singularity, analogizing the nation's conformity under censorship. Weiwei further pushes the concept of real versus fake in *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads (Gold)* (2010). Among the twelve zodiac animal heads that once adorned the fountain at the Yuanmingyuan (The Old Summer Palace), many were looted by foreign troops during the Second Opium War, with only seven of them known and recovered by Chinese museums. Weiwei recreated the five lost pieces to complete the full circle, painted in gold to venerate the national treasure. Destabilizing the obsession with original over replica, he addresses the objects' complicated history head on, noting that "without twelve, it's not a zodiac."

Installation view: *Ai, Rebel: The Art & Activism of Ai Weiwei*, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, 2025. Courtesy Seattle Art Museum. Photo: Natali Wiseman.

The exhibition's final section, "Watching Ai Watching Power," displays a giant snake made up of school backpacks stretched out across the museum's central ceiling. At first glance, the work *Snake Ceiling* (2009) appears to be a cliché celebration of the Year of the Snake. However, the objects are a poignant representation of the thousands of children who died in the devastating Sichuan earthquake in 2008. A turning point for Weiwei, this tragic event fueled his activism for human rights. Weiwei researched the 5,219 student victims' names and birthdays to commemorate them, while inquiring into the poor construction of the school buildings that the government tried to hide. His citizen investigation led to Weiwei's detention for eighty one days in an undisclosed location in 2011, which is reproduced as a life-sized mockup jail in the gallery juxtaposed with a hundred metal rebars salvaged from the sites of schools.

Over the years since then, Weiwei has been censored, beaten, and harassed by the Chinese government. His iconic selfie—posted online right before he was taken into custody by the police in 2009—is recreated with LEGO. Titled *Illumination* (2019), the glittering toy bricks augment the grids beneath the flashlight in the photographic selfie, which is evocative of both digital pixelation and tessera, ancient mosaic tiles. Such excessive physicality fossilizes the volatile digital image, memorializing and transforming the moment of arrest into a statement of resistance. Exiting the gallery of maximalist grids, one will spot two surveillance cameras sculpted in marble: *Surveillance Camera* (2010), attached to a high corner of the room, and *Surveillance Camera with Plinth* (2015) centered in the gallery. As Weiwei said to this author, "Surveillance is the monumental phenomenon of our time," and these marbleized cameras stand as symbols he continues to rebel against. Ai Weiwei is present.

**Eana Kim** is an art historian and curator based in New York. She holds a Ph.D. from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. A scholar of the intersection between contemporary art, technology, and science, Kim is at work on a book on life forms in contemporary art, which examines more-than-human agencies and hybrid morphology.

LISSON GALLERY

*Financial Times*
4 June 2025

# FINANCIAL TIMES

Architecture + Add to myFT

## This year's Serpentine Pavilion is extravagant and impressive – but where's the fun?

Bangladeshi architect Marina Tabassum has created a vast hangar of dark timber and polycarbonate panels — with a ginkgo tree at its heart

That long run of projects, however, a quarter of a century of commissions, takes a toll in sustaining interest. New themes have emerged over the course of the commissions: climate, sustainability, history, nature and memory (in a very meta move, architects Herzog & de Meuron and artist Ai Weiwei excavated the site to reveal the archaeology of the pavilions themselves). A certain inflation has set in, an increase in impact to maintain visibility. There has been a clear move away from white men (Bjarke Ingels was the last in 2016) but the commission has mostly kept to its core mission of exposing architects who have otherwise not built in the UK before.

'A Capsule in Time', the 2025 Serpentine Pavilion, designed by Marina Tabassum © Iwan Baan

Occasionally, the rhetoric clashes with reality. Despite much talk of sustainability, these are solid structures, requiring plenty of concrete and steel, which have to survive the unpredictable English weather through to autumn and accommodate an increasingly demanding schedule of events.

What is a little surprising is that Tabassum, a Bangladeshi architect who is accustomed to working with minimal resources using light-touch materials such as bamboo and woven panels (at least in her work for the poor and marginalised), has employed heavy materials and substantial engineering to create her pavilion this year.

The building is the shape of an extravagant jelly mould, a cylinder with half-domed ends and dark timber arches clad in tinted polycarbonate panels. It is big, and reminded me of those photos of epic, early 20th-century airship hangars. It has also been designed to move, one of its sections sliding to allow different permutations of open and enclosed space, although to me it looked like it might be quite a palaver for not that much effect.

Marina Tabassum, the architect behind the 2025 Serpentine Pavilion © Asif Salman

The interior is undeniably impressive, an echo of the vast British greenhouses of the Victorian era. The light is diffused through various shades of brown and the surrounding foliage casts gorgeous, shifting shadows while the open sky remains visible through gaps in the structure. At its centre is a single ginkgo tree, the leaves of which will turn from green to yellow over the course of the pavilion's existence in the park (for those worried about the harming of trees, it will be replanted in the park after the pavilion is gone). Apparently inspired by the *shamiana* structures of south Asia, temporary wedding and festival venues that appear overnight saturated with colour and excitement, this capsule is a more refined, more heavyweight version, similarly aimed at creating a sense of occasion and gathering.

Nearby this year is another structure, a "play pavilion" for children which sees the sudden return of white men, this time in the form of 1960s pop radical and Archigram co-founder Peter Cook. His structure, sponsored by Lego (and looking every inch of it), was still under wraps when I visited but there was plenty visible. A garish orange pavilion with layers of Lego applied as decoration in the form of contoured landscapes, it looks a little self-consciously wacky, in the vein of dungareed kids' show presenters, but also refreshingly unserious. Its folded roof even contains a subtle hint of Hadid's triangulated structures. Which would be the only subtle thing about it.

Back in the brown, though, it might be that the pressure of having to follow so many designs by so many esteemed designers is beginning to result in a certain burden. Lina Ghotmeh's structure in 2023 similarly struggled to reconcile big social space with the frippery of the temporary. Minsuk Cho attempted to reintroduce a certain playfulness last year, but maybe the pavilions have lost some of the lightness and whimsicality which, you might think, should define a pavilion in a park. Perhaps the world has become a little too dark for pavilions, and architecture has been overburdened with responsibilities.

There is also, counter-intuitively, something a little too finished about this pavilion. It sounds a curious critique but it is very beautifully made, the subtle gradations of tones in brown and beige are super-tasteful and the result is something that looks ostentatiously luxurious, like those exclusive fashion pop-ups in Parisian or Milanese courtyards around catwalk shows.

An interior view of the 2025 Serpentine Pavilion © Iwan Baan

Yet this remains an astonishing, admirable programme. At the press launch, Serpentine artistic director Hans Ulrich Obrist called it “an architecture without doors — free and open to all”. And absolutely it is. All this costs not a penny of public money (funding comes from Goldman Sachs, among others) and provides an opportunity to experience designs by the world’s most esteemed and intriguing architects first-hand. Its ephemerality is sometimes criticised (including by me), and yet it is also its essence; its impermanence is its urgency. See it while you can.

*Opens June 6; ‘Play Pavilion’ by Peter Cook opens June 11; serpentinegalleries.org*

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Comments

*CNN Style*
14th February 2023

CNN STYLE

# Ai Weiwei's new show considers the value of everyday objects

The Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei is headed to the Design Museum in London this spring with a major new show unveiling works drawing on the Covid-19 pandemic. Three toilet paper sculptures will go on show — including two life-size rolls, one in marble and one in glass — demonstrating the demand for basic disposable products during the coronavirus crisis.

The exhibition — described as the first to frame Ai's work through the lens of architecture and design — also focuses on the 2008 Sichuan earthquake and the changing urban face of Beijing over the past three decades.

"(The show includes) things we think of as worthless in ordinary times, something as worthless as a toilet roll, which during the pandemic suddenly became precious... that for him was a real signal of how objects can gain and lose value depending on the context of our times," said Justin McGuirk, the chief curator at the Design Museum and the exhibition curator, at an online press launch.

Crucially, he added, "we are not presenting Ai Weiwei as a designer and architect... (but) using his work and his thinking to reflect on design and architecture."

Ai Weiwei's 2020 artwork "Marble Toilet Paper"

Ai's "Marble Takeout Box"

A number of site-specific installations, comprising hundreds of thousands of objects arranged on the gallery's floor in sections known as "fields," form the centerpiece of the show. These consist of works collected by Ai in recent years, encompassing items such as Stone Age tools and Lego bricks. The show will also include Ai's largest work ever made out of Lego.

"This is a show about values; it is a meditation on cultural values and how they shift over time. It presents a history of making over thousands of years," McGuirk said.

"When you collect so much... it tells you about human society," Ai said at the launch.

One of the "fields," entitled "Left Right Studio Material," includes fragments from Ai's porcelain sculptures that were destroyed when his Left Right studio complex in Beijing was demolished by the Chinese state in 2018. "They (the pieces) have a moral value," Ai said. The Lego "field" will display bricks donated to the artist after the company briefly refused to supply him with material for a politically-charged artwork in the wake of a 2014 exhibition featuring Lego portraits of political prisoners.

Another "field" includes 1,600 neglected neolithic stone tools which Ai started collecting in the 1990s at places such as flea markets. "Nobody paid attention to them... they (market vendors) were really surprised I wanted them," Ai said.

Between the 200,000 porcelain spouts from teapots and wine ewers and the 100,000 porcelain displayed balls alongside them, other fields shine a light on ancient handcrafted works. "We often say modern people do not know how to wash a dish," Ai said. "In some senses, we are less understanding... about the touch, texture and shape of forms made by human hands." The field sections in the exhibition will not be cordoned off to visitors, who will be able to walk freely between them.

"Untitled (Lego Bricks)" is made from bricks donated by Ai to Lego after the Danish company clearly refused to sell him products he might use in political artworks.

The tension between handmade and industrially produced items underpins the show, added McGuirk, highlighting the period of turbulence and transition that China has gone through in the past 30 years. Ai charts the changing face of Beijing following "the tremendous scale of urbanization and development which brought a lot of destruction, a devaluing of history, a wiping away of streetscapes and architecture," McGuirk added.

Meanwhile the coffin-like "Rebar and Case", references the earthquake that devastated Sichuan province in 2008, claiming almost 90,000 lives. More than 5,000 students were crushed under the rubble of their collapsed school buildings. Ai's new work "Nian Nian" consists of 26 prints representing more than 1,000 names hand-carved in a jade seal using calligraphy, creating a graphic memorial to the children who died.

Ai's "Coloured House" is one of several artworks showing outside the main exhibition space.

Some works will be shown outside the exhibition space, including "Coloured House," the timber frame of a house that once belonged to a family in Zhejiang province in eastern China during the early Qing dynasty.

"The loss of cultural memory is very much one of the themes of this show... Ai is bringing ancient and modern together," McGuirk said.

*"Ai Weiwei: Making Sense" is showing at the Design Museum in London, UK, from April 7 to July 30.*

*Wallpaper**
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Wallpaper*

# Ai Weiwei's largest-ever Lego artwork revealed at London's Design Museum

At London's Design Museum, Ai Weiwei has unveiled Water Lilies #1, a new Lego recreation of Claude Monet's iconic painting. We explore the vast new work ahead of the Chinese artist's major show at the museum, opening on 7 April 2023

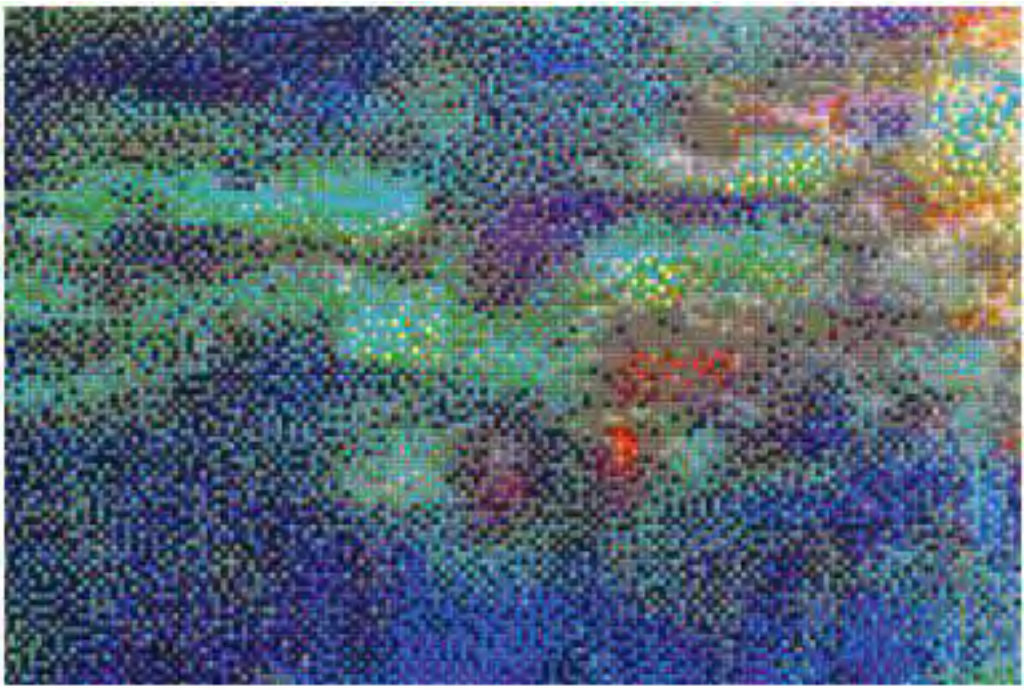
BY HARRIET LLOYD-SMITH
PUBLISHED 12 DAYS AGO

Water Lilies #1, 2022, by Ai Weiwei. Lego bricks
(Image credit: Photo © Ela Bialkowska/OKNO studio. © Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Continua)

Ahead of his major show at London's Design Museum, Chinese artist Ai Weiwei has unveiled a homage to Impressionist painter, Claude Monet, constructed entirely of Lego.

The piece, titled *Water Lilies #1*, is Ai's largest Lego artwork to date, spanning 15m in length and comprising 650,000 studs of Lego bricks in 22 colours.

The new work will be on view as part of the Design Museum's much-anticipated exhibition 'Ai Weiwei: Making Sense', which opens on Friday 7 April, and will be the artist's first exhibition to focus on design and architecture, as well as his largest solo show in eight years.



Detail from *Water Lilies #1*, 2022, by Ai Weiwei: Lego bricks

(Image credit: Photo © Ela Bialkowska/OKNO studio. © Image courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua)

In *Water Lilies #1*, Ai probes notions of reality and artifice. Although Monet's word-famous painting represents the epitome of natural beauty, the pond and gardens he depicts were in fact a man-made construct, designed and created by Monet himself at the turn of the 20th century. In Ai's work, the Lego bricks eliminate the humanistic gesture of Monet's brushstrokes in favour of a simplified, depersonalised language of pixel-like parts and colours. Through this, Ai comments on contemporary modes of digital image consumption, and all that might be lost in the process.

As Ai Weiwei commented, 'Our world is complex and collapsing towards an unpredictable future. It's crucial for individuals to find a personalised language to express their experience of these challenging conditions. Personalised expression arises from identifying with history and memories while creating a new language and narrative. Without a personal narrative, artistic narration loses its quality. In *Water Lilies #1* I integrate Monet's Impressionist painting, reminiscent of Zenism in the East, and concrete experiences of my father and me into a digitised and pixelated language. Toy bricks as the material, with their qualities of solidity and potential for deconstruction, reflect the attributes of language in our rapidly developing era where human consciousness is constantly dividing.'

Detail from *Water Lilies #1*, 2022, by Ai Weiwei. Lego bricks

(Image credit: Photo © Ela Bialkowska/OKNO studio. © Image courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua)

Ai Weiwei first deployed Lego bricks as an art medium in 2014 when he used them to create portraits of political prisoners. Now a key element of his practice, Lego will also feature heavily in the Design Museum show, most notably in Untitled (Lego Incident) which will see thousands of Lego blocks fill the gallery floor. Ai sourced the materials for the work (seen fully assembled for the first time at the Design Museum) via public donations from around the world, in response to Lego briefly refusing to sell their products to him in 2014.

Justin McGuirk, Chief Curator at the Design Museum and curator of 'Ai Weiwei: Making Sense' said: 'Several of the works in this exhibition capture the destruction of urban development in China over the last two decades. With *Water Lilies #1*, Ai Weiwei presents us with an alternate vision – a garden paradise.' McGuirk also describes how Ai has embedded a more poignant narrative into the piece: a dark portal on the right-hand side, representing the door to the underground dugout in Xinjiang province where Ai and his father, the acclaimed poet Ai Qing, lived in forced exile in the 1960s. 'On the one hand, he has personalised it by inserting the door of his desert childhood home, and on the other, he has depersonalised it by using an industrial language of modular Lego blocks. This is a monumental, complex and powerful work and we are proud to be the first museum to show it.'

*'Ai Weiwei: Making Sense' runs at the Design Museum from 7 April-30 July 2023.* ***designmuseum.org*** ✱

Detail from *Water Lilies #1*, 2022, by Ai Weiwei. Lego bricks

(Image credit: Photo © Ela Bialkowska/OKNO studio. © Image courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua)

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# Ai Weiwei's Latest Work Is a Monument to His Past

## The groundbreaking, exiled Chinese artist builds a hopeful new life—and a new studio, in the Portuguese countryside

Ai Weiwei's relocation to Portugal was largely practical, offering affordable land and access to European residency and travel visas. Visiting for the first time, he says, "There was no traffic on the road, a continuous empty landscape, just trees and grass. I thought it would be a nice place to settle." Jo Metson Scott

**By Jay Cheshes**

**Photographs by Jo Metson Scott**

"Honestly, I think it's a useless building," says Ai Weiwei in mid-October, talking outside his new studio, an imposing wood-framed structure nearing completion on a barren stretch of scrubbrush in the Portuguese countryside. The activist-artist has two studios already, in Beijing and Berlin. "I don't need another studio," he says. Nonetheless he's erecting another one above his home here, about an hour southeast of Lisbon in the rural Alentejo region—some 30,000 square feet of open-plan space around a central courtyard.

Beneath a construction crane, 100 solid wood pillars rise to meet a complex lattice of wood beams overhead, each piece notched into place without nails or adhesives, following the ancient rules of traditional Chinese joinery. The building, designed by Ai, isn't architecture in the contemporary sense but something more essential. "In China nobody is called an architect; we call it 'big cabinetry' or 'small cabinetry,'" he says. "Big cabinetry, you build houses; small cabinetry, you make furniture—same method. It's an old type of language...it's puzzled together. For me it's more like a game."

The new studio differs from its Shanghai forebear in one respect—Ai altered the axis of the gable roof, creating substantial building challenges and, for Ai, exemplifying a "subversive" aesthetic quality he seems to relish. "It's not supposed to work that way," he says. Jo Metson Scott

Before moving to Portugal three years ago, Ai, 66, China's most famous dissident artist—now unable to return to his homeland, lest authorities decide to detain him—had been living in Berlin, where he arrived in 2015 after he was released from house arrest in Beijing and the Communist regime returned his confiscated passport. Now he's traded the hustle of the big city for the idyllic calm of this sparsely populated corner of Portugal. "I used to enjoy the fast. Now I enjoy the slowness," he says of the change in scenery and lifestyle.

Even in isolation, though, as an icon of free speech and an outspoken presence on social media whose pronouncements sometimes rankle more than Chinese authorities, Ai's life still moves at a ferocious pace. Last fall, as war consumed Israel and the Gaza Strip, Ai weighed in on the conflict on X (formerly Twitter), calling out what he saw as the influence of American Jews on U.S. support for Israel, and igniting a controversy that quickly rippled around the world. "Financially, culturally and in terms of media influence, the Jewish community has had a significant presence in the United States," Ai wrote, in part, in a post he later deleted. "The annual $3 billion aid package to Israel has, for decades, been touted as one of the most valuable investments the United States has ever made. This partnership is often described as one of shared destiny." In response, Ai's London gallery, Lisson, indefinitely postponed a new exhibition of his work that had been set to open in November.

Over the years Ai has been a critic of Israeli government policy toward Palestinians, of the U.S.-Mexico border wall, of the United Kingdom's Brexit vote, of Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. His criticism of German society after he left Berlin—describing a pervasive "authoritarian mindset" and a distaste for foreigners, and going so far as to tell the *Guardian* "Nazism perfectly exists in German daily life today"—led to a fierce backlash in the German press. "When I start to criticize German society, they have a sense of loss or betrayal: 'We saved this guy's life, there's no gratitude,'" says Ai, of his comments about a country that gave him asylum. Still, he insists, he has "no regrets."

The building's frame will be made entirely from timber according to ancient joinery techniques that eschew nails, glue or other hardware. But because the roof is jogged off its axis, Ai says, the building's unique form "has never been seen in Chinese architectural tradition." Jo Metson Scott

Over the years Ai has been a critic of Israeli government policy toward Palestinians, of the U.S.-Mexico border wall, of the United Kingdom's Brexit vote, of Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. His criticism of German society after he left Berlin—describing a pervasive "authoritarian mindset" and a distaste for foreigners, and going so far as to tell the *Guardian* "Nazism perfectly exists in German daily life today"—led to a fierce backlash in the German press. "When I start to criticize German society, they have a sense of loss or betrayal: 'We saved this guy's life, there's no gratitude,'" says Ai, of his comments about a country that gave him asylum. Still, he insists, he has "no regrets."

Ai's new 30,000-square-foot studio, on a perch close to his home, is a near copy of his studio in Shanghai, which Chinese authorities demolished upon its completion. Based on traditional Chinese architecture, the frame is made from timber, the roof from clay tiles and the floor from stone. Jo Metson Scott

Portugal has offered something of a sanctuary from the spotlight, even as he continues to share his unrestrained thoughts in interviews and posts on Instagram and X. He put an offer on the 40-acre property, a lawyer's former vacation home, after seeing it once, on his first trip to the country in 2019. "It was very random, nothing planned," he says. "I didn't even study the map to see where it was."

He was drawn to Portugal by the plentiful sunshine, good real estate values and a "golden visa" program offering expats willing to invest in the country easy access to European Union residency. He took over the low-slung house with the furniture in it. The last owners, a couple with four kids, even left him their big white Alentejo mastiff, a local breed. "That dog was so sad," he says.

Ai, who shares the property with three assistants, spent periods of lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic here, living among the artifacts of someone else's life. "It was really interesting to see that he appropriated the circumstances of the house," says Philippe Vergne, director of the Serralves Museum in Porto, Portugal, who visited Ai shortly after he moved in. "I see a parallel with the way he approaches art, by occupying circumstances, moving in, like the hermit crabs who occupy these empty shells."

The courtyard of Ai's house, which had been the vacation home of a wealthy Portuguese lawyer and his family. Ai bought the home with the furniture still inside. "It's comfortable," he says. "The architecture is 20 years old, maybe 23 years old. It looks classic but it's not. It's well built." Jo Metson Scott

Among the few changes Ai made to the home were installing a table, chairs and potted plants in the courtyard. He still sleeps beneath artworks the lawyer hung above the bed. "I never met him—very strange," Ai says. "If I travel and go to a lot of hotels, it's just like that." Jo Metson Scott

There's a tennis court Ai never uses and a pool he never swims in—though he enjoys watching the sunlight reflecting off its surface. "You need some water for good feng shui," he says. He brought one cat from Berlin and adopted another, added potted plants and a decorative tub filled with koi fish to the courtyard and a big birdcage with a pair of turacos (exotic birds from Africa) to the veranda out back. "We needed some life here," he says.

With almost no art at all in the house, there's not much to indicate one of the world's highest-profile artists lives here. A single recognizable Ai creation hangs in a hallway, a rendition in Lego—a favored medium these days—of an iconic early work, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*. The original, a triptych of photographs capturing Ai smashing a 2,000-year-old Chinese relic, referenced the destruction of Chinese heritage during Mao's Cultural Revolution. (Some observers pointed out that in creating the work Ai himself was destroying—some said desecrating—that same cultural heritage.) He hung the Lego version, he told me, so TV crews who come to visit him in Portugal will have something to shoot. "I don't like to look at my artwork."

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Ai began mapping out plans for his Portugal studio a few months after he arrived, with no clear idea of how he might use the space. Eventually, he says, he might shift some of the fabrication that now happens in Berlin and Beijing to Portugal. But the new building is also an end unto itself. "I said, 'Maybe I should do something here to make me feel some sense of belonging.'"

Ai is a polymath and an autodidact, a conceptual artist, documentary filmmaker and architect—he helped design the Bird's Nest stadium for the 2008 Beijing Olympics despite having no formal design training. "My work you cannot really define as architecture, sculpture or design," he says. "I work in between, in everything." He creates beautiful things that double as big activist statements, often overcoming huge logistical hurdles along the way.

"He's a tireless figure, has got extraordinary energy, extraordinary ability to work on many different levels," says Greg Hilty, partner and curatorial director at Lisson. "I think he can do that because he approaches everything in a rational, intuitive way."

A model of the Bird's Nest stadium, which Ai helped design for the 2008 Olympics.
Mads Nissen / Panos Pictures

*Sunflower Seeds*, an installation composed of 100 million tiny porcelain sculptures.
Lennart Preiss / AP Photo

In 2010, Ai filled the Turbine Hall at London's Tate Modern museum with 100 million porcelain sunflower seeds, hand-crafted by 1,600 Chinese artisans—a commentary on global trade and the ubiquity of "made in China" exports. He tackled the global refugee crisis with his 2019 piece *Life Vest Snake*, weaving an enormous serpent from life vests recovered from the Greek isle of Lesbos.

In 2021, he presented an outdoor sculpture, cast in iron from a mold made from a 100-foot-tall tree in the Brazilian rainforest, as

part of an exhibition focused on deforestation shown at the Serralves Museum. Its director, Vergne, had originally approached Ai about organizing a show on his architectural work. "I liked the way he turned my question around," says Vergne. "When I said, 'I want to do something about your architecture.' He sent me a picture of this tree and he told me, 'This is architecture, this is a temple.'"

*Pequi Tree*, cast in iron from a mold of a tree in Brazil's rainforest Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio

Ai transforms ready-made objects from the ancient and modern worlds into complex works of art, carpeting museum floors with thousands of Stone Age tools or porcelain teapot spouts, and welding together bicycle frames to create towering sculptures. A few years ago, he acquired a huge trove of buttons destined for a landfill from a defunct British factory—"30 tons of buttons," he says, "covering the whole history of buttons." For the longest time he had no idea how he'd use them. Now he's considering a new body of work, focused on the Industrial Revolution. "I cannot just casually make something," he says. "It has to stay with me. Sometimes for years I don't know what to do."

In 2014, he unveiled some of his first Lego works, portraits of 176 prisoners of conscience and human-rights advocates from around the world, among them heroic figures like Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. and more controversial ones such as Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning. The portraits, based on blown-up photographs, matched each pixel to a color in the regular Lego spectrum. "It's only 40 colors," Ai says. "Can you believe it makes a very sophisticated image?"

First shown on Alcatraz, the former prison in San Francisco Bay, the works are now in the permanent collection of the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C. "When you see the works, the portraits, they appear to be pixelated, so it is referring, I think, to this moment we live in, where everything is rendered through this digital format," says Hirshhorn director Melissa Chiu.

Ai has since gone on to produce large Lego versions of many masterworks of Western art. His take on Monet's *Water Lilies*, shown at the Design Museum in London last spring, is constructed from 650,000 Lego bricks. In other new pieces, he's been adding his own mischievous touch to iconic works. He inserted the Bird's Nest stadium into a new Lego version of *Washington Crossing the Delaware* and popped his new studio in Portugal into a Lego rendition of *Christina's World* by Andrew Wyeth. "For me it's the best media to have my funny attitude toward art," he says of his Lego fixation.

Ai has always been meticulous about documenting on film and video both his works in progress and the world around him. That led, eventually, to a thriving sideline making documentaries. *Human Flow*, a 2017 feature on the global refugee crisis, took a year to shoot in 23 countries. During the pandemic, he oversaw three more searing documentaries, dispatching crews to cover the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, China; the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong; and the plight of Rohingya refugees who

fled Myanmar for Bangladesh. He's in post-production, now, on a new globe-spanning film, *Animality*, produced in collaboration with an animal-welfare nonprofit called Four Paws International, which features footage of animal abuse. "Not a pleasant film to watch," he says. "But I think necessary."

Ai's interest in architecture began with a childhood fascination with the materials and logic of the built world surrounding him. He learned to make bricks when he was just 10 years old, enlisted in a communal work detail in his small village. In the hardship he found a sense of accomplishment. "I did all kinds of hard labor when I was small," he says. "I enjoyed all of it because it was a challenge. You cannot handle it, you cannot manage it, but once you manage it it's such a joy."

An antique copy of a manual known as *The Way to Build*, originally composed more than 1,000 years ago. The book lays out in detail how to construct a building such as Ai's studio. "It's like an encyclopedia," Ai says. "China's culture used to be so complete and so developed." Jo Metson Scott

It was a punishing upbringing, as Ai recounts in his memoir, *1,000 Years of Joys and Sorrows*, published in 2021. He will release another memoir, *Zodiac,* in graphic novel form, this January, with illustrations by the Italian political cartoonist Gianluca Costantini. The book weaves the artist's personal story with that of his father, Ai Qing, one of China's most famous poets.

Ai Qing became a literary hero during the Communist revolution following World War II, embraced by Mao Zedong and his followers as they fought to take over the country. His fortunes changed dramatically during the Cultural Revolution, the great purge of intellectuals in the 1960s that began a few years after Ai Weiwei's birth. Denounced as a rightist, the poet was exiled with his family to a remote corner of China on the edge of the Gobi Desert, where they lived as social pariahs. For many years their home was a literal hole in the ground. "I was growing up in silence—we didn't even have birds where we were," says Ai Weiwei. "Music? We didn't even have electricity. We didn't even have water…I can't even imagine how we survived."

Ai Qing's public rehabilitation followed Mao's death in 1976. Today he is considered a literary giant, a sort of Chinese Walt Whitman, required reading in public school curriculums. Nobody talks about the long period when his family's life was a living hell. "They just skip that 20 years like it didn't happen."

Though his father, who died in 1996, had been an accomplished painter as well as a poet, Ai says he never once considered the possibility of an art career as a child. "When we grew up, we called artists 'art workers,' purely belonging to the propaganda department. There were no independent artists, nothing independent," he says. "There is no individual."

When Ai finished high school, the academics and intellectuals who had been considered enemies of the state were beginning to get their lives back. The country's universities, which had been shuttered for years, were starting to reopen. Ai was offered a coveted spot at the Beijing Film Academy, alongside other children of leading cultural figures. He didn't stick around long, dropping out after two years.

"I felt like I didn't fit in. They were a little privileged," Ai says of his classmates, many of whom went on to become celebrated filmmakers. "I didn't feel that way."

In 1981, when he was 23, Ai followed a girlfriend to Pennsylvania, and then across the country to Berkeley, California, where he spent a year studying English. He arrived in New York in 1983, moving into a tiny apartment in the East Village. He took on odd jobs to survive, working in a framing shop, sketching portraits on the street. And he discovered blackjack, an enduring obsession, making frequent trips to Atlantic City. "Probably until now Atlantic City is the city I visited most in the world," he says.

He took art classes at Parsons and the Art Students League and was introduced to the work of Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp, two important influences. In the mid-1980s he made his own off-kilter portraits of Mao, among his last canvases before he abandoned painting entirely in favor of conceptual art. He also had an active social life, immersed in the bohemian milieu of the East Village—his circle of friends included the Beat poet Allen Ginsberg—capturing everything with the camera that was often slung around his neck. "I had this idea that my life was almost meaningless at that time, but the photos have some meaning," he says.

Ai in Manhattan's East Village in 1986. He dropped out of art school after one semester but spent ten formative years in New York. The first book he read in English was a volume on Andy Warhol he found at the Strand Book Store. "The only places I'd go were bookstores and tool shops." Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio

After learning his father was gravely ill, in 1993 Ai returned to China for the first time in more than a decade, moving back in with his parents in Beijing. “I felt strange at home. I became a foreigner again.” He kept himself busy visiting flea markets and antique stores, amassing the beginning of what would eventually grow into a vast collection of dusty relics. “I didn’t know anything about our past, so that was a period of intensive learning about the material life in China—2,000 years ago, 3,000, 5,000 years ago,” he says of his early flea market excursions.

The original photos of Ai dropping a Han dynasty urn were shot on a whim by his younger brother in that period—it was 1995—and not printed until years later. “Now it’s become some kind of iconic anti-establishment image,” Ai says, “but nothing was planned.”

When his mother lost patience with him hanging around the house, he rented a piece of fallow farmland near the airport, where he began planning his first live-in studio. “She said, ‘You should move out. I’ve had enough of you,’” he says.

The Beijing studio, Ai’s first major building design—modeled partially on a New York loft—was completed in just a few months in 1999. With its clean lines, high ceilings and ample skylights, it became a sensation in the Chinese press. “My building appeared in the most sophisticated architecture magazines,” he says. “They invited me to Japan and Germany as a new star of architecture. Nobody knew I’m an artist.”

The area around his studio came to be known as Beijing East Village, embodying the spirit of the New York neighborhood where Ai had first come into contact with activist artists. “He brought a lot of those ideas back to China for a slightly younger generation of impressionable artists,” says Chiu, of the Hirshhorn, who met Ai when she was a graduate student visiting Beijing in that period.

As a new art scene rose up around him, he launched his own not-for-profit gallery space and, eventually, his own restaurant. "We had to close because so many friends came and, very often, we would not let them pay," he says.

And he began testing the limits of free speech, putting out some of China's first underground art publications (the first, a black book with no title, was his veiled response to *Red Flag*, an official Communist Party magazine) and organizing some of its edgiest art exhibitions. "When I decided to go back to China, I asked myself one question: 'Am I afraid to be arrested?' And the answer was no," he says.

In the fall of 2000 Ai rented a warehouse space in Shanghai for an exhibition showcasing other envelope-pushing Chinese artists, coinciding with the city's third official art biennial. "They were trying to promote the city, and I had this show," he says of the local authorities. "They were so mad. The head of the Communist Party held [the catalog] up to the Central Committee: 'Look at what art has become.'"

Though he had never used a computer before, in 2005, at the invitation of one of China's biggest internet portals, Ai began publishing his own daily blog. His first post, a single sentence, was published online that November: "To express yourself needs a reason; expressing yourself is the reason." Sharing his unbridled thoughts, the blog soon attracted millions of readers. For a few years, writing became a compulsion. "I spent 95 percent of my time, energy on the blog, less than 5 percent on art," Ai says. "I wrote a few million words."

Though many of his peers in the art scene in Beijing were eventually arrested for producing subversive work, for a while Ai seemed to be untouchable. "I was always laughing about it, because I thought it's very real, super real, and at the same time surreal. You want to test how far you can go."

By 2008 Ai's relatively privileged position in China as a critical voice with a public platform was looking increasingly tenuous. That spring, as work was nearing completion on the Bird's Nest, which he designed in collaboration with the Swiss firm Herzog & de Meuron, a devastating 7.9 magnitude earthquake shook Sichuan province in southwestern China. With little information about casualties coming out of the region, Ai set up a "citizen investigation team" online to gather the names of children who had gone missing after their schools collapsed, in the process calling attention to shoddy school construction. Though authorities quickly mobilized to shut him down, he would eventually publish 5,219 names—a small fraction of the more than 80,000 people estimated to have died in the quake.

In the summer of 2009, a few months after the birth of his son, Ai Lao, with filmmaker Wang Fen, Ai's blog went dark, officially taken offline by Chinese authorities. "For four years I had talked openly about anything on the internet," he says. "Those four years were the peak of my life, because I had a platform to organize actions online."

Things got worse that August, when Ai was assaulted by police while visiting Sichuan province, suffering a cerebral hemorrhage after being struck in the head. He was treated for his injuries at a hospital in Germany a few weeks later, while visiting Munich to install a museum show. The crackdowns followed him into 2011. By the start of that year the authorities were tearing down a new studio he'd just finished building in Shanghai. (Another of Ai's studios, the second of two in Beijing, was also later destroyed.) Then, on April 3, 2011, he was arrested at the airport in Beijing while preparing to board a flight to Hong Kong, and his passport was confiscated.

Ai's high international profile is inextricable from his political advocacy. In 2011, while he was detained by Chinese authorities, pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong carried placards demanding his release. Kin Cheung / AP Photo

A scene from Ai's 2013 diorama-based installation, *S.A.C.R.E.D.*, a half-scale, hyper-realistic depiction of his experience in Chinese detention in 2011. Alex B. Huckle / Getty Images

Ai would spend the next 81 days in a secret detention site, interrogated constantly, watched 24/7—even while he slept. After his release, he described the experience as a "kind of mental torture." Thinking of his son, he began writing his memoir right after his release. "Because it alarms me that I may disappear again and may never have the chance to tell the story to my son," he

says. (Lao, who is now 14, lives with his mother in Cambridge, England.)

And he began to make art referencing his months in captivity. He raged against the state in a Chinese-language rock album, *The Divine Comedy*, produced with a musician friend, Zuoxiao Zuzhou. A music video for the lead single, "Dumbass," showcases the claustrophobic conditions of his incarceration. "People kept asking me, 'What was it like?'" he says. "I said, I'll make a video." He built six hyper-realistic half-scale dioramas of the windowless space he was held in, including replicas of the guards who stood watch while he ate. Together, the lifelike scenes, encased in steel boxes, formed an installation, *S.A.C.R.E.D.*, which debuted in Venice during the 2013 art Biennale. "That's a point where his lived experience translated quite directly into a moving art project," says Hilty, his London gallerist, who has worked with Ai since 2010. "It had this almost timeless sense of suffering and existential dread."

Unable to leave China, Ai oversaw the Venice installation remotely. He wouldn't get his passport back until two years later. When he did, he left—possibly for good.

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Last fall, in the wake of his London gallery's postponement of his show, Ai released a broad statement in defense of unpopular speech. "If free expression is limited to the same kind of opinions, it becomes an imprisonment of expression," the statement read, in part. "Freedom of speech is about different voices, voices different from ours."

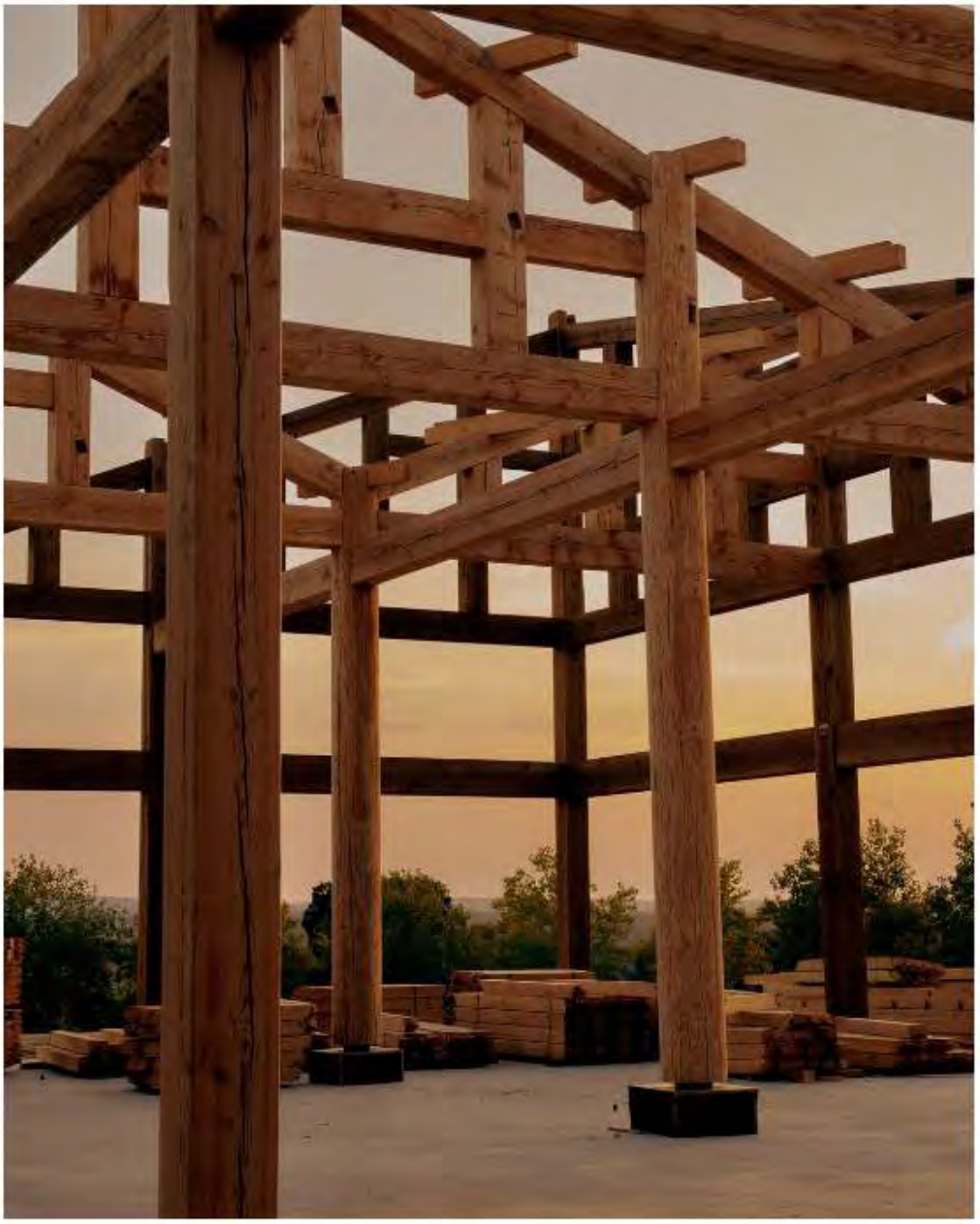
Ai's new studio in Portugal is an homage of sorts to a less divisive and perhaps more hopeful time in his life. The design mimics his destroyed Shanghai studio—before he fell decisively out of favor with the Chinese authorities, before the head injury, before exile. While the basic form and proportions are identical, he swapped in wood for concrete and made the new building much larger.

The old-fashioned timber construction is a nod to another Ai creation, an installation first shown in Beijing shortly before he left China in 2015. From near his father's hometown in southern China, he had purchased the ruins of the 400-year-old Wang Family Ancestral Hall, built in the Ming dynasty as a place for ancestor worship. After transporting the wooden structure, piece by piece, to Beijing, he rebuilt it inside two connected art galleries within an industrial space—one, Tang Contemporary Art, Chinese-owned; the other, Galleria Continua, Italian. "They both wanted to give me a show," says Ai. "I said it would be the best situation to put one work in two galleries." Showing half of the building in each gallery, he repurposed the historic site into a conceptual work of art, adding his own interventions in and around it.

Ai remained under constant surveillance, right until he finally left China. "The police never left the gallery, but they didn't close the exhibition, they didn't censor the exhibition," says Maurizio Rigillo, a partner in Galleria Continua, which has had a presence in Beijing since 2004, and which will host a solo Ai show at its flagship space in San Gimignano, Italy, this spring.

The dismantled building, which was later shown in Mexico City and Vienna, is now boxed up on Ai's property in Portugal, each of its 1,500 pieces matched to a numbered drawing like parts in an Erector Set. "If you don't make clear drawings, you cannot build it back," he says.

The traditional building techniques behind the Wang Family Ancestral Hall and Ai's studio in Portugal are described in excruciating detail in a historic manual, of sorts—the title loosely translates as *The Way to Build*—originally published during the Song dynasty a millennium ago. A hand-printed 1925 edition of the book in Ai's personal collection features the sorts of visual diagrams that might be included in an Ikea furniture kit. "The interesting thing is everything has a name, every piece defined, what should be, proportionally," Ai says, leafing through the book. "You can build the perfect house. Of course, my design is much simpler, not so complicated."



The studio's frame is composed of exactly 100 wooden pillars. In designing the building in line with traditional Chinese architectural principles, Ai has written, "I wanted to keep a record of history and memories and embody my understanding of Chinese culture into material manifestation." Jo Metson Scott

To the studio plans in Portugal, though, he added an extra hurdle to overcome—"I think I have to create problems to enjoy it," he says—jogging the roof off its usual axis to create new angles, new shadows, new building challenges. "I did just one movement, shifting the roof 32 degrees," he says. "That made it very subversive. There's no reason to do that. By doing that it destroys the logic of the interior and the outside...and it creates a lot, a lot, a lot of problems."

A sculpture called *Marble Toilet Paper* near the entrance to Ai's property. The artist designed the work during the pandemic, a commentary on the way ordinary objects can transform into precious items during a crisis. An earlier, similar work is *Marble Takeout Box*. Jo Metson Scott

With the land zoned for agriculture, the building permit describes the site as a storage warehouse. "They asked, 'What are you going to put in there?' I told them, 'Sunflower seeds,'" Ai says, with a laugh. With a small team of Portuguese carpenters handling construction, work has moved slowly. Ai's nearly 700,000 Instagram followers have been able to track the progress online.

Even with the building approaching the finish line—he's hoping to complete construction this February—the compound still doesn't

For Ai, accustomed to big city life, rural Portugal has been unusually quiet, so he filled the house with pets. "We needed some life here, so we have cats and birds and fish," he says. "The birds we bought at a local pet store. We had two; the cats got one. There's no justice." Jo Metson Scott

quite feel like home. For Ai, who hasn't been back to China since 2015, life in European exile has been a disconnecting experience, as he's retreated into an increasingly monastic existence. "I'm either in China or outside China. Berlin, Portugal—it's the same thing: outside China," he says. "That's the Chinese psychology."

*The Financial Times*
2nd December 2022

FT FINANCIAL TIMES

Simon Schama DECEMBER 2 2022

I know a poem can't stop a tank. But the reverse is also true. As I'm writing this, the streets of China and Iran have been alive with infuriated, chanting crowds, so tired of being institutionally deceived and robbed of any personal agency or independence of mind that they are prepared to risk arrest and imprisonment rather than be silenced by regimes demanding obedience to lies.

"Culture wars" ought not to be confused with the laborious woke-baiting that has become the default position of populist media in the west. The women's revolt in Iran is a culture war; Ukrainian resistance to the militarised fantasies of Russian imperialism is at root also a culture war, a refusal to accept Vladimir Putin's contention that their nation's language and history are a delusion. It is not accidental that one of the most powerful weapons that the actor-writer President Volodymyr Zelenskyy leading Ukraine has at his command is the gift of candid human communication.

Growing up in the 1950s, my baby-boomer generation assumed that the screamers of hate, the destroyers of culture, had gone with the war. "Well, boys," our school history teacher confidently proclaimed around 1958, "we don't really know what the rest of the 20th century has in store for us, but you can at least be sure of this: religious oppression and rabid nationalism are things of the past."

When, in that same year, Boris Pasternak won the Nobel Prize for *Dr Zhivago*, we thought that even the adamantine rock face of Soviet authoritarianism could somehow be cracked open just far enough for truth, memory and a faint breeze of freedom to be admitted. Even if Pasternak was demonised as an enemy of the Soviet people and forced to decline the prize, we believed that, sooner or later, light would return, as for a while, 30 years later, it did. Becoming a historian was, we thought, a vote of confidence in the victory of the Enlightenment. When the civil rights movement in the US flowered in the 1960s, we bought into Martin Luther King Jr's conviction that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice".

Often enough, though, it snaps. Four days after he spoke those words in 1968 at the National Cathedral, Washington DC, he was murdered in Memphis.

My new BBC2 television series is the fruit of sombre, late-life reflection that the History of Now was prefigured in the History of Then; that what we had imagined to be things of the past have returned to shadow the present and future. Shrieking, whether online or on platforms, is back; hate is sexy and stalks the world as "disruption".

So those old battles need to be refought, and with the help of the unlikely weapons that once opened eyes and changed minds: the soft power of culture — poetically charged words, images, music, all of which can, in some circumstances, exert a force beyond the workaday stuff of politics. Culture can do this because it can connect with human habits, needs and intuitions in ways that expose the inhuman hollowness of official propaganda.

What Václav Havel, in his most original and penetrating text, called "the power of the powerless" is capable of putting despotisms on the back foot, simply by being in sync with the simplest and most natural human instincts. Authoritarians can mobilise their heavy artillery of terror, torture, imprisonment and persecution; but in the end, Havel argued, they are not that well equipped to fight the asymmetric battle between lies and truth. Havel believed that the vast majority of people are not content to be forever walled within a prison of falsehood, where the price of material security and domestic safety is the unconditional surrender of personal freedom.

> **From minor slaps of repression, barely registering on the scanner of state security, outrage can swell, gather and finally erupt into uncontainable mass disobedience**

For a while — perhaps many decades — punitive disincentives against disruptive truth-speaking can prevail, especially when reinforced by visceral appeals to tribal loyalty: the demonisation of hate figures (such as George Soros) said to personify foreign manipulation. In the end what Havel calls the "trapped air"— a natural human wish to be able to speak one's mind in a café, dress as one wishes (including visible hair), listen to unauthorised music, all the innumerable small acts of social defiance — can build into a rising tide of disgust.

When Czech police infiltrated the underground concerts of the Plastic People of the Universe in the 1970s — concerned, as their saxophonist Vratislav Brabanec remembered, that the music was some sort of "black illness" that would grow and generate disaffection — they only guaranteed more risible contempt. But there was a price. In 1976 the band was jailed for months, a wound Brabanec says you carry for ever. Why the wound? "Because I was innocent," he says over his morning beer. "I was jailed for playing the saxophone."

**But from such** ostensibly minor slaps of repression, barely registering on the scanner of state security, outrage can swell, gather and finally erupt into uncontainable mass disobedience. This happens, above all, when local family life, and especially the lives of children, become the collateral casualties of authoritarian brutality. In Iran, the death in September of Mahsa Amini, arrested for inadequate hijab covering, was taken as a cause for personal freedom by girls and women throughout the country. In China, the screams of a woman unable to escape a blazing apartment in Urumqi when the building door was barred and locked in an excess of Covid confinement, became the cries of an instantaneous mass movement of revolt.

Perhaps the most agonising detail in Picasso's "Guernica" is the image of a mother cradling a dead child in her arms; the Pietà of civilian bombing. In Episode 2 of *History of Now*, one of the surviving children of the horrifying white supremacist bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in September 1963, Dale Long, revisits the church, and his own traumatically poignant memories of the carnage. It was the spilling of children's blood — among other murders and assaults — that led Nina Simone to compose the song of righteous rage "Mississippi Goddam". When some southern states banned it for the profanity of its title, that only anointed the song as the jazz anthem of the civil rights movement.

In May 2008, a devastating earthquake in the western Chinese province of Sichuan took the lives of 69,000. More than 5,000 of the victims were children, buried in the collapsing structures of their schools. The losses were especially unbearable for parents who had had to obey the official one-child policy. The artist Ai Weiwei responded with a gesture of poignant mourning covering the walls of the Haus der Kunst in Munich in 2009: the 9,000 backpacks of

"Remembering", some of them spelling out in Mandarin the words of a grieving mother: "For seven years she lived happily on this earth." But his reaction went well beyond tragic empathy, as searingly shown by another installation, exhibited later than "Remembering" but already under way at the time of that work's conception.

When the earthquake struck, Ai was artistic consultant in the design team building the "Bird's Nest" stadium for the 2008 Beijing Olympics (a role he subsequently repented, feeling compromised into an exercise in "patriotic education"). Familiar with the chronic corruption in kickback relationships with local and central authorities, Ai suspected that shoddy building practices had been responsible for the needless deaths of the children, a suspicion borne out when he visited the disaster site.

Meeting with a brick wall of silence from officials, not least about the families of the bereaved, Ai launched a citizens' investigation mobilising 100 volunteers to hunt for information in the traumatised community; "to remember the death and show concern for the living; to shoulder responsibility for finding out every child's name and placing it on record . . ."

**66**

**Over time, David Hockney's California paintings worked transformational magic on homophobia**

The affronted authorities responded with arrests, confiscation of the volunteers' notes and erasure of phone photos. But none of this stopped Ai from conceiving and executing the most powerful work of contemporary art to arise from calamity: at once a poetic meditation, a document of what happened, who and what had been responsible, and an act of resistance against oblivion. (That last resolution Ai inherited from his father, the poet Ai Qing, who suffered the depths of degradation during the Cultural Revolution and shared the hole in the ground that was his prison dwelling with his son, who still keeps a photo of the dugout on his phone.)

Scouring scrapyards, Ai recovered nearly 200 tons of buckled rebars: the steel reinforcing rods meant to maintain the integrity of concrete, which had failed so disastrously during the earthquake. Each of them was hammered (200 beats for each rebar) by a small army of workers and assistants back to factory-fresh form, giving the title "Straight" to a work that was about the obstinacy of the truth. Dimly, the authorities began to understand what they were up against and reacted with their routine savagery. In August 2009, when he was trying to testify on behalf of one of the volunteer investigators, Ai was waylaid in his hotel room and beaten so brutally he needed surgery to treat a brain injury caused by the assault.

None of this slowed the work down. While he was recovering, the piece came into shape. Hundreds of the straightened rebars were laid out on the floor, piled up in places to mimic the heave of a rolling, seismic wave of death. You stand before this assemblage — beautiful and terrible — and feel shaken, unsafe. On the gallery walls surrounding the piece Ai pinned lists of names — thousands of them — of the dead, marked in memory despite the best efforts of Chinese officialdom to consign them to oblivion. "Straight" is the "Guernica" of our young, bloodied century, and no textual history could possibly recover, as this masterpiece does, the enormous weight of the event's catastrophe.

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**But the lightness of art** can shift history too, subtly, yet decisively. I suspect the last thing David Hockney would want for his California paintings of the 1960s would be for them to be seen as manifestos of gay liberation. But, over time, they worked transformational magic on homophobia nonetheless, possibly because they were, in the first instance, celebrations of personal pleasure bathed in Angeleno radiance. Formally, "Peter Getting Out of Nick's Pool" (1966) is not just a perfect composition but a candy-box history of representational styles: Modernist angularity broken by spaghetti-ripples, but at its centre the original Greek coinage of beauty itself made tangible in the male nude. It is a very clever picture and yet also disarmingly artless: an oasis of innocent joy delivered to a dark, furious and still largely unwelcoming world. Who could possibly take exception?

Nearly six decades on, the answer is, alas, plenty of folk. Sixty-eight countries around the world criminalise homosexual acts, some with capital punishments including stoning. Among the prohibiters is Qatar, where police have obliged football fans at the World Cup to remove any item of clothing (or flag) with rainbow decoration and where Fifa threatened to penalise team captains should players have the effrontery to wear "One Love" armbands. It's safe to say that the father of the suspected shooter at the LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs who killed five and wounded 18 last month, whose main concern was whether his son might be gay, is probably unmoved by the swimming pools of David Hockney.

Of course, there are limits to what activist art and culture can do. More heartening, however, are the demonstrations — from one end of the world to the other — of how their eloquence and visionary power can actually affect contested outcomes.

There's no doubt that Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, originally published in 1985 but given new life in popular culture by television, played a part in mobilising votes in reaction to the Supreme Court's overturning earlier this year of Roe vs Wade's protection of abortion rights. Referendums held to restrict abortion rights further all failed, even in conservative states such as Montana and Kentucky. Artists and writers are under no obligation to be political, Atwood says in an interview for *History of Now*, but none can escape the imprint of their times. "I write about potentially unpleasant futures," she says, "in the hope that they will not become real."

When the worst does materialise, some writers become even more determined to have their voice heard. Rachel Carson was herself dying when *Silent Spring* was published in 1962. Her books on the natural history of the oceans had become million-copy bestsellers precisely because they translated scientific knowledge into poetically rich storytelling. As fiercely analytical as was her attack on the effect of chemical pesticides on the food chain, it was the opening fable of that birdless silence falling on the countryside that gripped the reader and changed minds.

My father, a great storyteller in his own right, understood the uniqueness of Carson's marriage of literature and science when he read passages from *Under the Sea Wind* to me while we were still living on the Essex coast. Swimming along with Scomber the mackerel, I understood, even then, that humans were not a breed apart from nature but an inseparable part of it. Which was the lesson, as it turns out, on which all our futures now depend.

All the stuff of mainstream history — wars, revolutions, economies — is becoming a subset of the engulfing, elemental question: the fate of the earth; what humans have done to it and what they may yet do to repair and redeem the damage. We are running out of time. But what we have not yet exhausted is what, in the end, makes us human: the great storehouse of visionary imagination. If, at the eleventh hour, we have what it takes to pull off the greatest escape act in the human story, it will not be databanks or algorithms that will have got us there, but something like a poem, a novel, a painting or a song.

*'Simon Schama's History of Now' is airing on BBC2, Sunday December 4 and 11, 9.30pm; all episodes are available on iPlayer. He is an FT contributing editor*

*ArtNews*
21st March 2023

ARTnews

# Ai Weiwei Uses 650,000 Lego Bricks for Recreation of Monet's Monumental 'Water Lilies'

Ai Weiwei's Water Lilies #1 made out of 650,000 Lego bricks.
PHOTO © ELA BIALKOWSKA/OKNO STUDIO

Art fans can already build Lego sets of Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe* screen prints, Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night*, and Hokusai's *The Great Wave*. Chinese artist Ai Weiwei recently took that combination of notable artworks and the popular Danish toy to another level, with a 50-foot-long iteration of one of Claude Monet's most famous images.

For *Water Lilies #1*, Ai used 650,000 Lego bricks in 22 colors in his version of the famous Impressionist triptych *Water Lilies* (1914-26). The latter is currently on display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

A closeup of Ai Weiwei's *Water Lilies #1* showing the composition of Lego bricks in the 50-foot mosaic. Photo © Ela Bialkowska/OKNO studio

*Water Lilies #1* will be available for public for viewing for the first time in London at the **Design Museum**'s exhibition ***Ai Weiwei: Making Sense***, which opens on April 7.

According to a press statement from the museum, *Water Lilies #1* is the largest artwork made of Lego by Ai, spanning the entire length of one of the institution's gallery walls. Ai's choice of pixel-like Lego bricks, industrial parts and colors instead of Monet's brushstrokes, "suggest contemporary digital technologies which are central to modern life, and in reference to how art is often disseminated in the contemporary world."

"There's so many layers of meaning in this work," assistant curator Rachel Hajek told *ARTnews*.

*Water Lilies* (1914-26) portrays a lily pond in the garden of Monet's home in Giverny, near Paris. While the image is famous for its depiction of beauty in nature, Hajek pointed out that the scene is a construct: the pond and Monet's gardens were designed and created by the artist through the partial diversion of a nearby river.

*Water Lilies #1* also includes a dark area on the right-hand side. The Design Museum said it represents the underground dugout in Xinjiang province where Ai and his father, Ai Qing, lived in forced exile in the 1960s. "Their hellish desert home punctures the watery paradise," the museum said in a statement.

In addition to *Water Lilies #1*, the exhibition will include the international debut of Ai's *Untitled (Lego Incident)*, comprised of thousand of Lego blocks that were donated to Ai by members of the public. The donations were collected after the toy company refused a bulk order for bricks Ai planned to use in a new artwork about political dissidents as part of an exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia in 2015. Lego said it never directly sold to anyone wanting to use its product to make a political statement, reported the *BBC*.

As part of ***Ai Weiwei: Making Sense***, dozens of objects and artworks from throughout the artist's career focused on construction and deconstruction will be displayed. These include several examples of Ai's transformation of useful items into useless but valuable 'ordinary' objects, such as a worker's hard hat cast in glass, and a sculpture of an iPhone cut out of a jade axe-head.

Four other "fields" of collected, "ready-made" items will also be presented at the Design Museum on April 7: *Still Life* consists of 1,600 tools from the late Stone Age, including axe-heads, chisels, knives and spinning wheels; and *Left Right Studio Material* consists of thousands of fragments of porcelain sculptures from Ai's 'Left Right' studio in Beijing. The studio was demolished by the Chinese state in 2018. *Spouts* consists of approximately 200,000 discarded porcelain spouts from the Song dynasty (960 – 1279 CE) as a representation of the scale of Chinese porcelain production during that time period. *Untitled (Porcelain Balls)* are approximately 100,000 canon balls also made of high-quality porcelain during the Song dynasty (960 – 1279 CE) and was created especially for the Design Museum's exhibition. Finally, *Left Right Studio Material* will be on display for the first time.

Ai has used Lego bricks in his artistic practice since 2014 to produce portraits of political prisoners. In 2017, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Gallery exhibited 176 of these Lego artworks.

"I like it's basic quality," he told the *Washington Post*. "Anyone can play with it."

*Design Boom*
21st March 2023

designboom®

ai weiwei recreates claude monet's water lilies using 650,000 LEGO bricks

## AI WEIWEI: MAKING SENSE EXHIBITION

The Design Museum in London has unveiled a significant new piece by Ai Weiwei in advance and in time for his first design-focused exhibition Ai Weiwei: Making Sense, which will premiere starting April 7th, 2023. Weiwei reproduces one of Claude Monet's most well-known paintings for the exhibition made entirely out of 650,000 LEGO pieces.

It is Weiwei's largest Lego creation to date which is over 15 meters long piece, titled Water Lilies #1. It covers the entire length of one wall at the Design Museum gallery and is built of 22 different colors. By recreating this famous scene, Ai Weiwei challenges our ideas of reality and beauty. The new image has been constructed out of Lego bricks to strip away Monet's brushstrokes in favor of a depersonalized language of industrial parts and colors.

These pixel-like blocks suggest contemporary digital technologies which are central to modern life, and in reference to how art is often disseminated in the contemporary world. Challenging viewers further, included on the right-hand side of Ai's version is a dark portal, which is the door to the underground dugout in Xinjiang province where Ai and his father, Ai Qing, lived in forced exile in the 1960s. Their hellish desert home punctures the watery paradise.

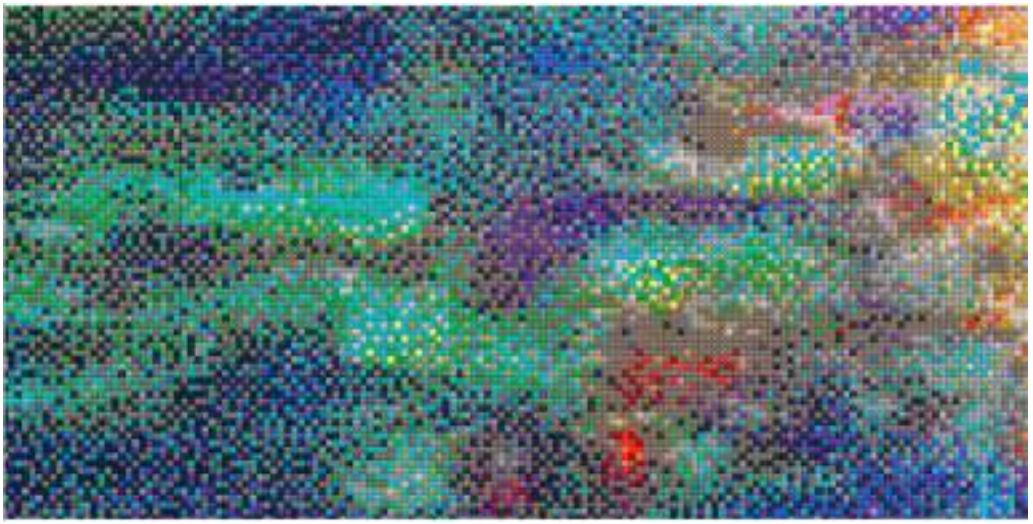
images courtesy of Design Museum | photos © Ela Bialkowska, OKNOstudio

## LEGO WATER LILIES BY AI WEIWEI

*Water Lilies #1* will be seen alongside another major new Lego artwork by Ai Weiwei, which is also making its international debut at the Design Museum. First announced in January, *Untitled (Lego Incident)* is part of a series of five expansive 'fields' where hundreds of thousands of objects will be laid out on the gallery floor.

In this field, visitors will see thousands of Lego blocks which were all donated to the artist by members of the public from around the world, in response to Lego briefly refusing to sell their products to him in 2014. These donated bricks are presented at the Design Museum for the first time as fully-formed artwork. Ai Weiwei: Making Sense will be the artist's very first exhibition to focus on design and architecture. It sees Ai using design and the history of making as a lens through which to consider what we value.

Other highlights of the exhibition include dozens of objects and artworks from throughout Ai Weiwei's career that explore the tensions between past and present, hand and machine, precious and worthless, construction and destruction, such as his Han dynasty urn emblazoned with a Coca-Cola logo, which epitomizes these clashes.



*Forbes*
20th March 2023

Forbes

# Ai Weiwei Shows His Largest-Ever Lego Artwork At Design Museum London

"Water Lilies #1" 2022, by Ai Weiwei created entirely in Lego bricks ©ELA BIALKOWSKA/OKNO STUDIO ©IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GALLERIA CONTINUA

Ai Weiwei has unveiled a new artwork inspired by Claude Monet's monumental "Water Lilies" (1914-26) triptych. Made entirely of Lego pieces, "Water Lilies #1" is a recreation of one of the most famous artworks by the French Impressionist painter. The renowned Chinese artist and activist questions our notion of reality and beauty and asks us to meditate on nature's fragility by choosing this painting but working with industrial materials and colors.

At over 15 meters long and made from nearly 650,000 studs of tiny, uniform plastic bricks in 22 colors, "Water Lilies #1" is Ai's most considerable Lego work to date. It is also pretty spectacular to see, spanning the entire length of one of the gallery walls of the Design Museum in London. It joins other artworks — some new, some reimagined — in "Ai Weiwei: Making Sense" — the artist's first design-focused exhibition and his largest UK show in eight years.

Details of the Lego bricks from "Water Lilies #1" 2022 by Ai Weiwei ©ELA BIALKOWSKA/OKNO STUDIO ©IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GALLERIA CONTINUA

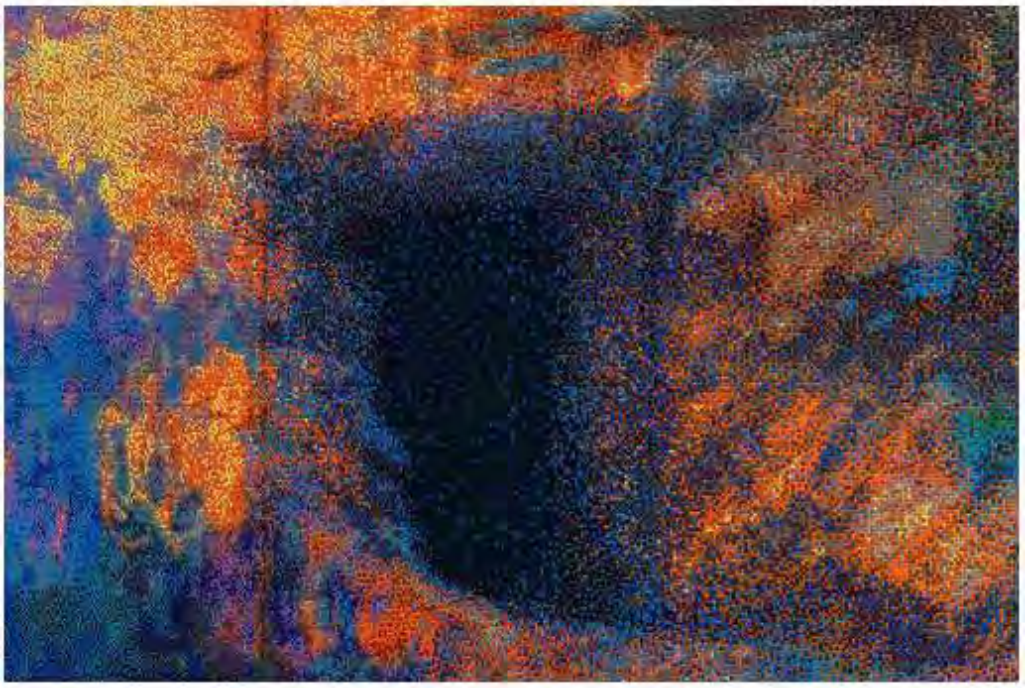
"Water Lilies," the main focus of Monet's artistic work in the final decades of his life, captures nature's serene beauty. Yet the lily pond and the garden depicted are artificial creations, designed by Monet for the gardens of his home in Giverny in Normandy when he had the nearby river Epte partially diverted for this idealized landscape.

Ai recreates the scene, replacing Monet's delicate brush strokes and complex palette with single-unit hard plastic parts and industrial shades. To add to our disorientation, a dark space on the right appears amid this colorful, jolly scene. It represents the door to the underground dugout in Xinjiang province where the young artist and his father (Ai Qing, one of China's most renowned poets) were forced to live in exile in the 1960s.

Close up of 'Water Lilies #1' (2022) by Ai Weiwei showing the Lego composition

He explains: “In ‘Water Lilies #1,’ I integrate Monet’s Impressionist painting, reminiscent of Zenism in the East, and concrete experiences of my father and me into a digitized and pixelated language. Toy bricks as the material, with their qualities of solidity and potential for deconstruction, reflect the attributes of language in our rapidly developing era where human consciousness is constantly dividing.”

Chief curator at the Design Museum Justin McGuirk adds: “With ‘Water Lilies #1,’ Ai Weiwei presents us with an alternate vision — a garden paradise. On the one hand, he has personalized it by inserting the door of his desert childhood home. On the other hand, he has depersonalized it using an industrial language of modular Lego blocks.”



Details of "Water Lilies #1" show the door to the underground dugout where Ai Weiwei and his father ... [+] ©ELA BIALKOWSKA/OKNO STUDIO ©IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GALLERIA CONTINUA

Ai has been experimenting with Lego since 2014, when he first worked with a material associated with playfulness, childhood, and innocence to produce portraits of political prisoners. “Water Lilies #1” is shown alongside another significant new Lego piece, “Untitled (Lego Incident),” also making its international debut at the Design Museum.

It’s a seemingly simple artwork comprising hundreds of Lego blocks. What adds depth is that the public donated much of the plastic toy parts in response to Lego’s refusal in 2015 to sell its products in bulk to the artist on the grounds of corporate political neutrality — a decision that the vice-chairman later reversed.

This latter artwork forms a series of five expansive so-called “fields” where hundreds of thousands of objects — some crafted, some found — are laid on the gallery floor to read like a conversation, a reflection on our humanity and how we relate to our time.

Over 15m long, “Water Lilies #1” is the most significant Lego work by Ai Weiwei ©ELA BIALKOWSKA/OKNO STUDIO ©IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GALLERIA CONTINUA

"Our world is complex and collapsing towards an unpredictable future," says Ai. "It's crucial for individuals to find a personalized language to express their experience of these challenging conditions. Personalized expression arises from identifying with history and memories while creating a new language and narrative. Without a personal narrative, artistic narration loses its quality."

*"Ai Weiwei: Making Sense" is at the Design Museum London from April 7 to July 30, 2023.*

*The Times*
20th March 2023

ART

# Ai Weiwei reveals Lego recreation of Monet's water lilies at Design Museum

Peter Chapped

Monday March 20 2023, 6.30pm
The Times

The 15m-long artwork punctures the watery paradise with a dark portal representing the dugout where Ai and his father lived in forced exile

Claude Monet's delicate brushstrokes depicting his love of his garden and its water lilies have been recreated by the artist Ai Weiwei in 650,000 Lego bricks.

Monet's *Water Lilies* panels, painted between 1914 and 1926, took inspiration from the artist's gardens in Giverny, France, and are credited as impressionist masterpieces. The originals hang in the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris, in rooms designed by Monet.

Now the Chinese dissident has reinterpreted the work, employing Lego bricks in 22 different colours to create a 15m-long piece that will form part of his biggest British show in eight years. It opens at the Design Museum in Kensington in April.

Ai Weiwei said he integrated concrete experiences of himself and his father into his work
RICK PUSHINSKY/DESIGN MUSEUM

*Water Lilies #1* is the artist's largest Lego artwork. In 2014 he used the medium to make portraits of political prisoners.

Justin McGuirk, the museum's chief curator, told the Guardian that Monet's brushstrokes are replaced with the "depersonalised language of industrial parts and colours", while the "pixel-like blocks suggest contemporary digital technologies which are central to modern life, and in reference to how art is often disseminated in the contemporary world".

On the right-hand side and "brutally puncturing the watery paradise" is a dark portal, the curator added. According to Ai, this is the door to the underground dugout in Xinjiang where he and his poet father, Ai Qing, lived in forced exile in the 1960s.

Ai said: "Our world is complex and collapsing towards an unpredictable future. It's crucial for individuals to find a personalised language to express their experience of these challenging conditions. Personalised expression arises from identifying with history and memories while creating a new language and narrative.

Ai used 650,000 Lego bricks in 22 colours for the artwork
DESIGN MUSEUM

"Without a personal narrative, artistic narration loses its quality. In *Water Lilies #I*, I integrate Monet's impressionist painting, reminiscent of Zenism in the east, and concrete experiences of my father and me into a digitised and pixelated language.

"Toy bricks as the material, with their qualities of solidity and potential for deconstruction, reflect the attributes of language in our rapidly developing era where human consciousness is constantly dividing."

McGuirk added: "On the one hand he has personalised it by inserting the door of his desert childhood home, but on the other he has used an industrial language of modular Lego blocks. This is a monumental, complex and powerful work and we are proud to be the first museum to show it."

The artist left China in 2015 and has lived in Cambridge for four years. He developed a close relationship with Downing College and has exhibited at the institution's Heong Gallery.

*Ai Weiwei: Making Sense runs at the Design Museum from April 7 to July 30. Tickets are available to pre-book now.*

*Wallpaper**
20th March 2023

Wallpaper*



# Ai Weiwei's largest-ever Lego artwork revealed at London's Design Museum

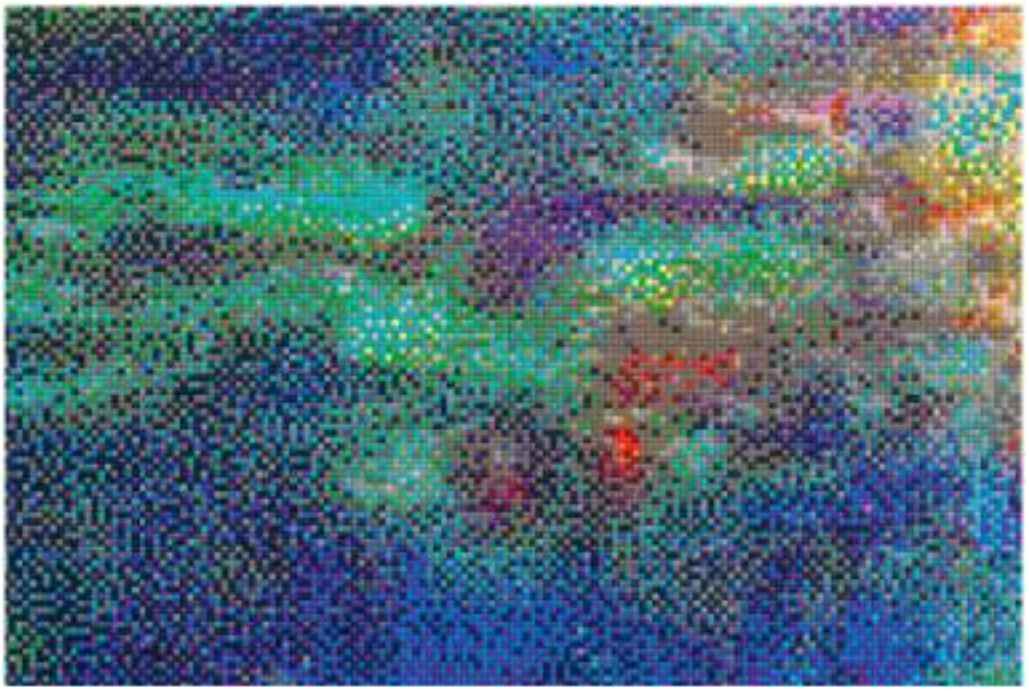
At London's Design Museum, Ai Weiwei has unveiled Water Lilies #1, a new Lego recreation of Claude Monet's iconic painting. We explore the vast new work ahead of the Chinese artist's major show at the museum, opening on 7 April 2023

Water Lilies #1, 2022, by Ai Weiwei. Lego bricks
(Image credit: Photo © Stu Bratlow/AiuDKNO studio. © Image courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua)

Ahead of his major show at London's Design Museum, Chinese artist Ai Weiwei has unveiled a homage to Impressionist painter, Claude Monet, constructed entirely of Lego.

The piece, titled *Water Lilies #1*, is Ai's largest Lego artwork to date, spanning 15m in length and comprising 650,000 studs of Lego bricks in 22 colours.

The new work will be on view as part of the Design Museum's much-anticipated exhibition 'Ai Weiwei: Making Sense', which opens on Friday 7 April, and will be the artist's first exhibition to focus on design and architecture, as well as his largest solo show in eight years.

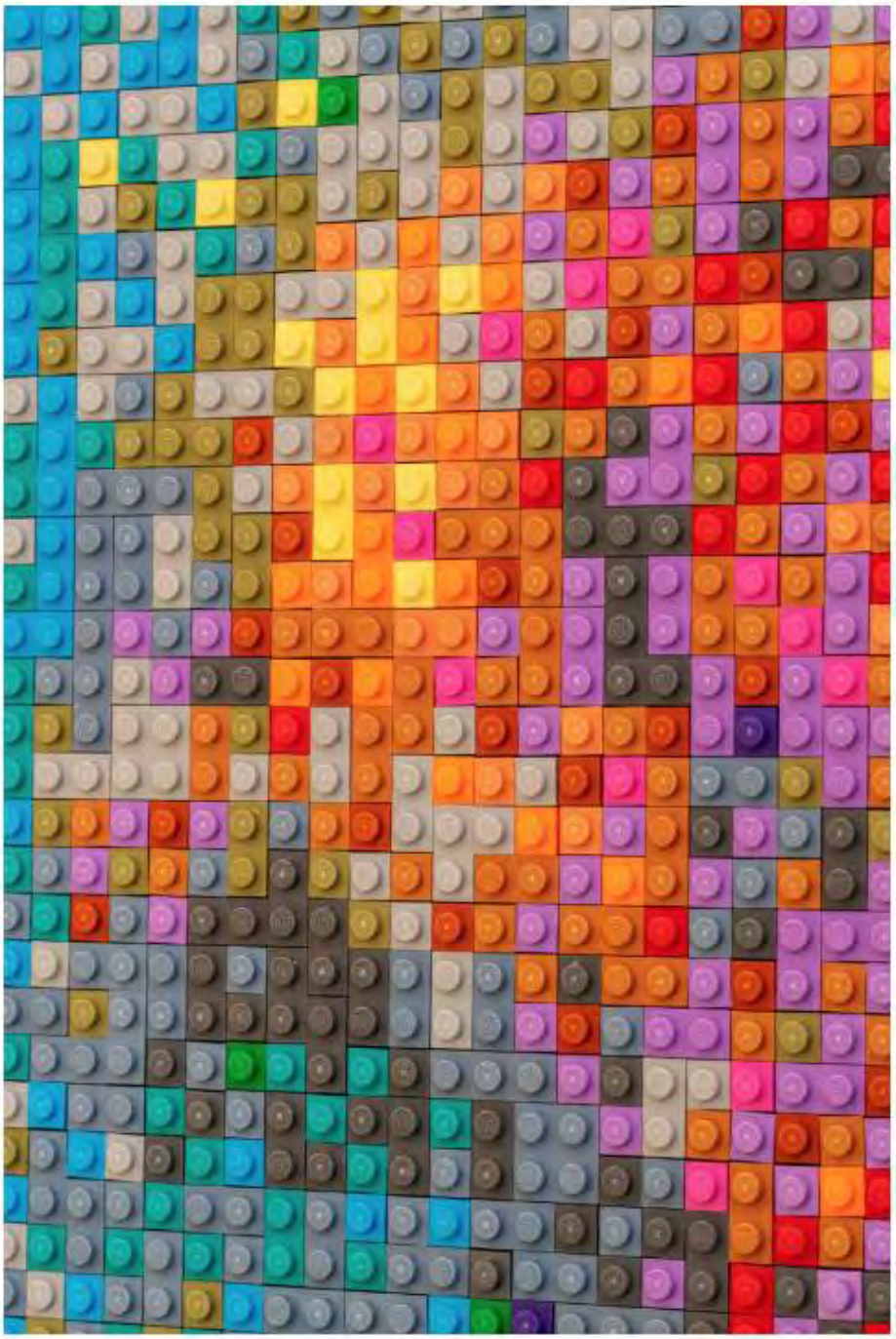


Detail from *Water Lilies #1*, 2022, by Ai Weiwei. Lego bricks

(Image credit: Photo © Ela Bialkowska/OKNO studio. © Image courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua)

In *Water Lilies #1*, Ai probes notions of reality and artifice. Although Monet's word-famous painting represents the epitome of natural beauty, the pond and gardens he depicts were in fact a man-made construct, designed and created by Monet himself at the turn of the 20th century. In Ai's work, the Lego bricks eliminate the humanistic gesture of Monet's brushstrokes in favour of a simplified, depersonalised language of pixel-like parts and colours. Through this, Ai comments on contemporary modes of digital image consumption, and all that might be lost in the process.

As Ai Weiwei commented, 'Our world is complex and collapsing towards an unpredictable future. It's crucial for individuals to find a personalised language to express their experience of these challenging conditions. Personalised expression arises from identifying with history and memories while creating a new language and narrative. Without a personal narrative, artistic narration loses its quality. In *Water Lilies #1* I integrate Monet's Impressionist painting, reminiscent of Zenism in the East, and concrete experiences of my father and me into a digitised and pixelated language. Toy bricks as the material, with their qualities of solidity and potential for deconstruction, reflect the attributes of language in our rapidly developing era where human consciousness is constantly dividing.'



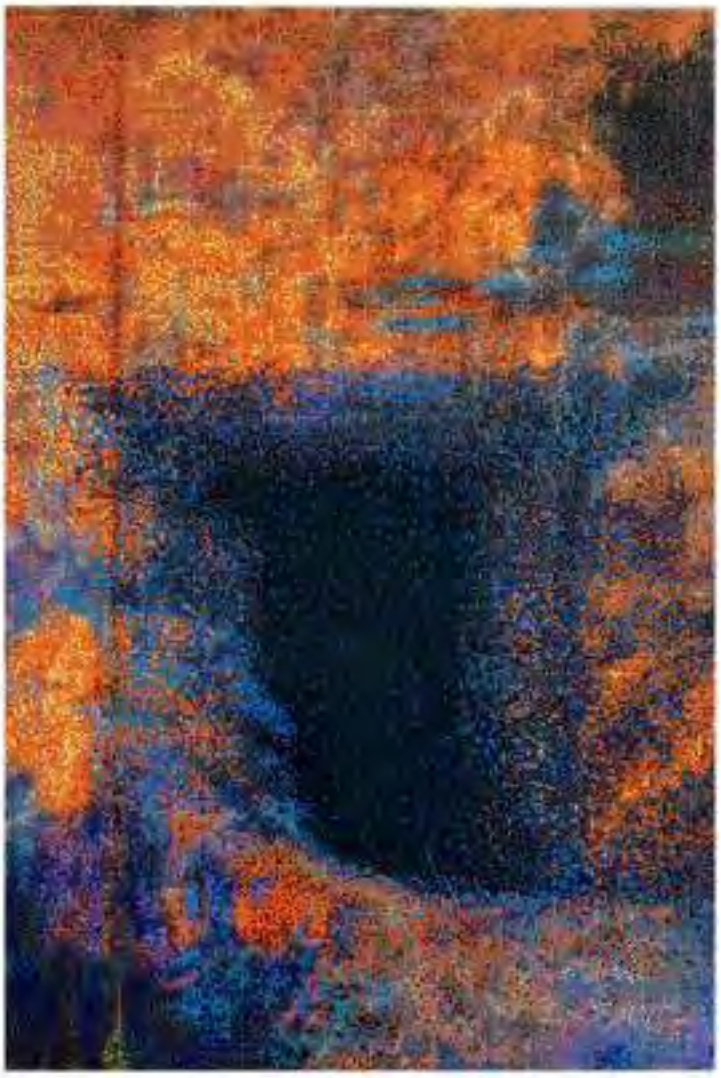
Detail from *Water Lilies #1*, 2022, by Ai Weiwei. Lego bricks

(Image credit: Photo © Ela Bialkowska/OKNO studio. © Image courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua)

Ai Weiwei first deployed Lego bricks as an art medium in 2014 when he used them to create portraits of political prisoners. Now a key element of his practice, Lego will also feature heavily in the Design Museum show, most notably in Untitled (Lego Incident) which will see thousands of Lego blocks fill the gallery floor. Ai sourced the materials for the work (seen fully assembled for the first time at the Design Museum) via public donations from around the world, in response to Lego briefly refusing to sell their products to him in 2014.

Justin McGuirk, Chief Curator at the Design Museum and curator of 'Ai Weiwei: Making Sense' said: 'Several of the works in this exhibition capture the destruction of urban development in China over the last two decades. With *Water Lilies #1*, Ai Weiwei presents us with an alternate vision – a garden paradise.' McGuirk also describes how Ai has embedded a more poignant narrative into the piece: a dark portal on the right-hand side, representing the door to the underground dugout in Xinjiang province where Ai and his father, the acclaimed poet Ai Qing, lived in forced exile in the 1960s. 'On the one hand, he has personalised it by inserting the door of his desert childhood home, and on the other, he has depersonalised it by using an industrial language of modular Lego blocks. This is a monumental, complex and powerful work and we are proud to be the first museum to show it.'

*'Ai Weiwei: Making Sense' runs at the Design Museum from 7 April–30 July 2023.* ***designmuseum.org*** ★



Detail from *Water Lilies #1*, 2022, by Ai Weiwei. Lego bricks

(Image credit: Photo © Ela Bialkowska/OKNO studio. © Image courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua)

LISSON GALLERY

*The Art Newspaper*
22 January 2021

THE ART NEWSPAPER

PREVIEW — EXHIBITIONS

# Fragile yet forceful glass works by Ai Weiwei, Fred Wilson, Fiona Banner and others travel from Venice to Florida

An exhibition of contemporary glass art opens at the Boca Raton Museum of Art

KAREN CHERNICK
22nd January 2021 19:48 GMT

Monica Bonvicini at the Berengo Studio in Venice in 2017

To prepare for the Boca Raton Museum of Art's upcoming exhibition *Glasstress*, Kathleen Goncharov, the museum's senior curator only had a narrow window of opportunity over the past couple of years to visit the Berengo Studio in Venice, which has helped organise the exhibition. First the Italian lagoon suffered from record-breaking floods, swiftly followed by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, but during an opportune moment in 2019 she made it to the island of Murano to choose handblown glass sculptures designed by 34 contemporary artists, including Ai Weiwei, Fred Wilson, Vik Muniz, Erwin Wurm, Fionna Banner, Prune Nourry, Ugo Rondinone, and Joyce J. Scott.

All of the sculptures shown in Florida were created over the past five years, and a few were even produced remotely in 2020, with artists coordinating with the studio via Zoom. Some are hand-sized and others fill rooms, and they are based on themes ranging from racial justice to climate change.

A detail of Ai Weiwei's Blossom Chandelier (2017)

Weiwei's oversized *Blossom Chandelier*, for example, looks ornately floral from a distance, but on closer inspection is made up of Twitter birds fluttering near hands flipping the bird, as well as security cameras and skulls. Dike Blair reproduced a Windex bottle in glass, and Vik Muniz created *Individuals*, human-scale reproductions of lavish wine goblets. "Glass is so flexible, glass can become almost anything you want. It belongs already to the creative realm," Muniz says in a short documentary prepared for the exhibition.

Other artists stretched how far the medium could be recognised, like Monica Bonvicini who created *Bonded* in which black glass looks like a sadomasochistic patent leather garment. And Jimmie Durham, who designed an installation of eight cougar heads called *Strike Twice*, chose to emphasize that unlike wood or metal, glass breaks. "It is interesting when it is broken, because the brokenness vibrates and is a little dangerous, always," Durham says in the documentary. "When glass is broken, it's prettier."

One work, *Glass Big Brother* by conceptual artist Song Dong, was acquired for the museum's permanent collection. It is a monumental chandelier with candlesticks pointing to the floor instead of the ceiling, and attached to surveillance cameras—a twist on an object that should illuminate our vision, but instead seems to be eerily watching us.

Monir al Qadiri Amorphous solid ghost (2017)

The exhibition is the museum's second collaboration with the Berengo Studio's Glasstress programme. "As it morphs from molten liquid to defined solid shapes, glass reinvents itself," writes Adriano Berengo, the studio's founder, in the exhibition catalogue. This fluid reinvention also applies to Berengo's hope that contemporary artists adopt glass as a medium, and continue using it after leaving Venice.

"It was a challenging year to plan an international exhibition, but the effort serves as a tribute to the resilience of Venice," says Irvin Lippman, the museum's executive director. After these ambitious works were created, they were transported—very carefully—from Murano by boat and then Milan by truck, on a plane to Miami, and then through customs and on to Boca Raton. "A reassurance that art is an essential and enduring part of humanity."

*The Guardian*
28 January 2021

The Guardian

# Great Big Art Exhibition invites locked-down Brits to put creativity on show

**People encouraged to make art on themes chosen by famous names and display it in their windows**

Lanre Bakare
@lanre_bakare

Thu 28 Jan 2021 17.05 GMT

▲ The project's first theme, chosen by Antony Gormley, is animals. Photograph: David Parry/PA

Some of British art's biggest names, including Antony Gormley, Sonia Boyce and Anish Kapoor, are encouraging Britons to turn their front windows into a gallery as part of a nationwide initiative to create a "magical patchwork of creativity".

The Great Big Art Exhibition was launched on Thursday by Gormley, who is the first artist to choose a theme for people at home to be inspired by as they create work to contribute to what organisers are calling the nation's largest ever exhibition.

Gormley chose the theme of animals for participants to riff on, and people are encouraged to make their artworks out of what they have at hand. The results – be they paintings, sculptures or something less traditional – are to be placed on a front porch, balcony or window.

The Angel of the North artist said the project would follow on from the NHS rainbow campaign, when thousands of rainbows were put in front windows to show solidarity and support for the health service. He said: "I think we could now celebrate the diversity and extraordinary range of creative talent there is in Britain. People will say, 'I'm not an artist I don't draw things', but I think actually everybody can, once they get going."

Historical works from UK galleries are being made available for download so they can be used as a template or inspiration, and participants are encouraged to collaborate virtually with others, from sports teams or schools to religious groups.

Boyce, who will represent the UK at the next Venice Biennale, has chosen the second theme, portraits, to follow Gormley's, and the project will run until April. Gormley said the lockdown had created a "huge reservoir of potential" creativity. "I'm saying let's funnel this energy into making things," he said.

Directors of Tate, the British Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the National Galleries of Scotland, the National Museums Liverpool and others have selected works including Lubaina Himid's Freedom and Change, Yinka Shonibare's Cheeky Little Astronomer, Darvish Fakhr's portrait of the dancer Akram Khan and Claude Monet's The Water-Lily Pond.

Other artists who are supporting the project include Etel Adnan and Simone Fattal, Tai Shani, Jeremy Deller, David Shrigley, Ai Weiwei and Ryan Gander.

Art has proven to be a popular lockdown pursuit for Britons. Coffee table books have been released featuring artists including Mickalene Thomas and George Condo with do-it-yourself guides to making art.

Care home residents and art students have embraced making work in isolation, while initiatives such as Artists Walk have displayed pieces by artists including Deller in front windows as part of curated local art exhibitions that can be viewed safely from outdoors.

Sally Shaw, the director of Firstsite, the Colchester-based arts organisation behind the initiative, said the project was about spreading happiness and creativity as the country deals with the long lockdown, with art galleries closed.

"The doors to our collections and galleries might be shut but our imaginations are forever open. Making, showing and experiencing art has created so much joy, connection and solace for many thousands of people," she said.

*The Independent*
28 January 2021

INDEPENDENT

# The Great Big Art Exhibition: Ai Weiwei and Anthony Gormley leading UK's largest-ever art exhibition held in people's front windows

Different theme will be chosen each fortnight by a famous artist, with members of the public encouraged to get involved

**Roisin O'Connor** | @Roisin_OConnor | 6 days ago | 7 comments

Ai Weiwei and Anthony Gormley are involved in The Great British Art Exhibition *(Getty Images)*

Ai Weiwei and Sir Anthony Gormley are among the artists involved in the UK's "largest-ever art exhibition", which will be held in people's front windows.

Galleries and museums, including the Tate, National Gallery and the National Galleries of Scotland, are teaming up to encourage people to create art to "counter the gloom of the pandemic".

Gormley, famous for his Angel of the North sculpture, has chosen the opening theme, which is animals.

Anyone can get involved to make drawings, paintings, sculptures or other works that follow the theme, and display their work in front windows, on doors, balconies or in gardens.

They can create art as individuals or as a community by joining up "virtually" with their street, school, temple, church, shopping centre or football team.

Other artists who will choose themes each fortnight include Ai Weiwei, Sir Anish Kapoor and Jeremy Deller.

The next theme of The Great Big Art Exhibition will be portraits, chosen by Sonia Boyce, and the artworks can be made of anything.

"Making, showing and experiencing art has created so much joy, connection and solace for many thousands of people," said Sally Shaw, director of Colchester venue Firstsite, which first came up with the idea.

"The doors to our collections and galleries might be shut but our imaginations are forever open."

She added: "I can't wait to see a brand new nationwide art gallery appearing before our eyes in coming days, weeks and months. This is sure to be an incredible expression of people's creativity."

The Great Big Art Exhibition will run from Thursday 28 January until April.

Information and an activity pack are available from http://www.firstsite.uk.

LISSON GALLERY

*Bloomberg*
3 February 2021

Bloomberg

# Ai Weiwei's Covid-19 Documentary

Dissident artist Ai Weiwei's Covid-19 documentary, "CoroNation," details China's handling of the pandemic. He discusses the film, art and censorship. (Source: Quicktake)

**February 3rd, 2021, 6:05 AM GMT+0000**

*Wallpaper**
9 February 2021

Wallpaper*

ART | 9 DAYS AGO | BY HARRIET LLOYD-SMITH

# Ceramic artists: top trail-glazers breaking the mould

Contemporary ceramic artists are firing up the canon into a new age

Lubna Chowdhary, *Certain Times VIII*, 2019

Ceramics and art have a companionship longer than most. In a story that began in the Palaeolithic period, this potent fusion of water, earth and creativity has evolved through many modes. 21st-century artists are proving that ceramics has as much potential for concept as function, lured to the medium for its versatility, sensuality and potential as a platform for provocation.

From artists upholding age-old techniques with a twist, to those unearthing radical ways to push materials to their limits, these are the trail-glazers, the mould-breakers and future-shapers on the cutting edge of ceramic art.

## Ai Weiwei

Ai Weiwei, *Coca Cola Vase*, 2011. Han Dynasty vases (206BC-220AD) and industrial paint. © *Ai Weiwei. Courtesy Lisson Gallery*

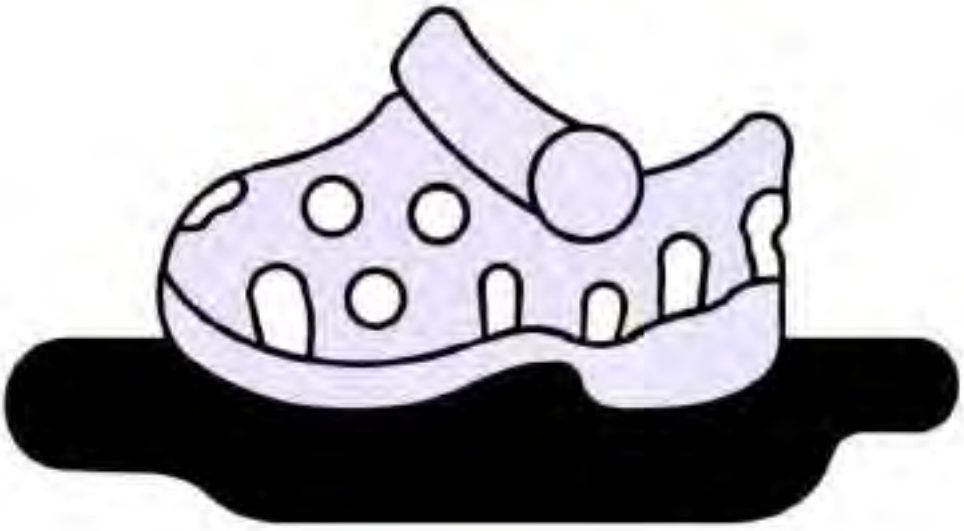
Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei is just as famed for breaking ceramic art as making it. In 1995, in one of the most memorable and controversial moments of art-world theatre, he intentionally dropped an alleged 2,000-year-old Han Dynasty Urn, which shattered at his feet. A year before, Ai painted over another with the red Coca-Cola logo. This erasure of artefacts – and ergo cultural history - is a recurring theme in Ai's work, with ancient ceramic vessels often his tools of choice to question who or what ascribes cultural value. In a different, but no less striking ceramic mode, Ai dominated Tate's turbine hall with 100 million individually hand-crafted life-sized sunflower seeds sculpted and painted by specialists in Jingdezhen, China. It was an invitation to reflect on the 'Made in China' phenomenon, and more broadly, contemporary cultural exchange. Ai confronts the vast history of ceramic art, smashes it open and pieces it back together to astonishing, and explosive effect.

*The New York Times*
13 February 2021

The New York Times

# Learn About Lincoln and Attend a Symposium on the Power of Fashion

This week, celebrate Presidents' Day, tune in to a discussion between two members of the Tuskegee Airmen Inc. and try a new recipe for Mardi Gras.



Nadia Hafid

**By Emma Grillo and Danya Issawi**

Published Feb. 13, 2021 Updated Feb. 16, 2021

*Here is a sampling of the week's events and how to tune in (all times are Eastern). Note that events are subject to change after publication.*

## Sunday

Tune in to a **conversation between the artist Ai Weiwei** and Yael Lipschutz, a curator at the Skirball Cultural Center. Mr. Ai and Ms. Lipschutz will discuss Mr. Ai's views on human rights violations around the world, as well "Trace," his touring exhibition that features portraits of 83 individuals from over 25 countries, whom Mr. Ai and various human rights groups consider to be activists, prisoners of conscience and advocates of free speech. Registration closes at 3 p.m. on Feb. 19. This event is free and is prerecorded.

**When** 2 p.m.

**Where** skirball.org/programs/words-and-ideas/conversation-ai-weiwei

Attend a **virtual symposium as part of Fashion In/Action: Dressing for Global Unrest**, a new exhibition from N.Y.U. Steinhardt's Costume Studies program. The exhibition and symposium explore the ways that Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 have changed fashion, including designers using their factories to make personal protective equipment and the symbolism of clothing worn to demonstrations. The symposium will feature original research from students and a keynote speech from Korina Emmerich, a fashion designer and the founder of EMME Studio. This event is free.

**When** 10:30 a.m.

**Where** fashioninactionexhibition.com/events

*Los Angeles Times*
18 February 2021

Los Angeles Times

# 17 culture picks: A modern dance take on 'Romeo and Juliet' and more

Cordelia Braithwaite and Paris Fitzpatrick dance the lead roles in Matthew Bourne's "Romeo and Juliet." (Johan Persson)

By MATT COOPER | LISTINGS COORDINATOR

FEB. 18, 2021 12 PM PT

Matthew Bourne, Ai Weiwei, Patton Oswalt, Los Angeles Opera and Japanese woodblock printing all make our weekly streaming list this weekend. Here's the rundown of online concerts, theater, art and other culture for your viewing consideration, all times Pacific.

**Matthew Bourne's "Romeo and Juliet"**

Center Theatre Group streams a filmed production of the British choreographer's modern-dress update of the Prokofiev ballet. 5 p.m. Thursday; 5 and 8 p.m. Friday; 2, 5 and 8 p.m. Saturday; 1 and 6:30 p.m. Sunday. $10. centertheatregroup.org

**Jazz at Lincoln Orchestra Septet With Wynton Marsalis**

The ensemble performs the trumpet player and composer's new work, "The Democracy! Suite" in this La Jolla Music Society presentation. 7 p.m. Saturday; available on demand through Feb. 23. Free. Register at ljms.org

**"A Conversation With Ai Weiwei"**

The artist and activist joins Skirball Cultural Center curator Yael Lipschutz for a virtual chat. 11 a.m. Sunday. Free. skirball.org, youtube.com

LISSON GALLERY

*T: The New York Times Style Magazine*
12 April 2021

THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

The artist Ai Weiwei is inspired by the resilience and self-contentment of his beloved cats.

**Ai WEIWEI**, artist, 63, with Whisker (left), 10 months, and Yellow, 1. Photographed at their home in Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal, on Feb. 22, 2021.

INTERVIEW BY ALICE NEWELL-HANSON
PHOTOGRAPH BY CATARINA OSÓRIO DE CASTRO

April 12, 2021

**Ai Weiwei:** My cats think they are so important. They always want to sleep in the center of my bed or get on my shoulder, and I really have to negotiate with them. But they bring me so much joy. A neighbor found Shadow nearby, abandoned in some trash. She's very small, but full of curiosity. Half is 6, and more sophisticated — I brought him with me to Portugal from my studio in Berlin, where I lived between 2015 and 2020 — and Yellow was a local street cat I took in. He's very attached to humans. If I go on a walk, he follows me, almost like a dog. But of course, all cats are independent, and our house here is in the middle of a field, so they can run around all day. In Berlin, we were on an upper floor of an apartment building, and Half and another cat I had then jumped out of a window. Fortunately, they weren't hurt. Cats are so capable. It's amazing. Any other animal would be dead.

By Catarina Osório De Castro

When I was growing up in Shihezi, China, in the 1960s, you didn't see families with pets, because of course communism is against private property, and any kind of compassion back then was deemed questionable. Animals were only valued as tools for productivity, as was the case with donkeys and horses, or for their meat. My mom's generation also tends to think that animals are dirty. Communism is very concerned with cleanliness — you have to be spiritually clean, physically clean — and so even a little bit of animal hair somewhere is unacceptable. When I built my own studio in Beijing in 2000, though, the first thing I wanted was to have some life in there. I bought one cat — the first cat — and took care of him for 20 years.

At one point, I had more than 30 cats in my Beijing compound. They were all rescues. In some cities in southern China, like Guangzhou, there is a famous dish called Dragon and Phoenix that often contains cat and snake meats. It's a mad local custom, and there are people who capture neighborhood cats in other cities and send them south. In 2009, I was working with an N.G.O. called China Small Animal Protection Association — really just a group of kids, because even that kind of nonprofit can't really exist in China — and we seized a truck filled with 400 cats in tiny cages. I couldn't take all of them, so I took 40. And they were all different. It doesn't matter how many cats you have — each has its own character.

Ai says of Yellow, "If I go on a walk, he follows me, almost like a dog." Catarina Osório de Castro

I was under horrible stress in China. Every day, when I walked outside, I was being surveilled. The secret police would follow me or watch me — when I was in parks, in restaurants. But the cats were another world. They are indifferent to the human struggle.

And yet they always find a way to inspire happiness. I did a lot of video interviews from Beijing, and every time, this one cat would jump onto my table and lie right in front of the computer. I always joked that he was a secret agent because he knew everything about my conversations. I left Beijing in 2015, but I still have my studio there, and my assistants send me photos of the cats. They tell me if one dies, and how they buried it.

I've learned so much from animals. It's important to be around another species that has a completely different set of instincts and intuitions. Humans are so rational. We are defined by our knowledge, and that blocks our emotions and understanding of ourselves. But anyone who opens their mind or heart to cats can experience something that can't be found in human society. They teach you that you can have a happy life without knowing anything at all. They take care of themselves, and they make their own fun. To be an individual, to be self-content — those are nice qualities for a life.

*Artnet News*
2 June 2021

artnet news

Op-Ed

# The Organizers of a Major U.K. Exhibition Used My Name to Promote Their Show. But They Were Too Afraid to Embrace My Ideas

"The Great Big Art Exhibition" rejected an artwork I made that focused on political prisoners. What was the real reason?

**Ai Weiwei**, June 2, 2021

Ai Weiwei. Photo Carl Court/Getty Images.

What is art and what is its purpose? What is its relevance to our post-industrialist and consumption-oriented world? These questions may seem banal, but they are especially pertinent if we look at "The Great Big Art Exhibition," organised by the U.K. visual arts organisation Firstsite this year. I am very honored to share that my 2021 project *Postcard for Political Prisoners* was not accepted—and that their rejection gave a real meaning to my artwork.

Erica Bolton, a public relations specialist who worked for Firstsite on the exhibition, contacted us earlier this year, on January 18, through

Greg Hilty, the curatorial director of Lisson Gallery, and invited me to take part in the nationwide show—which claims to be the U.K.'s largest-ever art exhibition and a celebration of creativity to counter the gloom of the pandemic. In collaboration with Art U.K., The Big Draw, Voluntary Arts, and supported by the Plus Tate network of 35 museums and galleries across the U.K., the idea is that Britain's leading artists would choose a different theme every two weeks and that people could join up virtually to produce artworks together. In the initial information I received from Bolton, we were told that "artworks can be made of anything," and that key works from across the U.K. would be made available for download.

Their slogan goes: "The doors to our collections and galleries might be shut but art and expression will be unleashed as never before across the U.K."

On January 22, Sally Shaw, the director of Firstsite who was leading the project, had a phone meeting with my studio's press and publications manager at that time. Between January and April, there was a constant flow of WhatsApp communications between the studio and Stuart Tulloch, Firstsite's head of program, about the specifics of my contribution.

Ai Weiwei's treadmill from Julian Assange, photographed in October 2016. Courtesy Ai Weiwei.

On April 22, my artwork titled *Postcard for Political Prisoners* was delivered to the Firstsite team. The idea of a postcard stems from my 2014 exhibition at the former Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary in San Francisco, where I made postcards that were each printed with an address of a political prisoner. Visitors could write on them and the postcards were subsequently mailed by the exhibition's organisers to that jailed individual.

This time, for the design of the postcard I included a sketch from my 2015 work *All Fingers Must Point Down* on the reverse side. On the front is an image of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange's treadmill,

which was given to me in October 2016 as a present some months after I interviewed him in summer 2016 while he was seeking asylum at the Embassy of Ecuador in London, before he was detained by the British authorities in April 2019. I am a strong supporter of Assange because I firmly believe in the importance of investigative journalism in a civil society. As I felt that I did not have the chance to do justice to Assange's story, the combination between my encounter with him and my ongoing interest in sending letters to political prisoners was crystallised into *Postcard for Political Prisoners*. It is a project which not only shows care to political prisoners, but it also encourages participants to reflect upon the relationship between the freedom that they enjoy and the price these fighters pay for that freedom.

As we submitted the work, we informed Firstsite that we were waiting for Amnesty International's list of political prisoners who would be able and willing to receive mail from the public. Immediately afterwards, we received an enthusiastic WhatsApp message from Stuart Tulloch: "I'll get back to you with any questions tomorrow. Thanks for all you've done to get this to us."

On April 25, we informed Firstsite that Amnesty International would take longer, due to the fact that there are so many people in prison at the moment, they have less information on where people are held. We enquired with Firstsite about posting the details of my project on their platform.

No response.

We followed up again on May 13 and May 17.

No response.

On May 17, we asked Lisson director Hilty to follow up on our behalf. That's how we finally received a response, on May 20, after Firstsite's silence for 27 days. The response came from the director of Firstsite, Sally Shaw: "We have given the idea a great deal of consideration and unfortunately, we are unable to take it forward for two reasons. Sadly, due to the timing of when the idea came through from the studio, it has made it difficult for us to include it in The Great Big Art Exhibition. Also, the concept of the project is to encourage people across the nation to make artworks and display them in their windows. The sending of a postcard takes us away from this intention. I must assure you, sincerely, that this is in no way a reflection of our appreciation of the idea itself, which is remarkable and profound, and equally our esteem for Weiwei and his work." [Shaw reiterated this to Artnet News when reached for comment, adding that "it was our greatest dream to work with Ai Weiwei. He is the most extra-ordinary artist for whom everyone at Firstsite has the deepest respect."]

On of the site-specific installations by Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz Island. (Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

Shaw's response carries exactly the same tone as a rejection letter sent to job applicants. The only difference is the reversal of our roles because she was the one who courted my participation in the exhibition. What makes even less sense is the reasons that she gave for not having included my postcard: timing and art form. In fact, no deadline was ever given for my contribution, and, according to official information, the last theme, "Performance," spanned from April 26 to May 9—my work could have fit nicely, thematically and temporally.

Now, for the second reason: In an exhibition where Anish Kapoor's abstract painting could potentially encourage people to make artworks and Antony Gormley's instructions could teach people how to make a dog figurine with a ball of clay, why wouldn't my conceptual artwork *Postcard for Political Prisoners* inspire people to make artworks in the form of a postcard and engage in art-activism? What could stop participants from sending the postcard to themselves and pasting it on the window? Who is judging whether one artwork is more worthwhile for the purpose of "encouraging people across the nation to make artworks and display them in their windows" than another? What is the criteria? Whom has my postcard with Julian Assange's treadmill offended?

The inherent self-contradiction in Shaw's stated reasons, or rather, excuses demonstrated an inability to make her case—she seemed too afraid to give us a straight answer and too maladroit to round it off. I think the reason is related to Assange who has been incarcerated in HM Prison Belmarsh in London since his arrest on April 11, 2019, and that they don't want to touch on a topic like Assange. Everyone is avoiding it—not just in the mainstream media, but in the circles of art and culture in general. By writing down the events that occurred, I hope to provoke everyone reading to think about the role that contemporary art plays in daily life.

Ai Weiwei poses with John Shipton, the father of Julian Assange, outside the Old Bailey court in central London on September 28, 2020, where the extradition hearing against Assange was taking place. Photo: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP via Getty Images.

In my opinion, contemporary art should be related to people's lives and concerned with humanitarian ideas; art is, first and foremost, about human beings. What I do as an artist is always related to my personal experiences and the world around me—as such, my postcard design references my personal contact with Assange.

Everywhere in the contemporary world, art exhibitions enjoy flaunting famous artists' work, while, at the same time, Western art has become completely cut off from society. "The Great Big Art Exhibition" used my name to promote the so-called "biggest exhibition" in the U.K. while also deciding against the core values of art, freedom of expression. What this incident unravels is the art world's hypocrisy and corruption to reveal a world that considers art as a decoration and a sedative within our capitalist and consumerist society, a world where cultural activities concern culture alone and nothing more. Art has become a tool to numb ourselves so that we may avoid introspection. Any reflections through art are undesirable because they evoke pain and suffering and, if we delve into it, we would all be found guilty—and artists are guiltier than others because we have far more opportunities for free expression.

My rejection also demonstrates that this art project, which involves more than 21 museums as well as other cultural venues based in this so-called democratic society, are quintessentially hypocritical. Let's read "The Great Big Art Exhibition" slogans once again: "artworks can be made of anything at all" and "art and expression will be unleashed as never before across the U.K." It is truly ironic to observe the corrupt practices of cultural circles in a place at the pinnacle of Western civilization, which advocates for and takes pride in its freedom of expression. In reality, freedom of expression is nothing more than empty talk and it has become a product that only serves the purpose of flattering the vanity of those who are powerful

and wealthy—which is even worse.

I feel ashamed that nowadays all art does is whitewash. My artwork has once again proven how the art world is corrupt. So, I would like to thank Firstsite and the experience that they offered: Their rejection made *Postcard for Political Prisoners* a truly worthwhile project.

*In response to this article, Sally Shaw, director of Firstsite, sent Artnet News the following comment: "It was our greatest dream to work with Ai Weiwei. He is the most extra-ordinary artist for whom everyone at Firstsite has the deepest respect. We gave his idea a great deal of consideration and unfortunately and very sadly we were unable to take it forward for two reasons. Due to the timing of when the idea came through from the studio, it has made it difficult for us to include it in The Great Big Art Exhibition. Also, the concept of the project is to encourage people across the nation to make artworks and display them in their windows. The sending of a postcard takes us away from this intention. I must assure you, sincerely, that this is in no way a reflection of our appreciation of the idea itself, which is remarkable and profound, and equally our esteem for Weiwei and his work."*

*BBC News*
2 June 2021

BBC NEWS

# Ai Weiwei's Gilded Cage unveiled at Blenheim Palace

The interactive sculpture will go on long-term display in the grounds of Blenheim Palace

**A cage sculpted by Chinese artist Ai WeiWei has been unveiled at Blenheim Palace.**

The internationally-known Chinese artist's 2017 work, the Gilded Cage, will go on long-term display at the world heritage site in Woodstock, Oxfordshire.

The golden structure resembling a bird cage explores themes around migration and refugees.

Ai said he was "thrilled" it is going on long-term view at the palace.

The golden structure is made from steel fences and is over seven metres tall.

To explore the cage visitors have to walk through turnstiles.

The sculpture is over seven metres tall

The Chinese dissident and filmmaker said: "Gilded Cage is a large sculpture which works with space and environment, and welcomes its audience to experience from inside as well as exploring outside surroundings.

"Blenheim Palace is the most proper setting for this work to be shown.

"The work itself is a commentary on fences and borders.

"As we can see, the world today encounters new possibilities, while being challenged by unthinkable crisis at the same time.

"To rethink our humanity is crucial for human development."

Ai's inaugural show was at the palace in 2014.

Visitors enter the cage through turnstiles

The artist is an outspoken critic of China's human rights record and left the country in 2015 before moving to Berlin and then the UK.

He also designed the Beijing national stadium, nicknamed the "Bird's Nest", which was built for the 2008 Olympic Games.

*The Guardian*
2 June 2021

The Guardian

# Ai Weiwei accuses curators of rejecting artwork over Julian Assange content

**Artist claims piece was rejected from exhibition for addressing imprisonment of the WikiLeaks founder**

▲ Ai Weiwei's artwork depicted the treadmill Julian Assange used while living in the Ecuadorian embassy. Photograph: Pedro Nunes/Reuters

**David Batty**

Wed 2 Jun 2021 19.37 BST

Ai Weiwei has accused the organisers of a large UK art exhibition of rejecting his artwork for the show because the piece addressed the imprisonment of the WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

The Chinese dissident artist and activist said the piece for The Great Big Art Exhibition featured an image of the treadmill which Assange used while seeking asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy.

In an opinion article for the art website Artnet, Ai Weiwei said the piece, called Postcard for Political Prisoners, incorporated a photograph of the running machine given to him by Assange, who is detained in Belmarsh high-security prison in south-east London.

Ai said that in April the artwork, which was intended to be sent as a postcard to political prisoners, was delivered to the visual arts organisation Firstsite, the organiser of the online exhibition, which he said initially responded enthusiastically.

But after informing Firstsite that there would be a delay because his studio was waiting for Amnesty International's list of political prisoners who would be "able and willing to receive mail from the public", Ai said the organisation ignored further inquiries about exhibiting the piece.

He wrote that Firstsite eventually responded to an inquiry from the Lisson Gallery, which represents him, earlier this month. He said Firstsite's director explained that they could not include his project due to time constraints, and because it did not fit with the concept of the exhibition: to encourage people across the UK to make artworks and display them in their windows.

Ai Weiwei said that this response made no sense to him because, he says, no deadline was given for the delivery of the artwork, and there was nothing to stop people from pasting the postcards on their windows.

He wrote: "I think the reason is related to Assange who has been incarcerated in HM Prison Belmarsh in London since his arrest on 11 April 2019, and that they don't want to touch on a topic like Assange.""

In a statement, Sally Shaw, the director of Firstsite, repeated the reasons given to Ai as to why they chose not to include the artwork in the exhibition. She added: "I must assure you, sincerely, that this is in no way a reflection of our appreciation of the idea itself, which is remarkable and profound, and equally our esteem for Weiwei and his work."

- This article was amended on 3 June 2021 to refer to Ai Weiwei on subsequent references - a direct quote excepted - by his surname Ai, in conformity with Guardian style, rather than his forename Weiwei.

*Wallpaper**
7 June 2021

Wallpaper*

ART | 7 JUN 2021 | BY HARRIET LLOYD-SMITH

# At home with Ai Weiwei

In our ongoing interview profile series, we hear about what artists are making, what's making them tick, and the moments that made them. Ai Weiwei speaks to us via Zoom from his new Portugal home ahead of the biggest show of his career so far, and the unveiling of his *Gilded Cage* sculpture at Blenheim Palace

Portrait of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. *Photography: Ai Weiwei Studio*

Experiencing the art of Ai Weiwei is like biting into a scorpion. Plenty of sting, searingly sharp, and hard to swallow. And so it should be. The divisive Chinese artist has dedicated his life, career and freedom to exploring some of the most pertinent issues facing humanity. From his bold and unwavering criticism of censorship and authoritarianism in his native country to documenting the escalating migrant crisis, cultural stereotypes, and the darker caverns of history.

Experiencing the art of Ai Weiwei is also cathartic. He is an artist of resilience, vision, optimism and undeniable wit. His art dares to dream of a world where speech has freedom, equality reigns, power is held to account and satire can roam free.

Installation view of 'Rastore' at Coleção Nacional, Lisbon. *Courtesy Ai Weiwei's studio*

Through film, installation, sculpture, performance, photography, and almost any other medium art has in its toolbox, Ai has invited those who see his work to walk, if for a moment, in another's shoes.

The stately rural haven of Blenheim Palace might feel like a far cry from the subjects Ai has often turned his attention to, but his relationship with the palace runs deep.

In 2014, he became the first contemporary artist in Blenheim's 300-year history to make the palace his canvas. The show was a courageous move from its host, and as one might imagine, conventions were kept to a minimum. Ai placed handcuffs on the bed in Winston Churchill's Birth Room, introduced the Long Library to 40 photographs of him 'giving the finger' to global institutions, and let loose a plague of porcelain crabs in the Red Drawing Room. Less conventional still was the fact that the show was organised remotely while Ai was barred from leaving China by authorities.

Ai Weiwei *Study of Perspective* 1995 – 2011. Installation view, 'Ai Weiwei at Blenheim Palace' 2021. Photographer: Ben Mumford. Courtesy of Blenheim Art Foundation

Now, *Gilded Cage* – Ai's imposing interactive sculpture exploring the physical and ideological constraints of refugees – has been installed on long-term view in the palace's grounds. We took the opportunity to speak to the artist, via Zoom, about his extraordinary life and work.

## Wallpaper*: Where are you as we speak?

**Ai Weiwei:** In Portugal. This is one day before my largest exhibition ever ['Rapture' at Cordoaria Nacional, Lisbon]. It's about 40,000 sq m.

I bought a property in Portugal and I now consider Portugal to be a place I will settle in. I've been pushed out of China for six years. I spent five years in Berlin, and some time in the UK in Cambridge, where my son still studies. Now, since the pandemic, I've been in Portugal for a simple reason: plenty of sunshine.

## W*: How are you finding your new home?

**AW:** I'm kind of a political refugee. Once you've left your home, either you're home, or you're a foreigner outside of your home. So I choose a place simply by instinct. I like a place to have sunshine. You open the door and see the sun, you open the

window and see the sun, and you don't feel depressed, you feel something you can trust in: nature. The sun given to us is so generous, but living in the city, we forget.

This is a natural life, it's not a city struggle. It's very peaceful, and at my age, 64, you need a moment to be alone.

Ai Weiwei, *Gilded Cage* (2017). Photography: Pete Seaward. Courtesy of Blenheim Art Foundation

**W*: *Gilded Cage* (2017), which has just been installed at Blenheim Palace confronts the international migrant crisis and lots of your previous work has centred on identity, displacement and inequality. Why are you so passionate about these issues?**

**AW:** It's like the Yin and Yang: there are the fortunate ones, and the not so fortunate. I have had a lot of unfortunate experiences, I grew up with my father in exile for 20 years, so I know what it's like. As humanity, we always have to think as 'one', so there's always 'fortunate ones' and 'unfortunate ones'. But we're basically the same.

If we go to the refugee camps, we see the little girls and boys, and they're so smart. Their lives have the same meaning, but if we don't provide very simple opportunities – like education and nutrition – it just becomes a waste. Their whole lives, millions, maybe hundreds of millions of people, living under those kinds of conditions, given no hope.

[For me] it's become a responsibility. It's not mercy or some kind of compassion, it's become, 'do you really think you're a good person' or 'do you really not care at all?' It's a challenge. As an artist, I cannot avoid a conscience, so I ask myself the same question. I make films, and exhibitions to introduce the institutions to the so-called liberal world, to say 'we're responsible' and 'we're not as free as we think'.

**W*: Were there any specific enclosures or cages it was inspired by?**

**AW:** Yes, when I made the film *Human Flow* (2017), I based it on 40 [refugee] camps from the Syrian border to the Egypt border, the Turkish border, Lebanon, Jordan, and Myanmar.

[The film asked] 'what's it like being someone forced away from their home?', 'How do they live?', 'What kind of future do they have?'

So I got all these not-very-beautiful images. What I remember most vividly are several locations; one is the US border with Mexico. You can see one side is so rich and plentiful, and the other side is so desperate, you always question 'why is it like that?'. And also in Israel on the West Bank, people have to go through these jail-like fences. They're very narrow and very long. The Palestinian people have to get jobs, and they have to wait in there for hours. I don't know why they make the fences so narrow; people are compressed like sardines. I think about the psychological warfare that makes people feel unimportant: 'I'm the master of you', 'I decide your life'. So that's not fantasy, it's reality, so I made a little fence, a cage, that you can go in and out of; it could only take 20 or 30 seconds. It's a sculpture, an installation, a little modern instrument [to show] how humans treat others.

**W*: The work was previously on view in New York's Central Park.**

**AW:** Yes, it was in Central Park, near 59th Street, a few blocks away from Trump Plaza.

**W*: Was that intentional placement?**

**AW:** I liked that placement because New York is a city for rich and powerful people. And of course, today if you're powerful, somehow you will understand the cage. Either you cage others, or you can be caged.

Building Ai Weiwei's Gilded Cage at Blenheim Palace. *Videography by Pete Seaward. Produced by Blenheim Art Foundation*

**W*: Installing *Gilded Cage* at Blenheim is a bit of a homecoming for your work. You were the first contemporary artist to ever exhibit there, but you were detained in China at the time. What was the experience like?**

**AW:** With every opportunity that comes, I say to myself, 'this will be my last show'. So I always make maximum effort, because, who knows, I could be locked up in jail for the next ten years. Whether it's a large project, or a small project, it's the same feeling. Life is short.

**W*: The history of Blenheim is complex. It provided a refuge for 400 evacuated children during WW2. It also symbolises a certain British elitism and exclusion, yet it also stages radical contemporary art. What does Blenheim mean to you, both as a place and what it represents?**

**AW:** Blenheim has a very historical figure in [Winston] Churchill and also represents Britain's struggle in modern times. Some were intelligent moves, some are maybe questionable, but the struggle is real. And that kind of struggle, we cannot replace it. History only teaches us how difficult [a place] freedom has come from.

**W*: That's interesting. I suppose what Blenheim has done by exhibiting contemporary art, is open itself up to analysis, and perhaps criticism, of its history.**

**AW:** I think they are brave. My show was their first, and they're always a little bit controversial. I asked them to place handcuffs on the bed inside Churchill's bedroom and they accepted. I can see the grandchildren of Churchill are so open-minded; they have great humour.

*Ai Weiwei, Handcuffs, 2002 & Hanging Man in Porcelain, 2009. Installation view: 'Ai Weiwei at Blenheim Palace' 2014. Photography: Ben Murphy. Courtesy of Blenheim Art Foundation*

When I tried to hang *Study of Perspective* – 40 photographs in which I held my middle finger up at 40 different famous locations – in Churchill's library, the photos were larger than the library bookcases, so we wondered how to hang them because nothing seemed possible. So they said 'why don't you hang them this way [landscape]'? So all of the fingers now pointed like this [horizontal]. I love that kind of response – to trust the artist and just let something happen in this 'historical readymade'. They [have] respect, and also see the possibility to integrate contemporary culture. I think that takes some courage and it made the show very meaningful for me.

Normally with heritage and history, we think we shouldn't touch it, but we should touch it, otherwise we are not existing.

Installation view of 'Rupture' at Contoseta Nacional, Lisbon. Courtesy Ai Weiwei's studio

**W*: What was the first piece of art you remember seeing, and how did it make you feel?**

**AW:** The first piece of art I can memorise was by my father. He was an artist that studied in Paris, and was exiled for 20 years since the year I was born. We were in Xinjiang, the province of the Uyghur people and the Gobi Desert where he was doing hard labour. There was a black hole in the landscape, and we lived in this home for five years.

**W*: You've got a picture of that home as your phone screensaver, that's quite powerful.**

**AW:** That was my palace. This home was like the moment, if you remember, when the US Army pulled out the Iraq leader Saddam Hussein [who was in hiding] from the ground. It's an awful image, but we lived in a hole like that with my father. Now you understand that the palace means something very different to me.

But the first piece of art I remember. My father was cleaning public toilets for 200 farmers. It was very dirty, there was no water, no roof, and awful flies. This was a punishment to insult him. My father was a poet. You can see what kind of struggle he'd been through because he was a writer.

He was the most important writer in China but he was forbidden to write for 20 years. For a writer, this was the best time, from [the age of] 47 to 67, and he was not

allowed to touch a pen. So once, he grabbed a pencil and drew a flower in front of me. I saw the magic happen. At that time, he was an old man who was supposed to clean the toilets. I never knew he could draw, and he just drew and the lines were so beautiful. That makes me feel like art is about real life, it's about the reality, it belongs to our heart.

Installation view of 'Rupture' at Cordoaria Nacional, Lisbon. Courtesy Ai Weiwei's studio

## W*: What's the most challenging art project you've ever worked on?

**AW:** My most challenging project also relates to my father [the Chinese poet, Ai Qing]. In 2011, I was detained [by the Chinese authorities]. In detention, I realised I knew him very little because I'd never really asked him a question. There were so many questions in my mind, but when he was alive, somehow I didn't ask them. I was stupid, I was not conscious, and now I will never get a solid answer.

The police told me I could face ten years of imprisonment. So suddenly, I felt sad because my son was only just over two years old. The prison guard said to me, 'after certain years, you come out of jail and your son won't recognise you'. That is very hard. One day, I [decided] to write a book about what was happening, so my son knew his grandfather and his father, from their own words, because there could be a lot of publications using their own words.

So that project has taken the last ten years, and the memoir will be published on 2 November (2021), it's called *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows*, published by Random House. It's taken a lot of effort to write this book. ✱

Installation view of 'Rapture' at Cordoaria Nacional, Lisbon. *Courtesy Ai Weiwei studio*

INFORMATION

*Gilbert Cage* is now on long-term view at Blenheim Palace, blenheimpalace.com

Ai Weiwei, 'Rapture', until 28 Nov 2021, Cordoaria Nacional – Galeria do Terreiro Nascente

*3000 Years of Art and Science: A Manifesto* by Ai Weiwei will be published on 2 November 2021, penguin.co.uk

*The New York Times*
30 June 2021

The New York Times

# Art to Augment 12 Botanical Gardens Around the World

The exhibition "Seeing the Invisible" will feature artists such as Ai Weiwei, El Anatsui and Sigalit Landau.

A rendering of a detail of Sigalit Landau's "Salt Stalagmite #1 [Three Bridges]" (2021). Sigalit Landau

By Peter Libbey

June 30, 2021

An exhibition of augmented reality artwork by 13 artists, including Ai Weiwei and Isaac Julien, will open simultaneously at 12 gardens in six countries in September, the Jerusalem Botanical Gardens and Outset Contemporary Art Fund, an international nonprofit, announced Wednesday.

"Coming out of the pandemic when outdoor experiences and nature have taken on a new meaning and gravity in our lives, this

exhibition represents a fresh way for people to engage with art and nature simultaneously," the curator Tal Michael Haring, who worked on the show with Hadas Maor, said in a statement.

El Anatsui, Pamela Rosenkranz, Timur Si-Qin, Sigalit Landau and Sarah Meyohas are among the other artists who will contribute to the coming show at locations in the United States, Britain, South Africa, Australia, Israel and Canada.

Visitors can view the art on their smartphone or tablet through a downloadable app; and it will appear on their screens as an overlay on the gardens' flora. The pieces have been created and organized to enhance and complement their surroundings. "To be able to have an artwork react to your presence and allow you to explore it and invite you to be participatory inside of it is something that is also part of the choice of medium for us," Haring said in an interview.

It was an earlier sculpture show curated by Maor, "Returning to Nature," which ran at the Jerusalem Botanical Garden last year, that gave rise to the idea for "Seeing the Invisible." The organizers felt inspired by its success to continue exploring new ways of presenting work outdoors and mediating between the art on display and its environment.

The new project, Maor said, focuses on a timely, increasingly complicated relationship. "It's created on this tension between the physical and the digital, what we would then perhaps term the phygital."

*Aesthetica*
1 July 2021

# Aesthetica

Art, Freedom and Control

Ai Weiwei's (b. 1957) new installation, *Gilded Cage*, encourages audiences to reflect on the nature and extent of the freedoms they enjoy within different social structures. The work, commissioned by Blenheim Art Foundation and on long-term view in the grounds of Blenheim Palace since early June, consists of a large, golden-barred structure, over seven metres in height, reminiscent of a cage for exotic birds or animals. It allows visitors in via a series of turnstiles, rendering them both an element of the visual spectacle and wanderers in a cramped maze. The sculpture, previously on display in New York and Venice, is now placed in the grounds of an opulent baroque mansion in the English countryside. It invites consideration on the ways in which mass cultural discourse, distraction and pleasure might blind us to the *realpolitik* of the worlds we inhabit.

Ai Weiwei is well placed to make comments on the covert (and not so covert) curtailment of personal freedoms by state forces. A long-time critic of the government of his native China – notably through his internet blogging and social media activity – he was famously arrested in 2011 and detained for several months on spurious grounds. The global art world rallied around his cause and he was released later that year, going on to give a series of candid interviews about the psychologically intrusive conditions in which he was kept. This new sculpture may partly reflect on the terms of the artist's own imprisonment. But more than that, it offers commentary on the flow of refugees across the world. In this sense, an important corollary work to *Gilded Cage* is Ai Weiwei's 2017 documentary film *Human Flow*, which follows the progress of migrants escaping climate change, conflict, and hunger across 23 different countries, from Iraq and Afghanistan to Western Europe and beyond.

Ai Weiwei has remarked that *Gilded Cage* "is a commentary on fences and borders. As we can see, the world today encounters new possibilities, while being challenged by unthinkable crisis at the same time. To rethink our humanity is crucial to human development." Inferences about pandemic-era lockdowns might be drawn from this comment, but the crises to which Weiwei refers are ones of conflict and natural disaster: from fleeing bomb-damaged cities and flooded farmland to negotiating inhumane asylum systems. Examples include Manus Island in Papua New Guinea – where seaborne refugees to Australia were detained for years on end – to Napier Barracks in Kent, subject of a recent scandal when it emerged that asylum seekers were being kept in filthy and unsafe conditions. Ai Weiwei's installation points towards the way economically developed countries impose hostile environments on newcomers; a system which stands in stark contrast to the ideals of equality for which many democracies stand.

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Find out more **here**.

Words: Greg Thomas.

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**Image Credits: *GILDED CAGE* BY AI WEIWEI, IN-SITU IN THE GROUNDS OF BLENHEIM PALACE, 2021. PETE SEAWARD / COURTESY OF BLENHEIM ART FOUNDATION**

Posted on 1 July 2021

*Publico*
13 July 2021

Público

ARTES

# Serralves recebe este mês escultura de Ai Weiwei com mais de 30 metros de altura

*Pequi Vinagreiro* é a peça monumental que está já a ser instalada no Parque de Serralves. O artista chinês apresenta vários outros trabalhos no Porto, a partir de 23 de Julho.

Lusa
13 de Julho de 2021, 17:03

Depois da Cordoaria Nacional, em Lisboa, Ai Weiwei vai chegar também ao Museu de Serralves DR

O artista chinês Ai Weiwei vai apresentar a exposição *Entrelaçar*, em Serralves, no Porto, a partir de 23 de Julho, que inclui a primeira exibição pública da peça *Pequi Vinagreiro*, com mais de 30 metros de altura.

A exposição, que será exibida ao mesmo tempo que o artista tem uma mostra na Cordoaria Nacional, em Lisboa, vai abranger o museu e o parque de Serralves, onde ficará localizada *Pequi Vinagreiro*, um trabalho de proporções gigantes criado entre 2018 e 2020, como réplica de uma espécie de árvore de origem brasileira, em vias de extinção.

Em declarações à Lusa, o director do museu, Philippe Vergne, disse que *Pequi Vinagreiro* ficará localizada perto da quinta, onde permanecerá durante quase um ano, até 9 de julho de 2022. Pelo parque, estarão ainda espalhadas as sete peças da série *Raízes*, também feitas de ferro e igualmente "monumentais à sua maneira", frisou Vergne.

Para instalar *Pequi Vinagreiro*, foi necessário "muito saber-fazer" devido às exigências de engenharia requeridas pela obra, com uma particular atenção às fundações, à resistência ao vento, entre outros detalhes: "Estás a construir um edifício". "Belisco-me sempre que vou ao local. Começas um projecto a esperar pelo melhor, mas, para o artista, para nós aqui, vê-lo acontecer é tão recompensador", acrescentou o director do museu, frisando a oportunidade única que terá quem visitar Portugal, por poder visitar duas exposições "complementares" de Ai Weiwei, em Lisboa e no Porto. "Tem-se a possibilidade, neste momento, de, apanhando um comboio, ver o âmbito completo da obra de Ai Weiwei", afirmou Philippe Vergne.

A exposição, comissariada por Vergne e pela curadora Paula Fernandes, inclui também os trabalhos *Duas Figuras* e *Mutuophagia* e o filme *Uma Árvore*, que serviu como *making of* da criação de *Pequi Vinagreiro*.

*Forbes*
9 August 2021

Forbes

Aug 9, 2021, 06:00am EDT | 339 views

# Yorkshire Sculpture Park: 100 Spectacular Artworks In 500 Acres Of Gardens, Woods, Lakes

**Joanne Shurvell** Contributor ⓘ
Travel
*I write about travel, food, culture and fashion.*

Barbara Hepworth, The Family of Man at Yorkshire Sculpture Park GETTY IMAGES

Artlovers will be pleased to hear that Yorkshire Sculpture Park, one of the most extraordinary places in Europe to see modern and contemporary sculpture in the open air, has reopened after more than a year of closure due to Covid-19.

Ai Weiwei installation at Yorkshire Sculpture Park PAUL ALLEN/WNDPHOTOGRAPHY

The museum doesn't have a permanent collection so there are always new artworks from long and short term loans and special commissions, to see both outside across 500 acres and in the six indoor galleries. All the best known artists are here, from Elisabeth Frink and Phyllida Barlow to Damien Hirst and Ai Weiwei, plus many other major and emerging international artists. And some of the pieces have been there since the opening in 1977, including works by Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore, the first patron of Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

Jonas Vaicunskas, Call Center at Yorkshire Sculpture Park PAUL ALLEN/WNDPHOTOGRAPHY

One of the new exhibitions for 2021 is *Beyond* by renowned Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos, her largest show ever held in the UK. Extended until January 2022, the show features 25 works inside and outside the Underground Gallery including her famous sculpture of two stilettos *Marilyn* referencing Marilyn Monroe, made from saucepans. Equally dramatic is her piece *Call Center* made from 168 vintage dial telephones that form the shape of a Beretta pistol, perhaps inspired by James Bond.

Joana Vasconcelos · PAUL ALLEGRANDE PHOTOGRAPHY

The exhibition's focus is female identity and also includes vibrant sculptures using fabric, needlework and crochet plus other items associated with domestic work and craft. Joana Vasconcelos' striking 12-metre-long "Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi" is a tribute to the great-grandmother of the founder of Max Mara fashion brand.

A beautiful 18th-century chapel is the location for the spectacular towering porcelain sculpture *399 Days* by British artist Rachel Kneebone, so named because that's how many days it took the artist to complete. The five meter high work was shown previously at the Victoria & Albert museum sculpture court and while it dominated the room, the piece really deserves to be seen on its own, allowing the viewer to properly appreciate the intricate details. The impressive piece has 63 unique panels with an array of body parts, flowers and objects, each telling its own story.

Rachel Kneebone, 365 Days at Yorkshire Sculpture Park PAUL ALLEN/ANDYPOTOGRAPHY

Another site specific piece, built into the side of a hill, is one of "sculpture of light" James Turrell's sky stations. For over 40 years he has used light and space to create art installations which extend and enhance perception. James Turrell has created the Skyspace at YSP within the Park's 18th-century Grade II Listed building - the deer shelter. The Deer Shelter Skyspace consists of a large square chamber with an aperture cut into the roof. Through this aperture the visitor is offered a heightened vision of the sky, seemingly transformed into a trompe l'oeil painting.

Silence – Alone in a World of Wounds by Heather Peak and Ivan Morison, Yorkshire Sculpture Park JOANNE CRISWELL

In a discreet area of the woods, visitors can go inside a thoughtful new commission *Silence – Alone in a World of Wounds* by artists Heather Peak and Ivan Morison from Studio Morison, at YSP. Responding to the question "Can art save us from extinction?", the artists developed a sculptural space made of natural materials that acts as an extended open pavilion and a quiet place set within nature. The circular structure is made from materials sourced from the park and sustainably sourced timber from the artists' own woodland. The roof, made from heather from the Yorkshire Moors, has already become a home for birds. Over the next ten years or so, the work will decompose and become part of the natural landscape. For now, as YSP director Clare Lilley says, *Silence* holds "light, space and stillness" as "a place of peace, an oasis of calm in which people will be inspired, moved and rejuvenated." And in fact it's no exaggeration to say that any visit to the glorious rolling landscape of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park with all its wonders, is a guarantee of rejuvenation.

*Dazed*
18 August 2021

DAZED

# Meet the Circa x Dazed Class of 2021 filmmakers

**The 30 finalists will get free studio access at Dazed Space and have their work displayed on the iconic London screen, with one finalist selected by Marina Abramović to win the #CIRCAECONOMY £30k cash prize**

18th August 2021

Text Hannah Bertolino

In May, Dazed teamed up with digital arts platform Circa to launch the Class of 2021 – a brand new initiative which invited young video artists from around the world to submit a two-and-a-half minute short film in response to the theme 'Communion', as set by interdisciplinary artist Angel Rose.

One lucky finalist, chosen by performance artist Marina Abramovic, will receive the #CIRCAECONOMY cash prize of £30k to help kick off their careers. Accordingly, the pot of money was generated through sales of CIRCA artists' prints, including work by Patti Smith, Ai Weiwei, and David Hockney – with hopes of bringing the profits back to empower and support the winning finalist.

After receiving 2,000 applications, 700 submitted artworks, and over 30 hours of video footage, 30 emerging artists have been selected to make up the acclaimed Class of 2021.

The selected finalists are made up of Czech photographer and videographer Mojmir Bures; London-based Ben Cullen Williams, who works on understanding our changing relationship to the material world; British-Zambian Athena Vlachos, who is telling Zambian stories through film; Josh Spindler, who recently made the film *Margaret Gallagher is Real (5g)*; Colombian filmmaker Nicolas Barrera, who explores contradictions of our capitalist society; Russian-based video artist, painter, and performance practitioner, Ksenia Ilx; Ed Carr, artist and founder of Northern Sustainable Darkroom; Singaporean artist, Bart Seng Weng Long; experimental Polish documenting subjects over individuals, Ewelina Wegiel; and Korean performance and video artist, Seungi Kang.

The Class of 2021 also includes Rhea Storr, who explores representation of Black and mixed-race cultures; Zongbo Jiang, who created environmental film *Dilemmas For Earthlings*; Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, who documents the lives of Black Trans people; London-based artist duo, Michael and Chiyan Ho; Romanian architect and filmmaker, Flavian Belar; US-based circus-inspired artist, Brin Schoellkopf; Norwegian artist Hogan Schia, who worked on *Framfortid* (2021) and *Ut av Naturen* (2021); Brazilian digital artist, Gabriel Massan; French-Egyptian artist, musician, and analogue photographer, Susu Laroche; and New York-based performance artist and sculptor, Miles Greenberg.

Class of 2021 L-R: Alfie White, Athena Vlachos, Bart Seng Wen Long, Ben Cullen Williams, Brin Schoellkopf, Carla Fernández, Christina Anagnostou, Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, Diane Cescutti, Edd Carr, Ewelina Wiggiel, Flavian Belar, Gabriel Massan, Heliana Hagos, and Hoa Dung Clerget.

Additionally, it features Christina Anagnostou, who created the work "I looked at myself and myself stared back at me"; Diane Cescutti, who explores weaving through her art; Hoa Dung Clerget, who hosted exhibition "Grown Up" at London's Holland Park Church; British filmmaker Lucy Loader; former animator Wes Viz, who explores how technology shapes our identities; Joseph Wilson, who created the documentary *Drag Is My Ecstasy* (2014); Mexican fashion designer and cultural historian, Carla Fernández; South London-based photographer and filmmaker, Alfie White; Ning Zhou, who made the film *Addicted* (2020); and Heliana Hagos, who explores global counter-cultures through her animations.

Celebrating the finalists best-in-class talent, the 30 filmmakers will join the Circa public art program, and each will see their work displayed on London's Piccadilly Lights, Seoul's Coex K-Pop Square, and at Tokyo's Yurika Vision – taking over the screens for the 30 days of September. Besides, each winner will be granted access to the Dazed Space, a new multimedia studio complex in London.

Class of 2021 continued L-R: Hogan Sotej, Joseph Wilson, Josh Spindler, Kamie R. Lucy Luecke, Michael and Chiyan Ho, Miss Grenberg, Mojmir Blurex, Nicolás Serrano Martínez, Ning Zhou, Rhee Soon, Seulgi Lee Kang, Ruau Laroche, Wael Via, and Zongbo Jiang

A jury featuring some of the world's most important creative leaders across art, design, film, photography, music, fashion, and culture will deliberate – including Caulaen Smith, Jefferson Hack, Frank Lebon, Hugo Comte, Simone Rocha, Norman Rosenthal, Dexter Navy, Ib Kamara, Priya Ahluwalia, and Caleb Femi.

J.P. Ib Kamara, Jefferson Hack, Josef O'Connor, Jean Nioru , Rugemah Frankel, Jordan Hemingway, Alexander Fury, Julianknxx, Holly Bobby, Ivan Blackstock, Sabina Getty, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Caleb Femi, Shanna Osborne Frank Lebon, Simone Rocha, Yinka Ilori and Caulaen Smith

The winner will be chosen on October 14 during Frieze Art Fair in London, and will be presented with an award personally-crafted by artist Jermaine Gallacher.

All films from the Dazed x Circa Class of 2021 will be available from September 1 via the Circa YouTube channel.

The CIRCA x Dazed Class of 2021 was co-created by CIRCA and Dazed to spotlight and support the next generation of artists working in moving-image. With public art spaces diminishing, investment in arts education being cut and artist communities at risk, the joint initiative aims to empower youth through creativity and platform new voices and points of view from local communities on a global level, giving

them unrivalled media exposure and access to CIRCA and Dazed's combined networks.

***Ahmad Swaid,*** *Head of Content at Dazed Media;* ***Alexander Fury,*** *Fashion Features Director, AnOther;* ***Angel Rose,*** *Visual Artist and Lecturer;* ***Antonia Marsh,*** *Director at Soft Opening Gallery;* ***Beflc,*** *Artist and Director;* ***Caius Pawson,*** *Founder Young, Director XL Recordings;* ***Caleb Femi,*** *Writer, Director;* ***Caroline Norbury,*** *Chief Executive of Creative Industries Federation;* ***Cassie Boadle,*** *Curator, Cob Gallery;* ***Cauleen Smith,*** *Filmmaker and Interdisciplinary Artist;* ***Daniel Birnbaum,*** *Artistic Director, Acute Art;* ***Derek Manns,*** *Commercial Media Director, Landsec;* ***Dexter Navy,*** *Filmmaker and Photographer;* ***Ellie Grace Cumming,*** *Fashion Director, AnOther;* ***Ellie Pennick,*** *Director and Founder, Guts Gallery;* ***Ferdinando Verderi,*** *Creative Director, Vogue Italia;* ***Frank Leboh,*** *Artist;* ***Gareth Wrighton,*** *Art Director, Dazed;* ***Greg Hilty*** *Curatorial Director, Lisson;* ***Greta Hewison,*** *Film London Jarman Award;* ***Hannah Barry,*** *Director, Bold Tendencies & Hannah Barry Gallery;* ***Hans Ulrich Obrist,*** *Artistic Director, Serpentine Galleries;* ***Holly Blakey,*** *Choreographer;* ***Hugo Comte,*** *Image Maker;* ***Ib Kamara,*** *Editor-in-Chief, Dazed;* ***Ivan Blackstock,*** *Multidisciplinary Artist;* ***Jefferson Hack,*** *Co-Founder, Dazed;* ***Jenn Nkiru,*** *Artist and Director;* ***Jess Kohl,*** *Filmmaker;* ***Jordan Hemingway,*** *Photographer, Director and Cinematographer;* ***Josef O'Connor,*** *Founder, CIRCA;* ***Julia Peyton Jones,*** *Senior Global Director Special Projects, Thaddaeus Ropac;* ***Julianknxx,*** *Artist;* ***Katie Metcalfe,*** *Video Commissioner, Nowness;* ***Katie Shillingford,*** *Fashion Director, AnOther;* ***Kay Pallister,*** *Curator, Gagosian;* ***Lawrence Lek,*** *Artist;* ***Leonn Ward,*** *Director;* ***Lulu Kennedy,*** *Founder and Director of Fashion East;* ***Lynette Nylander,*** *Executive Editorial Director;* ***Marc Macdonald,*** *Communications Executive, Dazed Media;* ***Norman Rosenthal,*** *Art Curator and Writer;* ***Priya Ahluwalia,*** *Designer;* ***Rafael Pavarotti,*** *Photographer and Director;* ***Rhea Dillon,*** *Artist;* ***Ruth Waters,*** *Studio & Editions Manager, CIRCA;* ***Sabine Getty,*** *Editor-at-Large, Tatler;* ***Sean Bidder,*** *Creative Director, The Vinyl Factory;* ***Sharna Osborne,*** *Photographer/Director;* ***Simone Rocha,*** *Fashion Designer;* ***Sophie McElligott,*** *Head of Communications, Dazed Media;* ***Susannah Frankel,*** *Editor-in-Chief, AnOther;* ***Tony Tremlett,*** *Digital Curator, CIRCA; and* ***Yinka Ilori,*** *Artist & Designer.*

*The Guardian*
24 October 2021

The Guardian

# 1,000 Years of Joys and Sorrows by Ai Weiwei review – a life of dissent

Sean O'Hagan

Sun 24 Oct 2021 07.00 BST

## The artist's memoir reveals a rebellious spirit, inherited from his persecuted poet father, which sustained him through detention by Chinese authorities

In 1957, the year of Ai Weiwei's birth, China's leader, Chairman Mao, launched the Anti-Rightist Campaign, a purge of intellectuals whose work was deemed critical of the state. By the end of the year, about 300,000 people had been rounded up, the majority of them exiled to the country's remote border regions to undergo "reform through labour". Ai's father, Ai Qing, a respected poet, was one of them.

"The whirlpool that swallowed up my father upended my life too, leaving a mark on me that I carry with me to this day," Ai writes in the opening chapter of this ambitious memoir, in which his father's story gives way to, and often echoes, his own. In 1967, his father's life was upended once again, when he was transported to a desert region known as Little Siberia to undergo political "remoulding".

His wife, exhausted and demoralised, returned to Beijing with their youngest son, but Ai, not yet 10, chose to go with his father. For almost a decade, they existed in "a square hole dug into the ground, with a crude roof formed of tamarisk branches and rice stalks, sealed with several layers of grassy mud". His father was assigned to trim trees on a nearby farm and, after a long day's labour, was forced to attend a public gathering of his fellow exiles, during which he would often be singled out and denounced as a "bourgeois novelist".

**His sense of isolation was so acute that he refused to answer the door to callers at his grotty apartment in New York**

While Ai undoubtedly inherited his father's stoicism, the defiance that would characterise his later activism was all his own. It initially took the form of a blog that first appeared towards the end of 2005. The first post read: "To express yourself needs a reason, but expressing yourself is the reason." For the Chinese authorities, who would take time to come to terms with and control the internet, this was the first of many transgressions that would lead to his blog being shut down in 2009 and to his subsequent arrest and detention in 2011. As Ai puts it himself, the blog propelled him into "the public's field of vision with the force of a bullet from a gun".

His creative life, which began in 1978 when he enrolled on an animation course at the Beijing Film Academy, had taken time to find its footing. That same year, he also became one of the founders of the mostly self-taught avant garde art group Stars, who were pioneers for today's thriving art scene in China.

▲ Ai Weiwei on New York's Lower East Side, 1985.

In 1981, during a period of tentative reform by the Chinese government, Ai was among the first group of students to be granted a visa to study in America. He remained there for 12 years, mostly living in New York, where he won a scholarship to Parsons School of Design, only to forfeit it with an impetuous decision: leaving an art history exam paper blank save for his signature. As protests go, it was oddly self-defeating in its vagueness. "I was simply ambivalent," he writes. "I didn't know what I liked."

He survived in New York by doing part-time jobs and becoming a street artist sketching tourists in Times Square. He had few friends and, at one point, his sense of isolation was so acute that he refused to answer the door to callers at his grotty apartment on the Lower East Side. For inspiration, he lingered long in downtown galleries and secondhand bookstores. He met, and briefly befriended, Allen Ginsberg, a champion of his father's poetry, and for a time shared a loft with the performance artist Tehching Hsieh who happened to be spending a year tied to fellow artist Linda Montano with an 8ft rope. They were, writes Ai, "models for me in terms of their unflinching commitment to an artistic vision".

It was in New York that Ai held his first solo show, the intriguingly titled Old Shoes, Safe Sex, at a small SoHo gallery. It received a single, short, affirmative review in *Artspeak*, which described it as "a neo-dadaist knockout". On 4 June 1989, and for several days afterwards, he compulsively watched CNN reports of the massacre of pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square. It precipitated a long bout of soul-searching that, alongside anxiety over his ageing father's increasing ill health, culminated in his return to Beijing in 1993. "Freedom with no restraints and no concerns had lost its novelty."

The second half of Ai's book documents his art world ascendancy alongside his bruising battles with the Chinese authorities. In November 2010, he was placed under house arrest after the authorities suddenly authorised the demolition of his newly built studio in Shanghai. Then, in April 2011, he was arrested at Beijing airport as he prepared to board a flight to Hong Kong.

**“Night and day, he shared his living space with two guards, whom he was forbidden to look at**

So begins the most Kafkaesque section of the book, a detailed account of his 11-week detention in an anonymous government building on the outskirts of the city. His prose is determinedly matter of fact, which imbues the events he describes with an even more absurdist aspect. Held in a small room with sealed windows, he was interrogated daily, the questions circling continuously around the same false charges of inciting unrest and evading tax. Night and day, he shared his living space with two guards, whom he was forbidden to look at and whose permission he needed for every movement and utterance.

> Five hours of each day were taken up with enforced exercise, which consisted of walking seven steps, back and forth, within an allotted space in the middle of the room, all the time flanked by his two attendants. “They’re here to protect you,” his investigator informed him. “If you walk fast or walk slow, they have to do exactly the same. The regulations make things clear and easy.”

In the west, unbeknown to him, his supporters staged protests calling for his release. Tate Modern posted a giant “Release Ai Weiwei” sign on the facade of its building; it was also home to what has since become his most celebrated piece of art: an arrangement of millions of tiny, hand-carved porcelain sunflower seeds symbolising hope and survival. “When I was growing up in China, we had few possessions,” he writes. “But even in our darkest days, we might well have a little handful of sunflower seeds in our pockets.”

Since his release from detention in June 2011 and the subsequent return of his passport in 2015, Ai has lived in Berlin, Cambridge and, since last year, rural Portugal. His art and activism, and the price he has paid for both, have made him the most emblematic artist of our turbulent times, with the *New York Times* describing him as “an eloquent and unsilenceable voice of freedom”. *1,000 Years of Joys and Sorrows* touches on the inevitable contradictions of being an activist and an art superstar, but it is above all a story of inherited resilience, strength of character and self-determination. “Like a star in the sky or a tree in a field, he was always there as a compass point,” Ai writes, reflecting on his father’s death in 1996. “And in a quiet and mysterious way he helped me navigate in a direction all my own. By the very absence of explicit guidance, a spiritual connection was forged between us; Father, in his own way, protected me.”

*1,000 Years of Joys and Sorrows* by Ai Weiwei is published by Bodley Head (£25). To support the *Guardian* and *Observer* order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply

*The New Statesman*
27 October 2021

THE NEW STATESMAN

Environment 27 October 2021

# Ai Weiwei on climate loss: Leaving Beijing was not just a political choice – I was a climate refugee

In the 1970s Beijing was like other cities in China. There were no private cars, and bicycles formed a matrix in the streets.

**By Ai Weiwei**

Photo by Inge Morath/Magnum Photos

Fog, sandstorm and smog: these were three words I learned during my decades living in Beijing. Everywhere you went, you could hear that short, rapid dry cough, emerging from the depths of the chest cavity, the lungs and trachea, as if these body parts were resisting a profound quietness – a visceral rejection of human depravity.

The "Beijing cough" condemns the city's transport system, power supply, industrial production and expansion. China now produces half the world's steel, and the demand for raw materials has been a catalyst for the country's crazy growth.

In the 1970s Beijing was like other cities in China. There were no private cars. Bicycles formed a matrix in the streets, advancing slowly forward. On rainy days, no vehicles or bicycles were to be seen – just a few pedestrians, and occasionally a bus or tram. The city was so quiet that only bike bells were audible. Today there are more than five million vehicles running on poor-quality fuel.

One visible result of the pollution is the lengthening queues to see doctors. Cancer, septicaemia and other once alien diseases are common. We now have "cancer villages" and "pulmonary disease villages", where the rates of these illnesses are very high, as well as a generation of children dubbed "big head dolls", a reference to babies whose heads are thought to have grown abnormally after being fed melamine-laced formula milk in 2008.

The environmental change is a sign of moral corruption, like an apple beginning to rot from its core. Our new vocabulary also includes clenbuterol, gutter oil (illegally recycled waste cooking oil), toxic milk, waste materials and carbon emissions. Our mountains are no longer green; our rivers run dry. Air and water pollution are facts that we live with.

This autumn China announced a strategic deployment of power outages as a way of curbing shortages and overproduction. These are irregular and intermittent in many provinces and cities, threatening both industrial production and people's daily lives. Individuals have finally become trapped in a prison of their own making, environmental refugees within their own homes.

It was poverty that prompted China to embark on its 40-year journey towards today's globalisation strategy (and the Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013) under the slogans "Adversity leads to prosperity" and "Reshaping nature and Earth, man can conquer nature" (the latter was widely used during the construction of the Three Gorges Dam, which began in 1994). This was a transformation from dialectical materialism to consumer materialism – but those who have "lost their chains", to paraphrase the *Communist Manifesto*, still dream of acquiring the entire world.

I fled from the suffocating and life-threatening political environment of Beijing, but leaving was not just an aesthetic and political choice. It was also a longing for fresh air, clean water and green plants, and a desire for freedom and safety. I, too, have become an environmental refugee.

The environmental costs of authoritarianism, capitalism, nationalism and corporatocracy have put the world's health at risk, challenged our confidence in sustainable human development and cast a shadow over our imagined future. The pandemic has shown us that humans cannot dominate the world, and that our excessive claims on it are to be repaid. We have moved from a religious economy to one based on empire, war and the pandemic, but wealth has overridden all disasters. Now we are discovering that the idea that "hardships may awaken a nation, and from crisis comes an opportunity", as one Chinese saying goes, is a fantasy.

*Ai Weiwei's memoir "1,000 Years of Joys and Sorrows" will be published by Bodley Head on 2 November*

*The New York Times*
30 October 2021

The New York Times

NONFICTION

# For His Father and His Son, Ai Weiwei Is Determined to Leave a Trace

The artist Ai Weiwei and his father, Ai Qing, in 1958. via Ai Wei Wei

By Jiayang Fan
Oct. 30, 2021

**1000 YEARS OF JOYS AND SORROWS**

**A Memoir**

By Ai Weiwei

Translated by Allan H. Barr

"You're just a pawn in the game, you know," a public security officer summarily informs Ai Weiwei, China's most controversial — and to the Chinese Communist Party, its most dangerous — artist. It is 2011 and Ai, suspected of "inciting the subversion of state power," has recently been held captive for 81 days; soon after his release, he is slapped with a tax bill equivalent to $2.4 million. According to the officer, Ai's high profile has made him an expedient tool for Westerners to attack China, but "pawns sooner or later all get sacrificed." Of course, it's obvious that Ai also regards the officer as a pawn, one who, in serving an oppressive regime, has sacrificed his freedom to speak for himself.

In his first memoir, "1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows," Ai recounts this and other showdowns with the state — confrontations that, alongside his iconoclastic art, have both forged his status as an international icon and forced him to work in political exile. The book takes its title from verses that his father, the famed poet Ai Qing, wrote while visiting the ruins of an ancient city on the Silk Road: "Of a thousand years of joys and sorrows / Not a trace can be found." During his months in detention, Ai became determined to leave a trace; regret about the unbridgeable gap between himself and his late father, and the fear that his young son might never know who his father really is, gave rise to the idea of a book.

Ai's story begins with his childhood, years of which were spent living with his father in the remote hinterlands of China, where Ai Qing was exiled in 1967 to do reform labor during Mao's murderous purge of intellectuals. While his father was cleaning latrines, scraping feces that had frozen "into icy pillars," 10-year-old Ai built the stove, fetched water from the well and endured a life that resembled "an open-ended course in wilderness survival training, if we were lucky enough to survive." During countless "denunciation meetings" of which Ai Qing was a primary target, the author bore intimate witness to his father's ritualized humiliation. "The estrangement and hostility that we encountered from the people around us instilled in me a clear awareness of who I was," Ai writes, "and it shaped my judgment about how social positions are defined" — and the necessity of enemies in the rhetoric of revolution.

Interspersed throughout this narrative are flashbacks to the senior Ai's birth, his childhood as the eldest son of prosperous landowners who often abandoned him to the care of his nursemaid, a loving peasant woman named Big-Leaf Lotus. The collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 mired the country in turmoil, but it also stirred in its youths new possibilities for the future. At 19 Ai Qing traveled to France, where exposure to Apollinaire and Breton reshaped his aesthetic sensibility and honed an appreciation for the relationship between art and politics. Upon his return to China in 1932, he was arrested in Shanghai's French Concession for "causing a public disturbance through Communist Party activities," an offense for which he served almost three years in prison. It was from behind bars that Ai Qing composed his first masterpiece, "Dayanhe, My Wet Nurse," a tender tribute to Big-Leaf Lotus and her countless Chinese countrywomen who toil and perish in obscurity.

An illuminating through-line emerges in the many parallels Ai traces between his life and his father's. The charge of "damaging the republic" for which Ai Qing was incarcerated is not unlike the political crime of "inciting subversion" his son is jailed for 80 years later. Similarly, a Western metropolis — New York — would become for Ai Weiwei what Paris was for his father: a kaleidoscopic swirl of influences that catalyzes new ways of seeing.

Ai Weiwei in his studio in Beijing, 2011. Shiho Fukada for The New York Times

If Ai Qing was tentatively searching for a new vernacular to democratize the subject and scope of poetry, Ai Weiwei found in the technology of communication a way to democratize his audience. In 2005, Ai discovered the blogosphere, where he accrued a large following with his singular, irreverent voice: "I was like a jellyfish, and the internet had become my ocean." Like his blog entries, Ai's art — whether it's a 1995 photograph that captures him flipping the bird to Tiananmen Square, or an architectural installation made up of rebar mangled in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, or the numerous documentaries that expose the negligence and corruption of Chinese authorities — is forged "in a state of flux," always operating within and reacting to the constraints of an evolving reality.

Ai claims that unlike his father, "I lacked that ability to harness the power of words"; but this isn't true. He is most eloquent when he stops pontificating on art and surrenders, almost despite himself, to the act of remembering. Ai writes evocatively of the nights spent in his detention cell when "all I could do was use memories to fill the time, looking back at people and events, like gazing at a kite on a long string flying farther and farther, until it cannot be seen at all." Most poignant are his midnight conversations with the young, rural-born men employed to guard his door, their cracking joints reminding Ai of "a crisp snapping sound like a turnip being broken into two pieces." The guards "gradually became fully, noisily human to me," Ai writes. "They were like me, in a way, confined and constricted, their present ruptured from the past, and lacking anticipation of their future." Recalling Ai Qing's affection for Big-Leaf Lotus, this moment catches Ai freed from his self-appointed role as provocateur, and permits him the artist's most mundane liberty: to observe the world dispassionately and recognize in himself and others that most human capacity to be simultaneously both prisoner and guard, player and pawn.

In the final pages of the book, Ai writes that "advocacy of freedom is inseparable from an effort to attain it, for freedom is not a goal but a direction, and it comes into being through the very act of resistance." Remembering, too, is a form of resistance. In documenting the past, he is also repudiating the country's generations of imposed amnesia. "After all the convulsions that China had experienced, genuine emotions and personal memory were reduced to tiny scraps and easily replaced by the discourse of struggle and continuous revolution," Ai writes. In "1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows," Ai does not allow his own scraps to remain buried. To unearth them is an act of unburdening, an open letter to progeny, a suturing of past and present. It is the refusal to be a pawn — and the most potent assertion of a self.

Jiayang Fan is a staff writer at The New Yorker.

1000 YEARS OF JOYS AND SORROWS
A Memoir
By Ai Weiwei
Translated by Allan H. Barr
Illustrated. 380 pp. Crown. $32.

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30 October 2021

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

CHINA

# Ai Weiwei Traces a Century of Making Authorities Squirm

Chinese artist writes about his family's history of political commentary in a new memoir

Ai Weiwei photographed earlier this week at the Kimpton Fitzroy hotel in London

By James T. Areddy Follow | Photographs by Carlotta Cardana for The Wall Street Journal
Oct. 30, 2021 11:00 am ET

Artist-provocateur Ai Weiwei became world famous mocking Chinese icons—dynastic artifacts, Tiananmen Square, Beijing's Olympics—and has spent time in detention for his artistic expressions. One symbol of Chinese power he hasn't pilloried is Xi Jinping, the country's pre-eminent leader.

Mr. Ai, who is publishing a memoir on Nov. 2, says his mission is to call out governments and institutions when freedoms are threatened.

"China is a much bigger matter than an individual like Xi Jinping," he says. In Mr. Ai's view, attributing trends in China to the president alone ignores "much deeper and more profound reasons," like entrenched nationalism.

Why pay attention to Mr. Ai? "Art-world star" goes only so far to characterize the global influence of China's most outspoken showman, a 64-year-old who revels in making authorities squirm by sticking his cannonball-shaped head where he's not invited. In between sold-out museum exhibits from Lisbon to Seoul that burst with wry commentary on human rights, like giant representations of refugee boats, he sprays a dizzying volume of political and artistic messages to his more than 600,000 followers on Instagram and 360,000 on Twitter.

This past week, Mr. Ai joined supporters of Julian Assange outside a London court in a protest against a new U.S. effort to extradite the WikiLeaks founder. On Mr. Ai's travels, restaurant chefs pop out of kitchens and airline pilots from cockpits requesting selfies.

Ai Weiwei took part in a demonstration earlier this week in London with supporters of Julian Assange to protest U.S. efforts to extradite the WikiLeaks founder.

PHOTO: JUSTIN TALLIS/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

"He has an incredible empathy, and I think that segues very well with the consciousness we're experiencing," says New York gallerist Mary Boone, who for years represented Mr. Ai. "He's more than the art world. He's a bigger voice than that," she adds.

STILL LIFE

The artist-activist on his most beloved objects and his memoir

- Ai Weiwei's Artistic Rebellion

Mr. Ai attributes his fame to a universal desire to challenge authority. "I speak out about what's in my mind, and I speak out very loudly," he says.

Mr. Ai's memoir, "1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows," which is being translated into 18 languages and published in over 20 countries, though not China, traces around a century of ups and downs—and mostly downs—in his family's relationship with Chinese authorities. The result is a witty but dark view of the world's most populous nation.

China's authoritarianism, he argues, is at odds with freedom by rejecting honest accounts of history and the policies necessary to develop a healthy society. "Although China grows more powerful, its moral decay simply spreads anxiety and uncertainty in the world," he writes.

Speaking by telephone from the Portuguese town Montemor-o-Novo where he rode out much of the pandemic finishing the book, editing documentary films and remotely managing his studio in China, Mr. Ai said the book is for his 12-year-old son, Ai Lao. The boy deserves an explanation for the tumult in his short life, Mr. Ai says.

The artist fled China for Europe in 2015 after repeated run-ins with authorities, including an 81-day stint in detention followed by four years of house arrest. Though he remains a Chinese citizen and worries about his aging mother in Beijing, Mr. Ai said returning home now would be risky. If he goes to China, he says, "I don't think I can come out."

Mr. Ai may be China's most famous living artist, but all traces of his work vanished from public view there years ago. Chinese authorities have said his legal problems stemmed from his business practices, not his activism or art.

'I speak out about what's in my mind, and I speak out very loudly,' Mr. Ai says; he attributes his fame to a universal desire to challenge authority.

"To be frank with you, he is not my taste," China's then-ambassador to the U.K., Liu Xiaoming, told a television interviewer in 2015 when asked about a blockbuster exhibit by Mr. Ai in London.

"Ai Weiwei, the so-called 'artist' you mentioned, is under investigation for suspected economic crimes, including making false accounts and deliberately destroying accounting vouchers," the spokesperson office of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in response to questions about the book. "What I want to emphasize is that gaining attention by criticizing the Chinese government and concocting false lies is despicable."

In his book, Mr. Ai calls the charges "cooked up."

Prison runs through Mr. Ai's memoir, which opens with a poem his father wrote in 1932 during a six-year sentence for "leftist" activities alleged to have threatened the republic, then run by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists. When Mr. Ai was nearly 10 and the Communists were in charge, he tagged along when his father was banished to a remote province for producing "rightist" poetry and assigned to scrub latrines, the two of them living five years in a lice-infested hovel.

Fast forward to 2011, when Mr. Ai himself disappeared into a secretive Chinese detention system. It followed a string of encounters with law enforcement and provocations by Mr. Ai, such as uploading to the internet an audio recording of police storming into his hotel room and a photo of himself in police custody wearing a torn shirt, actions he described in the interview as his "ruthlessly making trouble"—and as "so much fun."

His activism marked an escalation of early art pranks, like smashing a Han dynasty urn. He criticized the 2008 Olympics and memorialized the earthquake deaths the same year of schoolchildren in a display of 9,000 backpacks, all the while pushing boundaries on China's internet.

Mr. Ai has depicted his Kafkaesque detention in artwork and expands on it in the book: Two guards moved in sync with Mr. Ai at all times inside the tiny lockup, including pacing alongside him as he went back and forth on the six floor tiles available for exercise. "What one would take for granted outside had here become absurd," he writes.

A diorama installation by Chinese contemporary artist Ai Weiwei depicts him with guards while in detention in China.
PHOTO: MIGUEL A LOPES/EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Two works by Ai Weiwei at the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum in 2012: "Colored Vases," 2007-2010, displayed in front, and "Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn," 1995/2009, on the wall. PHOTO: MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES

His disappearance only boosted Mr. Ai's global fame. For a time, he might have been the world's most prominent political prisoner. Western government officials and museum directors blasted Beijing to release Mr. Ai. Authorities ultimately let him go and leveled a fine for taxes of $2.4 million, prompting Mr. Ai's fans to donate money over the internet and sometimes hurl it into his Beijing compound folded as paper airplanes.

The takeaway of his incarceration, Mr. Ai writes, was that "as a public enemy, I could stand as an equal with my father. After an 80-year gap, in this same land, similar offenses enabled us to meet."

In Mr. Ai's telling, it's a family tradition to poke at authority. His reformist grandfather dissed Qing dynasty tradition by cutting off his braided queue and allowing the women in his household to unbind their feet.

Even his surname represents a protest. The memoir says it derives from a moniker his poet father adopted, Ai Qing, to replace his given name, Jiang Haicheng, as repudiation of the Nationalist leader he despised, Chiang Kai-shek. Jiang and Chiang are the same character in written Chinese.

His father was a contemporary of Communist leaders like Zhou Enlai, who brought him to their revolutionary camp Yan'an in 1941, where he met Mao Zedong. He knew the father of President Xi, party stalwart Xi Zhongxun, whose word got him a slightly improved condition in exile. In the earliest days of Communist rule, the party tapped Ai Qing to chair the committee that chose the national flag and anthem, and he later headed what became the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

The younger Mr. Ai used the privileges of being from a well-known family as a springboard. He leveraged a spot at the Beijing Film Academy into an exit route toward the U.S. A penniless art student in New York, he worked in a printing company and sketched tourists in Greenwich Village.

Inspired by Mark Twain, Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp, he fell in with New York artists, sharing a Tribeca apartment with one who, for a year as a project, roped himself to another person. Mr. Ai worked as an extra at the Metropolitan Opera House and bonded over poetry with Allen Ginsberg.

Before his father's death, Mr. Ai returned to Beijing. At Tiananmen Square in 1995, he extended a middle finger of his left hand toward Mao's portrait, a signature pose that the artist would later repeat in front of the White House, the Rome Colosseum and Trump Tower. "I had no other resources—all that I could deploy was an attitude," he writes.

Ai Weiwei's memoir, "1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows," is being published in over 20 countries, though not China.

*The Art Newspaper*
1 November 2021

INTERNATIONAL EDITION
THE ART NEWSPAPER

# Ai Weiwei goes back to Piccadilly

Ai Weiwei in Piccadilly Circus
Circa

Ai Weiwei went back to Piccadilly Circus last weekend. Last year the Chinese artist and activist broke records by posting an hour-long film on Piccadilly Circus' famous billboards, a first for Europe's largest screen. On 30 October, he returned to the famous London location, this time to launch the first fine #CIRCAECONOMY print priced at £5,000 produced by the eponymous digital art platform (go to: circa.art).

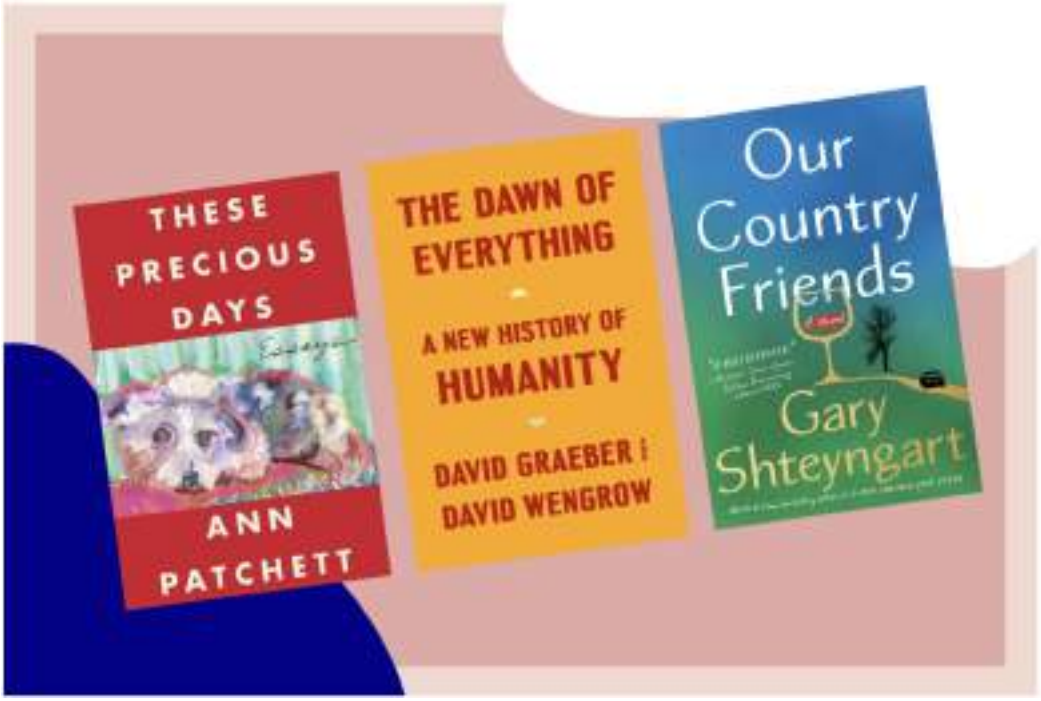
"The new work explores the value of £100 and what it could buy in the UK when CIRCA launched onto the global stage in 2020," the organisers say. Proceeds from the sale of the "£" print will go towards supporting the CIRCA free public art programme in London, Tokyo, Seoul, Milan and New York as well as fund the #CIRCAECONOMY initiative, helping support creative communities. Circa also presented a ten-minute film at Piccadilly Circus featuring over 1000 submissions received to the question, "Where do we go from now?"

*Time Magazine*
1 November 2021

TIME

# Here Are the 10 New Books You Should Read in November

BY ANNABEL GUTTERMAN NOVEMBER 1, 2021 4:08 PM EDT




Cozy reading season starts now, with a crop of stirring new books offering something for everyone to curl up with. For those looking to reflect on deeply unsettling recent history, there's Gary Shteyngart's new novel set at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when a group of friends enter lockdown together in a country home. For those eager to escape, Nnedi Okorafor offers a break from reality with her latest work of sci-fi about an outcast living in near-future Nigeria. There are powerful essay collections from Ann Patchett and Emily Ratajkowski, incisive examinations of history and more. Here, the 10 new books you should read in November.

## *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows*, Ai Weiwei (Nov. 2)

In his new memoir, acclaimed artist and activist Ai Weiwei looks back on his life and family history. The author dives deep into the hardships that his father, Ai Qing, endured during China's Cultural Revolution—and how that familial history shaped his own childhood and artistry. *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows* is a close look at a father-son dynamic, written in affecting terms, as well as a narrative about legacy, politics and creativity.

*Esquire*
2 November 2021

Esquire

# Ai Weiwei and the Echoes Inside

The Chinese artist on how writing about his father's political persecution helped make sense of his own

By Miranda Collinge 02/11/2021

Sitting across from me in a corner table of a London hotel restaurant, with his grey-flecked beard and somewhat crumpled navy shirt, Ai Weiwei's appearance is both unassuming and iconic. His is a face instantly recognisable from the posters and artworks that appeared in streets and museums around the world when, in 2011, the artist and outspoken critic of the Chinese government was detained at Beijing airport for unspecified "economic crimes". He was kept in solitary confinement in a tiny cell for 81 days before being released without charge.

Ai recounts, in jaw-dropping detail, the episode for which he is most famous in his new memoir, *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows*. The idea for the book came to him when he was taken into police custody; in isolation, he found himself reflecting on the experiences of his own father, the renowned poet Ai Qing, who, during the Cultural Revolution that began in 1966, was branded an "anti-Rightist" and banished to a re-education camp in Xinjiang known as Little Siberia. There, he was made to clean the latrines. For five years, between the ages of 10 and 15, Ai Weiwei lived in Xinjiang with his father in a rudimentary shelter dug out of the earth. "I resolved to write an account of his life and mine, and to share this memoir with my son, Ai Lao, who at the time of my arrest had just turned two," he writes in his book's acknowledgements.

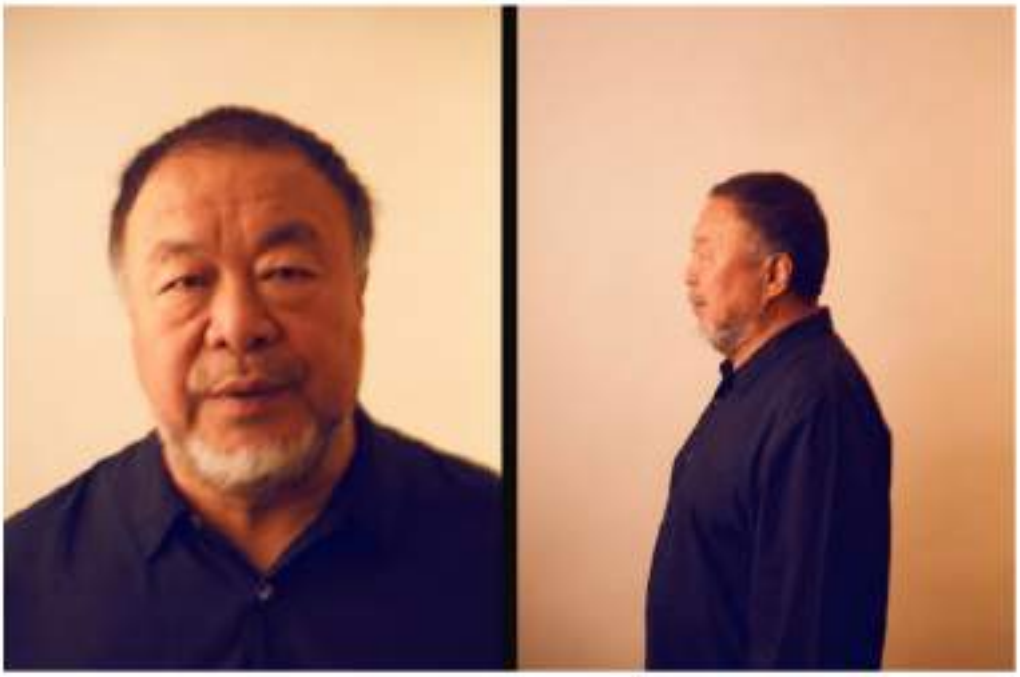
**1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows (Hardback)**

waterstones.com

SHOP NOW


As a student in the 1980s, Ai would travel to New York, and gradually build up his artistic practice and international reputation, later cemented by landmark projects such as his design, with the Swiss architecture firm Herzog and de Meuron, for the iconic "Bird's Nest Stadium" at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and his 2010-11 installation, "Sunflower Seeds" in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. Since leaving China – his passport was not returned to him until 2015 – he has based himself in Berlin, Cambridge and, most recently, Portugal ("Three hundred days of sunshine," as he reasonably points out).

Even after his confinement, Ai has continued to be a vocal critic of the Chinese government, and decry social injustices across the world, both through his words and his work. The day before we meet, he had joined a protest outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London against the extradition of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange. Later that evening, a new film piece reflecting on some of his most important past work would illuminate the electronic billboards above Piccadilly Circus. It is evident that, despite having already lived a life full of astonishing events and extremes, the 64-year-old Ai is far from done.



**Why did *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows* take you 10 years to write?**

You want to make it as truthful as possible, so every detail of the political struggle requires a lot of study. It may come out as one sentence, but I have to understand what I am saying, you know? I cannot automatically put what has been given by historians. Especially in China. Many facts cannot be revealed and you cannot trust anything. I wrote for two hours daily, and this is the fifth version. They reduced it from 800,000 words. It's really a heavy project for me.

**The book is about your family's history, but it is also about the last 100 years of China's. Would it have been possible to write about one without the other?**

Well is there a way to separate a fish from water? Maybe, but not in my case. I survived that stream, but I also cannot live without it. It's impossible.

**Living in exile with your father, what did you understand about what was happening politically?**

As I child I did not understand that much, but still now I will not say I understand so much about China. It's like a group of blind men trying to figure out what an elephant is like. One would touch his tail and say, "Oh, an elephant is like a sweep!" Another touches the trunk and says, "An elephant is like this…" They touch an area which relates to a larger picture, but they don't have a clear scope. My knowledge is simply not good enough to have a concrete idea, though I can imagine.

> It gives you wisdom about what is necessary. I think in modern society, we don't know that

**You describe constructing a lamp and a stove during that period with your father. Do you think that is where your interest in making began?**

I think it's not about interest in making, but awareness that you can change a matter by acting on it. Without a lamp you would be in total darkness, but with a lamp you would have light, which is very low, but still it's better than darkness. With putting up a stove, you have warm water, otherwise you have frozen water. It gives you wisdom about what is necessary and what is not necessary. I think in modern society, we don't know that.

**You write that your parents would often say that your birth marked the start of their misfortunes. Why did they say that?**

When I was born [in 1957], that was the year that the word "anti-Rightist" came along. My father was under heavy political criticism, so if he opened the newspaper the headline would be him. My mum was running in the street before the postman came to get the paper and tear out that page; in China, the newspaper is more important than a trial. Of course it was a metaphor, and it wasn't fair to offer that conclusion, but what is fair? What happened to them was not fair. When I was born their life completely changed. But they are not blaming me. That's the facts.

**Later, when you left Beijing for New York, did you really tell your mother that you were going to be "the second Picasso"?**

I did say that, and I was very confident. I never knew I would be better than Picasso. Haha! And my mum was very, very disappointed when I came back empty-handed. No money, no American passport. I don't even have a university diploma because I never recognised that it's important until very late. Still, when I have to write a resumé, I think, "God, I don't have anything to write!"

Ai Weiwei on the Lower East Side, New York, 1985

AI WEIWEI

**What was it like arriving to New York in the 1980s?**

I liked to be alone, I liked to act on my own. I didn't care about success – I really don't care about success. Just leave me alone. And in that sense I enjoyed being in New York, as the most lonely and unromantic city, a dangerous and harsh society. I like the harshness. It's so cold. You realise you're just like a wild wolf walking on every street.

**You got some encouraging words from Allen Ginsberg while you were there – can he take some credit for this book happening?**

Yeah he cared about talking about my past. I had a little chat and he said, "You really should write down what you have." I thought, "Write down what I *have*? I think that's the most ridiculous suggestion. Who cares anyway? I don't even care myself." He was a kind person, and he was always an inspiration, but I followed the literature tradition long before he told me that. I respect my father and a whole generation of poets and writers. Putting ink on paper is such an admirable act of the human being. Only humans do that. To record your thoughts with these marks.

**The book includes images of some of your earlier works from when you went back to China, which have a certain irreverence, such as a photograph from 1995 of you giving the finger to Tiananmen Square. How do you feel about those works now?**

You know, today when I look at it, is it too casual? Too ridiculous? But my life at the moment when I did it was casual and ridiculous, so I was being honest about my own state of mind.

**I told them, 'You know I don't have any secrets? You're the ones that have secrets'**

**You designed the Bird's Nest stadium for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, but in the memoir you refer to those games as a "grotesque jamboree". Do you regret participating?**

No I don't regret it. I designed the stadium because I love architecture, and it was a wonderful design. What I don't like is the Communist Party using that as state propaganda for nationalism, which is why I refused to go to the opening. I'm very clear about that.

**Did that mark a key turning point in your relationship with the state?**

I think the true turning point is 2008 before the Olympics opened, when there was an earthquake in Sichuan. In that earthquake, 80,000 people disappeared, and among them were 5,000 students. I kept asking, "How does a school built by the state collapse, but the building next to it not collapse?" We started an investigation, as a kind of civil act. We said, "Who is dead, and what are their names?" They said, "It's a national secret." We said, "It's not a national secret, it is a public event, you're responsible to tell us the truth." The confrontation became so direct and they realised I had so much power on the internet that they shut down my blog. They said, "This guy's uncontrollable."

**When did you realise they were watching you more closely?**

The surveillance started in 2009. I saw people following me everywhere. If I was walking my son in the park, pushing the pushchair, there were people behind bushes taking photos. Cars followed us everywhere, there were people sitting by my front door to record whoever comes. It was normal. I told them, "You know I don't have any secrets? You're the ones that have secrets."

**When they arrested you at Beijing airport, the police put a bag over your head and drove you to a secret location. What did you think was going to happen?**

When I was taken away, I think I knew it was deadly serious because why they have to do it in that way? At home they could have said, "Weiwei, come with us." Why did they have to kidnap me from the airport and take me to some unknown place? I asked them, "Can I call my mum to say I'm safe?" Or "Can I have a lawyer?" They said no. I was prepared in a way, because I knew my actions would have consequences. If they'd said, "You will be sentenced for 13 years," I would not have been surprised. Because I did more than anybody in that society, openly, against what they do. Nobody did that.

**The descriptions of the routines imposed on you when you were in confinement are so vivid, each activity scheduled down to the minute.**

They were so precise. The guards would have to look at their watches and to the second they would tell me what to do. It was so sharp. If I took a shower a little bit faster, then I would have to stand next to the bed, nude, my whole body streaming. They'd look at me, standing there, then they'd say, "Go." I would get into the bed, two soldiers standing right in front of my bed, and after that second the surveillance monitors would not see any movement in the room.

Protestors in Hong Kong demanding the release of Ai Weiwei following his arrest in 2011

**You draw a few parallels in the book between things that have happened in China and things in the West, such as the "big character posters" used to denounce intellectuals, which you compare to Facebook. Is that to make it clear such things happen everywhere?**

You're right. The book ends in 2015, when I was released. I have a lot more to say about democratic society, "freedom" society, or international politics. There'll be another book.

**The title comes from a poem by your father about the futility of human endeavour. Why did you choose that?**

We have to put ourselves on a larger scale. We're so sophisticated, such intelligent creatures, but at the same time we're so suicidal. Daily, species are disappearing because humans are present. And we create situations we can never even cope with, like climate change. I don't think there's a simple answer to the refugee situation, or climate change, or China-Western relations. But at the same time, my father writes that all of human joy and sorrow won't even leave one trace. We have to face daily matters, but also have perspective about what we're doing.

**Did writing the book help you feel more of a connection to him?**

We had a casual, friendly relationship. Not like father and son. I remember his integrity as a writer, I'd read a few really famous poems that everybody knew at school, but to tell the truth I never completed reading his writings. I never thought about his life until writing this book. But it is so colourful, so dramatic. Since he was born, he went through so much. It's just one episode after another. Like dropping into a heavy stream, it pushes you. I realised I'm part of that. Because he's my father it brings all those consequences to me.

Ai Weiwei and his father, the acclaimed poet Ai Qing

**You include some poetry by your son, who is now 12. Do you think he has taken after you or your father?**

No I don't think so, I never tried to influence him. The day before yesterday we got the book for the first time. The publisher said, "What do you think?" So many people worked on it, and also I worked on it for 10 years. So I did a little act with my son. We burned it.

**Why?**

Why not?

**Did your son like the book?**

He also liked the fire. Today he is visiting this stupid museum about wax.

**Madame Tussaud's?!**

I said, "Why do you go to this kind of thing?" I was thinking it must be horrible, but I can't stop him. He told his mum he wants to be a designer. He said his grandfather is a poet, his father is an artist, if he is a designer, "My son might be a street graphic artist." So he's a very funny guy. It's a different world.

*1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows by Ai Weiwei (The Bodley Head) is out on 2 November*

*The Economist*
8 November 2021

The Economist

The World Ahead 2022

# Ai Weiwei on reclaiming art from capitalism

**Contemporary art has become just a form of entertainment**

Nov 8th 2021

BY AI WEIWEI: ARTIST AND ACTIVIST

CONTEMPORARY CULTURE, by which I mean the paintings, sculpture, audio-visual media, literature and poetry that have emerged since the Industrial Revolution, bears the mark of the times. Over the past 200 years fundamental changes in manufacturing, and an emphasis on the pursuit of profit, have transformed economics, politics and culture. It was a huge leap unlike anything that had previously occurred in history, dramatically expanding mankind's capabilities and resulting in global differences in wealth and development. Powerful European and North American nations plundered other parts of the world. In the post-cold-war era, a new framework of globalisation emerged, championed by the West, its political bodies and monopolistic corporations. Political and cultural discourses are dominated by the need to make profits. The national boundaries that once delineated territories seem not to exist any more.

All this is reflected in our era's culture. It is unduly influenced by profit-driven companies with inordinate power over our economic and political structures, education and media. Their pervasive impact is manifested in society's value judgments, aesthetic education and philosophy. The cultural landscape is also shaped by the framework of Western capitalism and its associated concepts of democracy, freedom and a partial dose of socialism. A complete system has been formed, spanning from the shaping of aesthetics under these conditions, through cultural education, art criticism and the curatorial processes of galleries and museums, to artworks' eventual entry into the narrative of Western art history. This system reflects the values and aesthetic tendencies of capitalism in every respect.

> **Contemporary art has become just a form of entertainment, detached from spiritual life**

It is characterised by capitalism's fervent advocacy of individual freedom, its encouragement of so-called "creativity" and the idealisation of unfettered personal development. Its symptoms can be observed in the overwhelming tendency to consider art from a purely commercial perspective, neglecting spiritual concerns in favour of wealth accumulation. At the same time, societal injustices, regional inequalities, exploitation of the weak and unsustainable use of natural resources are ignored. By dodging these questions, contemporary art has become just a form of entertainment, detached from spiritual life. Art's power to shape self-awareness and assist in the understanding of identity has been compromised. The outlook is dim.

I believe that art can develop in a meaningful and rewarding manner only when it redefines the human condition. An artist, as a human being, is both an individual and a member of society. It is impossible for individuals in our era to escape from the broader political context. To be aware of one's unique existence and spiritual nature, it is vital to remain sensitive to the human condition and conscious of the origin of morality. Without consciousness, there is no morality. Over the years, my artworks have been concerned with life and death, the bigger sociopolitical context, global environmental change and the ongoing pandemic and its impact on humanity and the human condition. They are all connected with the human condition and human dignity, which provided the inspiration for "Black Chandelier" (2021) and "A Tree" (2021). My future works will continue in this vein.

In 2022 and beyond, the prevailing aesthetic values will be questioned, but awareness and action will be needed to bring about real change. Authenticity and accuracy are the most important requirements for artists. That is why art cannot shy away from aesthetics and ethics. The core of all art lies in the sense of responsibility that artists have, both as individuals and social beings. Art is a unique form of expression and a language of its own, capable of sounding a warning for the present and the future.

**A cornerstone of life**

Humans' intellectual limitations provide artistic possibilities. Despite mankind's exaggerated self-esteem, extreme arrogance and tendency to overestimate the degree of control we have over the universe, humans have been unable to escape the fact of their own mortality. Life and death, pain and disappointment, exploitation and sacrifice—all provide the best soil in which art can flourish, awakening humanity and constantly reshaping self-awareness. Art is as vital as religion and science, an indispensable cornerstone of life. Even if it is temporarily eclipsed by human greed and desire, its re-emergence is inevitable, and all of humanity will be the better for it.

*Ai Weiwei: artist and activist* ■

*This article appeared in the Culture section of the print edition of The World Ahead 2022 under the headline "Reclaiming art from capitalism"*

*The Telegraph*
12 November 2021

The Telegraph

# Ai Weiwei on his early years in America: 'New York destroyed all my illusions'

Ai Weiwei remembers the years he spent as a sidewalk portrait artist

*By* Lucy Davies

12 November 2021 • 5:00am

Ai Weiwei, working as a sidewalk portrait artist in Times Square, 1987 | [illegible]

I can't remember who took this picture. I was supporting myself as a sidewalk portrait artist, and sometimes I'd just give my camera to anybody passing, to take a photograph.

I mainly set up near Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, or in Times Square, where this shot was taken. It's 1987 – about halfway through my time in New York. I was 30. What am I thinking? Nothing. I'm just waiting, watching people surge out of the subway. I had no interest in who they were. All that mattered was whether they would spare 15 minutes to have me sketch them.

Once I got going, a line would form. I wouldn't have a moment to grab a bite to eat or go to the toilet. No great powers of imagination were required. I knew that I was never going to be another Picasso, but this way, at least, I could take care of next month's rent.

I spent from the age of 24 to 36 in New York, basically wasting every second. It was probably the most difficult time in my life. I'd come from a communist society, seeking personal freedom and to become an artist, but New York destroyed all of my illusions. I look at this picture and I think, 'I'm not functioning.' It doesn't make me so sad. It was just my reality.

'Parsons was like an expensive kindergarten' says the artist, Ai Weiwei, of his time studying in New York | CREDIT: TOBIAS SCHWARZ

I hadn't come to America because I hankered for a Western lifestyle – it was more that I couldn't stand living in Beijing any more. When I gazed at the hallucinatory metropolis for the first time as my plane came into JFK, all my motherland's teachings, earnestly imparted over so many years, had drifted away like smoke.

I was admitted to Parsons School of Design with a scholarship. My painting teacher was the Irish artist Sean Scully. In my first class, he said that my picture was the worst he'd ever seen. He always held a whisky tumbler in front of his chest like a boxer ready to throw a hook.

Parsons was like an expensive kindergarten, but I felt myself standing on the waterfront of art, with a tangle of ideas in my mind. Just as I was beginning to get used to it, though, I had to leave, because I submitted a blank paper for my art history exam.

Andy Warhol died that year. He and I had nothing to do with each other, but his death deepened my sense of emptiness. I was living on the Lower East Side. I had a futon and an old green bench that I had toted back from a park.

I registered at the Art Students League. It was shabby, but my teacher was [the abstract expressionist] Richard Pousette-Dart. He encouraged me, but I knew I didn't have it in me to make a career out of painting.

In time, I was kicked out again, losing my student status. I became undocumented. I soon accepted my predicament and so long as there was milk in the refrigerator, I felt secure. When you are forgotten by the world, it's easy to adopt a devil-may-care attitude.

In the 1980s the East Village was swept up in a contemporary art craze. Not far from where I was living, a trio of fish tanks was put on display with basketballs floating inside. Meanwhile, a tall, thin artist huddled in a wool overcoat, selling the snowballs laid out at his feet. As I saw it, everything was just beginning, and I had no plan to leave.

I was drawn toward Dada, with its critical view of other cultures. When a review of my first solo exhibition, in SoHo, described it as "a neo-Dadaist knockout", I was very happy. But not one of my works sold. Usually if that happened, rather than take the pictures home with me, I chucked them. Dumpsters are everywhere in New York City, and you could probably find a number of masterpieces in them.

I kept an eye on China – you couldn't avoid it. By 1989, the big story was Tiananmen Square. Telephone conversations with my brother, Ai Dan, were drowned in the din of military helicopters flying low over Beijing. The residents never imagined the army would open fire on students peacefully petitioning for change, and the legitimacy of the Chinese regime crumbled to dust in the slaughter.

I was increasingly weary of my situation. Freedom with no restraints had lost its novelty. People said I would be the last person to go back to China, and I thought the same. But we were all wrong.

On my return, I still felt there was nothing for me to do. I wandered around, I did some architecture, and I was pretty successful at it, but I didn't like it. The internet finally offered me the possibility to express myself. Was New York essential to my journey? It was, but it was not a happy part of that journey.

*Interview by Lucy Davies. courtesy of Ai Weiwei*

*1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows, by Ai Weiwei (Bodley Head, £25), is out now*

*ARTnews*
17 November 2021

ARTnews

# Ai Weiwei on 'The Daily Show': 'The Fear Is That I Don't Speak Out'

Ai Wei Wei and Trevor Noah on 'The Daily Show'
COMEDY CENTRAL

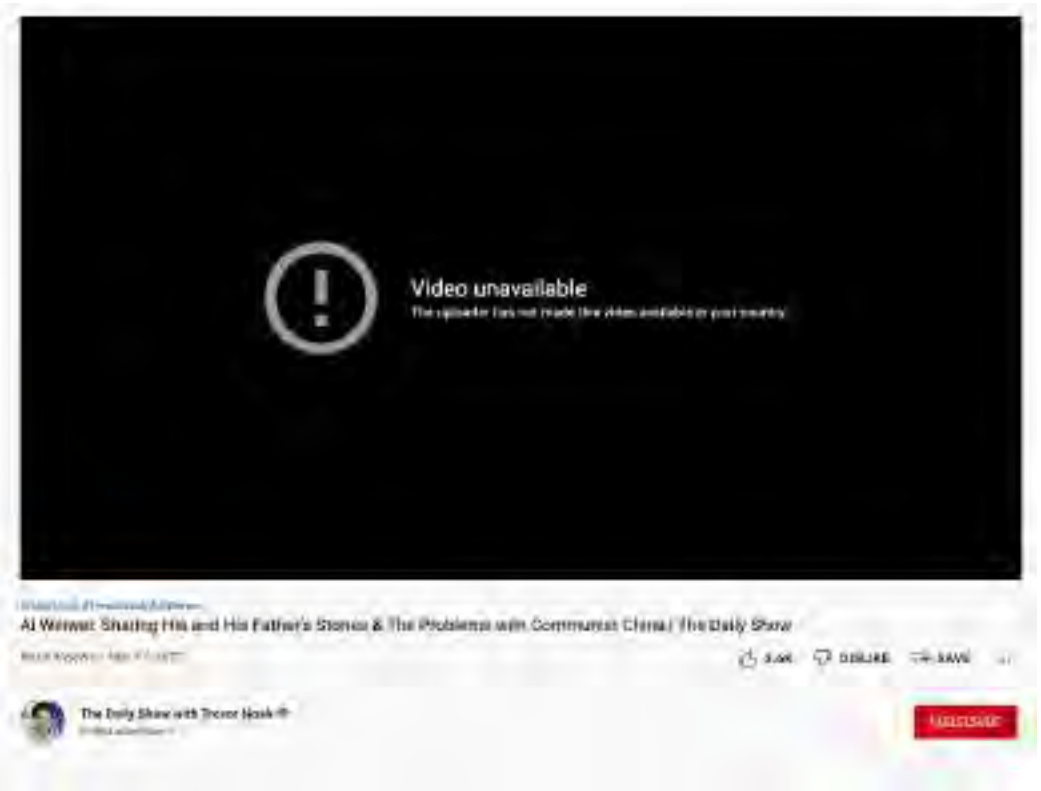
Ai Weiwei, the internationally acclaimed artist who has been harassed and imprisoned by the Chinese government, appeared on Trevor Noah's *The Daily Show* on Wednesday. While the upbeat host usually cracks jokes and does impressions during the interview portion of the show, his conversation with Weiwei was somber as the two discussed the artist's new memoir *1,000 Years of Joys and Sorrows*, which recounts his time in prison as well as at that of his father. The host started off by heaping praise upon Ai: "You are, without exaggeration, one of the coolest human beings I've ever spoken to," Noah said, "and you've also lived one of the hardest lives I've ever come across."

When asked why his memoir recounts so much of his father's life, Ai responded, "I'm often asked, 'How did you become you?' and when I was in detention I asked myself the same question: How did I become an enemy of the state?" Ai went on to talk about the threads that have connected him to his father in the context of the Chinese government's changing political landscape. Noah asked Ai if he has been able to challenge the government because he has no fear, but Ai said that's not the case. "There is fear," he said. "The fear is that I don't speak out."

Noah turned the conversation to the Uighurs, an ethnic and Muslim minority in China who have been put into reeducation camps. International human-rights groups have called the Chinese treatment of Uighurs a genocide. When asked what he thought, Ai said that China has a history of treating certain people, particularly Tibetans and Inner Mongolians, in a similar manner. "They do this to their own people," he said.

LISSON GALLERY

*The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*
17 November 2021



*The Art Newspaper*
21 December 2021

THE ART NEWSPAPER

# Seoul, sneakers and the end of steel monoliths: the highs and the lows of the art world in 2021

Who had a good year and who had a bad one? We aim to find out

**Hong Kong**

A new crackdown on artists, film-makers and creatives prompted more worries about the art world's co-existence with ongoing human rights abuses in Hong Kong and China. It was telling to see the director of the M+ museum being forced to walk back comments about the institution's "artistic freedom" as the museum removed works by Ai Weiwei from its website in advance of its grand opening.

LISSON GALLERY

*Artnet News*
24 December 2021

artnet news

**Books**

# Our Writers Pick 20 Books About Art and the Art World to Keep You Reading Well Into the New Year

Our favorite biographies, memoirs, essay collections, and more.

**Artnet News**, December 24, 2021

We've rounded up 20 arty books to tuck into this winter. (Photo by Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

One of the best parts of a holiday vacation is finally getting to curl up with a good book (perhaps that one that's been waiting patiently on your nightstand for months!).

Below, we've selected 20 novels, memoirs, biographies and other books all themed around art or the art world. Happy reading!

## 7. *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows: A Memoir* by Ai Weiwei (2021)

*1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows by Ai Weiwei. Photo Courtesy Penguin Random House*

This highly anticipated memoir by one of the world's most famous Chinese artists is more than just a personal tale, but a story that mirrors the evolution of China from over the past century. It's told through the experiences of three generations of Ai's family: the artist's father, Ai Qing, a famous poet, Ai Weiwei himself, and his son Lao. This English version of the book offers Western audiences a glimpse into the life and trauma that was endured by generations in the country.

**Find it at:** Bookshop.org, Penguin Random House

*—Vivienne Chow*

*Wallpaper*
29 December 2021

Wallpaper*

ART | 29 DEC 2021 | BY HARRIET LLOYD-SMITH

# Year in review: Wallpaper* arts editor Harriet Lloyd-Smith picks top 10 art stories of 2021

Wallpaper's Harriet Lloyd-Smith selects her top 10 art stories of 2021, from profiles on Ai Weiwei and Theaster Gates to photos of Apple packaging

What exactly would a normal year in the art world look like? New-normal, paranormal and business as (ab)normal – this year had it all.

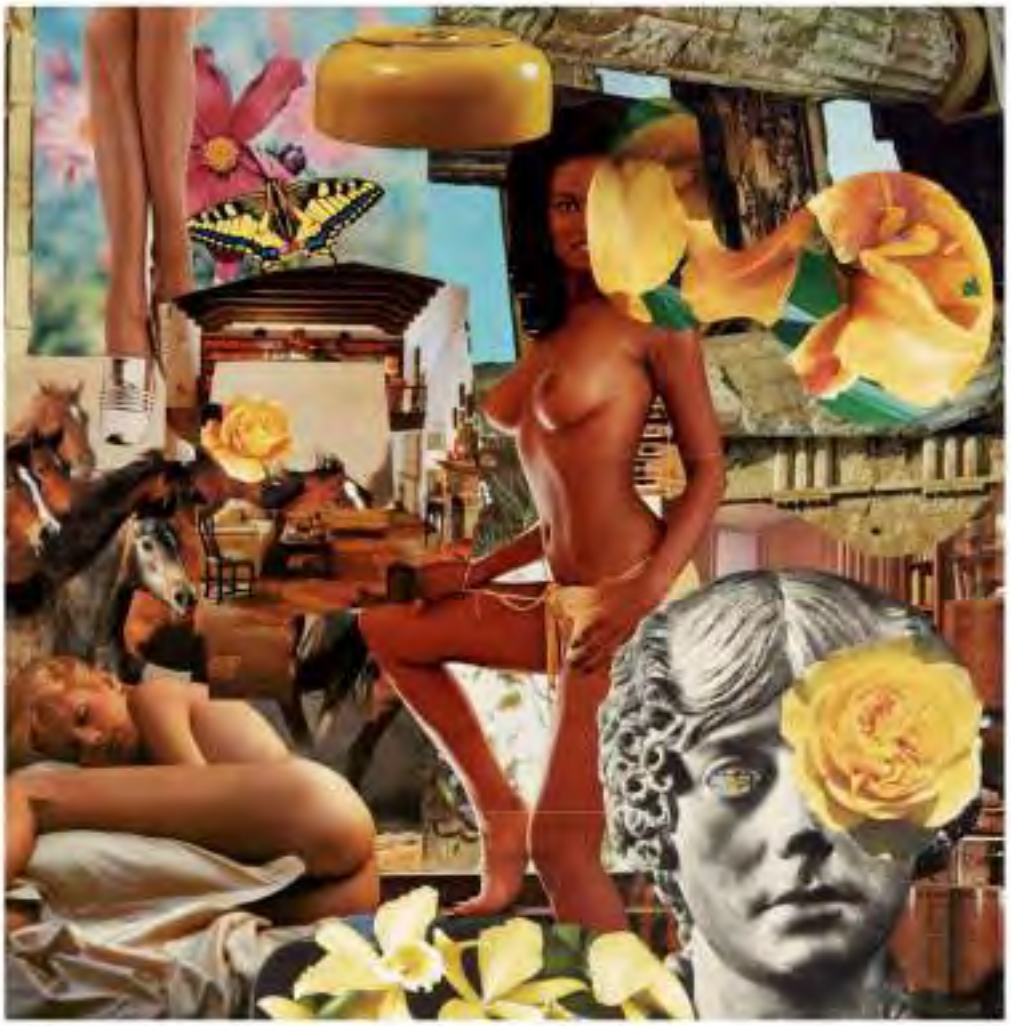
There was a tentative transition from URL to IRL. Exhibitions got physical again, and art fairs – along with the rest of us – were freed from the pixelated confines of OVRs (online viewing rooms).

Artists dissected recorded histories and rediscovered those overlooked. They sparked socio-political debates, squared up to social injustices and shed a stark and critical light on the future of our planet.

The Turner Prize 2021 brought more firsts, 'immersive art' reached new depths, and we all, at least once, took to Google and typed: 'what is an NFT?'

Here's a snapshot of 2021 in ten art stories:

## 01. Sexual taboos, myth and montage: Linder's provocative collages



Linder, *Fragrant rays*, 2021, photomontage. Courtesy the artist and Andréhn-Schiptjenko, Stockholm/ Paris

In a show of new work in Stockholm, Linder plunged viewers into a world of Greco-Roman mythology, autoeroticism, and sexual taboos. We were smitten. Disparate clippings rubbed up against each other in an orgy of desire in its many guises as Linder discussed the almost undiscussable. There was a lot to digest between the creases of these photomontages, but perhaps the overriding myth here is not that of taboo classical exploits, but a myth of heteronormativity.

## 02. Theaster Gates: London, urban reform and exemplars of Black excellence

*Theaster Gates photographed at his studio on Chicago's South Side on 3 August 2021. Photography: Caroline Tompkins for the October 2021 issue of Wallpaper**

Ahead of a multi-faceted cultural takeover in London, Wallpaper* editor TF Chan spoke to Theaster Gates about the history of clay, art as a social force, and nurturing the next generation. As part of Wallpaper's 25th-anniversary project '5x5', Gates also put forward five of his creative leaders of the future – all of them creators of elegant, distinctive forms who are advancing a social message with equal confidence.

## 03. Ryoji Ikeda exhibition review: a sensory assault course

*Ryoji Ikeda: test pattern*

Emerging from the industrial brutalist labyrinth that is London's 180 The Strand, it's customary to feel like your senses have been through the wash a few times. But after Japanese artist Ryoji Ikeda's solo show, your eyes could hear, and your nose could see. Ikeda didn't politely request our attention, he got inside our heads and played our eardrums like snares. This did not feel like an exhibition, it felt like a sensory assault course that one does not view, one survives.

## 04. Judy Chicago on revolutionising art history: 'I just didn't fit'

*Judy Chicago, On Fire at 80, 2019, Archival Inkjet Print. © Judy Chicago/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Photography © Donald Woodman/ARS, New York. Courtesy of the artist; Salon 94, New York; Jessica Silverman, San Francisco; and Corzo Gallery, Los Angeles. Image provided courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco*

At the age of 82, and after 60 years of spearheading feminist art, Judy Chicago received her first retrospective in 2021. Puzzling, perhaps, that it took so long, but in understanding Chicago's relatively recent institutional acclaim, one must first appreciate what it took to arrive there. We spoke to the art icon about an epic career, filled with patriarchal battles, fierce self-belief... and a lot of smoke.

## 05. Mark Bradford's epic show put Hauser & Wirth Menorca on the map

The artist Mark Bradford in his studio in Los Angeles, with one of the sculptures that were part of his solo show at Hauser & Wirth's new arts centre in Mahon, Menorca. *Photography: Max Farago for the July 2021 issue of Wallpaper**

Mark Bradford excavates the past through art. His works, larger than mere wall maps, vibrate with crisscrossed gestures that simulate the energy and urgency of global matters. In 2021, Bradford inaugurated Hauser & Wirth Menorca with 'Masses and Movements'. The artist was profiled by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp in the July issue, for which he also designed the limited-edition cover: 'With everything that I was experiencing and especially with the protests and the much-needed conversations around race in this country, I chose a map that said for the first time, "America,"' he said. 'What does the word America mean for an African American? It is all there.'

## 06. Photography series shed new light on Apple packaging

Clean lines, whiter-than-white elegance and direct, no-fuss minimalism. These are the qualities that give Apple its unmistakable Apple-ness. But Apple's product packaging seems to involve almost as much artistic consideration as the device it shrouds: superfluity is a sin, and simplicity is ecstasy in a messy world. This formed the subject of an intriguing photo series by Johann Clausen, who gave Apple's packaging, not its products, the floor.

## 07. At home with Ai Weiwei

*Photography: Ai Weiwei Studio*

Experiencing the art of Ai Weiwei is like biting into a scorpion. Plenty of sting, searingly sharp, and hard to swallow. And so it should be. The Chinese artist has dedicated his life, career and freedom to some of the most pertinent issues facing humanity. From his bold and unwavering criticism of censorship and authoritarianism in China to documenting the escalating migrant crisis, cultural stereotypes, and the darker caverns of history. For our ongoing 'At home with' profile series, we interviewed the artist about his life, work and blending the two in his much-anticipated memoir.

## 08. Marina Abramović: death, Maria Callas and breaking the rules of Opera

*Marina Abramović, 7 Deaths of Maria Callas, 2019. Photography: Marco Anelli, Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives*

During Frieze London 2021, Marina Abramović staged a dramatic operatic takeover. The artist opened a duet of solo exhibitions across Lisson Gallery's spaces, focusing on her lifelong preoccupation with Greek American opera singer Maria Callas. Writer Jessica Klingelfuss interviewed the artist ahead of her London moment, which offered a tantalising prelude to her 2023 survey opening at the Royal Academy, where she will be the first female artist to have a solo show across the entire Main Galleries.

## 09. Jakob Kudsk Steensen on how VR can bring us closer to nature

Jakob Kudsk Steensen's *Berl-Berl* (2021)

In July, Danish artist Jakob Kudsk Steensen took over the hallowed halls of Berlin's Berghain (yes, that one) with his immersive VR installation *Berl-Berl*, a vast virtual swampland. Drawing from meticulous fieldwork in Germany's Spreewald, archival research and collaborations with biologists, linguists, sound artists and creative technologists, *Berl-Berl* encouraged viewers to contemplate the forgotten complexity and beauty of wetlands. As Kudsk Steensen told Wallpaper's TF Chan, 'I want to direct the eyes at the world beyond our human domain, to bring a sense of mystery, imagination and fascination.'

## 10. At home with Jeff Koons

Artist Jeff Koons pictured with his work, *Hulk (Tulips)*, 2004-2008, installed in the exhibition Shine at Palazzo Strozzi, Florence. Photography: Ela Bialkowska/ OKNOstudio

2021 has demanded reflection, and no artist has used this motif in more variety, or notoriety, than Jeff Koons. The artist has a knack for reflecting the idealism in human history; reflecting contemporary times, in all their mass-consumerist, superficial and voyeuristic banality; and making work that literally reflects, consumes and warps its surroundings, and all those who observe. We Zoomed the artist ahead of his major show at Florence's Palazzo Strozzi titled 'Shine'.

ArtReview
10 January 2022

# ArtReview

Ai Weiwei photographed by Jens Ziehe, 2019. © Ai Weiwei Studio; courtesy Lisson Gallery

**The artist and human rights activist discusses the power of writing, the poetry of his father, and the artworld's self-serving ideologies**

Contemporary artist and human-rights activist Ai Weiwei came to international prominence for his open criticism of the Chinese government's autocratic rule and its human rights policies, a position that resulted in the state's efforts to silence his condemnations via sustained intimidation, a 2009 attack by the police that left him with a brain haemorrhage and a three-month imprisonment in 2011. Following the unannounced demolition of his Beijing studio in 2018 by local authorities, Ai relocated to Berlin. His memoir *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows* (2021) tells the story of China's political and social history over the last century through the intertwined experiences of Ai and his father, the renowned modernist poet Ai Qing, who was exiled for two decades, including a period of hard labour in Xinjiang.

**ArtReview *How did you approach writing* 1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows?**

**Ai Weiwei** I always need to be balanced: to not get too emotionally involved and to be a little bit cool in tone. Otherwise the emotions are often overwhelming. On the one hand because the book spans 100 years of China's history (and that's a large period to cover) – but on the other because it reflects the history of two people: me and my father. I wanted it to be balanced so that it wasn't too much about us, but rather sets our stories within a historical context.

**AR *How do you see the relationship between writing and making art?***

**AWW** Ideally they should be one. As someone who has always been interested in conceptual art, I have always thought the form and concept should be undivided. It would be too arrogant or misleading to just give a form without a clear conceptual interpretation of the work. If it's just about the words, it can be too obvious and dry: it doesn't have charm. It needs to be balanced. Artworks can have specific meanings but can be vague and abstract at the same time. For me, writing is like a clear measurement of how far you can go with an idea: it's black words on white paper; there's a clear definition.

**AR *You've previously said that you hate 'hidden meanings'. But your artwork does have a lot of hidden meanings...***

**AWW** That's the nature of art. It has to be able to be interpreted by itself and often it has multiple meanings. But that's why I need to write. For me, writing is part of the art practice because it sets a clear meaning. However, it doesn't have the same emotion as the artwork. That's why I have to have both.

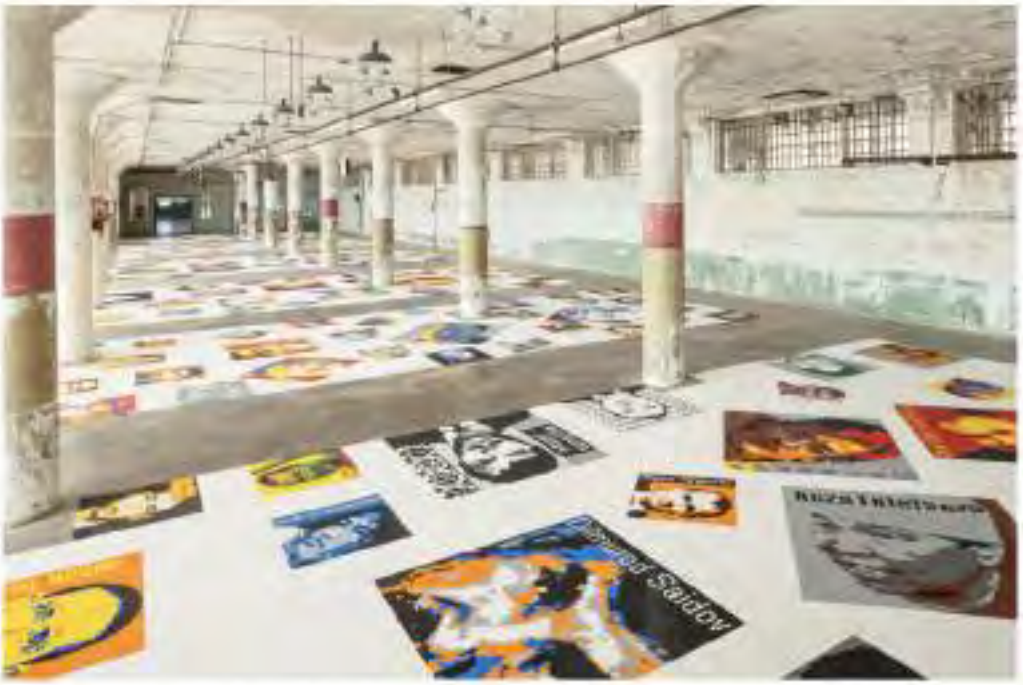
Ai Weiwei, *An Archive*, 2016 (installation view at Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney). © Ai Weiwei Studio. Courtesy Lisson Gallery

**AR** ***Your father, Ai Qing, was a renowned modernist poet, and in your book you mention these handwritten messages that were placed in public known as Big-character Posters, some examples of which were used by the state to denounce your father, but also one written anonymously by someone called Mechanic No. 0538, who used this format to criticise Mao Zedong – did language play a role in your becoming an artist and the process behind your practice?***

**AWW** I think language has had a very profound impact on my work. When my father wrote poetry he was very careful in selecting his vocabulary, as are all poets. So that method of using a limited number of words to carry a powerful idea has always been very attractive to me – to see how language functions. I think, with any form of art practice, control is a crucial skill. So choosing words, form, materials carefully is the best means of expression. And expression itself is a selection of emotions and concepts. That process reflects the uniqueness of any individual work. It's not about fitting all your ideas into one thing, but about reducing it and in fact excluding certain emotions and concepts.

**AR** ***Is that opposite to the way you grew up absorbing words and phrases used in Communist propaganda that were taught to you at school? Because there was an expectation that you would accept these ideas given by the state without question?***

**AWW** Yes. I think it's about trying to limit yourself from becoming another kind of propagandist. It's about saying something carefully but also acting on it. And to act on the ideas is crucial, otherwise they just become antiwords. They function with no meaning.



Ai Weiwei, *Trace*, 2014. Lego. © Ai Weiwei Studio. Courtesy Lisson Gallery

**AR** ***How do you act on your ideas?***

**AWW** I try to use different media: writing for social media, making videos, films and images, installations or even using pieces of Lego. Firstly, there is a challenge in understanding a particular medium; it takes a great effort to learn to control materials – whether it's porcelain-making or Chinese carpentry – as well as knowledge of how these materials have been used throughout history. Secondly, you have to find the right material for the right concept. For example I used Lego for *Trace* (2014), a series of portraits of political prisoners, because it was necessary to give all the images the same kind of quality; at the same time, it was important to show they are distinct from one another – and Lego felt like the perfect medium for this. Similarly, with *Sunflower Seeds* (2010), porcelain has a huge tradition in Jingdezhen [where the work was fabricated by 1,600 artisans over a period of two-and-a-half years]: every woman knows how to make porcelain, which involves a very sophisticated process, but they make them just like they make dumplings. That's the beauty of it. You have one hundred million porcelain sunflower seeds, but at the same time, it's just like how every Chinese household would put dumplings in their wok and boil it. I still think of it as a miracle. But in every artwork, each different medium takes the same kind of effort to make sure that the aesthetic and moral work together to communicate an idea. To act on an idea is to make art, because the fight for freedom is part of freedom.

Ai Weiwei, *Sunflower Seeds*, 2010, 100 million hand painted ceramic seeds. © Ai Weiwei Studio. Courtesy Lisson Gallery

**AR** ***And what's been your most important act so far?***

**AWW** The most important thing I have done is to set up different ways of communicating social and political issues, and not just doing something that is self-indulgent, but rather to test if that expression really functions as a way of reflecting humanity and human dignity. If you took away my writing – the blogs, the social media messages, the book – my so-called artwork would fall apart. It's like flesh and bones. To be alive, we have to have these connected structures of bones and tissue. That's how my art comes alive.

**AR** ***Do you think your written ideas have a greater impact than your artworks?***

**AWW** That is very hard to measure, partly because this book has just come out. I used to think people liked watching films, and I made so many films. But it depends on the circumstance, because in China, people love to watch films, but in the West, no one goes to theatres anymore – they just react quickly to social-media images. So the book really hasn't been tested yet in the West. I used to write blogs in China, which were extremely popular. I believe that is the reason for the police brutality and attention from the state. If I had just made the artworks, I wouldn't have had a problem. Even in detention, the interrogators never asked me about my artworks, except for when I flipped the finger at Tiananmen [*Study in Perspective – Tiananmen*, 1995]. I told them I did it to the White House too, but the interrogator said, 'I'm a Chinese policeman, I'm taking care of my duties, and if you did that to the White House, the US police should take care of that'. So, basically, in prison they read my blogs to me as evidence of subverting state power; the texts were critical of the Chinese government and of the party. They even asked me to reread them, and asked me if I agreed with their judgment. I said, 'I do.'

Ai Weiwei, *Lensbaren Study of Perspective*, 1990–2011 / 2014, 40 black-and-white and colour C-prints, glasses. © Ai Weiwei Studio. Courtesy Lisson Gallery

**AR** ***Do you feel there's a connection between your and your father's writing?***

**AWW** Well, his writing was very calm with good intentions, and my writing is quite brutal and harsh. He faced 20 years of exile; the police told me that I'd have been killed if I had been writing during that time. But it's very clear that our experiences correlate in some ways, I think.

My father went to Paris before he was twenty years old, to become an artist and poet; I went to New York to study. We have both been subject to the enforcement of state laws as individuals who have spoken our minds. I feel proud to be identified as an individual who can still defend freedom of expression.

**AR** ***Since moving to the West, do you see any ways in which the power structures here reflect some of those in China?***

**AWW** I think China is clearly a very authoritarian society, and that has been the history of the country for 2,000–3,000 years. It never really changed. But for the past 200 years, the West has undergone an Industrial Revolution, and before that there was the Renaissance. Democratic systems were established in the West, but capitalism is a competing structure that creates different problems. In the West, on the surface, there's liberty and individual freedom and an encouragement of people's so-called creativity, but the world is so much controlled by corporate culture that those ideas are economically challenged because the corporate powers hide within the political, educational and media structures. So here we're facing a very different structural problem.

**AR** ***And how does that impact the artworld?***

**AWW** I think the artworld is basically dominated by certain ideologies that are self-serving, and capital-oriented. Artworks have to be recognised by important dealers and galleries, and have to be bought by collectors, which might then be donated to museums. It means sacrificing a huge amount of education and effort and creativity to fit into that system, in which it seems impossible to achieve success. In the West, education is fixated on telling people how to become successful – those ideas are taught in school education and through mainstream value judgements. That is the problem. It's a pollutant, and opposite to the idea of the individual.

*From the December 2021 issue of ArtReview*

Harper's Bazaar
11 January 2022

Harper's BAZAAR

# The top 10 art exhibitions to book this year

From Francis Bacon in London to Barbara Hepworth in St Ives, here's our guide to the must-see art exhibitions opening around the UK this year...

FASHIONING MASCULINITIES: THE ART OF MENSWEAR AT V&A MUSEUM

Get ready for a year of brilliant art. And a pleasingly diverse one, too. You'll see blockbuster names like Francis Bacon and Raphael in London (both eagerly awaited shows were postponed due to the pandemic) and the captivating work of a little-known female photographer revealed in Milton Keynes.

The V&A in London stages *Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear*, a show celebrating the power, artistry and diversity of men's fashion; while the Dundee outpost presents an exhibition exploring the past, present and future of plastic.

To help you navigate 2022's jam-packed exhibition calendar, we've rounded up 10 of the very best shows to plan ahead for. Get those diaries out!

# *Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt*

The art of Ai Weiwei, which includes sculptures, films, photographs and installations, addresses notions of truth, authority, authenticity and value, while exploring the links between the contemporary world and traditional Chinese culture. This new solo exhibition comprises one installation of 13 artworks by the artist and 14 historic Chinese objects which Ai bought at auction in 2020.

By displaying works from different periods and styles together, Ai draws attention to the ways in which we attribute meaning and value to objects. In doing so, he prompts the viewer to question the role played by museums as historical and cultural gatekeepers. A selection of recent films, including *Coronation* (2020) and *Human Flow* (2017), will also be screened during the exhibition's run.

***Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt*, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, runs from 12 February- 19 June 2022**

*The Daily Telegraph*
29 January 2022

telegraph.co.uk/culture Saturday 29 January 2022

The Daily Telegraph

# Review

INSIDE
How Saul *LEITER* found grace in grime p.4
My life as Britain's first black television reporter, by Barbara *BLAKE-HANNAH* p.20
*ULYSSES*: read the book? Now do the jigsaw p.22
plus
'Does Katie Price not have enough on her plate?' By Victoria *COREN MITCHELL* p.20

## *Notorious* Ai Weiwei

The world's most famous living artist on why we've got China all wrong

*The Daily Telegraph* | *Review,* 29 January 2022

Cover story

# 'My son says "Keep your mouth shut!"'

At Weiwei on why he believes Covid leaked from a lab, China's 'ice-cold, cruel' response – and how his new show will reveal that we're less free than we think

"The West trying to understand China is like a soccer school trying to play chess"

OLD MEETS NEW: WHAT'S ON SHOW

Cover story





'I never liked colours, but I'm an artist so I have to use them'

*The Daily Telegraph* | *Review*, 29 January 2022

Cover story

# 'My son says "Keep your mouth shut!"'

Ai Weiwei on why he believes Covid leaked from a lab, China's 'ice cold, cruel' response – and how his new show will reveal that we're less free than we think

By Chris Harkett

The West trying to understand China is like a soccer school trying to play chess'

OLD MEETS NEW: WHAT'S ON SHOW

DRAGON VASE (RED AND WHITE), 2017

MARBLE CUBOUT CONTAINER, 2015

HAN DYNASTY URN WITH COCA-COLA LOGO, 2015

STILETTO SUP CAMERA WITH PLINTH, 2016

Cover story

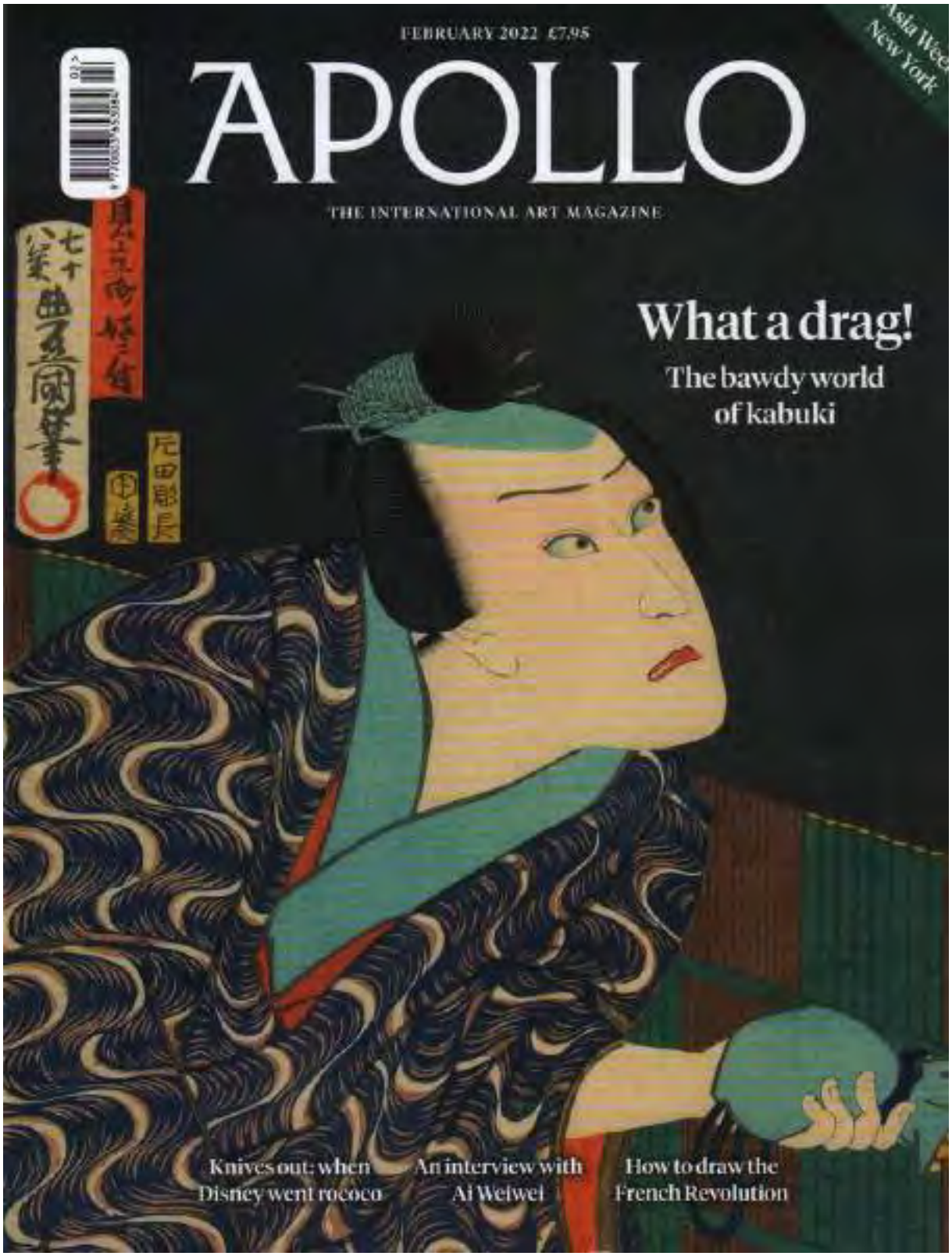




"I never liked colours, but I'm an artist so I have to use them"

# LISSON GALLERY

*Apollo*
February 2022



# LINE OF DISSENT

Ai Weiwei has built a career on defying the Chinese state. Ahead of his latest exhibition in Cambridge, he tells *Apollo* how he has found freedom to create in the UK

By Christopher Turner
Portrait by Toby Glanville

On 3 April 2011, Ai Weiwei was arrested at Beijing airport, his face was covered in a black hood marked 'SUSPECT', and he was driven to a secret location. 'I was kidnapped,' he tells me, speaking in a voice scarcely louder than a whisper. 'You expect that of the mafia, not of the state.' He was imprisoned for 81 days, flanked by two soldiers, who stood sentry next to him as he went to the toilet and even when he was in bed. The artist recreated the dehumanizing experience in *S.A.C.R.E.D* (2013; Fig. 2): six large black boxes into which you peer, as if through CCTV cameras or a cell door, to view three-quarter-size dioramas featuring the artist being interrogated and having a shower, shit, meal and sleep under the careful watch of his prison guards.

A vocal critic of China's government, Ai was accused of 'inciting subversion of state power', a crime for which other human-rights campaigners and dissidents had been imprisoned for more than a decade. He was eventually charged with the lesser, fabricated crime of tax evasion, and released. He paid the $2.4m fine with more than 30,000 loans from his supporters, many of whom threw banknotes over the wall of his Beijing compound in expression of solidarity. (His elaborate IOUs became works of art in themselves.)

After four years of house arrest, Ai moved to Berlin as a political exile, and then to Cambridge with his girlfriend, the film-maker Wang Fen, and their son Ai Lao-wai 艾老外. We meet at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, where the burly, 64-year-old artist is preparing his solo exhibition 'Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt' (12 February–29 June). Ai Lao sits patiently alongside his father as we speak. He strokes his father's pot belly affectionately, and sometimes passes him notes, which feed into our conversation. When he was released, Ai Lao told his father, 'They were doing a commercial for you, to make you more famous.' Tate Modern had been capped with the enormous slogan 'FREE AI WEIWEI', and Hillary Clinton had called for his freedom, all of which helped make him perhaps the world's best-known living artist.

At Kettle's Yard, not far from his house in Cambridge, Ai is exhibiting some of the 50 antiques he recently acquired online from an auction house in the city, which he will show next to his own works – marble handcuffs, jade sex toys – that make use of the same traditional techniques. Many of these antiques, bought unseen, turned out to be fake but highlight the differing attitudes to copies in East and West. In China, plagiarism was proof that a craftsman could attain the same high level, he explains, whereas in the west it is considered a crime. Ai will also show *Coronation* (2021), his documentary film about life in lockdown Wuhan shot with privileged access by his underground network of supporters. 'Wuhan has the world's most advanced pandemic research centre, so I think [Covid] was a leak from there,' he says matter-of-factly.

Ai says that the experience of his incarceration made him feel that he could 'stand as an equal to his own father', the renowned poet Ai Qing, who had been among Mao

1. Ai Weiwei (b. 1957) photographed at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, in January 2022

Zedong's first followers and victims. It also made him determined to write down his family history and memories for his son, who was two at the time, before it was too late. Ai Weiwei tells this story in his gripping memoir, *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows* (2021), which captures the history of a Chinese century that Ai Qing described with understatement as 'momentous, multicoloured epoch'. Ai Qing had lived alongside Mao in the caves of Yan'an, Shaanxi province, from where they plotted a communist China, and he administered the competition that chose the designs and symbols of the new republic. However, in 1957, the year Ai Weiwei was born, Mao turned on his intellectual supporters. Ai Qing was persecuted as a 'Rightist' and he and his family were exiled to a military re-education camp in north-western China. They spent much of the next 20 years living in exile.

In the early 1960s, following an intervention from Xi Zhongxun, the father of current president Xi Jinping, Ai Qing was briefly rehabilitated. But by 1967, when Mao had launched the Cultural Revolution, he was again out of favour, paraded through the streets in a dunce's cap by the Red Army. Ai Weiwei helped his father burn his library, with its incriminating Western volumes. They moved to a labour camp in the Gobi Desert. They lived in a hole in the ground covered in brushwood, a frosty home beset with lice and rats. As part of his programme of 're-education', Ai Qing was forced to dig out the camp's latrines every day for five years, emptying and eating over the pits' faecal sludge. Ai Weiwei learned to find 'comfort in exclusion', a characterise of self in adversity that underlined his artistic attitude ever since.

A few years after Mao's death and the purging of the Gang of Four in 1976, Ai Qing was admitted back into the party and, at the age of 69, enjoyed a new celebrity. 'He would meet all the leaders and join all the meetings,' Ai Weiwei says of his father's rehabilitation. 'For me it was a big disappointment.' In 1981, realising that the government had changed little and would never admit its mistakes, Ai Weiwei left for America in disgust. He spent the next decade in New York, where he was first exposed to the work of Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, who would become his artistic polestars. He attended classes briefly, studying under Sean Scully, but was expelled after submitting a blank exam paper. Having forfeited his scholarship, meaning he was now an illegal immigrant, he played the flâneur around Greenwich Village, painting portraits of tourists in charcoal and ink.

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4. Installation view of 'Ai Weiwei: According to What?' at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, in 2014, including his *Coloured Vases* of 2008 and *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* of 1995

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Wang Fen arrives, and the family prepare to leave for lunch at a nearby Vietnamese restaurant. Before they do, considering films of the Rembrandt of the selfie, Ai takes an iPhone portrait of us both, one of a collection of many thousands. A self-confessed contrarian and itinerant soul, Ai Weiwei now spends most of his time in Lisbon, where he has started building a replica of the studio complex that was pulled down in Shanghai in 2011 and which was perhaps his best building. 'I have to clearly tell myself I'm a traveller,' he says, looking finally at his son. 'I will never be settled. Life is too short. I'm building my new studio in Portugal but, after that, who knows.'

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# LINE OF DISSENT

Ai Weiwei has built a career on defying the Chinese state. Ahead of his latest exhibition in Cambridge, he tells *Apollo* how he has found freedom to create in the UK

By Christopher Turner
Portrait by Toby Glanville

On 3 April 2011, Ai Weiwei was arrested at Beijing airport, his face was covered in a black hood marked 'SUSPECT', and he was driven to a secret location. 'I was kidnapped,' he tells me, speaking in a voice scarcely louder than a whisper. 'You expect that of the mafia, not of the state.' He was imprisoned for 81 days, flanked by two soldiers, who stood sentry next to him as he went to the toilet and even when he was in bed. The artist recreated the dehumanizing experience in *S.A.C.R.E.D* (2013–Fig. 2): six large black boxes into which you peer, as if through CCTV cameras or a cell door, to view three-quarter-size dioramas featuring the artist being interrogated and having a shower, shit, meal and sleep under the careful watch of his prison guards.

A vocal critic of China's government, Ai was accused of 'inciting subversion of state power', a crime for which other human-rights campaigners and dissidents had been imprisoned for more than a decade. He was eventually charged with the lesser, fabricated crime of tax evasion, and released. He paid the $2.4m fine with more than 30,000 loans from his supporters, many of whom threw banknotes over the wall of his Beijing compound in expression of solidarity. (His elaborate IOUs became works of art in themselves.)

After four years of house arrest, Ai moved to Berlin as a political exile, and then to Cambridge with his girlfriend, the film-maker Wang Fen, and their son Ai Lao-now 11. We meet at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, where the burly, 64-year-old artist is preparing his solo exhibition 'Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt' (12 February–29 June). Ai Lao sits patiently alongside his father as we speak. He strokes his father's pot belly affectionately, and sometimes passes him notes, which feed into our conversation. When he was released, Ai Lao told his father: 'They were doing a commercial for you, to make you more famous.' Tate Modern had been capped with the enormous slogan 'FREE AI WEIWEI', and Hillary Clinton had called for his freedom, all of which helped make him perhaps the world's best-known living artist.

At Kettle's Yard, not far from his house in Cambridge, Ai is exhibiting some of the 50 antiques he recently acquired online from an auction house in the city, which he will show next to his own works – marble handcuffs, jade sex toys – that make use of the same traditional techniques. Many of these antiques, bought unseen, turned out to be fake but highlight the differing attitudes to copies in East and West. In China, plagiarism was proof that a craftsman could attain the same high level, he explains, whereas in the west it is considered a crime. Ai will also show *Coronation* (2021), his documentary film about life in lockdown Wuhan shot with privileged access by his underground network of supporters. 'Wuhan has the world's most advanced pandemic research centre, so I think [Covid] was a leak from there,' he says matter-of-factly.

Ai says that the experience of his incarceration made him feel that he could 'stand as an equal to his own father', the renowned poet Ai Qing, who had been among Mao

1. Ai Weiwei (b. 1957) photographed at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, in January 2022

Zedong's first followers and victims. It also made him determined to write down his family history and memories for his son, who was two at the time, before it was too late. Ai Weiwei tells this story in his gripping memoir, *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows* (2021), which captures the horror of a Chinese century that Ai Qing described with understatement as a 'momentous, multicoloured epoch'. Ai Qing had lived alongside Mao in the caves of Yan'an, Shaanxi province, from where they plotted a communist China, and he administered the competition that chose the designs and symbols of the new republic. However, in 1957, the year Ai Weiwei was born, Mao turned on his intellectual supporters. Ai Qing was persecuted as a 'Rightist' and he and his family were exiled to a military re-education camp in north-western China. They spent much of the next 20 years living in exile.

In the early 1960s, following an intervention from Xi Zhongxun, the father of current president Xi Jinping, Ai Qing was briefly rehabilitated. But by 1967, when Mao had launched the Cultural Revolution, he was again out of favour, paraded through the streets in a dunce's cap by the Red Army. Ai Weiwei helped his father burn his library with its incriminating Western volumes. They moved to a labour camp in the Gobi Desert. They lived in a hole in the ground covered in brushwood, a frosty bomb heat with lice and rats. As part of his programme of 're-education', Ai Qing was forced to dig out the camp's latrines every day for five years, emptying and eating over the pits' faecal sludge. Ai Weiwei learned to find 'comfort in exclusion', a clear sense of self in adversity that has defined his artistic attitude ever since.

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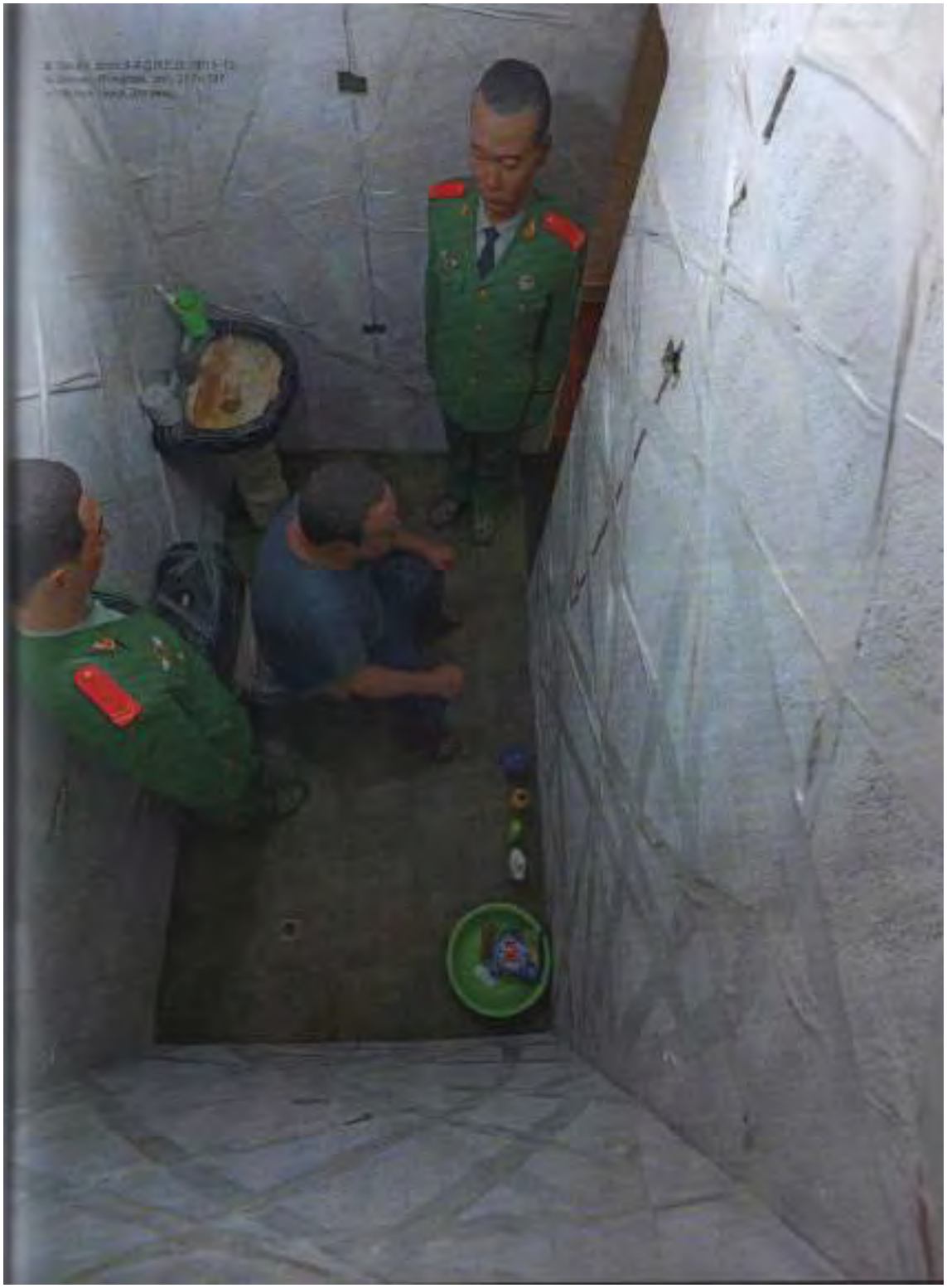

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*CNN*
04 February 2022

Arts

# Ai Weiwei helped design Beijing's Olympic stadium. But he regrets how it's being used today

Updated 4th February 2022

Editor's Note — Christiane Amanpour's interview with Ai Weiwei airs Friday 1pm ET. See more here.

Written by
**Jacqui Palumbo**
**Christiane Amanpour, CNN**

Contributors
**Henry Hullah, CNN**

As the Beijing Winter Olympics gets underway, artist Ai Weiwei is once again criticizing China's ruling Communist Party — and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which he said is "ignoring" the safety of the country's athletes by prioritizing business and "standing next to the authoritarians."

The world-renowned Chinese dissident and rights activist made the comments to CNN's Christiane Amanpour in an interview from Portugal, where he has been living in self-exile since 2021. Fearing for his safety were he to return to China, where he was once detained for 81 days for "inciting the subversion of state power," Ai has resided around Europe for almost seven years.

Years prior to his departure from his home country, Ai famously consulted on the design of the venue hosting Friday night's opening ceremony: The Beijing National Stadium, or "Bird's Nest."

The open-roofed structure, wrapped in interwoven steel structs, functioned as one of the main venues for the Summer Olympics in 2008. A collaboration with Swiss architecture firm Herzog & de Meuron, the stadium took five years to build and was designed to represent a new, modern China.

Ai Weiwei: International Olympic Committee 'standing next to the authoritarians'

But the artist distanced himself from the project and criticized China's hosting of the Olympics ahead of the opening ceremony, believing it to be a propaganda tool at odds with what he felt were the oppressive realities of life in the country.

"Unfortunately, as an architect, you cannot control how the building is being used," Ai told Amanpour in the interview, which airs Friday. "For me it's a big disappointment, not only in how it's being used but also in the directions China (has taken) in past decades."

In his recently published book "1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows," Ai wrote about the stadium's design, which was inspired by the art of Chinese ceramics. It "aimed to convey the message that freedom was possible," he wrote, and "encapsulated something essential about democracy, transparency and equity."

## "We have to defend everybody who has been mistreated, and only by doing that, can we build a better future."

Ai Weiwei

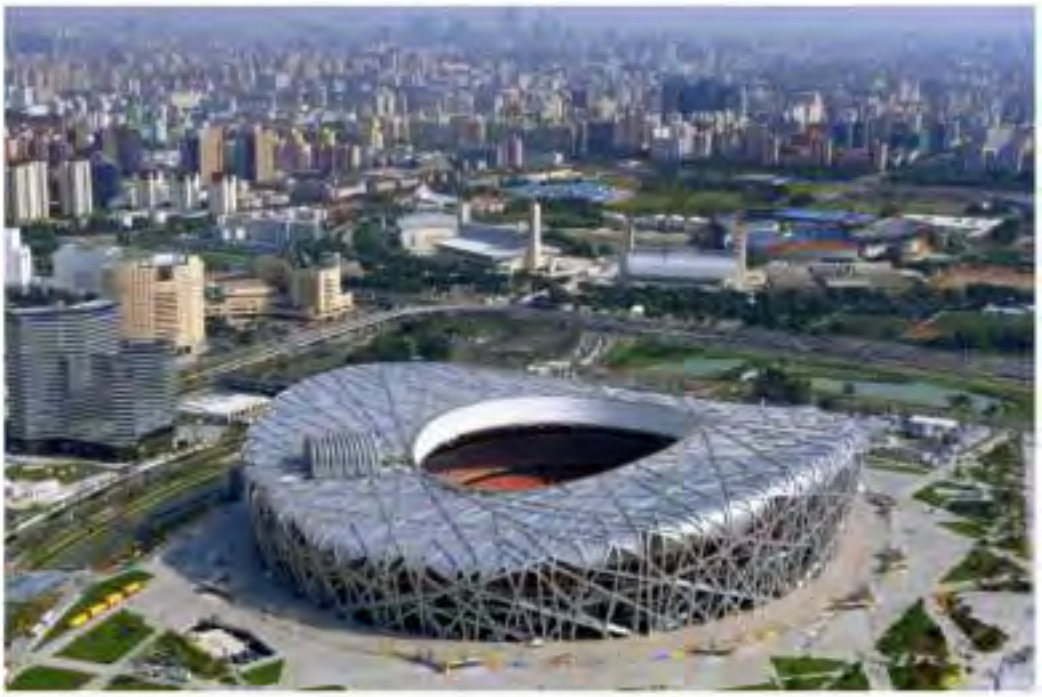
When asked if he really believed, back then, that China would become democratic, free and transparent, Ai responded, "Well, by that time, of course I believed so. But at this moment, I doubt (it)," adding that that the country has, in many ways, gone "backwards."

In the lead up to this year's Winter games, which Ai has also been openly critical of, China has been subjected to increased international scrutiny, from its alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang to its stringent Covid-19 policies to the global concern for the well-being of Chinese tennis player and three-time Olympian, Peng Shuai. Peng disappeared from public view for over two weeks after she accused a former top Communist Party official of sexual assault.

Beijing denies allegations of human rights abuses and has dismissed fears for Peng's safety as "malicious speculation." The IOC, meanwhile, did not respond directly to Ai's accusations, but said in a statement to CNN that it "recognizes and upholds human rights," which are "enshrined" in both the Olympic Charter and the organization's code of ethics. "Given the diverse participation in the Olympic Games," read the statement, "the IOC must remain neutral on global political issues."

But Ai argued that the IOC has "never" been neutral. "They're always standing next to the authoritarians or business," he told Amanpour. "Since the 2008 Olympics, they have been working with the government's propaganda, and this time they are (doing so) even more. They are ignoring the top (Chinese) athletes' safety and well-being."

While the dissident artist has not called for athletes to boycott the games, he appealed to their "sense of justice and fairness," adding: "The Games is about fairness, the competition is about fairness. And so, athletes representing human spirit (should) of course defend those very important issues, such as human rights and freedom of speech.



The Beijing National Stadium also known as the "Bird's Nest."

## A 'citizen of nowhere'

Ai said he wrote "1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows," his first memoir, to show young people what he called the "absurd" reality of living in China.

"I have to write (for) my son's generation to understand what really happened to his father and his grandfather," he told Amanpour. Ai's father, a poet who was also accused of subverting state power, spent time in jail and was sent to a labor camp in Xinjiang when Ai was a child. Ai later joined him in the far northwestern region where, today, China has been accused of genocide by the United States against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities.

Ai said he ultimately left China in 2015 because he lacked a "sense of safety" as an artist. His conceptual works, many of which were considered controversial in China, often contend with the country's past and present using found objects. He has created sculptures from the remains of demolished Ming and Qing dynasty houses, as well as from steel rods salvaged from schools that collapsed during the deadly 2008 Sichuan earthquake. One of his most famous works, a photo triptych from 1995, shows him smashing a Han dynasty urn.

"China is totally under the control of one party, and the party can do anything," he said of his reasons for living in self-exile. "It can make you disappear. It can make you (go on) trial without lawyers. And also, they can put you (for) a long time behind bars. Nobody can (argue with authorities) -- that's the reality. So, if I want to have a sense of safety, a normal life, I have to escape."

Ai has been critical of other countries too, particularly when it comes to the West's treatment of refugees.

"I'm a citizen of the world, if I can call it that. Actually, I'm a citizen of nowhere," he told Amanpour. "So, wherever I see injustice, I always think that's connected. Whatever happens in Afghanistan, in Syria, is connected to China (and) also connected to the United States. We have to understand humanity as one, human rights as one. We have to defend everybody who has been mistreated, and only by doing that, can we build a better future."

*The Guardian*
06 February 2022

The Guardian

Observer New Review
Q&A
Ai Weiwei

Sun 6 Feb 2022 09.30 GMT

Interview

# Ai Weiwei: 'I am like a cat. Cats can play for a whole day'

*Kate Kellaway*

**As his new show opens in Cambridge, the artist reflects on his interest in fakes, why he'd love to go home, and the fate of the Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai**

'The first intention of life itself is to grab something': Ai Weiwei. Photograph: Steffen Roth/The Observer

Ai Weiwei, 64, must qualify by now as a grand old man of contemporary art except that as a sculptor, photographer and documentary film-maker, he is characterised by unflagging energy and youthful playfulness. As a child, he lived in a dugout in China's "Little Siberia" where his poet father, Ai Qing, had been banished, condemned as a "rightist". In 2011, he was "disappeared" for 81 days in a Chinese jail and then spent four years under house arrest. In 2015, he left China and has since lived in Berlin, Cambridge and Portugal. His latest show at Kettle's Yard, The Liberty of Doubt, exhibits Chinese antiquities - bought in 2020 at a Cambridge auction sale - alongside his own work.

**You seem always to have been interested in what constitutes a fake and even once described yourself as simultaneously "sincere and insincere"?**

I talk about fakes all the time. My architecture company in China is called Fake. People joke and say: the only real company, producing real stuff, in China is "Fake". I thought maybe I'd do a show about authenticity. I've been a collector of Chinese antiquities for 30 years. I used to look for them in thousands of shops in China. I enjoyed it because every piece is a mystery. The Cambridge auction happened when I was driving to Portugal. I told my partner to use her garage to store the works - they arrived badly wrapped in newspaper. I realised that many were not authentic but they were not badly made. They were super-good - perfect - except that they did not have the patina of 500 years ago. Then I showed them to friends, one of whom, a retired top US dealer, said: "Weiwei, it is all fake." Another friend who sells antiques in China said: "Not only is this fake. I even know who made it." And I thought: this is interesting.

**There is a 2020 work in the show of a toilet roll made out of marble (2020). Do you like using valuable materials ironically?**

Playfulness is so important - I think I am like a cat. Cats are always wondering. If you throw a paper ball to a cat, it can play for a whole day.... Life is a serious matter, but also ironic. When marble was used in the past, it had a monumental or memorialising status. Toilet paper disappeared from the shelves during the pandemic. This is a society in which we can send a shuttle into outer space yet cannot solve a humble problem - the moment deserved to be remembered.

**In your autobiography, you write of your "wilful tendency to let the dice fall where they may" - does that streak of gambling and opportunism contribute to your art?**

The first intention of life itself is to grab something. It is like a drunk person having to grab something to hold on to... grabbing reflects my mind: as an artist, if I don't grab something, I might as well be dead. It is my inner need to do that.

**To what extent have the years spent living in the dugout influenced your life? What did they teach you about survival? And what did being dirt-poor teach you about riches?**

My father was a poet, and the word "money" never came out of his mouth. He was such a pure man. What mattered was imagination and the spiritual and the daily practice of language. This time was a training in understanding that nothing belongs to you except your mind and your health. The rest is illusion. If I look back, it was an extremely difficult time. If you look at my iPhone, I have this image of the dugout... it was in a vast, vast desert - the Gobi desert - with no sign of life. But we survived. We survived the lack of material things. We also had to protect our dignity from total insult and discrimination - but I didn't really pay much very attention until much later. That time taught me how low humanity can go.

**And at what point in your life did you start to feel a spirit of resistance in yourself?**

When I started to research the students who died in the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, right before the Olympics opened [the Chinese government censored and controlled all information about the earthquake]. Piece by piece, we found them - the names, schools and universities of 5,219 students. I felt desperate at that time. I felt I could collapse at any moment and I knew the authorities could make me disappear easily.

**What would your father have made of your success had he lived to see it?**

He died in 1996. I went back [to China] from New York in 1993. I was trying to stay calmly in China - doing nothing, sometimes playing poker with my brother, just to be there as his son. I knew the time was getting closer and one night we came to the hospital and he had passed away. We didn't have very close relations, we were together all the time but didn't have that much communication. He had been tragic in his life. His mind was always somewhere else. He never wanted me to become an artist. He was tolerant that I did art, but knew what art was like in China, that it could bring all kinds of trouble. He had been punished by doing poetry - so he did not encourage nor try to stop me. He would never have imagined that I would become a well-known artist.

**Do you think your son, Ai Lao, has the artistic or poetic gene?**
He is 13, and I think my son has better potential than me - I was very late in recognising I could do some art but he, I can see, is very creative and with a strong mind and good skill. But I am not sure he would want to become an artist. And I don't give him any advice.

Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo, 2014. Photograph: Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

**One of your films that will be part of the exhibition is Human Flow (2017), about the refugee crisis. I imagine you must have keen fellow feeling for the refugees...**
To be a refugee, you have to give up everything: your language, first; your people, your culture, even your religion. It is never a clear choice. I can understand their courage to give up everything in exchange for their children's future. And many courageous people lose their lives on the way to their destination. That's a price they are paying... They need safety and to be helped and treated with compassion and to be told "here you can stay", but we don't even give that possibility, and that makes me really frustrated. They ask so little and are giving up so much.

**Could you ever envisage living in China again?**
I'd love to go back. My mum is almost 90 and thinks about me and my safety but tells me: do not come back. I take her words seriously. No mum tells her son: "do not come back", but she is sincere because of what she experienced when I was disappeared. In the whole nation, no one could give her one sentence about where I was and that made her older by many years so that, when I came out, I could see all the worry and absence of sleep marked on her face.

**This morning, knowing I was interviewing you, a headline leapt out at me: where is Chinese tennis champion Peng Shuai?**
She is in the very safe hands of the Communist party. They will make sure she behaves exactly according to the party. She may already be thinking she made a mistake in exposing this very deep, dark relationship. She has put her family, friends, career at stake. There is no spirit for her any more. She has become another person, and whatever she tells you is not true.

**I know your work involves many people – how many do you employ regularly in your team and is it really true, as you often modestly argue, that you are mostly the ideas man nowadays?**
We have about 30 people – mostly, they find me. Many have been with me 10, 20 or even 30 years. Once we were together, we became like a family. We live together and have fun. I have survived a difficult life and I am a very handy person – my hands are always working. If your hands are not working, your brain is not going to function. I am very capable: carpentry, stone, iron. I have also become skilful on social media. Everything is about the continuity of learning, and learning comes from curiosity.

**Does your energy *ever* flag?**
I have much less energy, which is natural when you are getting older. My older dog always takes a nap while my younger dog runs round with more curiosity. But when you do something you believe in, it attracts you and you are part of it. You borrow your energy from others.

- The Liberty of Doubt is at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, 12 February-19 June

*The Art Newspaper*
10 February 2022

THE ART NEWSPAPER

# Ai Weiwei sparks outcry by posting 'vaccine-sceptic' video on Instagram

Chinese artist and activist says society does not have the right to make the Covid-19 vaccine compulsory

**Anny Shaw**

10 February 2022

Ai says no Weiwei to Covid-19 vaccine
Photo: Alfred Weidinger

The Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei has sparked outcry for posting a video that appears to cast him as a vaccine sceptic. In a video Ai reposted on Instagram, a group of men dance to the drums and accordion on a hilltop, with the caption: "Me and my friends living off the grid after refusing the vaccine."

However, Ai tells *The Art Newspaper* it is a civil liberty issue. He says: "For or against the vaccine should be individuals' autonomous decision, made for themselves and according to their social interaction, so society does not have the right to make vaccine compulsory. I had vaccines myself but I can completely identify myself with those who do not want to get vaccinated. If individuals are forced to be vaccinated through social pressure and public opinion, it will be a very dangerous social tendency."

He continues: "Regardless of the type of society, individuals are entitled to accurate information and then they can voluntarily collaborate with the government or not. This decision should belong to individuals."

Ai has captioned the video: "#RunForOurRights #treadmill In defence of freedom of press and human rights", framing it as part of a social media campaign he launched in December defending the freedom of press and in support of WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange, who is facing extradition to the US on espionage charges. In 2010, WikiLeaks published hundreds of thousands of leaked files relating to the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Ai kicked off that campaign by posting a video of him running on a treadmill that Assange gave the artist in 2016. It has prompted an outpouring of support, with hundreds of videos created around the world of people running in support of human rights, which Ai has reposted on his Instagram page.

Ai's post on Instagram earlier today

However, Ai's latest video has sparked backlash from his followers. "Did aiww get hacked by anti-vaxxers?" questions one in the comments section. "The vaccine is how we get our lives back without sacrificing half of our community, that's actual human rights. Your art has always given a voice to vulnerable communities, what about the communities vulnerable to Covid 19?" says another. "This is not human right [sic], this is human responsibility!" someone else points out.

Nonetheless, some have posted in support of Ai's stance. "Thank you for speaking up—even if it's differently than those who follow you. It's not just about the vaccine. It's about the mandates," says one follower. "Controversial and freedom loving as always," says another.

China has operated a vigorous vaccination rollout, with the government calling on the tens of millions of people who work at state-owned enterprises, and the roughly 90 million Communist Party members, to encourage the drive. In some areas, local officials have pushed for mandatory vaccines. For example, residents in Wanning in the southern province of Hainan have been told they will be blacklisted from receiving government benefits or using public transport if they fail to get vaccinated.

Countries that have introduced mandatory Covid-19 vaccines for all or parts of their populations and workforces include Austria, Italy, Greece, France, Germany, Croatia, Ecuador, Fiji, Oman, Turkey, the US, New Zealand, Philippines and Indonesia.

*The Guardian*
11 February 2022

The Guardian

# Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt review – so dull and sentimental it's offensive

★★☆☆☆

'Another brilliant act of antiquity abuse' ... Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo, 2014. Photograph: Ai Weiwei Studio

## Kettle's Yard, Cambridge

The iconoclast's opposition to the Chinese state has been admirably brave. But this edgeless, confused and mawkish show suggests his art is less so

In 1995 Ai Weiwei held up an ancient Chinese ceramic vessel, opened his arms to let it go, and stood there as it shattered. His new exhibition about craft and fakery includes a recent remake of Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn in Lego. It's impressive how the black, white and grey

Lego bricks create shadowy Warholian images of the artist in three stages of smashing a masterpiece.

I feel obliged to explain. But I can't, really. I don't actually know what is clever about smashing an archaeological treasure - the Han dynasty ruled China when the Roman Empire ruled Europe - so I will quote the exhibition guide instead: the "transformative act" of destroying a 2,000-year-old work of art (transforming it into little tiny pieces, I guess) "drew attention to the Chinese government's widespread destruction of the country's heritage".

And there you have this exhibition in a nutshell: a display of sometimes amusing but superficial art that we are urged to appreciate as "important" because of the artist's unquestionably heroic political acts. Ai Weiwei is a true hero of free speech, braver than most of us will ever be, and - in his tireless campaigning for refugees - compassionate, too. I admire him deeply. But this exhibition made me seriously doubt whether he is a good artist.

The problem with his new version of Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn is that he wants to have his cake and smash it. The alleged campaigning, critical point is the direct opposite of what it actually makes us feel. Seeing him smash an urn, we laugh. We don't ponder the erosion of China's heritage. Instead we enjoy seeing it happen before our eyes. And remaking the original photographs in Lego just accentuates that celebration of irony, freedom, the throwaway modern world.

I think even that is an overreading. The gesture is - literally - throwaway. For in this show it sometimes seems Ai Weiwei is better at throwing concepts in the air than clarifying what he means by them, as they crash to earth.

The Lego shares a gallery with old-fashioned wood-framed display cases containing a collection of ancient art from China that Ai Weiwei bought in 2020. It's a mix of styles and periods, including a buckled-up image of a crouching hare in red sandstone and a sensual broken limestone Buddha. The artist claims at least five of these apparently time-hallowed sculptures are modern fakes. For the forgery business is so refined in contemporary China it is transforming the historical record.

The gallery points out the "fakes". For what it's worth I think they do look dodgy. Their surfaces are cleaner and sharper. The signs of age appear artificial. But perhaps Ai Weiwei is playing with my mind, presenting the real as fake, the fake as real.

'The marble is overstated and artistically heavy' ... Surveillance Camera and Plinth, 2014. Photograph: Ai Weiwei Studio

If only I cared. The myth of authenticity, the fascination of the fake - this is the small change of postmodernism that has been around for decades now. As with smashing a Han urn, mixing real and fake ancient Chinese art just gets in the way of any chance, as a westerner, I might have of responding aesthetically to this art. We live in an entire world of inauthentic replicas. It is not at all daring or memorable to point that out, again.

At least when Damien Hirst celebrates the inauthentic he does it on a colossal scale in his bad taste epic museum of fake treasures, The Wreck of the Unbelievable. But I suspect snooty, cosy Kettle's Yard wouldn't touch Damien with a surgical glove on the end of a bargepole. This exhibition is boring because its urge to provoke is constantly checked by an insistence on Ai Weiwei's moral excellence.

I cannot believe Ai Weiwei has put his name to a set of blue and white porcelain plates with childish paintings of refugees on them. A helicopter buzzing a crowd! A boat crammed with people - painted on a porcelain plate! It's the kind of cheap, easy "gesture" I'd expect of Grayson Perry. Though that may be unfair - at least Perry aspires to satire. These well-meaning platters are merely mawkish and sentimental. I feel offended to have my distress at the treatment of refugees pandered to in this way.

Advertisement

One sad possibility is that Ai Weiwei has the same problem now as dissident writers who fled communist Europe in the 1970s or 80s. The real meaning and power of his art lay in the sheer courage of his opposition to China's dictatorial state. In exile, he is adrift. Some of the art here muddies his previously clear stance for freedom by implying democracy is just as unfree as a totalitarian state. Surveillance Camera and Plinth is a marble replica of a security camera – it might be anywhere, from Beijing to Cambridge city centre. But the meaning of these objects surely depends on how they are used, why and where.

Anyway, the marble is overstated and artistically heavy. There are other everyday objects imitated in stone – a marble toilet roll, a jade sex toy and smartphone. Funny for a moment, but so what? Their meanings remain in the shallow end. Marcel Duchamp, more that a century ago, "chose" objects from the world as readymade art. His levity mocks Ai Weiwei's stone gravity. Turning readymades into marble and jade is a ponderous way to make your point.

In another brilliant act of antiquity abuse, he's painted the Coca-Cola logo on a Han vase. It symbolises this exhibition, which itself resembles the cool Cambridge outlet of a global brand. But the guy is phoning it in, on a jade iPhone.

- Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt is at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, from 12 February to 19 June

*The Telegraph*
11 February 2022

The Telegraph

❝ REVIEW

# Ai Weiwei, Kettle's Yard, review: a witty middle-finger to the Chinese vandals-in-chief

★★★★☆ 4/5

In this exhibition, The Liberty of Doubt, the dissident artist blends past and present to query the CCP's values – and those closer to home

*By* **Alastair Sooke**, CHIEF ART CRITIC
11 February 2022 • 12:01am

Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo (1994) by Ai Weiwei

Globalisation, the Covid-19 pandemic, "geopolitical crises" – oh, and the tiny matter of "truth": these are the grand themes of Ai Weiwei's new exhibition, The Liberty of Doubt, at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge. If that sounds vainglorious, don't be deterred. Because, arranged within the beautiful, Jamie Fobert-

designed galleries recently grafted onto the rickety cottages that the collector Jim Ede turned into a sanctuary of modern art, this show sparkles with connections and ideas.

Born in Beijing in 1957, and routinely described as a "dissident" thanks to his long, traumatic tussle with the Chinese Communist Party, Ai here, in what he calls a single installation, for the first time juxtaposes his own work with historical objects: 14 fragmentary, and mostly Buddhist, Chinese antiquities, including a tactile red-puddingstone sculpture of a crouched hare possibly once used as a paperweight.

After settling in Cambridge in 2018, he picked them up at an auction in the city. Doubting the authenticity of several of his purchases (apparently, Chinese craftsmen are now so skilled it requires radiocarbon-dating to tell a copy from an original), he decided to display all of them at Kettle's Yard within bespoke wood-and-glass display cases, provoking a game of spot-the-difference.

Alongside the Buddhist deities and bodhisattvas, he also presents his Dragon Vase (2017), a replica of a red-and-white Ming vessel indistinguishable from the real thing except for one significant detail: the scaly creature snaking across its swelling form has six claws rather than the traditional imperial five. It's unclear whether this extra talon refers to the CCP or the individual's uncrushable power to resist: it's significant, perhaps, that one of Ai's favourite motifs is showing the middle finger.

Nearby, a well-known photographic triptych, in which Ai drops a Han Dynasty urn (to lament the destruction of China's heritage during the Cultural Revolution), is recreated, curiously, out of Lego; during my visit, someone was still labouring to replace the monochromatic bricks that had come loose in transit. Anyone concerned that something so cheap and mass-produced should be exhibited at Kettle's Yard will be dismayed to learn that, elsewhere, the artist includes a jade sculpture of a sex toy. I suspect that Ai, who calls Lego his "favourite medium", enjoys working with these little plastic blocks because, like fakes, they upend our hierarchy of values. They also reflect tensions between individuality and conformism, and, here, reminded me of the millions of grey porcelain sunflower seeds which he scattered across Tate Modern in 2010.

Surveillance Camera with Plinth (2014) by Ai Weiwei

A second gallery mostly contains Ai's work, much of it produced over the past decade. A Han Dynasty urn emblazoned, in an act of seeming vandalism, with the Coca-Cola logo appears alongside another with traces of its original decoration of swirling, interlacing clouds: the "rhyme" with the trademark's flowing script is remarkable – and, surely, an indictment of the tawdriness of contemporary society.

Blue-and-white porcelain plates with imagery, like photography from a war zone, of boats and barbed wire and bullet-ridden bodies, evoking the refugee crisis, are somewhat voyeuristic, and smack of disaster tourism; another porcelain platter, Brain Inflation (2012), is much stronger. Reproducing a scan of the swollen contents of the artist's skull, after he was beaten up by the police and suffered a cerebral haemorrhage, it's a brutal but darkly witty object, in which Ai's brain (appropriately, given that it appears on a plate) looks edible, like a slice of carpaccio, while his eyes resemble boiled eggs: the dissident served up as a snack for the state. Jade handcuffs and a marble surveillance camera on a plinth also commemorate his persecution.

Elsewhere, Ai bemoans our planet-damaging, throwaway consumerist habits. There's even a Duchampian marble sculpture of a toilet roll, like the debased descendant of an ancient Chinese "cong" (a ritual tubular object), which harks back to the panic-buying at the start of the pandemic. Thus, surprisingly perhaps, this exhibition reveals Ai to be something of a conservative, brimming with connoisseurial passion for the cultural history of his homeland, as well as an artist with an impish sense of humour.

*From Saturday until June 19. Information: kettlesyard.co.uk*

*The Times*
11 February 2022

THE TIMES

# Ai Weiwei on tyranny, optimism and being a rebel at 64

## Rachel Campbell-Johnston talks to the artist about his new show at Kettle's Yard and his move to Portugal

Ai Weiwei's exhibition will bring his artwork together with antique pieces that he purchased
ZENITH RICHARDS/BAFTA/CAMERA PRESS

Rachel Campbell-Johnston | Friday February 11 2022, 12.01am, The Times

We are struggling our way out of the pandemic's grip. We are starting to dare to reclaim former freedoms. Yet the fight is far from over, warns Ai Weiwei, the world's most famous artistic activist, if we want to keep that democracy and freedom of speech that he describes as the "true immune system" of our society.

The pandemic has left us, Ai believes, "even more divided, more confused" than before. "Governments and scientists have worked hard," he explains, "but at the

same time there has been so much serious contradiction between them, and public argument has become so very polarised, so polluted, that people have basically lost perspective on life itself, on how to act individually." And many governments, he warns, have been using these divisions as an "easy excuse to make authoritarian control more efficient".

These are the sorts of issues upon which Ai encourages us to reflect as he stages a new exhibition at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge. *Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt* will bring 13 of his artworks — some new, some already familiar — together with antique pieces that he bought at auction. The show's aim, he suggests, is to question our notions of "truth"; to compare eastern and western ideas about what constitutes liberty; to open up space for questions and argue for political transparency.

Ai says that he is enjoying a slower pace of life in Portugal
RICCARDO GHILARDI/CONTOUR/GETTY IMAGES

Ai, dressed in a high-buttoned collarless black shirt and seated against a blank background, could be anywhere when he comes up on my Zoom screen, but his broad face, framed by close-cropped hair and a trimmed beard, is suntanned. He is in his new house in Montemor-o-Novo, about an hour east of Lisbon, it emerges. Ai moved there last year, having left first Berlin, where he was offered safe haven in 2015 (when his passport, which the Chinese authorities had confiscated, was returned), then Cambridge, where he moved four years later so that his son Ai Lao, now on the verge of his teens, could get an English education.

"It's beautiful here in Portugal," he tells me. "There is sunshine — the sun is so generous — and green trees. I can't see another building. This country has taken a nap since the 15th century and still hasn't quite woken up, so I am enjoying its slowness and this escape from the industrial revolution."

Although the farmhouse — which he found on his first day in Portugal and immediately bought — is "OK and perfectly comfortable, if you are a traveller there is no destination". Sometimes, he admits, he tries "to set up some obstacles" for himself. He established a studio in Berlin. He is planning to do the same in Portugal where he has already gathered a team of five assistants, not to mention a menagerie of eight cats, three dogs and a number of exotic birds. In Cambridge he and his film-maker partner Wang Fen got involved with the school.

Yet in the long run, Ai says, "Every house is for me only a hotel. It doesn't matter how good or bad it is because my home will only ever be Beijing." And although he confesses he would happily give up everything he has established at any moment to return to his homeland, he remains uncertain as to whether he ever will. Every day, he tells me, he speaks to his 90-year-old mother in China, and at the end of each conversation she says: "Son, I love you. You are the reason that keeps me alive — but, son, don't come back."

A diorama in the series S.A.C.R.E.D, showing Ai's imprisonment in China
ALAMY

It's hardly surprising given the life story that Ai recounted in the autobiography he published last year. Born in 1957 amid what he described as "the thick fog of a communist narrative", he was barely ten when his father, one of China's most famous poets, fell foul of the authorities during the Cultural Revolution. Sentenced to hard labour, he was banished to a barren salt plain for "remoulding" in a region dubbed "Little Siberia". Ai went with him to live, for five years, in a dugout at temperatures that descended to minus 30C.

A further three years of hardship and routine humiliation were still to pass before, in 1975, the family were finally authorised to return to Beijing. And even then, the death of Mao the next year did little to ameliorate matters. "Death took away an era soaked in evil, leaving us only with the habit of clinging ignobly to life," Ai wrote.

Before finally leaving China, he was to suffer horrendously at the hands of the state: put under house arrest with 24-hour surveillance, imprisoned on trumped-up charges of tax evasion, and beaten so badly that he suffered a brain haemorrhage.

A Chinese white marble Buddhist deity that will be on display at Ai Weiwei's Kettle's Yard show

In his career, there is little that Ai hasn't done in the name of art or protest — or indeed playfully provocative fun — to hold to account the authorities that had tried so hard (but so hopelessly) to suppress his individualism. Even his harrowing 2011 imprisonment was turned into an artwork. A nearly lifesized diorama invited spectators to spy into the humiliations of his ordeal.

Art is never just for art's sake, Ai declares. That, he asserts, is "the biggest lie of the 20th century". It is the "ridiculous" confection of a "corrupted west", of "a capitalist bourgeois who wanted something to decorate their walls". Yet "art is part of humanity", he says. It is part of "our compassion, our fear, our imagination" — all things, he adds, that are too often overlooked by a "polluted" educational system that treats learning as "a ladder to success".

"Education is basically trying to teach people how to be useful; it is about trying to provide the right workforce for different professions rather than teaching people to recognise their own sense of rightness or beauty or creative activity. Art cannot be separated from its social function," he insists. "In Chinese tradition, the artist is everything. He's a scientist, a scholar, a thinker and I'm sure some kind of activist." Although Ai resists the word "activist" as a label, which western culture — "the west likes its vocabulary" — has pinned on him.

It is not that he thinks that he can see "the truth", he stresses. In his native culture, he explains, "there is no such thing as absolute truth or absolute fake . . . The truth, in philosophy or in art, is always seen as a river: the view can change, but still the water is flowing."

Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo, 1994

This is the idea that Ai sets out to explore in his Kettle's Yard show. During the pandemic he bought several thousand antiques online from a Cambridge auction house, only to later realise that several of them were what the west would term "fake", in the sense that "they were not made in the period to which they refer".

He says: "In the west the real is worth a fortune and the fake is worth nothing, but in China that is not so. In China, art works are copied and copied down the dynasties, each generation memorising and copying the work of the master, providing a differing interpretation of the same subject matter."

Visitors to Kettle's Yard will find, for instance, a marble replica of a surveillance camera of the sort that Chinese authorities used to monitor him. Many will recognise it as a familiar piece, made more than a decade ago. It alludes to the Ming period when functional objects were crafted from luxurious materials. (Ai took the idea to bawdy extremes in a butt plug carved from jade.) Yet now, in an added twist, the camera is mounted on a marble base that replicates a 1,500-year-old lamp Ai bought. It was made to light a tomb, he explains, to show that there will be light, and hence life, even amid the grave's darkness.

The two marble objects, modern and ancient, match stylistically, but by combining them a new meaning is created. "It's about where we place value, about monitoring power, about who is monitoring whom and who has control," he says.

The art is not prescriptive, however. Ai's creations, not to mention his ardent contributions to social media, are emphatically about throwing open debate, about examining problems with the human empathy without which, he says, "there is no art". He sees, for example, the "very good" and the "extremely bad" in social media — although for him, he admits, it's been "totally good".

Dragon Vase, 2017

He does not veer to the side of communism or capitalism: "neither is the solution". Arguments about refugees, to which he has been a vocal contributor, will only start to find resolution when we realise that "there is no fundamental difference between them and us. There always have been refugees and there always will be. We have to understand how to share and to help. Throwing them out at the doorway is not the answer."

Ai recognises that he might have made mistakes in his youth. "Youth is a time full of imagination, but imagination is a very limited resource" and "when I was young I was completely empty-handed, though of course my mind was working all the time". Yet he never regrets any of his past stances or opinions. "I still get lost," he says, "but I don't get confused. And I try to do the best that I can at that moment, using my responsibilities, judgment and passion." As to changing his mind: "It's like being in the boxing ring: to change your mind is very dangerous."

What happens to his art is of little concern to him. "It comes from me like water from a spring and what people do with it, whether they drink it or use it to wash the toilet, is not under my control." Still, as the Winter Olympics take place in Beijing, he sees the Bird's Nest stadium, the design of which he collaborated on, being once again put to the sort of propagandist purposes that he detests. In 2008 he boycotted the Beijing Games in protest at how the authorities were using them to whip up nationalism. Now, although dismayed, he sounds more resigned. "It's like any other building. It will be used again and again for a long time.

Surveillance Camera with Plinth, 2014

"Our world is pretty corrupted and going down very fast. We have never faced such a big global problem; such challenges from the authoritarian state and such deterioration of democracy," Ai says. He looks at what's happening in Brazil, the US or any number of other nations, and sees decades of democratisation coming to an end. "We are seeing a huge setback to the idea of the liberal state. Many of these countries are in crisis and this leaves enormous space for authoritarian regimes."

However, he remains optimistic "that life can serve a much higher purpose than just to make money or look for opportunities to win the economic battle". His most important creative achievement, he says, is communication. "I have no clear purpose except to get my voice out. This is the most important thing we can do, and we do it of course with the help of art."

As for himself, he is happy, he declares, although he adds that "without sadness we don't know the meaning of happy". He enjoys the sunshine of Portugal, drinking tea, watching his cats and, he adds graciously, talking to me. He raises his glass of tea to the computer screen as if in a toast. His family are not with him, but he doesn't get lonely "except for when I go to parties", he says with a laugh. He feels no urgency — "except when I need to go to the toilet". His proudest achievement, he states, is simply that "I can still breathe. My heart has been functioning for 65 years, and it's still going, just quietly pumping. I am really proud of that little piece of loyal equipment."

Ai may have earned the title of China's most "controversial and dangerous" artist. He has kept on producing his work, he says, but often at great risk. He has certainly suffered for it. "But what has happened to me is a miracle. I feel that I have a wonderful life."

***Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt*** **is at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (kettlesyard.co.uk) from Feb 12 to June 19**

*The Art Newspaper*
15 February 2022

THE ART NEWSPAPER

# Inaugural Hawaii Triennial considers social activism, climate change and the Westernisation of Asia-Pacific

Gabrielle Angeleti

15 February 2022

The exhibition, which began as a biennial, has been curated by Melissa Chiu, Miwako Tezuka and Drew Kahu'āina Broderick

Installation view of Ai Weiwei, *Roots* (2018-ongoing)
Photo: Cat Lee. Courtesy Honolulu Contemporary

The inaugural edition of the Hawaii Triennial, titled *Pacific Century - E Ho'oman no Moananuiākea*, opens across seven venues in Oahu this week, featuring works by more than 40 artists and collectives from Hawaii, the Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere, such as Ai Weiwei, Izumi Kato and Sun Xun.

According to the curator Melissa Chiu, the director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC, whose background includes extensive curatorial work focused on Asia-Pacific, the exhibition has some overarching themes like social activism and climate change, but more specifically responds to cultural and historical narratives tied to specific sites on the island.

Among some highlights, Ai will install trees from his series *Roots* (2018-ongoing)—a collection of iron-cast versions of endangered trees from the Brazilian rainforest—in the Foster Botanical Garden in Honolulu. The work aims to critique the settler, imperialist and corporate practices on the island that have upended traditions of the Indigenous Hawaiian population. And the artist Richard Bell will install an iteration of his roving work *Embassy* (2013-ongoing) that considers Indigenous histories through the lens of Westernised institutions on the grounds of the Iolani Palace, the residence of the last reining Hawaiian monarch, Queen Liliuokalani, who was imprisoned and forced to abdicate.

Chiu organised the exhibition in collaboration with Miwako Tezuka, the associate director of the Reversible Destiny Foundation in New York and previously an associate curator at the Asia Society Museum, and Drew Kahu'āina Broderick, the director of the Koa Gallery of the Kapiolani Community College in Honolulu.

"As the geographic midpoint between the US and Asia-Pacific, Hawaii has its own unique cultural landscape, starting with the native Hawaiian perspective but also including various different immigrant voices, especially from Asia and other parts of the world," Chiu tells *The Art Newspaper*.

The title and curatorial theme of the exhibition, drawn from a term introduced as Asia-Pacific grew in economic prominence, explores "Hawaii as a central rather than peripheral place, not just from a geopolitical but also a cultural standpoint", she adds.

The title and curatorial theme of the exhibition, drawn from a term introduced as Asia-Pacific grew in economic prominence, explores "Hawaii as a central rather than peripheral place, not just from a geopolitical but also a cultural standpoint", she adds.

The exhibition began as a biennial in 2017 organised by the Honolulu Biennial Foundation, a non-profit organisation that was renamed Hawaii Contemporary in 2020 after two successful biennials that collectively drew more than 200,000 visitors.

The triennial's venues include: the Bishop Museum, the Foster Botanical Garden, the Hawaii Theatre Center, the Hawaii State Art Museum, Iolani Palace, Honolulu Museum of Art and Royal Hawaiian Center.

*Financial Times*
16 February 2022

FT FINANCIAL TIMES

Visual Arts ✓ Added

# Ai Weiwei at Kettle's Yard – a story of faith and fakes

The artist's show in Cambridge combines authentic artefacts with forgeries and his own artworks

**En Liang Khong** FEBRUARY 16 2022

The idea that we might trust an artwork seems strange. But what if I were to tell you that your favourite piece — a Gauguin in a museum, or a performance of a Rachmaninov piano concerto, say — was a fake? That the painting was actually a forgery, or the recording was a hoax (indeed, both have actually happened). Would you be able to see it or hear it in the same way? Or would you feel something akin to betrayal?

At Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, the city that became a home for Ai Weiwei in 2018 following his self-imposed exile from China, the dissident artist has filled the galleries with an assortment of Chinese antiquities alongside his own artworks that either ape or playfully vandalise ancient masterpieces, as well as outright fakes, for his exhibition *The Liberty of Doubt*. The story they tell us has a lot to say about how we approach art.

The mass desecration of China's heritage under the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s was traumatic for many. But that frenzy of iconoclasm was followed by a mania for the distant past. In the 1990s, Ai spent his days wandering Beijing's antique markets, developing a taste for ancient artefacts. In a triptych of now infamous photographs, he recorded himself letting a Han dynasty urn fall to the ground, his face impassive as it lay shattered in pieces. In *The Liberty of Doubt*, that iconic moment is recreated on a grand scale in Lego bricks (one of the artist's favoured materials).

Ai also shows us one of his Coca-Cola vases, in which he has treated another piece of Han dynasty earthenware to the familiar curling logo in red paint. He offers a visual thread to its sweeping font by placing it alongside an ancient funerary jar decorated with swirling clouds, designed to be placed in a tomb to accompany the dead into another world. Both vessels hint at the unexpected afterlives of objects: one defaced with the branding of modern capitalism, the other venerated on a plinth.

In a repurposed mahogany display case which once sat in the British Museum, Ai offers up a cabinet of curiosities: a roll of toilet paper and a takeaway box sculpted in gleaming white stone, a pair of handcuffs and anal beads carved out of jet-black jade. His "Surveillance Camera with Plinth" (2014) squats close by, in which the marble CCTV head perches on a pedestal modelled after a lamppost from the Northern Qi dynasty. And in another typical Weiwei-ism, "Dragon Vase" (2017), Ai sets out to faithfully recreate a piece of red and white Ming porcelain. But whereas the emperor of that era enjoyed the privilege of a dragon motif with five claws (his courtiers were allowed four), Ai cannot resist giving his scaly serpent six talons: a kind of forger's signature.

There's an odd feeling in seeing such mischievous art appear alongside works that also boast of their worthiness. A sequence of Ai's "Blue-and-White Porcelain Plates" (2017) feature scenes from the refugee crisis, populated with small dinghies swaying on choppy water, helicopters hovering overhead, and clouds of tear gas. The crude illustrations manage to be both grotesque and banal: the cynical deployment of tropes of south-east Asia in the service of a kind of political slogan. Sincerity is not the same as artistic merit.

Sometimes, it feels as if Ai has lost his economy of means in his journey towards celebrity activism. You can feel it in his recent film-making too — for instance, *Cockroach* (2020), Ai's documentary on the pro-democracy protests

in Hong Kong (which the gallery is screening alongside his other recent films on the refugee crisis and the pandemic in Wuhan). The film is filled with long drone-eye shots as protesters face off against heavily armed police, clouds from smoke grenades slowly drifting down highways, suggesting scenes from an apocalyptic blockbuster.

In the history of Chinese social cinema, Ai has played an outsize role: his films on the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, and the devastation magnified by the state's failures, emphasised the right of the citizen to confront power, constantly shoving the camera in front of figures of supposed responsibility. That jagged naturalism — of the defiant activist wielding a mobile camera — has slipped away.

The installation that Ai creates in the gallery below is more impressive. Here he has placed a collection of ancient figurines recently acquired at auction, many laden with Buddhist symbolism. Some, however, Ai suspects are carefully crafted forgeries. Entering the room, my gaze falls on a handsome wine-coloured hare, carved out of mottled puddingstone: a Sui dynasty paperweight. Paired in the same vitrine is a ghostly hand in lacquered greystone, clutching a bottle: it's a fragment of what was once a Bodhisattva statue, possibly dating back to the Northern Qi dynasty. In another case, a veined black marble Laozi sits with a hint of a smile, waving a fan. But this is a forgery: the apparent signs of age and damage may be the deliberate movement of a chisel — the marks of mischief rather than the marks of time.

**The paradox of forgery is that art often requires some measure of self-deception**

We behave differently towards something we know is false. We fool ourselves into thinking we can spot the signs of deceit. A Buddhist deity perched on a lotus throne even carries traces of pigment that imply the original once appeared in bright colours: yet this too is thought to be a cunning copy, made in recent decades. The artist Doug Fishbone tried out something similar when he snuck a cheap Chinese knock-off of Fragonard's "Young Woman" (1769) — commissioned from a company in Fujian famed for its counterfeit artworks — into the Dulwich Picture Gallery in 2015 and challenged visitors to spot the fake (they mostly failed).

"It's powerful only because someone thinks it's powerful and invests value in the object," Ai once said of his smashed urn — in destroying it, he was challenging that authority. And in his mission to question the ways we assign value to objects based on notions of authenticity, at Kettle's Yard he poses as both connoisseur and conman. Fakes and copies sabotage the leap of faith involved in looking at art.

But the paradox of forgery is that art often requires some measure of self-deception. How many people really know about the specialist fabrication companies that transform the visions of Jeff Koons, for instance, into giant stainless steel balloon dogs? Ai too commissions his finely crafted ceramics from specialist artisans, although you won't see their names on the wall labels.

The history of art is also a history of inauthenticity (after all, Michelangelo began his career by forging Roman sculptures, palming them off on to a gullible cardinal). We talk a lot these days about how the contemporary art world has become little more than asset management, filled with arcane sub-deals and inflated sales. Yet none of that would be possible without our belief in the artworks themselves: the hope that we can have an encounter with a piece of the creator's soul. Buyer, beware.

*To June 19, kettlesyard.co.uk*

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17 February 2022

artnet news

**Art World**

# ‘Ninety Percent of the History You Learned Is Nonsense’: Ai Weiwei on Blending Political Reality With Counterfeit Art in His New Show

“The Liberty of Doubt” at Kettle’s Yard is more than just a survey of the famed artist’s recent work.

**Vivienne Chow**, February 17, 2022

Portrait of Ai Weiwei, 2022. Photo credit: Helen Dickinson

“Truth is a relative concept,” Ai Weiwei told Artnet News recently, on the occasion of the opening of “The Liberty of Doubt,” the solo exhibition that has just opened at the Kettle’s Yard in Cambridge. “What we need to keep asking is not whether certain things or events are true or not, but whether we, ourselves, are true or not.”

The Kettle's Yard show offers a juxtaposition of 13 of Ai's own works from the past decade with a range of antiquities that he acquired at a 2020 auction in Cambridge, where he spends a good part of his time. The exhibition also features three documentary films he has produced in recent years: *Cockroach* (2020), a visual record of the 2019 Hong Kong protests; *Coronation* (2020), which offers a glimpse into Wuhan, the epicenter of the early stage of the Covid-19 pandemic; and *Human Flow* (2017), which centers around the global refugee crisis.

Among the 14 artifacts on display, some are believed to be authentic antiques dating from the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534 CE) and Tang (618–907 CE), according to the artist. The rest, however, are thought by the Ai to be counterfeits or copies that were made in much later years.

Ai Weiwei, *Dragon Vase* (2017). Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio.

These antique pieces, however, have not been formally examined by experts, and they are exhibited alongside Ai's works that also play with ideas of authenticity: *Marble Toilet Paper* (2020), a sculpture in the shape of a soft toilet roll made of the hard marble, created in response to Covid-19 pandemic panic buying; *Dragon Vase* (2017), which is a near exact replica of a porcelain vase from Ming dynasty (1368–1644 CE); and *Handcuffs* (2011), alluding to the arrest and detention of Ai by the Chinese authorities in 2011. Ai's *Blue-and-White Porcelain Plates* (2017) feature imagery that echo the scenes from the three documentary films, being screened nearby.

Left: A Chinese white marble Buddhist deity (Figure of a Bodhisattva) in Northern Wei Dynasty style. Right: A Chinese limestone Buddhist votive stele in Northern Wei Dynasty style. Photo: Vivienne Chow

"About half the works are fakes and half are real," Ai explained. "More than 90 percent [of the exhibition-goers] cannot identify what's real and what's fake. Hence, doubt is important, especially in today's political situation. There's a tendency to erase the possibility of doubt, which is very dangerous to our development."

But what *is* the truth? The artist has said that there are vast differences between the notions of truth in the Western world, which adheres to a standard of absolute truth, and that found in Chinese philosophy, which has a more fluid concept of truth. Explaining such differences to a Western audience has always been a challenge to him.

A scene from Ai Weiwei's documentary film *Cockroach* (2020).

"What you see in front of you may not be true, and what appears to be unreal may not be false. I want to get people to discuss this," said Ai, referring to his works on show, and in particular to the three documentaries that attempt to offer a glimpse into three key chapters of recent history.

"We only see fragments [of reality] because they are easier to grasp. The complete truth can often be too emotional, with too many conflicts," he said. "The way we look at history is even more fragmented. Ninety percent of the history you learned at university is nonsense."

That theme of challenging how we tell history permeates a number of Ai Weiwei's recent projects, in different ways. It is present in his online initiative to raise awareness for the case of the jailed WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange (part of which will be featured in his upcoming show at Vienna's Albertina Modern in March). And it is definitely an inspiration for his topical, political staging of the opera *Turandot*, which is set to open in Rome in March (even as he was opening his Cambridge show, his team was bombarding him with edited video clips connected to the production for approval).

At Kettle's Yard show and beyond, Ai seems ready to embrace whatever mediums allow him to press his case, while also staying true to his own defiantly singular creative process. "I'm like a chef, cooking dishes depending on what I can find in the backyard," the

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# ai weiwei presents the liberty of doubt at kettle's yards in cambridge

## ORIGINALS AND FAKES INHABIT AI WEIWEI'S THE LIBERTY OF DOUBT EXHIBITION

cambridge's kettle's yard is presenting a new solo exhibition by renowned chinese artist [redacted] titled ai weiwei: the liberty of doubt. the show explores notions of truth, authenticity and value, as well as globalization, the [redacted] paradigm, and the current geopolitical crisis, with new and existing works shown among historic chinese objects. the show sees the artist reflect on the notion of liberty in the west, in contrast to china and other authoritarian regimes, questioning truth and authority, expressing doubt and insisting transparency in political systems.

*'in china, everything, including the human condition and aesthetic judgements, is considered a part of nature,' said ai weiwei. 'the concept of 'truth' is also part of nature and hence not an absolute. that's why reinterpretation, re-modeling and recreation of artworks through personal reflections are valued more in the common perception than artworks which are deemed absolutely 'true' or 'real'. this is a unique and blurred understanding of 'truth' is not only a chinese state of mind with respect to philosophical expression (including matters, aesthetics and ethics), but also what distinguishes china from the west in the nature of aesthetic and social considerations.*

beloved ai weiwei, dragon vase (2017). courtesy ai weiwei studio
*beloved han dynasty urn with coca-cola logo (1994) by ai weiwei*

## THE ARTIST JUXTAPOSES HIS OWN WORK WITH ANTIQUITIES

*the ai weiwei: the liberty of doubt exhibition at kettle's yards is a single installation with 13 artworks exhibited along 14 antiquities which the artist bought at an auction in cambridge in 2010. this marks the first time [redacted] juxtaposes historic chinese objects with his own work. some antique pieces are original, dating back to northern wei (386- 534 CE) and tang (618-907 CE) while others have been identified as counterfeits, later copies of original works.*

*recent films made by ai weiwei will also be presented, including [redacted] (2020), cockroach (2020), and human flow (2017). two fairytale chairs (2007) will be available for visitors to use.*

surveillance camera with plinth, 2014. Image by Ioannis Tawoulas)

the earlier works on display play upon the modern and the traditional, such is the case of *his dynasty urn with coca cola logo* (2014) which sits along a similar vessel from the *han dynasty — chinese painted han dynasty pottery gradated 'cocoon' vase*. the surveillance camera with plinth (2014), which is a replica of the lamp posts from the

marble takeout box (2015), marble toilet paper (2020) and marble hat (2015) allude to gluttonism and the ongoing pandemic. the worship of contemporary objects is showcased with *iPhone colors!* (2013) which is juxtaposed with buddhist statues.

by displaying works from different periods together and those whose full identity has not yet been researched or established, the artist draws attention to the ways in which we attribute meaning and value to objects.

marble takeout container, 2015 by ai weiwei. image by rosanna hawkins/unk gregory powell

**exhibition info:**

**name:** ai weiwei: the libero of doubt
**location:** [illegible] zurich
**dates:** 12 february 2022 – 19 june 2022

*Highsnobiety*
17 February 2022

HIGHSNOBIETY

(FRONTPAGE 107)

# AI WEIWEI IS EMBRACING THE BEAUTIFUL EMPTINESS

WORDS: CHRIS ERIK THOMAS
PHOTOGRAPHY: SPYROS RENNT

*In this FRONTPAGE feature, we spent time in the Berlin studio of the legendary Ai Weiwei. Though heralded as one of the most important contemporary artists working, he tells us why he hasn't "accomplished anything."*

Down a cold, cement staircase and through a cavernous tunnel somewhere in Berlin, Ai Weiwei sits quietly at a long table in a brick hall. It's early, and as the city outside begins to wake up, Ai is busy scrolling through his phone and sipping tea. A few feet away, sunlight streams into an open courtyard set two floors below ground. There's a serenity and completeness to the scene because, in a way, this former brewery turned underground art studio is a perfect metaphor for the artist's journey. Here, in what he calls his "underground temple," Ai has found peace and come full circle.

In 1967, decades before he would become known as one of the world's greatest living artists, Ai's childhood was spent in another underground shelter. This one was cramped, not sprawling, and was infested with lice and situated in the harsh desert region of China known as Little Siberia. He shared this abode with his father, the late poet Ai Qing, who had been a renowned artist in China for years. But that all changed in 1957, the year of Weiwei's birth, as the Anti-Rightist Campaign by Chairman Mao Zedong began a ruthless purge of intellectuals who were critical of the state. After rising to fame for his poetry, Ai Qing became one of the 300,000 intellectuals who were forced into hard labor. For years, Weiwei and Qing slept in a square hole dug into the ground whose roof was a mix of tamarisk branches, rice stalks, and grassy mud. Weiwei watched his father struggle, as Qing was forbidden from writing and endured the daily humiliation of being forced to clean toilets, yet this harsh environment never broke Weiwei's spirit.

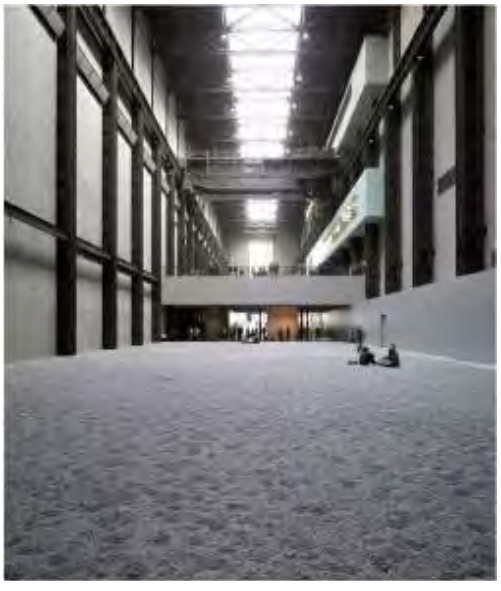
"We have to think of life as almost like a testing ground to see how far you can go, and how it's been given to you for you to realize yourself," he explains as he pours another cup of tea. "That's a real

opportunity. Always to think whatever the condition you are in, you may not necessarily understand it, [but] it has a profound meaning. So gradually you grab a few lessons." For Ai, the lessons learnt from this period have provided a steady flame for his art. Over a span of decades, his work has chafed roughly against the forces of Communism in his Chinese homeland, the hostile ambivalence to the plight of migrants, and the invisible hand of capitalism, whose power, he says, has "sculpted our time." But the most evident through-line has been his constant grappling with the way governments can so easily suppress the humanity of large swathes of people, or erase a country's rich history to maintain their grip on power.

© HIGHSNOBIETY / SPYROS RENNT

In 2017, as a record 68.5 million people became forcibly displaced because of political unrest, Ai brought attention to the plight of these refugees through both documentary film (*Human Flow*, 2017) and by affixing over 14,000 life jackets to six columns on Berlin's Konzerthaus that had been used by people attempting to flee to Europe through the Greek island of Lesbos (*Safe Passage*, 2016). He has used capitalism to interrogate Europe and America's insatiable urge for Chinese mass production with a display of 1179 frames of the steel bikes used by Shanghai's working class (*Forever (Bicycles)*, 2003).

In one of his most famous installations, "Sunflower Seeds", which ran from October 12, 2010 to May 2, 2011, he filled the sprawling Turbine Hall in London's Tate Modern museum with 100 million hand-crafted porcelain sunflower seeds. Produced over a two year period by 1,600 artisans in Jingdezhen, China, the seeds were a reference both to modern "Made in China"-xenophobia but also — and tellingly — to the brutal crackdown by Zedong that forced his father into hard labor. In the Cultural Revolution, propaganda posters likened Zedong to the sun and had sunflowers turning towards him, but in Little Siberia, the exchange of sunflower seeds among the exiles was a small act of rebellious compassion. By filling one of the world's most famed museums with millions of these seeds, Ai cast a new light on this era in his country's history — like a sunflower rising from the darkness towards the sun.



Ai Weiwei, Sunflower Seeds Installation, Tate Modern London, 2010.
© GETTY IMAGES / UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP / VIEW PICTURES

It's this work more than any other that is key to understanding Ai Weiwei, because by the end of the London exhibition, Chinese authorities had locked him away in a Beijing detention center. Officially, Ai had been arrested on charges of tax evasion, but days turned to weeks without an appearance from the artist. His studio was raided, eight employees were held for questioning, and his own family were at a loss for where he'd been taken. Human rights groups sounded alarms and the world asked "Where is Ai Weiwei?" 81 days later, the artist re-emerged profoundly changed.

It was this arrest and disappearance that capped years of mounting escalation by the Chinese government against him that had begun in the aftermath of 2008's Sichuan earthquake. The tragedy claimed the lives of over 80,000, but it was the deaths of over 5,000 children as a result of shoddy school construction that caught Ai's attention. In an attempt to honor the victims — and fight back against censorship that sought to cover up the tragedy — Ai began a Citizen Investigation Group to name the children. In response, the government arrested group members, deleted names they'd written down, confiscated belongings, shut down the blog, and in August 2009, Ai was beaten so severely by police in Chengdu that he was forced to undergo emergency brain surgery.

While a brush with death could have scared off other artists, the beating only solidified Ai's resolve — and provided material for his 2011 documentary *So Sorry*, which cataloged all of the events, including the assault. Two months after his surgery, Ai opened a retrospective show at Munich's Haus der Kunst, whose entrance was adorned with 9,000 children's backpacks spelling out the sentence "She lived happily for seven years in this world" in Chinese characters – a quote from the mother of a child who died in the earthquake. The next year, in 2010, Ai released a two-hour video titled *Hua Hao Yue Yuan* (or *Blissful Harmony*) that recorded the experience of two Chinese activists who had been arrested and abused by state officials after protesting the Chinese Communist Party. It was not the artist's first documentary criticizing the Chinese

government, but it became one of the most widely shared.

After years of balancing precariously on a razor's edge with a series of works critiquing the Chinese government, the government began forcefully pushing back in 2011. One of his art studios was demolished by authorities in January, and the opening of a solo show in Beijing was postponed (and subsequently canceled) because of the "political sensitivity" of his work. The series of events would lead him to announce plans to open a studio in Berlin and declare that he was "simply at a loss for how I can continue to work [in China]." Only a week later, the artist's nearly three month disappearance into the detention center began.

In the years since his arrest, Ai has used his arrest as inspiration for both documentary films (*Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*, 2012) and installation work (*S.A.C.R.E.D.*, 2013), but the arrest also altered the trajectory of his life in more personal ways. As Ai sits in the same Berlin studio he'd announced a week before his disappearance, he recalls the threat from officials as they let him go. "We don't have to release you," they said. "Yes, you got arrested and also you are released, but please understand that we don't have to release you. You can stay there forever." It was this threat that inspired *1,000 Years of Joys and Sorrows*, his sprawling 2021 memoir that covered both Weiwei's life and the life of his father, Qing. Written for his son, Ai Lao, to "let my son know who his father is," it was also a reaction to Weiwei watching so many Chinese friends be jailed for their activism. "Their children grow up wondering. They hear all kinds of accusations. They don't know who their father is. I know many children [whose] father was a political prisoner. They get lost."

For Ai, looking forward is as essential as looking back. History and future are intertwined, yet humanity stumbles forward as if with permanent blinders. "We refuse to recognize our past, not only in the US, but in the whole world. We develop so fast, we try to erase

what they have been through. The problem is not just them, or him, or she, it's us." The importance of both preserving and learning from history has always flowed through the artist's oeuvre, but in the last few years, his output has become sharper as he looks forward, imagining what the future holds for a world so set on forgetting the lessons of the past. In 2017's *Hansel and Gretel* installation in New York, a mix of CCTV cameras, projections, facial recognition software, and drones tracked every move that visitors made. There was no way of knowing it at the time but, a mere three years later, the installation would take on eerie prescience amid the pandemic. In his 2020 film *Coronation*, the entirety of the Wuhan lockdown is documented by ordinary citizens as untold levels of surveillance and control are put in place by China's government.

There's a cynicism flowing like a brook beneath Ai's work, but that's to be expected after decades spent creating art like his. Since his earliest years, he has witnessed the myriad ways a powerful minority can maintain control of the masses. Prone to proverb, he explains his view of this systemic rot through an apple. No matter how fresh the apple is, time will rot it, because "no freshness can keep forever," and Ai always sees the rot. Even his move to Berlin in 2015 was short-lived;. During his period in the German capital, Ai found Germany to still live in what he calls an "authoritarian mental state."

"If you go deeper to their political situation, their cultural situation, and even law, you realize that basically they change into a nice jacket. Very, very flashy. Very attractive. And it's good. But as we used to say, you have a new glass with old wine," he says, before noting that his criticism isn't rooted in hatred. "I'm being critical because I wish it [would] become better. I have no problem. I don't hate anybody – even China I don't hate. I really wish they could be much better." Through criticism, a system – no matter how rotten — can begin to be fixed. "If we all say how great some things are, if we have the same opinion, that's [when] danger comes."

It's this principle that helps to explain his constant stream of work. Ai isn't just an artist, he is a mirror. "I reflect the reality, I don't make the reality," he explains. "Even the mirror can be shattered but, still, the pieces can have that relative reflection of reality." The hope, of course, is that by holding up the mirror long enough, things may change. But when asked about his hope for the future, Weiwei is blunt. "We consumed the future already. To get to prosperity, we consume the future. We consume the poorest. People exploit their rights and it's really a monster. Humans are really monsters." The problem, as he sees it, is that greed, short-sightedness, and selfishness are weaknesses that are deeply rooted in everyone – not just those in power.

The rotten apple isn't just authoritarianism, it's capitalism. "Every fingerprint of our time has capitalism's imprints on it," Ai laments. Even the industry he navigates has sped up its descent into a mire of capitalist muck through the rise of get-rich-quick schemes like NFTs that make art less about the message and more about the collectability. As the work matters less and less than the resale value, an artist like Weiwei feels like more of a rarity. His work sells, of course, but every piece that he creates is imbued with a purpose and a message.

While the world might crown him one of the greatest living artists, Ai Weiwei will never embrace the accolades. He creates because he must. "I do projects just like a cat walks the way a cat walks," he explains. "It's my nature." For Weiwei, this natural search for meaning and harmony will never end. "I appreciate [that] at the age of 64, I'm still unsettled, unclear, and still feel I have not accomplished anything," he admits as he pours another cup of tea, ensconced in his quiet sanctuary. "I still have this beautiful emptiness in my mind, and that I treasure."

**Words:** Chris Erik Thomas
**Photography:** Spyros Rennt

Surveillance Camera with Plinth (2014) by Ai Weiwei

*FAD Magazine*
18 February 2022

FAD magazine

# REVIEW: AI WEIWEI AT KETTLE'S YARD, CAMBRIDGE

By Tabish Khan • 18 February 2022
Share –

Ai Weiwei is one of the most important contemporary artists operating today so it's quite the coup for Kettle's Yard to be hosting an exhibition of his work – though of course, it helps that Ai now lives in Cambridge so is close by.

Ever political this show is about what the truth really is, given we now live in world of fake news and disinformation – as always with his work, it's dealing with important contemporary issues.

To illustrate how authenticity differs between the West and the East he has displayed ancient Chinese artworks bought at auction next to his own works, commissioned to mimic the older works such as a vase with a dragon on it that is based on a centuries old artefact but was made recently.

It's a recognition that while we may consider these 'fakes' there is a burgeoning market for craftspersons who make these imitation vases and it keeps plenty of people in jobs in industries like ceramics that have suffered decreased demand as China becomes more consumerist.

There are personal works too, most striking being a pair of jade handcuffs referencing the time the Chinese authorities imprisoned him. By using a material that's associated with history and tradition, it ensures this exhibition shows us that traditions are important but they can also act as a pair of handcuffs on progression and freedom.

One of Ai's most controversial works was when he dropped an ancient 2,000 year old Chinese vase, smashing it on the floor, caught in a series of photographs and here recreated using Lego bricks. Some think it's brilliant for drawing attention to how China has changed as it has industrialised, forgetting its heritage, while others think such a desecration of history can never be justified.

Ai Weiwei Marble Tofu on Concrete (2014)

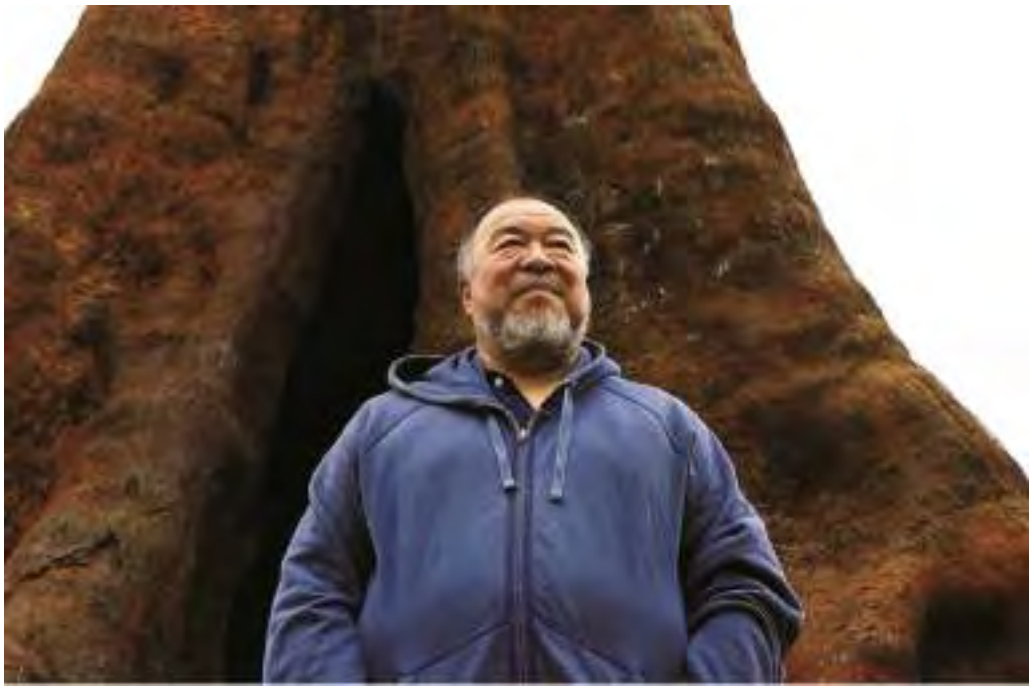
*Options*
20 February 2022

Options

# Book review: Ai Weiwei's '1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows' reflects the artist's journey in activism

The memoir was written to remember his father Ai Qing and as a remembrance for his son Ai Lao.

By Aireena Azni | 20 February 2022 - 10:02am



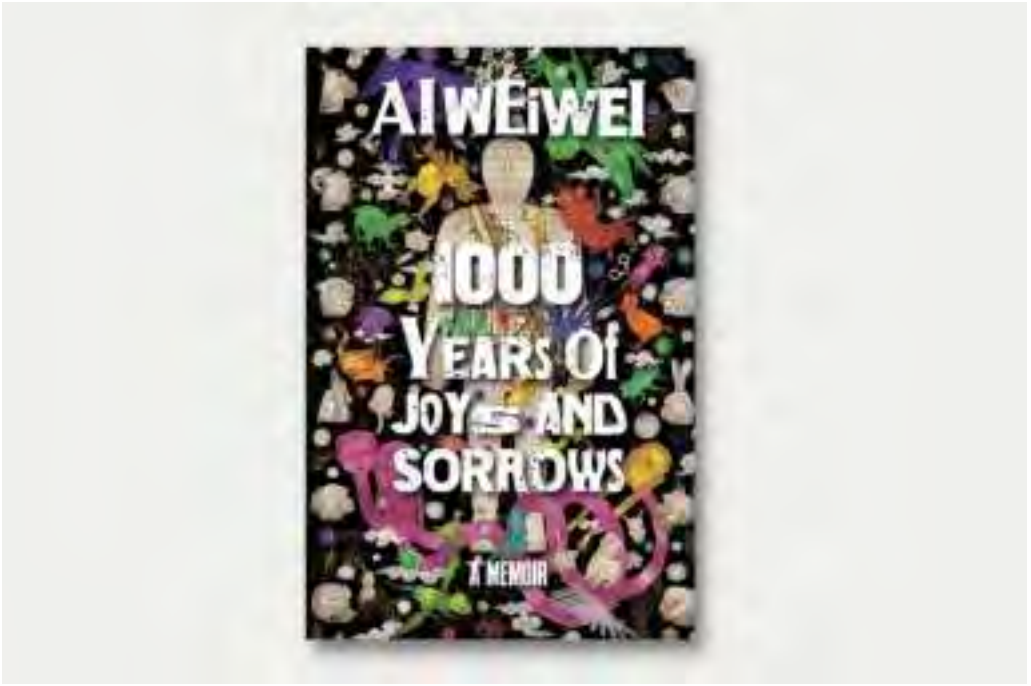
Injustice and corruption fuelled Ai Weiwei's desire to be the voice of the people (Photo: Violeta Santos Moura)

Translated by Allan H Barr, *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows* was written by Ai Weiwei to remember his father Ai Qing and as a remembrance for his son Ai Lao. The memoir opens with the author reflecting on his detention by the government of China, which then reminded him of his father's experience as a political exile half a century before.

Ai Qing was born in a privileged family but raised by Big-Leaf Lotus, a peasant who drowned her newborn daughter in order to nurse Ai Qing to support her drunkard husband and their five children. Ai Qing was deemed "an ill omen" by his clan and would be "the death of his parents" if they were to raise him at home.

As a young child, the boy had shown profound talent and interest in arts: "Out of wood, he fashioned a miniature house with doors and windows that could be opened." But this gave his father another reason to be discontented with his son as arts was accorded little respect in society at the time.

At 19, Ai Qing left Shanghai for Paris to pursue his passion in the arts. Being in a foreign country, his feelings of isolation deepened his desire for knowledge and he turned to literature to fill the void. Later, he would look back on his stay in France and conclude that it was the best time of his life as "never again would he experience such freedom and leisure".




Ai Weiwei decided to write this book so his son Ai Lao would have a trace of who his father was and the journey he had taken (Photo: Penguin Random House)

As a prominent poet exposed to subversive things happening in the West, Ai Qing was viewed as a threat to the state and government of China; "he was now a young man, with an independent mind and the confidence to express himself". A huge collection of books at his home often attracted the unwanted attentions of the authorities. With Ai Weiwei's help, Ai Qing decided to burn down his whole library.

In his early twenties, Ai Qing was put behind bars for being a member of a revolutionary group, before being exiled years later during Mao's Cultural Revolution to a deserted location called Little Siberia to undergo "thought remolding" after being labelled a purveyor of bourgeois literature and arts.

The family, including Ai Weiwei — who was 10 at the time — and his stepbrother Gao Jian, nested in a dugout that "took the form of a square hole dug into the ground, with a crude roof formed of tamarisk branches and rice stalks, sealed with several layers of grassy mud" for a decade.

Not able to withstand the hardships in his homeland after the release of his father, Ai Weiwei went to New York to pursue self-funded study. He studied arts and started participating in exhibitions before finding his way into photography. After being credited in *The New York Times* for a photo he took during a protest, he became interested in joining other movements and demonstrations, especially those fighting for freedom of expression.

Ai Weiwei with his father, celebrated Chinese poet Ai Qing in Beijing, November 1992 (Photo: Ai Weiwei)

After 12 years, Ai Weiwei flew back to Beijing to spend time with his ill father. He found his native country had changed yet remained the same all at once. Many roads and tall buildings had been built, but the nation was still very harsh on the right to express one's beliefs and opinions.

Injustice and corruption fuelled his desire to be the voice of the people, even if it meant walking the path his father had once forcefully taken: "I had changed, it seemed, from being an artist to being a social activist. It is not at all difficult to become a social activist: As soon as you start expressing concern about the nation's future, you're already on a path that could take you straight to jail."

As a designer of the National Stadium for the Beijing Olympic Games, Ai Weiwei was condemned by architecture academicians who claimed he was trying to make China an experiment for Western architecture, owing to the heavy use of metals in the building's structure. He had also organised a programme, bringing 1,001 Chinese on an overseas tour to Kassel, Germany, in an attempt to overcome the participants' insecurity "instilled in them by political and cultural life in China".

From then on, he began creating offensive art in the form of photographs, painting, writing, artefacts, architecture, films, documentaries and music to challenge the autocratic system. Obsessed with the deconstruction of classical order and ethics, Ai Weiwei's provocative stance naturally antagonised the authorities.

New York was to Ai Weiwei what Paris was to Ai Qing. Similarly, blogging to Ai Weiwei was what writing poetry was to his father. It was not until the former actively started blogging and freely expressed his thoughts to thousands of subscribers that the authorities began to keep an eye on his every move. His blog became a public diary where he updated just about anything, including a picture of him being treated harshly by officers.

As an internationally renowned artist, Ai Weiwei was often invited to hold art exhibitions overseas. In 2011, before boarding a flight to Taipei, he was swarmed by police at the airport and taken into detention for 81 days, during which every movement and utterance required permission from the two guards in charge. Even after being discharged, the authorities never really gave Ai Weiwei a definite reason as to why he was taken away from society, as was his father.

The dreadful period made him look back to the person Ai Qing was and it struck him that he never truly knew his father's story. Feeling like he could disappear forever at any moment during detention, Ai Weiwei decided to write this book so his son Ai Lao would have a trace of who his father was and the journey he had taken.

The 400-page *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows* was not easy to finish in one sitting, as some of the events required you to put it down to process the author's words, before picking up where you had left off. Hardship after hardship makes this book an intense read. With every chapter, it did not feel like the story got any easier. Given the nature of Ai Weiwei, who is extremely vocal and provocative, his memoir fairly reflected his journey.

LISSON GALLERY

*Londonist*
24th February 2022

londonist

# The 14 Biggest Exhibitions To See In London And Beyond Right Now

By Tabish Khan

*Our pick of the best exhibitions to see right now in London's galleries and museums. We've split the list into areas to make it easier to navigate, with one exhibition outside of London that's worth travelling for.*

## Exhibitions in Central London

Copyright Jock McFadyen RA

**URBAN LONDON:** London is constantly changing, as we all know, and painter Jock McFadyen has been capturing it for the last 30 years, including a poster-less wall at Bank station, a blocks of local authority flats, a glaringly bright petrol station and view across Canary Wharf. It's not a celebration of London but one man's reflection of a changing city in some impressive large-scale paintings.

*Jock McFadyen RA: Tourist without a guidebook at Royal Academy of Arts, Weston Rooms.* **Until 10 April, free.**
★★★★☆ (Tuesday-Sunday)

**FADED GLAMOUR:** There's something beautiful about old-school movie theatres, with their elaborate ceilings and thick curtains, even when in a state of disrepair — modern cinemas just can't compete. Photographic duo Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre have captured those that are falling apart and also those that have been repurposed into other uses such as a supermarket, and most strikingly, a basketball court — we'd love to shoot hoops in that one.

*Yves Marchand & Romain Meffre: Movie Theaters at Tristan Hoare Gallery.* **Until 11 March, free.** ★★★★½ (Tuesday-Saturday)

Photo: Amit Lennon

**CERAMIC BEAUTY:** It's great to stumble across an exhibition that expands your horizon, and that's exactly what happens at Two Temple Place, with a show of 70 years of ceramic art by Black female artists both in Britain and abroad. It opened our eyes to a practice we knew little about, and as an added bonus, it's free to visit and housed inside one of London's most beautiful interiors.

*Body Vessel Clay: Black Women, Ceramics and Contemporary Art at Two Temple Place* **Until 24 April, free.** ★★★★☆ (Wednesday-Monday)

© courtesy of the Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California

**BLUE BOY:** After travelling to the US 100 years ago, Gainsborough's portrait known as 'Blue Boy' has returned to the UK. Gainsborough's paintings can be hit and miss, but in this full length portrait of a young chap in blue, he has truly excelled in capturing the boy's quiet confidence and superb outfit. It's great to have this masterpiece back temporarily, flanked by a few of the artist's other paintings held by the gallery.

*Gainsborough's Blue Boy at The National Gallery, Room 46.* **Until 15 May, free.** ★★★★☆ (Open daily)

## Exhibitions in West London

A teenager ready for prom in Tennessee. Copyright Stacy Kranitz.

**AMERICA IN CRISIS:** This photography exhibition captures the United States in a microcosm. There are flags, American football, proms and 4 July fireworks, alongside the darker side of gun violence, poverty and homelessness. It's brought right up to date with a refrigerated trailer for victims of Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter protests — the photograph of riot police emerging from a cloud of tear gas feels apocalyptic. The variety and quality on display is superb.

*America in Crisis at Saatchi Gallery.* **Until 3 April. £5.** ★★★★☆ (Open daily)

## Exhibitions in South London

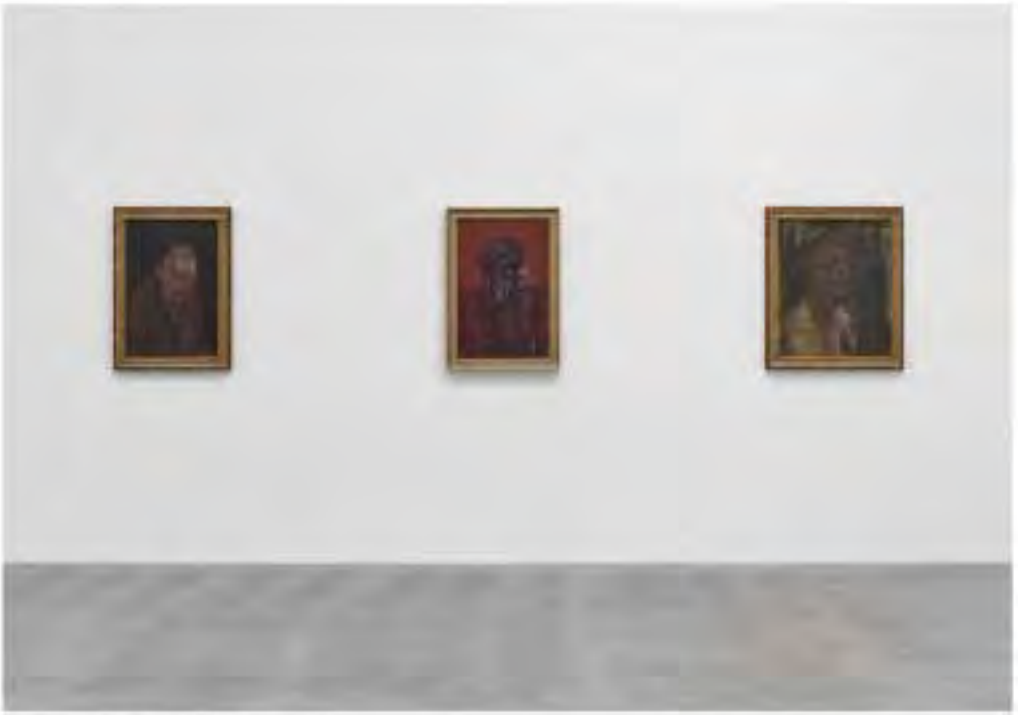
Image courtesy Studio Voltaire

**DEATH DOULA:** Objects hang from the ceiling, all of which feature in a video looking at the role of a millennial death doula in preparing a body for burial, whether it's a comb to neaten the hair of the deceased or chocolate bars to ensure the relatives of the dead eat something. The video is part-documentary, part-performance and all fascinating.

*Every Ocean Hughes: One Big Bag* at Studio Voltaire. **Until 17 April, free.** ★★★★½ (Wednesday-Sunday)

Photo: Mark Blower

**SPIDERY MOTHER:** Louise Bourgeois was best known for her spindly spider sculptures and while there are a few here, the focus is on her fabric works. There are some superb works including creepy vitrines and tender fabric embraces, but the works can be very hit and miss and almost everything on the walls doesn't add much to the show.



Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates.

**DARK & MOODY:** I hadn't heard of Keith Cunningham before this exhibition and now my head is filled with his dark, thickly-layered portraits, paintings of dogs, skulls and other animals. It's easy to draw parallels to Francis Bacon and this showing of over 70 artworks is an impressive collection of an artist from the 1950s and 60s who has largely been forgotten — a shame, as this exhibition is memorable one.

*Keith Cunningham: The Cloud of Witness at Newport Street Gallery*. **Until 21 August, free.** ★★★★☆ (Wednesday-Sunday)

Image courtesy White Cube

**DELIGHTFUL DESIGNS:** If you missed the Noguchi exhibition at Barbican, here's a chance to see more of his works including a fountain wall and ceiling mounted undulations, and to stand among a sea of circular lanterns. It's a truly beautiful show even if I'm not convinced that it manages to make the leap across from design to art.

*Isamu Noguchi: A New Nature at White Cube, Bermondsey*. **Until 3 April, free.** ★★★☆☆ (Tuesday-Sunday)

Antonio Berni, Landru in the Hotel, Paris, 1932 Private Collection. Courtesy Galeria Sur. Photo courtesy Eduardo Baldizan

**THE SURREAL LIFE:** Tate Modern takes us on a global tour to show how artists were creating surreal visions beyond Europe, across Latin America, Asia and Africa – a highlight being the dark and moody paintings from Cairo. It's great to see more diverse artists alongside well-known works by Picasso, Dalí's famous lobster telephone and Magritte's train emerging from a fireplace. Where this show comes a cropper is that it's very research-heavy and it comes at the expense of showing us the fantastical paintings that we're all here to see – this show would have benefitted from a greater focus on the art over the message.

*Surrealism Beyond Borders at Tate Modern.* **Until 29 August. £18.** ★★★☆☆ (open daily)

## Exhibitions in North London

Using bone conduction technology to listen to Beethoven. Photography by Justine Trickett.

**FEEL THE MUSIC:** The life of one of history's greatest musicians is laid out through his fantastic compositions and a depiction of the huge turnout at his funeral. But it's not all good news as we also see the flawed genius who fell out with people including the nephew he'd adopted. While most of the show is mildly interesting, the mind-blowing highlight is an interactive piece where, by placing elbows on a wooden rail and cupping our hands over our ears, we can listen to music the way Beethoven managed to after he lost his hearing.

*Beethoven at The British Library.* **Until 24 April. £8.** ★★★☆☆ (open daily)

## Exhibitions in East London

© Kerry James Marshall. Courtesy of the artist, David Zwirner London and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo: Steve Briggs

**INSIDE THE STUDIO**: The artist's studio is where the magic happens and Whitechapel Gallery invites us in to see the creative process up close. The highlights are the recreation of well-known artists' studios including the red wall as the backdrop for works by Henri Matisse, silver foil to replicate Andy Warhol's factory and lots of scaled-up photos showing Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth at work. A lot of artists and artworks are packed into this show, which makes it a little congested, but the variety on display makes it a fun journey through the creative process.

*A Century of the Artist's Studio at The Whitechapel Gallery*. **Until 5 June, £12.95.** ★★★★☆ (Tuesday-Sunday)

Explosive fun. Copyright Vlatka Horvat.

**DAILY DOODLE**: We all savoured our daily walks during lockdown and artist Vlatka Horvat took it one step further by photographing what she saw and then modifying them to turn everyday scenes into a volcano, a tower into a beacon of light and ladders hooked on to clouds. It's innovative and fun, even if the sculpture and video in the other two rooms don't deliver as strong a showing.

*Vlatka Horvat: By Hook, on Foot or Pole*. **Until 2 April, free.** ★★★☆☆ (Wednesday-Saturday)

## Exhibitions outside London

An imitation ancient Chinese vase made in 2017 (image copyright Ai Weiwei studio)

**WHAT IS REAL?**: Legendary political artist Ai Weiwei has a new show in Cambridge that looks at the power of truth and what's real. There's a burgeoning market for replica ancient Chinese vases and while they aren't the real thing, they are keeping factories in China open, asking us to challenge our beliefs around greater good. Thematically the show is often all over the place without a solid narrative throughout, but any chance to see the impactful work of Ai Weiwei is always a treat.

*Ai Weiwei: The Limits of Doubt at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge.* **Until 19 June, free.** ★★★☆☆ (Tuesday-Sunday)

*The New Yorker*
27th February 2022

THE NEW YORKER

# AI WEIWEI'S FAKE-ART EXHIBIT

*The artist and activist does a final inspection of the antiquities (some counterfeit) and the scan of his brain after a police beating (real) at his new show, which mixes the phony and the authentic.*

**By Daniel Penny**
**February 27, 2022**

The Chinese artist, activist, and filmmaker Ai Weiwei slumped in a chair at the Kettle's Yard gallery, in Cambridge. He had a trimmed goatee and was dressed all in black, the heels of his shoes crushed to be worn like house slippers. He yawned and scratched his calf. "It's so boring," he said. He got up and began wandering the empty galleries, inspecting a pair of ancient-looking Chinese sculptures in glass display cabinets. The objects were part of his new exhibit, "The Liberty of Doubt." Ai had overseen the installation from his studio in Portugal, and this was the first day he had actually seen the show in person.

"Are you trying to tell which ones are real, Weiwei?" Greg Hilty, the curatorial director at the Lisson Gallery, which represents the artist, asked.

The show is based on a peculiar conceit. In 2020, one of Ai's friends tipped him off to a sale of Chinese antiquities at Cheffins, an auction house in Cambridge. Ai had recently moved to the city with his partner and his son, after four years of exile in Berlin. He was on the road and looked at the auction house's Web site. "Several pieces looked charming," he said, and the prices were "unthinkably low." To amuse himself, he placed a few bids, and he ended up winning about fifty items.

One of Ai's most famous works is a photographic triptych of him dropping a Han-dynasty urn; the piece is reproduced at Kettle's Yard in gray-scale Legos. He is also an obsessive collector who has spent years trolling Beijing's antiquities markets. When the items he bought from Cheffins arrived, he found that they had been "badly wrapped" in newspaper. As he began examining them, "I realize some of them are not

real," he said. "On iPhone, you don't see the patina." He consulted an antiquities expert back in China, who confirmed his suspicions. The expert then said, "I know who made some of them." Ai pointed out that there's a long tradition of copying and one-upmanship among Chinese artists that is at odds with Western concepts of authenticity.

As it happened, Ai had just been asked to do an exhibit at Kettle's Yard. The one requirement, according to the gallery's director, Andrew Nairne, was that the works utilize "local materials." Ai had the mischievous notion of mixing his phony (and real) auction acquisitions with pieces of his household furniture, ceramics, and stone reproductions of everyday objects: he had a CCTV camera and a takeout container rendered in marble, and a pair of handcuffs and an old iPhone were carved from hunks of jade. In the exhibit, some of the marble and jade works are arranged in an antique mahogany case purchased from the British Museum. It once stored ancient Chinese earthenware.

When the show opened, a critic from the *Guardian* wondered whether the artist was just "phoning it in, on a jade iPhone." Ai seemed troubled. "I still struggle with whether or not I am a good artist," he said.

He perked up when a group of Cambridge students arrived for a private tour. A pair of young men admired a plate featuring a scan of Ai's brain after he'd been beaten by police, in 2009.

*"That word-puzzle gloat of yours is getting old fast."*

Cartoon by Julia Suits

"I had a few while I was at the doctor's, for these tests about language-acquisition aptitude," one of the students said. "They would show you your brain. I thought it was great at the time. I've since realized that doing that repeatedly . . ." He trailed off.

In another corner, a trio was examining large blue-and-white porcelain plates featuring contemporary scenes of political strife, takeoffs on the Blue Willow pattern. In the center of one plate, masked protesters are surrounded by clouds of swirling tear gas.

An upstairs gallery had been turned into a screening room and was showing the artist's 2020 documentary about the Hong Kong protests, "Cockroach." Muffled screams, cheers, gunfire, and police sirens echoed through the building. "If we give up like this, we won't be able to pay our debts we owe to the people who have left, who have been hurt, arrested . . . or who have to live in exile," a young protester says in the film.

In the gallery, a student mentioned that she was from Hong Kong and had been part of the protests. "These kinds of images bring me back," she said.

"Was it pretty scary?" a boy asked.

The girl paused. "It was less scary than the news reports," she said, her tone growing wistful. "Those were the days." ♦

*Published in the print edition of the March 7, 2022, issue, with the headline "Phonies."*

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*Daniel Penny, a journalist and a critic, writes about art, design, fashion, books, technology, and culture.*

*Recessed Space*
28th February 2022

RECESSED.SPACE

# Cities & sculpture: An interview with Ai Weiwei

In an exhibition at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, Chinese artist **Ai Weiwei** explores the ideas of value, history, and dissent. Intrigued at the exhibition as a new lens Cui unravels following Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters of 2019 through the city, with both show and politics looking only this interview with the

The oak floorboard creaks my arrival and Ai Weiwei, comfortably reclined in an armchair looked up. He is in the living room of Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, a house made for comfort and ease, in which light and space are as central (subconscious) components as the fabric of the building.

Originally home of Jim and Helen Ede, Jim had been a Tate curator over the 1920s and 30s; it is formed of Jim (unconventional) intrigue as a curator to not only live but also carefully display their collection of 20th century art and ceramics. Kettle's Yard is a place rooted in creativity, looking, and slow contemplation, and Weiwei seemed quite at home, settled. I asked if it was a place he was familiar with.

"I have been here many, many times. I feel so familiar to the environment and I feel comfortable, and it feels real, natural. I like it because I feel I belong to it, you know. Jim Ede understood how to make his life as art, make art as his life. So, I very much identify to the environment."

Winter sun floods the window, carving stripes on the sill and rippling the white floorboards. I wondered if it was something about the surfaces and limited light of the house, how the materials carry a patina of age and aesthetic. "No, it's not anything about that. It's about the ordinary feeling of how you can imagine what kind of life could be in here. So, it's more information than just space or material. It's a social information" he laughed.

Fig.1

Weiwei may not settled still at home, but it's relationship to the domestic which he added is not natural to him. His father, Ai Qing, was also an artist, a poet exiled by the government to Xinjiang in the northwest of China, a landscape of deserts and mountains, suffering relentless punishment of harsh manual labour. In his blog, which ran for three years from 2006 until the Chinese state shut it down, Weiwei spoke about the domestic space of his childhood.

"My earliest experience with anything was when I was eight years old, and we were sent down to Xinjiang, as punishment we were forced to live in an earthen pit. I think that in political circumstances like those, living underground can provide an incredible feeling of security – it was a pit dug right into the ground, in the winter it was warm, and in the summer it was cool. Its walls were lined with America, and we used their water thanks, and other straight, when paper could run over the pit, their harmless would fall through our roof, making us comfortable with the sight of rain or another elements."

His father was too tall for the subterranean space, and so they dug the house deeper to give more headroom – an approach to dealing with architecture, material, and space from a place of simplicity and need – qualities he has taken not only into sculptural works but also architectural projects through his studio FAKE Design.

Weiwei now lives across Europe, with his studio studio in Berlin and primary residence in Portugal. He does, however, have a property in Cambridge, after moving to the city in 2009, though says "I cannot call Cambridge my home town, but my residence." The word does to me he doesn't quite recognise, adding, "I never had that privilege because I always see myself as a traveller. Every space to me is just the place to prepare me for the next trip."

This precarious relationship to settling is perhaps connected to Weiwei's childhood displacement as well as the constant sense of being followed by the Chinese government. Instead, his restlessness is a creative stalling, as his father's was before, something he has written about but still finds hard to speak of – "The story is too dramatic, to tell. But all my understanding of art has come from him."

Creativity comes from a place of need, especially within a climate where an ability to question and propose can be crushed. "What is imagination?" he wonders. "It's got to be some kind of desire, and it's always about something we don't have. I'm [...] thinking what would be a good idea if I can exist."

Sculptural animal Kettle's Yard are works by Brancusi, Nicholson, Hepworth, Nicky, and Hamilton Finlay amongst many more. Downstairs, in the new family kitchen, Weiwei designed gallery, they are joined by Weiwei's exhibition *Re Library of Doubt*, a collection of carved wood works replicating values and missing, alongside a second room with a grid of thirteen of Chinese antiquities bought at a Cambridge. He later discovered a number were fakes, though a typical visitor wouldn't know which ones were authentic. Historical objects and which date to the last few decades – it was only through antique expert acquaintances in New York and China that the artist himself is to say which were real and which were fake.

Of course, they are all real, and this is at the heart of Weiwei's provocation, that even fakes are legitimate art objects with a [illegible] of craftsmanship and material knowledge which should be respected and are worthy of exhibition. I thought of these objects when Weiwei made that quip about real information, and how to look beyond viewing something as a fixture within a single frame but consider a material or object beyond surface. It touches on subjective notions and cultural power, as well as worth of cultural narratives contained within its history.

Much of Weiwei's sculptural works are carved from jade, a material he says has "the longest history in human civilisation as a kind of jewel", and a material used in Chinese craft for 6,000 years or so. He explains "a tradition which has never stopped, was interrupted for one or two times during the [illegible] period [illegible] so it's a continuous image that grows with power for centuries."

In a large Shakespeare display case made by British Museum to contain Chinese earthenware, were erected by Weiwei of a range of marble and jade sculptures, emulators of everyday objects carrying a carved power, carrying wonder and meaning. *Cauldron* (2013) are jade homes of chrysanthemum plants contained by tubes, *Marble Grass Bar* (2013) considered by evaluate disposability into a preservative.

The cabinet also holds other playful items – *Marble Toilet Paper* (2020, made over the pandemic, still keeps us everyday objects we rely on but are considered of little value to our modern sense of self-worth. It also has the most serious – *Marble Mobile* (2013) recreates a bedside handset, referencing those used by secret services during films from the wake of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake in which over 80,000 died.

Architecture has been very present in Weiwei's artistic practice. In response to their 2008 earthquake, he created *Straight* (2008-2012), a vast array of iron bars lost in piles, each a tribute to the substandard collapsed buildings, disdainful to criticised by Weiwei and his team, then individually straightened out as an act of documentating the material – presenting it as evidence. For *Remembering* (2009) he covered the façade of Munich's Haus der Kunst with 9,000 schoolchildren's backpacks, symbolising lives lost as corruption engineered, rote-built schools crumbled. *Forever* uses the fluid shapes of the earth, the huge sacks of Chinese characters, spewing 3 metres.

Not long after this event Weiwei was arrested and imprisoned, in secret for 81 days, a period of torture and intimidation during which a customer still, in response he sustained. It found through an ordeal that time in *S.A.C.R.E.D.* (2011). That event is also reflected here with *Handcuffs* (2011), a small marble containing all three locked into the bright. Carved from a single piece of stone, including tiny locks and chains. Enormous control and precision, an example here in which beauty from the problematic ugly, through creativity, craft, and materials.

fig viii

In 2007 for documenta 12 in Kassel, Wenzel created Empire, an architectural-scale sculpture formed of wooden doors and windows from Mao and Qing Dynasty buildings. Shaped as a circus, at its centre an absence confined the supposed form of a Chinese temple. It was formed of components salvaged from historic buildings cleared for speculative developments in the Shanxi region, an iconic centre now in ever demolished for the new. It stood as a form of erasure, misinterpretation, and speculating of value, form, and materialities through indecision.

A shrine for the German town, pulling at the installation, pinning it to the ground. The artist chose to leave it unexplained, of no mystique, enjoying the puzzle when it was free of explanation. He told me: "The [city] council pushed me [...] I chose up the art [...] and that it's growing. A challenge to easy questions, easy answers rather than a easy conclusion. This is the interesting of history. If you realise Van Van Gogh or Rembrandt that they had made the ultimate painting, they would laugh. They would run to another building."

fig ix

*Empire*, as so much of Wenzel's work, is about transformation. How events, experiences, opinions or imposed value systems can shift the meaning or importance of an original object – both through a recalculation of architectural salvage, as well as a change in its own artistic meaning following the collapse. The spirit in the transformative work the original surfaces and the original fabric. One has more value not because it is inherently better or more functional, but because it has lasted longer, has some patina of meaning through survival and scars picked up along the way.

There is a romance in Wenzel's approach to material, and a respect given to the overlooked or ordinary object around us that the antique is celebrated. He speaks of accessibility we have as humans, "we always want to grab something which we identify with – not just the accumulation of belongings, but rather an unspeakable knowledge." He feels, however, that this sense is nearly destroyed in a time of disposability and depreciation. A material is one way we can keep a connection to the past and future, whether with the junk, the Qing architectural salvage, or a more mundane object.

"I remember my son when he was young, he always wanted to give me pieces of litter, about talking to me, things like that, and I still have that piece of litter. That's now in my life, one piece of litter is not much different from another one. But here we have that! We see litter, but we don't even [pause] see litter.

fig. 1

Weiwei imbues his readymade objects with stories that unsettle the state's authority watching the artist, and his Beijing studio complex surrounded by 24 CCTV cameras (surveillance Council with Plum, 2010). In a powerful form of defying the artistry the cameras are designed to instill fear as much as they are made to observe. Here is one alongside a Chinese black limousine, parked and idling from the Northern Wei Dynasty, with squares and circles of its plinth referring to traditional Chinese coins, symbolism contained in Weiwei's marble plinth. There is also the transformation of narrative – where Weiwei has a camera watching over the ancient lamp would have had a wall, thinking it represents wi, a contemporary of an architectural form, but deployed for different political ends.

Three A/Weiwei films are shown within the Kettle's Yard exhibition, two of which are new: *Coronation* (2020), observing Wuhan during the outbreak of Covid-19, and *Undressed* (2020) following Hong Kong ballet activity-resisting up to the Chinese state in 2019's pro-democracy protests.[1] Both also show a transformation of built space, and how the personal and political overlap with infrastructure and architecture.

I think of the marble camera when I reload dwellings and all-encompassing infrastructure, and how architects can be recontextualised for a totalitarian future. However, the film also shows how the existing city centre re-used and rearranged by the people themselves, including incredible stories of construction and defiance of bureaucratic forms of artistic literature. The city is both backdrop and protagonist. Groups of youths in yellow helmets – not unlike Weiwei's marble reproduction – flood down shopping centre escalators stuck with umbrellas. Moments of bliss on the terrace, Kowloon Park, top of building. A Chinese-owned shopping centre is remodelled.

I could easily keep adding parts of the city that have been changed by the forces of capitalism, and how architecture can be recontextualised for a totalitarian future. However, the film also shows how the existing city centre re-used and rearranged by the people themselves, including incredible stories of construction and defiance of bureaucratic forms of artistic literature. The city is both backdrop and protagonist. Groups of youths in yellow helmets – not unlike Weiwei's marble reproduction – flood down shopping centre escalators stuck with umbrellas. Moments of bliss on the terrace, Kowloon Park, top of building. A Chinese-owned shopping centre is remodelled. – in both splitting and terrifying ways.

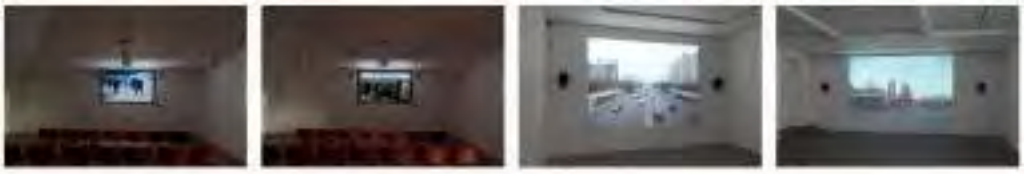

fig. 2 – 5

A street chair sketch passes over empty and silent pavement roads. It brings to mind two of Weiwei's older films, city studies *Chongqing Boulevard* (2004) and *Beijing: The Second Ring* (2005). Each considers road infrastructure across the capital, fragments of time and place obscuring copious unsettled under rapid economic development. Lives, transformation, and rhythm repeat through Weiwei's practice, and in photo series *Fundamental Landscapes* (2002-2008) the artist recorded vast urban landscapes razed in preparation of redevelopment. In his blog, Weiwei described these sites as "a world because no one speaks, no one asks the questions [of who is building it] … I lived with many questions, yet people don't want to think or voice their questions."[2] That is if they are allowed the space and ability to ask the questions.

In today's culture of demolition and clearance of communities for financial uplift, at a pace of Dongguan and mass speculative development terrifying as previously as Zagreb before the storm. I ask Weiwei his thoughts on developers of global architecture, which we can see from New Ebisu to Nanjing.

"I think architecture has lost a very essential feeling of architecture – to describe the human's environment with which we live, how we use that environment, and how it relates to our mind and aesthetic beliefs. If you can want to make an object of sculpture to be photographed … once a new architecture. That's just an exaggeration of ego."

I think of the students in Gothenburg reimagining the city to their immediate needs, layering new meanings and stories into existing artifacts and materials. Their imagined future could be one built on the traces and layers of the present, yet formed from a whole new. Recalling Weiwei's earlier comment about imagination being "some kind of power", I ask if imagination is enough to fight the machinery of such violent power, but he has less optimism: "Well, no imagination can cope with capital – and the desire to fill everything with profit."

This speaks to the theme of the exhibition at Kettle's Yard, *The Library of Doubt*. Imagination feeds on doubt, and with a continuous restriction of questioning and doubt, the space for imagination and creating a future is also closed. Weiwei insists that we "… need doubt to allow for expression. And in today's social or digital landscape, there's a tendency to really erase the possibility of doubt. Which is frightening … [our ways of] communication from doubt."

Since I spoke to Weiwei, the world has shifted post-Biden's invasion of Ukraine. Doubt is a luxury for those who can less xenophobic outsiders by wrong, and personally lose or sometimes chaos. It is a privilege, and one focused more sharply in light of aggressive authoritarianism.

The many movements and violence that have unfolded represent a state of violence the artist is not unfamiliar with, telling me that "we are living in a very unsettled world right now. I mean, there's a threat of a nuclear war, completely shattered that it reflects different images because the angle changed."

His work in reimagining matter with a complexity of form, his investigation and reuse of the past before abandoning it for future imaginations, is Weiwei's way of making sense of this shattering. Throughout his life, he has dealt calmly with these shocks, and incredibly stood to rebuild what remains in the wake of the unfairness of politics. It is a wise and creative approach to real, all-most, how many times can the shattering continue, because can be felt not. "In the most difficult times, only art is good, you fill the void and the fear can never touch."

fig.xv

[1] See Ai Weiwei's Blog (2006-2009), published by MIT Press (2011), page 52.
[2] Ai Weiwei's films are available to view online for a small price at www.aiweiwei.com
[3] Ai Weiwei in Ai Weiwei: Spatial Matters: Art, Architecture and Activism, by Ai Weiwei and Anthony Pins, published MIT Press, p 336

**Ai Weiwei** is a global citizen, artist and thinker, moving between modes of production and investigation, subject to the direction and outcome of his research. Ai's production expanded to encompass architecture, public art and performance. Beyond concerns of form or protest, Ai now measures our existence in relation to economic, political, natural and social forces, uniting 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 important. He is one of the leading cultural figures of his generation and serves as an example for free expression both in China and internationally.
www.lissongallery.com/artists/ai-weiwei

**Kettle's Yard** is the University of Cambridge's modern and contemporary art gallery. Kettle's Yard is a beautiful House with a remarkable collection of modern art and a gallery that hosts modern and contemporary art exhibitions.
www.kettlesyard.co.uk/events/ai-weiwei-the-fourth-of-doubt

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Images
**fig.i** Ai Weiwei portrait, 2022, © Photograph by Gao Yuan © Ai Weiwei Studio. Courtesy Lisson Gallery
**fig.ii-iv** *The Liberty of Doubt*, by 2020, Installation images, © Jo Underhill
**fig.v** Movie Takeout Box, by Ai Weiwei, 2015, © Jo Underhill
**fig.vi** Marble Toilet Paper, by Ai Weiwei, 2020, © Jo Underhill
**fig.vii** Handcuffs, by Ai Weiwei, 2011, © Jo Underhill
**fig.viii** Template, by Ai Weiwei, 2007, © Ai Weiwei archive, photograph by Mimmo Nobile
**fig.ix** Template, by Ai Weiwei, 2017 © David Gamez Fontenla
**fig.x** Surveillance Camera with Plinth, by Ai Weiwei, 2014 (l), and A Chinese black limestone pedestal of Tang, Northern Wei Dynasty (r), © Will Jennings
**fig.xi** Coronation, by Ai Weiwei, 2020, © Jo Underhill
**fig.xii** Cockroach, by Ai Weiwei, 2020, © Jo Underhill
**fig.xiii** Beijing, The Second Ring, by Ai Weiwei, 2005, all the Bricks © Ai Weiwei, Courtesy Lisson Gallery
**fig.xiv** Chang an Boulevard, by Ai Weiwei, 2004, all Bikes 13mins © Ai Weiwei, Courtesy Lisson Gallery
**fig.xv** Portrait of Ai Weiwei, 2020, © Thierry Bal

*Hawai'i Public Radio*
1st March 2022

Hawai'i Public Radio

# Hawai'i Triennial's many art exhibits are designed to make you think and feel

Hawai'i Public Radio | By Noe Taniguma

"Originally installed as a group of eight trees in the front courtyard of the Royal Academy of Arts in 2015, fragments of dead trees from southern China, artist Ai Weiwei's "Tree" (2006–18) have been grafted together to reimagine the original living tree. For the Hawai'i Triennial 2022, two of these types and two of their non-pair versions are grouped together in a variety and placed on the upper terrace of Foster Botanical Garden in Honolulu."

The Hawai'i Triennial is off and running in Honolulu, and there is a lot to see all around the city. The many art exhibits are designed to make you think and feel.

The Hawai'i Triennial, HT22, is offering experiences at Bishop Museum, the Hawai'i State Art Museum, and five other venues including Royal Hawaiian Center in Waikiki.

HT22 co-curator Miwako Tezuka says surprises are built in at every location.

"Our hope is that everybody, not thinking about contemporary art as something too difficult to understand or too foreign to you. We wanted to create purposeful windows for everybody to open so that they can really free their mind," Tezuka said.

The Global Free Store at Royal Hawaiian Center in Waikiki

For example, at Royal Hawaiian Center in Waikiki, Double A Projects has installed their Global Free Store. It's a non-commercial pop-up where people can give or take away useful items like household goods, books, drawings, clothes, whatever!

Also at Royal Hawaiian Center, Momoyo Torimitsu's gigantic Pink Bunny called, "Somehow I Don't Feel Comfortable."

Tezuka won't divulge where that sculpture is — she wants you to be caught unaware.

"Momoyo's work, Pink Bunny, is going to really surprise you, and hopefully activates your imagination," Tezuka told Hawai'i Public Radio.

Every Sunday in March, Foster Botanical celebrates the Triennial with free admission. Internationally renowned artist Ai Weiwei is among those showing at Foster Gardens.

Hawai'i Triennial runs through May 8.

*Hyperallergic*
2nd March 2022

# HYPERALLERGIC

## In the Work of Ai Weiwei, Biography Supersedes Art

Perhaps Ai is untouchable. If that is the case, where were we left when judging his new art?

by Michael Glover
March 2, 2022

Ai Weiwei, "Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo" (2016) (all images courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio)

CAMBRIDGE, England — Why is it so difficult to write about Ai Weiwei? I begin to discover the answer as I stand a few feet away from him at a press conference of sorts in Cambridge, England. Andrew Nairne, the director of Kettle's Yard, where a new exhibition, *Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt*, is being staged, is putting a few questions to him. It was to be a brief affair, that was made clear. We would not be detaining him for too long. After all, he had art to make, errands to run, a life to live, lunch to eat. Ai himself is sitting in a chair, with his legs drawn back. He is wearing canvas shoes. He is dressed entirely in black.

My eyes had strayed down to the shoes *faute de mieux*. The fact is that he had been very difficult to hear, and, if the truth were told, it was not really a press conference at all. The questions were soft-ball. The last was a rather emotional one from a journalist, and had largely consisted of thanks — from us all perhaps? Why not? — for being himself: a luminary, an activist, a man who speaks truth to power. Ai, being a courteous interlocutor, had returned her thanks. In short, no one was being called to account. It was an exercise in allowing us to be in the presence of Ai Weiwei, and many had eagerly answered that call. The atmosphere of awestruck reverence was almost suffocating. Perhaps Ai was untouchable. If that is the case, where were we left when judging his new art? And, if so, is that not a preposterous state of affairs for any critic to be in?

A Chinese white marble Buddhist deity

Andrew Nairne was especially pleased to be able to claim a precious part of Ai. He even called him *a local artist*. This is true in part, of course. Ai has been in Cambridge since 2018. Cambridge was a good place to educate his son, and so he lives there — at least part of the time, with that son, his two cats, and his girlfriend. But does he not also live, at least part of the time, in Portugal? And did he not once live in Berlin, where he had a very large studio indeed? And was he not once also in New York, for a little more than a decade, living as an undocumented immigrant, savoring the freedom of Reagan's America, learning the joys of being able to snap, quite casually and off the cuff, with a small, handheld camera, enjoying the precious freedoms of not being snooped on? And also learning what it might be like to work as a practicing artist, from the likes of Duchamp, Warhol, and Jasper Johns?

In the taxi back to the station, after all the razmatazz is over and done, I throw out a question to the publicist who is sitting behind me. Do you think he still feels under threat? There must be paranoia, she replies. How could there not be, given all that he has suffered?

That is the crux of the matter, of course. Ai has suffered a great deal for his art. As did his poet-father before him, who was banished to the countryside and forced to do meaningless toil, and to bow his head in shame every evening, for being nothing other than who he was. And he had been accompanied to that godforsaken, barren place by his son, who had been a witness to all his father's humiliations.

Years later, those years in New York came to an abrupt end. His father was ill. He needed his son back in China. What else drew him back? The Tiananmen Square protests and massacre of 1989. That was a turning point. He had to stay, to register a protest. How to do it though?

Ai Weiwei, "Surveillance Camera with Flash" (2014)

The rest of his story in China, at first as an underground agitator of sorts, is fairly well known. It does not end well, of course. He helps to design the Wasp's Nest stadium, and later is infuriated by how the CCP coopts it, using it as a platform for propaganda. In 2011, as he tries to leave the country, he is arrested. His passport is taken from him, and he spends 81 days in secret detention. He is refused the right to travel for four years. His studio in Shanghai is demolished. He leaves. He makes a home in Europe. And now he is a man who seems to live both somewhere and nowhere, a kind of drifting sage, a man known, above all things else, for his role as a conscience.

But what sort of work does he make? The fact is that his trajectory as a maker is less clear than his persona as something of a hero of our times. And that is a problem. It makes it more difficult to judge his work.

Much of the show is not work by Ai Weiwei at all. It is a lesson in encouraging his audience to think about the nature of faking and copying, and it pivots around a group of 14 Chinese antiquities that Ai thought he had bought from Cheffin's, an auction house in Cambridge, relatively recently, and which are now on display in one of the two downstairs galleries.

*Thought* he had bought antiquities? Yes, precisely. The difficulty is that some were not antiquities at all; they were copies. And part of the reason Ai has displayed them here is to remind us that the Chinese do not subscribe to the same idea of the *authentic object* as the West. There can be bad copies made for sale in the museum shop, and superb copies that can be regarded as equal to the original. This can cause big problems, even in China. In the last five years, according to a conversation reported in the show's catalogue, a museum has opened in China every few days. At least three of them have subsequently closed because most of the works were forgeries.

Ai Weiwei, "Handcuffs" (2011)

These thoughts are swirling around my head when I walk into the second of the exhibition's galleries. This gallery contains objects authored by Ai himself. I choose that word "authored" with some care because these works have not necessarily been made by him. He has conceived them. You could say that they are conceptual artworks, more akin to Duchampian readymades than anything else — though these are readymades with a twist or two. Many are fabricated from precious materials — jade, for instance — and could quite legitimately be described as brilliant examples of the craftsman's art.

Consider a set of jade handcuffs, for example. Did Ai Weiwei make them? No, almost certainly not. As he remarked at the press conference, when speaking of the talented craftsmen who work for him, "I always want to give them more difficult work to do." These are jade replicas of the very handcuffs that shackled him, and they must indeed have been very difficult to make. They are two things at once: a painful fragment of autobiography and a reminder of a state's repressive actions. This is the problem, though: the fact that they are so directly related to the artist's own backstory makes it difficult to judge them as works of art. That familiar backstory, together with the knowledge that these evils have been perpetrated by a one-party state whose actions much of the world has agreed to abhor, block our path. He is too much of a hero activist; he is too much an enemy of our favorite enemy, communist China. Is it also not a touch vainglorious on the part of the artist to raise up these handcuffs in this way?

*Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt continues at Kettle's Yard (University of Cambridge, Castle Street, Cambridge, England) through June 19. The exhibition was devised by Ai Weiwei and curated by Elizabeth Brown, Guy Haywood, and Andrew Nairne.*

*Varsity*
4th March 2022

VARSITY

# In conversation: Ai Weiwei and Kettle's Yard director Andrew Nairne

'I was born into political struggle, I didn't jump into it': Weiwei and Nairne discuss Weiwei's new exhibition 'The Liberty of Doubt'

by **Akshata Kapoor**

Weiwei and Nairne at Kettle's Yard before the press viewing of 'The Liberty of Doubt'
AKSHATA KAPOOR

Before the press viewing of Kettle's Yard's new exhibition, Ai Weiwei sat down to discuss 'The Liberty of Doubt' exhibition. Looking bemusedly at the eager gathering of journalists, he answered questions with jokes and wry comments. Light-hearted yet profound thoughts lent insight into the hilarious, defiant, creative genius behind the works we were about to see.

Andrew: The title of this exhibit is 'The Liberty of Doubt', could you tell us a bit more about it?

Wei: There was a Guardian review of this exhibition and the main message they sent was that *we really doubt this artist is a real artist*, which is very interesting. This time we have given a new definition of ourselves. Our art, culture, and politics has been dramatically changed. Changing. I think the title is fitting too... I don't want to explain more in detail, but it's a really nice title.

Andrew: Does it means more to you than other artists because of your experiences in China? You are hyper-aware of notions of freedom, whether it is freedom to interpret and understand history and culture, or freedom in some political and social matters...

"I don't care about becoming an artist, but I really care to become a good craftsman"

W: Talking about being from China: my friend in New York, when I showed him my work, he likes it. He also said I don't know any gallery who would show a Chinese artists work. He's honest, it's 1980s. By the 2000s many galleries – major galleries – showed Chinese artists' works. So, times change. Before, they call me a dissident, now [much of the] media is asking *is he really an artist or an activist wanting to make some kind of big splash?*

That's why I wrote my book '1000 years of Joy and Sorrow', which explains why I get involved with political struggles. Because I was born into political struggle, I didn't jump into it. My works, if you look carefully, focus on the traditional meaning of art and craft and shape... in all kind of media and forms. And that's part of my interest. I don't care about becoming an artist, but I really care to become a good craftsman, because that means your hands can find true knowledge.

"Only art or poetry makes us feel the area that the authoritarian can never touch"

A: One of the documentaries showing upstairs is about the migration crisis. These antiquities here, if you like, are a sort of parallel. To be authenticated in a museum where you need three or four people to make exact comparisons [of the reals and fakes], you need someplace like the Metropolitan Museum. So, these antiquities are also in a kind of limbo. In a kind of non-space that also raises concepts about objects being in exile in museums. There are lots of parallels between ideas flowing between the documentary and what you see in the galleries.

I was thinking about one specific work- the handcuffs made out of jade. What do you feel happens to the idea of handcuffs when they are made in jade?

W: I'm an artist, really like using my imagination. Most things I make because I think that would be a good idea. First, jade has the longest history in human fascination about objects. 1.4 billion people have the longest tradition dealing with jade from 6,000 years ago that's a tradition that's never stopped, not interfered by war or different kinds of religion. This is an ordinary piece of stone, they [gave] that stone an essential power by carving it, by relating it to their ritual or goodwill or what they're scared about.

Because carving is a difficult [skill]. [Putting] one piece of stones into one element which can loosely connect with others requires tremendous [effort]. Handcuffs can do that because its two pieces that can connect by a ring, and they have to come from a very hard piece of rock. And so, I give my craftsmen this challenge because they always want me to give them more work for them to do, that will consume their time and they will less come back to me to bother me with what's next.

That this is being exhibited -- For me, it's a joy, but that's a joy that comes also *because* I was handcuffed by the state, I was kidnapped by the state for my report. So mystical to think of why powerful state have to do that to me, I'm just a stupid artist; I cannot even convince the audience that I'm an artist so why are you worried about me...

*Weiwei spoke a bit more about his sense of belonging to Kettle's Yard, the use of porcelain in the exhibition, and the exhibit's connection to his father. He ended the discussion with some thoughts about beauty and creation inspired by his father.*

W: All my understanding about art has come from [my father]. If he sees something beautiful, he becomes so happy. Only art or poetry makes us feel the area that the authoritarian can never touch.

Imagination must be some kind of desire. It is something that we don't have or [are] always thinking *that would be a good idea if that could exist. Doesn't matter what happens, I want to make that happen.* ●

*Artsy*
11th March 2022

ARTSY

# Hawai‘i Triennial 2022 Emphasizes Local Culture in a Global Exhibition

Ayanna Dozier

Installation view of Hawai'i Triennial 2022, Royal Hawaiian Center, 2022. Photo by Lito Lee. Courtesy of Hawai'i Contemporary.

The running theme for the 2022 Hawai‘i Triennial is outreach. After two successful iterations as a biennial in 2017 and 2019, the survey exhibition, which is presented by Hawai‘i Contemporary, returned as a triennial in 2022 with a city-wide exhibition curated by Dr. Melissa Chiu and associate curators Dr. Miwako Tezuka and Drew Kahu‘āina Broderick. The hiatus since the 2019 biennial afforded the exhibition more space and time to critically consider the role of the local and the global in cultural conversations across Hawai‘i. This is evident with the title of the exhibition, “Pacific Century – E Ho‘omau

no Moananuiākea," the first time the exhibition's title is in Hawaiian.

"Pacific Century – E Ho'omau no Moananuiākea" features two key Hawaiian expressions merged together: *ho'omau*, which translates to "perseverance," and *moananuiākea*, which means "Pacific," the oceanic body that Hawai'i is located within. The exhibition catalogue is bilingual, with texts in both English and Hawaiian. The use of the Hawaiian language prioritizes the local community of Hawai'i among the global audience who will be attending the exhibition. This emphasis speaks to the motives of the exhibition as a whole: to reestablish Hawai'i as a key link across intercultural, global exchange.

Site specificity is another point of exploration, as the exhibition takes place across seven institutions that vary in cultural practice: Bishop Museum, Foster Botanical Garden, Hawai'i State Art Museum, Unexpected Encounters, Honolulu Museum of Art, Royal Hawaiian Center, and Hawaii Theater Center. Additionally, the Iolani Palace was used to open the triennial with a projection by Los Angeles–based artist Jennifer Steinkamp.

The chosen sites create a beautiful tension in the triennial from the use of state museums to the Royal Hawaiian Center, which is a shopping mall. Chiu described this occupation of space as practice that allows art to be everywhere. She further elaborated that it also reminded her of exhibition work she did across Asia and Oceania where in specific environments, shopping malls were used as exhibition sites because there were no neighboring museums.

Jennifer Steinkamp, installation view of *Queen Lili'uokalani* (2022) at Hawai'i Triennial 2022, Iolani Palace. Photo by Lanmaile. Courtesy of the artist and Kinz+Feigen.

The show opened with a public large-scale projection by Steinkamp at the Iolani Palace, entitled *Queen Lili'uokalani* (2022), referencing Hawai'i's last sovereign monarch who was forced to abdicate the throne to U.S. forces in 1893. Steinkamp's public activation features Queen Lili'uokalani's garden projected onto the Palace, redefining the space of her imprisonment as an intervention in the history of Hawai'i. It is a sheer marvel that the Iolani Palace was not torn down as one of the few architectural remnants of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

Interconnectedness across various cultural institutions is emphasized by the curators' work in the triennial and their outside practices. This emerged in two key areas: the selection of artists and the framing of Hawai'i to audiences. On the latter point, leading

up to the triennial, associate curator Tezuka emphasized in the Hawai'i Contemporary Art Summit how the exhibition was allowing her to unlearn harmful narratives of Hawai'i as a paradise. For Chiu, unlearning the "paradise" narrative came through the collaborative process of working with the artists alongside Tezuka and Kahu'āina Broderick, who is a native Hawaiian.

Portrait, from left to right, of Hawai'i Triennial 2022 curators, Drew Kahu'āina Broderick, Melissa Chiu, and Miwako Tezuka at Hawai'i State Art Museum, 2022. Photo by Brandyn Liu. Courtesy of Hawai'i Contemporary.

But unlearning paradise has a precedent in Chiu's practice, as evidenced by "Paradise Now?: Contemporary Art From the Pacific," the 2004 exhibition she curated at the Asia Society and Museum in New York. To rethink Hawai'i beyond the prism of leisure intervenes on what scholar Edward Said described as the Western imagination of Asia-Pacific Oceania made possible by colonial histories. Paraphrasing her colleague Kahu'āina Broderick, Chiu further reiterated that "we acknowledge those who are with us and those who have been practicing in other places in this show" across social and climate justice.

The intricacies of these histories are further affirmed through the artist selection, which includes Theaster Gates, Ai Weiwei, Gaye Chan, and Momoyo Torimitsu, among others. Featuring both locally and globally established artists was a way to complicate how we typically view these artists and emphasize the influence of Asia-Pacific Oceanic territories' culture on a global audience.

Chiu elaborated on this argument by pointing to Gates's sculpture series of tarred vessels that he began in 2021, "Preservation Exercise." These vessels see Gates work with Japanese ceramic traditions—infusing them with West African and Black American cultural and labor histories. Gates's work is staged in the Japan gallery at the Honolulu Museum of Art. This staging not only affords audiences a different perspective of Gates's practice that is underexamined by institutions and art historians, but also complicates his own practices of disrupting monolithic interpretations of Blackness and Japanese culture. The latter is both an exciting and necessary intervention to those representations.

Ai Weiwei, installation view of Tree, 2010, Iron Tree, 2010, and Tree, 2010, at Hawai'i Triennial 2022, Foster Botanical Garden, 2022. © Ai Weiwei. Photo by Lila Lee. Courtesy of the artist and Hawai'i Contemporary.

The Foster Botanical Garden is used as a site to respond in real time to the ecology of Asia-Pacific Oceania through Ai's installation *All Three Together* (2010–22), which features a series of eroding trees made from iron and wood materials. Elsewhere, at Unexpected Encounters, Gaye Chan's artistic practice sees her occupy sites in order to develop anarchistic methods to redistribute food resources to local communities, evident in her collaborative series "Eating in Public" (2003–present). Chan's practice echoes native Hawaiians' critiques of a tourist industry that erases their visibility and damages their communities.

Through all these critical points of tension, Chiu recommits to the triennial's openness to being aware of misrepresentation and erasure across Hawai'i's history, culture, and ecology. Chiu asserts that knowing these tensions gives us a way to look at Hawai'i that underscores histories of colonialism and how they continue to inform the way we see and understand Hawaiian culture. As Chiu described, the triennial solidifies the "local as the global imprint of the exhibition and intercultural relations." ∎

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ArtReview

# How To Be a 'Real' Artist

Tom Whyman

**What Plato, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Werner Herzog, Iris Murdoch, Ai Weiwei, and Canadian comedian Nathan Fielder might teach us about artmaking and authenticity**

As we all know, the way we see art is always bound up with the notion of authenticity. In the most obvious example: 'fake' paintings, that are known to be fake, have next to no value; a 'real' one, or one believed to be real, might in some cases be worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Wealthy collectors need to feel the assurance that this object they own was touched by the hand of the master; scholars need to know that it was really produced at the point in art history that it purports to have been. A genius is no longer a genius if they are discovered to have plagiarised from somebody else. The real object is one and only one thing: a fake, by contrast, might be infinitely replicable. Anyone can right-click on a jpeg of an ape, but you can get hundreds of thousands of dollars for one if it was minted on the blockchain.

There is at least some measure of cognitive dissonance here. Art involves making things up. But we also long to feel assured that its invention is not merely fanciful: that a given object might turn some gears with social, physical, historical reality. Imagining stuff is great: we can imagine anything we want to. I can sit here and imagine a man whose hands are replaced by wolves; a woman who can only hear the buzzing of bees, whenever she sees the letter k. I can imagine a lamp as an overworked doctor, working in the NHS; a spoon as Director-General of the BBC. But a funny story might only be funny, if we believe that it really occurred. The image of a spoon as BBC DG is merely silly – but imagine if the government *actually* put a spoon in charge of the BBC. Imagine how strange that would be, imagine what you'd think. Imagine the political fallout from such a move. Imagine remembering that it happened, years later. You know: did they *actually?* Does anyone remember this? Is the spoon still in charge? How did this even work? Did the government *actually* make a spoon the Director-General of the BBC?

But any easy dichotomy between the 'real' and the 'fake' is likely to be shallow. Ai Weiwei's exhibition *The Liberty of Doubt*, currently on at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, pairs authentic historical Chinese artefacts with forgeries. But of course all this ends up doing is producing a new range of 'real fakes' – the real fakes that were actually produced by the master, Ai Weiwei. If I had the pottery skills I might forge a forgery, and pass it off as an authentic Ai fake. Hence why many of the most important philosophical aestheticians of the twentieth century were drawn to bulk out the notion of authenticity in art with a bunch of other different, perhaps more fundamental concepts.

Congo, the chimpanzee painter. Courtesy: Mayor Gallery

Werner Herzog's notion of 'ecstatic truth' is helpful here: if the point of art is to teach us things we don't already know, to de-centre ourselves from ourselves and with this to show us something fundamental about the truth of our world, then the artist cannot be permitted, in Herzog's words, to 'confound fact and truth.' The facts are already known – the truth, what is 'really real': that is what is beyond us. As (notoriously) in Herzog's own documentaries: what is *ultimately* true might thus be best served by 'fabrication and imagination and stylization.'

Walter Benjamin spoke of 'aura' as the power ostensibly 'authentic' artworks have over us, and which was in his time, he thought, being eroded by the possibility of said artworks' mass reproducibility – a development which he believed was an essentially good thing: the democratisation of art (Benjamin would have been dismayed by the advent of NFTs). For Theodor Adorno, all artworks, authentic or otherwise, were *enigmatic*: what this enigma demands is philosophical reflection, to solve the riddle that any particular art object poses; to determine its 'truth-content'. To figure out, in short, what any given work of art is trying to tell us about the world. For Adorno, art *fails* when it tells us something untrue – 'Great artworks are unable to lie.' This thought chimes with one from Iris Murdoch, namely that the point of art is to take us in some sense *beyond* ourselves. 'Good art reveals what we are usually too selfish and too timid to recognize, the minute and absolutely random detail of the world.'

In a way though, all of these ideas can be traced back to the work of the man who was perhaps the very first thinker to be troubled about the power of art to mislead: Plato. The famous 'Cave Allegory', from *Republic*, gives us the image of the illusory world of mere appearances (the shadows that appear before the prisoners, playing on the walls of the cave), which contrasts with the 'real' world of the forms (the world outside the cave, which one of the prisoners suddenly finds themselves taken to by force). But the reason why the Cave Allegory has proved so philosophically enduring is not that it presents us with this sort of simple distinction between appearance and reality, but that it shows us just how much of a *struggle* it is to make sense of it. After all: when the freed prisoner returns to the cave, to tell his former brethren about the wonderful world that exists beyond their chains, the first thing that Plato thinks his audience are likely to do is to try and kill him. The truth is not remotely easy: it is something that both exists within, that must be validated in and through a given social context, while also standing necessarily in tension with any society as it actually exists.

In the cave, the prisoners see things illuminated by their fire, which misleads; outside of it, they see things illuminated by the sun, which reveals things as they really are. But what might 'the sun' here be, for us? In Plato, it is supposed to be the Good – but what could that actually, possibly mean, to see things in the light of the good? There is a risk of circularity here: things are real when they are real, and fake when they are not.

Cueva de las Manos, Argentina. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons; photo: Mariano. CC BY 3.0

Iris Murdoch struggled with this question herself. Towards the end of her most enduring philosophical work, *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), she suggests that, of the many concepts we might fill 'Good' with, perhaps the best candidate we have is Love (by which Murdoch seems to mean something more like Christian neighbour-love, than self-assertive, erotic love). We are human, Murdoch notes – we are fallible. We cannot always see things right, or well; we can barely even hope to. But we can always strive to see things Lovingly: to see ourselves, and others, in their best light; to refuse always to be led astray, by what might otherwise consume us – by mutual suspicion, our own insecurities, and petty grievances. Sometimes, yes, this might go wrong – and sometimes love can itself distort and mislead. But it's the best thing we have to go on.

In terms of contemporary artists, however, the modern master of the appearance-reality distinction is not Ai Weiwei. For my money, it's Nathan Fielder. I've been thinking about the Canadian comedian recently for no better reason than that I spent the past month or so watching his 2013-2017 Comedy Central series *Nathan For You* – a satirical faux-docu-reality show – all the way through.

*Nathan For You* started out with funny episodes in which the awkward, incompetent Fielder (who interacts with real people, while playing a fictionalised version of himself) 'helps' small businesses by drawing on the expertise he has ostensibly accrued as a result of graduating from "one of Canada's top business schools, with really good grades" (Fielder did actually study Business at the University of Victoria). In the first episode, for instance, Fielder convinces a frozen yoghurt place to start serving a new yoghurt flavoured like poo.

*Nathan For You*, 2013-2017. Courtesy Comedy Central

Throughout the show's run though, Fielder – perhaps struggling against the difficulty of convincing any actual business owners to go along with his ridiculous ideas – gets more and more interested in the relationship between the pranks he is staging as part of his TV show, and the actual reality that exists beyond them. In early episodes, this means staging stunts, like faking a cute viral video to promote a petting zoo, or exploiting a loophole in copyright law to open a parody Starbucks (both these stunts end up making the actual news). In later episodes though, Fielder's fakes start having less and less to do with promoting any actual businesses: in one episode, he commissions a ghostwriter to produce an autobiography of a body-builder he wants to pass off as having gotten in shape solely by lifting furniture, in order to convince a moving company that he can exploit a fitness craze to supply them with free labour; in another, Fielder's efforts to promote a restaurant by having a Michael Richards impersonator leave an unusually generous tip there end up necessitating that he start a fake newspaper called *The Diarrhoea Times*.

All of this culminates in the show's last and best episode: the hour-and-a-half special 'Finding Frances' (2017). In 'Finding Frances', Fielder decides to help Bill Heath, a 78 year-old Bill Gates impersonator who has been roped into his pranks before, reconnect with his "long-lost love," a woman named Frances Gaddy, who he abandoned as a young man in his home town of Little Rock, Arkansas, in order to pursue his dream of becoming a Hollywood actor. On the surface at least, Heath's story is a powerful one: of love and loss undying for some 50 years; of regret and of a hope that refuses to die. But Heath is a strange presence: stiff and evasive, vague on any of the real details about his relationship with this woman. And early on, it becomes clear that in his dealings with Fielder at least, he has always been a fake: he has never been a professional Bill Gates impersonator, he just pretended to be one to get on TV. Heath himself is a forgery of a forgery, a fake of a fake. He does not seem to know how to *be*, honestly, in the world: with him, nothing is ever quite real.

Fielder and Heath travel to Arkansas, where they struggle to uncover any information about Frances, while Fielder finds it increasingly difficult to be sure about any of Heath's real motivations. At one point, he decides to hire an escort to take Heath on a date, in order to address the doubts that are beginning to grow in Fielder's mind about how Heath relates to women. On learning that the woman he's being set up with is a sex worker, Heath refuses to see her – and so Fielder decides to meet her instead.

*Nathan For You*, 2013-2017. Courtesy Comedy Central

What then follows is one of the strangest sequences in recent television history, as we see Fielder, filming an episode of his show in which he fakes things, which is focused on a fake man's (possibly fake) long-lost love, meeting a woman whose job is effectively to pretend, to lonely men, that she's their girlfriend, and going on a date with her... and then another... and then another... and then for all intents and purposes seeming to fall in love with her, as they meet in private in Fielder's hotel room, and share a kiss, but with the cameras on, and they both clearly know that what they're doing is for a show. Fielder seems to shed some layer of his usual on-screen persona, and he is seen with the escort, Maci, acting not like the usual stiff, awkward character he portrays, but as you imagine he might be in real life: making wry jokes, casually performing magic tricks – honestly attempting to charm her.

And the effect of all this is utterly vertiginous. It is like looking at the televisual equivalent of an Escher painting: from no perspective can you quite make out what is really going on here. Is Maci actually an escort from Little Rock, Arkansas, who Fielder has repeatedly hired for his production, presumably at her usual rates – or is she an actress, playing one? Did Fielder actually develop feelings for this woman, or was he just pretending to, for the purposes of his TV show? Why is he even *showing* us any of this, anyway? And frankly – is any of this *OK?* Is this not horribly exploitative of everyone involved, including perhaps even Fielder himself?

I doubt that any of this was designed with the idea of refuting Iris Murdoch in mind, but if it was – bravo. 'Finding Frances' is about Love – where Love features throughout, almost exclusively, as a force of distortion. Heath's 'love' for Frances is little more than a thin veneer of self-denial: he has never married, he has never had children, he has never been a success – his memory of Frances is all he has left, to prove to himself that he hasn't completely wasted his life. Nathan's 'love' for Maci, meanwhile, is something else entirely: a relationship which *seems* very real, when you watch it on the show, but which we also know, as an audience, is never going to be allowed to have its visas stamped, as it were, by the guards who lurk at the borders of reality.

So what are we to make of this? Do we, ultimately, have any way of making sense of reality at all? This much, at least, seems to be right: people like Bill Heath – people who live in denial of themselves – are only capable of distortion. Bill Heath is a failed actor; and he would also be a bad artist. Maybe honest people, by contrast, are capable of genuinely telling us things: of portraying things as they are. But then the question is: how might we ever know, that we're *really* being honest with ourselves? Nathan Fielder, for instance – does he know this? Does any artist, that sets out to manipulate the distinction between appearance and reality in clever ways? (Does Werner Herzog?). How can we ever *really* be sure, that we're one of the real people, and not the fake ones?

**Tom Whyman** Opinion 16 March 2022 artreview.com

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TOWN&COUNTRY

# The Hawaii Triennial Offers a New Way to Experience Paradise

The sprawling arts event, which runs through May, offers beauty beyond the beach.

"Waikiki is a conundrum," my dinner companion mutters. We're sitting in a second-floor restaurant overlooking that Honolulu neighborhood's famous beach—the one where Duke Kahanamoku inspired generations of surfers and where tourists and locals alike still gather to watch the sun set. It's an interesting thing for a local who works in the arts to whisper across a kale salad, but it's a valid point.

The conundrum, according to my new friend, is that Waikiki is one of the world's most recognizable tourist destinations. It's crowded at all hours of the day, built up with hotels and shops, and if it's the only stop visitors to the island of Oahu make, they might not walk away with much of an idea about the land they're standing on and the people who live there. Still, the revenue and jobs that the Honolulu neighborhood brings to the local economy are vital, and the fact that it does attract so many visitors (a reported 10 million people made their way to Hawaii in 2019) hypothetically means there will be many more chances for the real story of the island to be amplified for people from around the world.

It's an issue that the recently opened Hawaii Triennial (this edition is titled "Pacific Century–E Ho'omau no Moananuiākea") tackles head on. Spread out across seven of Oahu's major cultural institutions, the ambitious program—which features work by 43 artists, including Ai Weiwei, Jennifer Steinkamp, and Theaster Gates, in addition to many native Hawaiian artists, as well as workshops, panels, and virtual undertakings—will run for 11 weeks and offer visitors not only an opportunity to see photography, painting, sculpture, and performance work from the Pacific and beyond, but also a chance to consider the aspects of Hawaii that aren't always visible from Waikiki Beach.

Momoyo Torimitsu's "Somehow I don't feel comfortable," on display at the Royal Hawaiian Center as part of the 2022 Hawaii Triennial.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND HAWAI'I CONTEMPORARY. © MOMOYO TORIMITSU. PHOTO: LILA LEE

"When I was invited to be curator of the exhibition, I was very interested in the question of 'Why Hawaii?'" says Dr. Melissa Chiu, the curatorial director of the 2022 Hawaii Triennial and the director of the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. "That's what appealed to me, the idea of curating an exhibition that was in response to a place. My own background in studying and writing about Asian contemporary art prompted me to think, 'What would happen if in this century, Asian and Pacific artists were considered central rather than peripheral?' Instead of thinking of Hawaii as being on the outer edges of the continental U.S., 'What would happen if it was the center?'"

Along with a curatorial team that included Dr. Miwako Tezuka, associate director of Reversible Destiny Foundation in New York City, and Drew Kahu'āina Broderick, an artist, curator, educator, and native Hawaiian, Chiu built a program that spoke to that question. The triennial spans venues including the Royal Hawaiian Center, the Honolulu Museum of Art, Iolani Palace, the Hawaii Theatre Center, Foster Botanical Garden, the Hawaii State Art Museum, and the Bishop Museum, and includes photography, sculpture, mixed-media works, and site-specific pieces that are thought provoking and challenging.

Issues of Hawaii specifically are addressed throughout the triennial. At the Hawaii State Art Museum, the documentary work of video production team Joan Lander and Puhipau (known collectively as Nā Maka o ka 'Āina), which addresses topics including land rights and the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, is screening alongside unreleased archival footage. Nearby, the work of Hawaiian publishing outfit 'Elepaio Press, co-founded in 1976 by brothers Richard and Mark Hamasaki, is presented in an exhibition that celebrates the beauty of printed products and calls to mind earlier eras of struggles still being waged today.

Ai Weiwei's "Tree," at Honolulu's Foster Botanic Garden, is one of the stand-out pieces at the Hawaii Triennial.
LILA LEE

At the Bishop, New York–based artist Michael Joo's "Fossil Bed," made of a 400-million-year-old slab of petrified sea lily set on a four-poster bed, begs questions about time and land, but also references Queen Lili'uokalani, Hawaii's last sovereign monarch, and her infamous house arrest. In another room is Gaku Tsutaja's "Enola's Head," a fabric-and-video piece that considers the fallout of nuclear war and how both Japanese and American citizens live with its consequences. At the Honolulu Museum of Art, Theaster Gates is showing his film *A Clay Sermon* as well as a collection of his own ceramic works. Nestled into the groves of the Foster Botanic Garden, Ai Weiwei's three-piece "Tree" series looks at home among the lush foliage but is also meant to bring attention to the social structures of China, a country the artist left after being jailed in 2011; in the garden's orchid conservatory, the fashion label Toqa, based in Hawaii and the Philippines, presents "Extreme Sport Resort," an immersive installation that showcases not only their garments but a film and native flowers—and pieces from their line are available in the gift shop. At the Hawaii Theater Center, Ming Wong's mixed-media piece "Bloody Marys—Song of the South Seas" addresses racial stereotyping in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*. And at the Royal Hawaiian Center—an upscale shopping destination—the collective Double A

Projects presents "Global Free Store," a pop-up shop where visitors can take or leave items at no cost, which on a recent visit turned heads among the shoppers otherwise moving between the Apple store, jewelry shops, and designer clothing boutiques.

"There's a sense of negotiation," Chiu says of the work, which will be on display through May 8. "Everywhere has it to some extent—complicated ideas of community—and it's especially a part of the experience here in Hawaii. On the one hand, there is a tourism industry that generates a lot of attention and support for the community. But at the same time, there's a complicated history around land ownership and how that came about. That's one of the big points of discussion for us, how do we present within the exhibition the secret history of Hawaii? If you come here as a tourist, how can we complicate that through art?" (Local attractions are interested in the question as well; the Alohilani Resort Waikiki Beach is offering 20% off best-available rates to visitors traveling for the Triennial, and Hawaiian Airlines is another of the event's partners.)

The work of 'Elepaio Press and its cofounders Richard and Mark Hamasaki on display at the Hawaii State Art Museum.

COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS AND HAWAI'I STATE ART MUSEUM. PHOTO: BRANDYN LIU

Some ways are hard to miss, like Jennifer Steinkamp's "Queen Lili'uokalani," a projection and computer animation that splashed across the late monarch's home for three nights in February. Images of the flowers grown in her garden—which supporters brought to her daily during her confinement, sometimes wrapped in the day's newspaper to sneak news to her—were projected across the American Florentine villa. It was a true showstopper of an exhibition, visible to anyone who wandered by and beautiful enough to be enjoyed even without knowing the meaning behind the blooms. Others might catch viewers by surprise. "Cafe," staged by the Honolulu-based publisher Tropic Editions, overtakes a portion of the Hawaii State Art Museum's lobby and could be mistaken for a garden-variety museum canteen before visitors become aware that it's also an exhibition grappling with ideas about food, art, and the ways in which we nourish ourselves. (The grub, it must be said, is also delicious.)

"Often times we think of Hawaii as paradise, and we have a reductive image of the islands," says Tezuka. "As I was doing research, I was able to think about artists who might be able to bring in different historical perspectives and take inspiration from histories, cultures, and heritages of this place. By doing so, we're not only speaking to the communities here who know about much of this, but we're talking to international audiences and giving them a chance to learn about the past and the present of this place.

"I'm excited for the moments of surprise, particularly at the Royal Hawaiian Center, in the middle of commercialized Waikiki. Anyone who travels here and is looking for relaxing beach time might go shopping, and I imagine them happening upon our space, seeing something inside and being drawn to it. That's the kind of encounter I want."

**ADAM RATHE** Deputy Features Director

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HKFP

# China dissident artist Ai Weiwei warns of 'shaking foundation' of democracy over Russia's war on Ukraine

While condemning Russia's invasion of its neighbour as "unacceptable", Ai expressed concern about increasing global divisions. A "Cold War psychology is not going to work", he said.

AFP

by **AFP**
09:00, 19 MARCH 2022

***by Jastinder Khera***

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has revealed the "shaking foundation" of democracy, Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei said as he unveiled what he said was the biggest retrospective of his work to date.

Chinese artist Ai Weiwei reacts during a preview of his exhibition "In Search of Humanity" at the Albertina museum in Vienna, Austria, on March 18, 2022. Photo: Joe Klamar/AFP.

Reflecting on the war and the massive refugee crisis it has created, Ai expressed fears for "our... so-called peaceful life since World War Two"

"Suddenly we feel the... foundation is shaking of democracy and freedom," he told journalists in Vienna Tuesday.

He was speaking at the Albertina Modern gallery where the show, "In Search of Humanity", opens Wednesday.

While condemning Russia's invasion of its neighbour as "unacceptable", Ai expressed concern about increasing global divisions. A "Cold War psychology is not going to work", he said.

The new exhibition, which he described as "critical and radical", displays several works that are responses to the experiences of those fleeing war and persecution.

There is a striking arrangement of life jackets found on the shores of the Greek island of Lesbos, arranged around a giant crystal ball in a lotus-like installation.

That piece is also typical of the monumental nature of much of the work on show, which comprises more than 50 tonnes of material.

None of his previous shows, he said, had had such broad coverage of his work. It charts the evolution of his artistic work and political activism over several decades.

## Dystopian dolls' houses

What Ai calls the current "crisis of human rights and freedom of speech" is starkly portrayed in a life-size replica of the cell where he was held and interrogated after his 2011 arrest by the Chinese police.

A set of dioramas beside it depict scenes from his interrogation, like dystopian dolls' houses.

Some of his more recent works, such as the treadmill used by his friend Julian Assange during his stay at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, are perhaps not the easiest to read. Others however, pack a more direct emotional punch.

A huge installation makes use of twisted rebars salvaged from a school destroyed in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, which killed more than 80,000 people.

Embed from Getty Images

The work stands as a testament to the thousands of children killed when poorly constructed school buildings collapsed.

Irreverence and humour are also on display, such as in the series of photos of Ai's famous middle finger directed at sites such as the ceremonial gate in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. They are arrayed beneath a four-letter word lit up in neon.

He also makes extensive use of Lego as a medium — in one case to recreate the Saudi flag.

Instead of the Islamic profession of belief, the flag is emblazoned with the reported last words of journalist Jamal Khashoggi during his 2018 murder in Istanbul's Saudi consulate: "I can't breathe."

The show runs until September 4.

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The Guardian

# Ai Weiwei on the new Silk Road: 'This is China's counterattack in a global game of chess'

**China is pouring trillions into the developing world. It is, the artist and activist says, an audacious power grab**

by Ai Weiwei. Photographs: Davide Monteleone

The landscapes in Davide Monteleone's images of China's belt and road initiative are very familiar to me. We can see desert, uninhabited wasteland and views along the Yangtze River and in north-west China. There are also photographs showing the characters "Stay strong, Wuhan!" on skyscrapers in neon lights.

They are reminiscent of images I took in China, which captured dilapidated cities before they were rebuilt; energy plants; the development of impoverished areas and large-scale architecture. At that time, I wanted to write a new encyclopedia to elucidate new concepts and thoughts that emerge with rapid urbanisation, and to form a new language. The project was too ambitious, and I did not complete it. It was my failed "belt and road".

'Stay strong, Wuhan!' The Chinese city of Heihe seen from Blagoveschensk, Russia, across the frozen Amur River, February 2020

The initiative, which has been likened to the Silk Road trade routes of imperial China, was proposed by the current Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, as a blueprint to reposition China in the era of globalisation, and to change the world order in a Chinese way. The thinking behind this $1tn project is ambitious. Such long-term planning, coherent political goals and effective implementation are rare, both in Chinese and in human history. The ruling party in China has laid bare its determination to occupy an important role in the world.

Local people at work on the Great Renaissance dam, Ethiopia, September 2019. The mammoth project, which began on the Blue Nile in 2011, is one of the largest hydroelectric power plants in the world. China has contributed about $1.8bn of the $4.8bn total cost

The Tecno Mobile factory in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, September 2019. The Chinese phone manufacturer stopped doing business in Asia in 2008 to focus on the African market. It is now the second biggest supplier of smartphones on the continent

The goals of the belt and road initiative are pragmatic, unlike those proposed by the Chinese Communist party in their early days, and embodied in slogans such as "Exceeding the UK, Catching the US" in the 50s and 60s. China, with a huge amount of accumulated wealth and managerial and production experience, has understood that it can fill the gaps in parts of the world that are forgotten and abandoned by the west. These regions thirst for a strong economic entity to piece together fragmented, disorganised territories with longstanding historical differences. This is where China comes in.

About 145 nations have joined the belt and road initiative by signing a memorandum of understanding with China, including countries in Europe, south-east Asia and the Middle East. It is an initiative that mainly focuses on basic infrastructure and engineering projects, such as transportation through rail, road and ports, to facilitate global trade and offer solutions to the problems of developing countries – as the Chinese saying goes, "If you want to be rich, build roads first." Many people in China, and also in the developing world, feel optimistic about this initiative, and mock Europe and the US for failing to match its vision.

Aktau, Kazakhstan, October 2017. The city's port offers access to the Caspian Sea. From 2016 to 2020, trade between China and the Caucasus region almost doubled

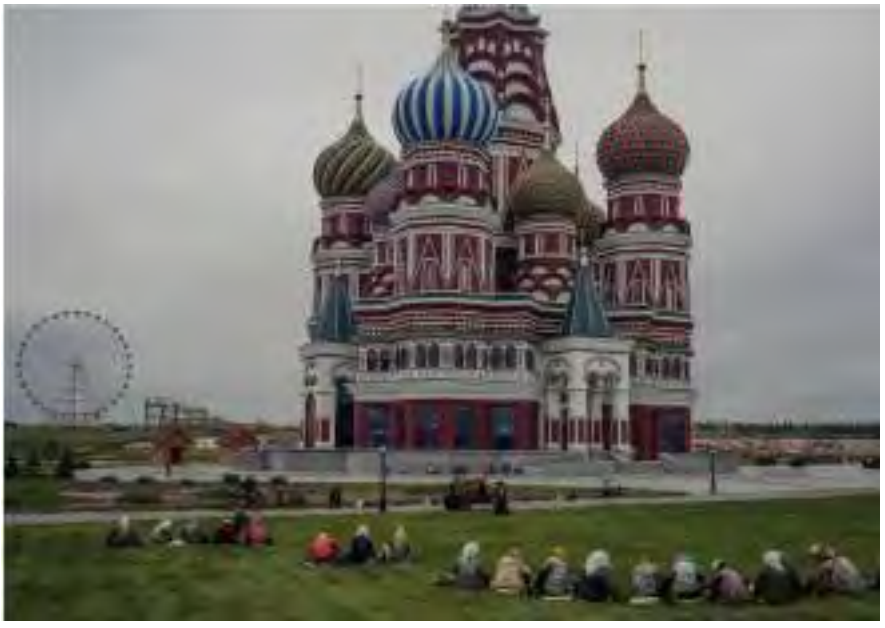
A monument in Khorgos, Kazakhstan, October 2017. The newly built tower will accommodate 100,000 workers serving the nearby Khorgos dry port. A Chinese logistics company has 49% ownership of the land

The belt and road was not a decision taken on a whim. The idea comes from an article by Mao Zedong titled "People of the world, unite and defeat the US aggressors and all their lackeys", published in 1970 and commonly known as the "520 statement". In this article, Mao prompted the developing world to be united and fight against western political power led by the US. He stressed the importance of nationalist revolutions, independence and liberation movements as the wave of unstoppable historical change. Mao quoted the Confucian philosopher Mencius – "a just cause attracts much support, an unjust one finds little" – to illustrate his belief that people in the world would triumph over Anglo-American imperialism.

When my generation was growing up, these thoughts permeated the entire country. I belong to the same generation as Xi. We were encouraged to "have the entire motherland in mind and the whole world in view" and to start revolutions everywhere in the world. These arrogant ideas relate to the ideology of that era. Based on these thoughts, the belt and road initiative is a strategic move that corresponds to the country's rapid development. The question is: will its goals be achieved in a world that is much more complicated than it once was?

Sihanoukville, Cambodia, December 2019. The once quiet tourist town on the coast has been transformed, its skyline dominated by casinos built to accommodate those seeking to avoid the ban on gambling in mainland China. More than 90% of businesses are Chinese-owned and locals complain the newcomers are turning the city into a de facto colony, forcing up rents and making them second-class citizens in their homeland

Monteleone's photographs are broad in scope and encompass many stories and strange landscapes. The Italian photographer began his project in Russia in 2014 before visiting vast rail and road projects across Asia; container ports; factories; casinos; and the Grand Renaissance dam in Ethiopia. The images clearly depict China's strategic ambitions, very different from the original Silk Road, which operated from around 130BC until the mid-15th century. The Silk Road was a network of trade routes, whereas the belt and road initiative embeds a political ambition beyond commerce. The issue in question here is: who will be the centre of the world? Who will rise to world power?



A copy of Moscow's St Basil's Cathedral in Manzhouli, China, August 2015. The small city on the Russian border is one of China's biggest trade hubs. The Ukrainian crisis has given fresh impetus to Chinese efforts to forge a closer relationship between the two nations, as Russia faces sanctions from the west

From my perspective, China refuses to waver in its policies, no matter what setbacks it encounters. The belt and road initiative is its counterattack in a global game of chess. The democracies of Europe and the US are very different from China.

Images from Ai Weiwei's Provisional Landscapes project in China. Photographs: courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio

Under pressure to solve short-term problems during their terms of office in order to get re-elected, western governments concentrate their efforts on capital projects and economic competition. The corporatocratic west, primarily measuring political success according to economic profitability, has lost its vision of pursuing mutual benefit and the wellbeing of humankind.

This, however, is not to say that China is necessarily bringing real benefits to the developing world. The belt and road initiative, launched to benefit China, is tinted with colonialism.

It leads this ancient country of 1.4 billion people to a swamp of pragmatism and egoism. While China is pumped up with ambition, it also sinks into contradiction and confusion, because of its lack of self-awareness. The ideological superstructure and economic base will be at odds with each other for a long time.

*France 24*
22nd March 2022

*Rome (AFP)* – **Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei makes his directorial operatic debut in Rome on Tuesday with a new reading of Giacomo Puccini's final, unfinished opera, "Turandot".**

Issued on: 22/03/2022 - 10:36 Modified: 22/03/2022 - 10:34

And with a storyline seeping with bloodshed and despotism, a new geopolitical focus and Ukrainian conductor Oksana Lyniv in the pit, the new production – originally meant to have premiered in 2020, but delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic – comes exactly on time.

From the ominous opening five notes, the audience is plunged into an uncertain, violent world and 64-year-old Ai never lets up the pressure.

The production, which opens at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, is a fitting project for an artist known for his installations, sculpture and photography that denounce authority and champion human rights and freedom of expression.

The presence of rising star Lyniv – who became the first woman ever to conduct at Germany's prestigious Bayreuth festival last year – further ramps up the immediacy of the production in face of the outbreak of war in Europe.

"It's beyond the imagination that we are still in the middle of these (territorial) conflicts," Ai told reporters last week.

"We're experiencing the biggest human struggle in Europe. Over three million Ukrainian people have been pushed out because of war caused by Russia," he said, speaking in English.

"We're in the middle of two crises."

- Pervading menace -

Puccini's dark opera centres around cold, vengeful Princess Turandot who kills her suitors if they fail to correctly answer three riddles for her hand.

Italian soprano Francesca Dotto and Italian bass Antonio Di Matteo star in Rome's new production of Giacomo Puccini's "Turandot" Handout OPERA DI ROMA/AFP/File

Refugees, a sacrificial victim and a morally compromised chorus round out the cast – all fodder for Ai, who uses unrelenting video images to intensify the sense of state-sponsored menace pervading the opera.

Behind a set resembling the ruins of a futuristic city, Ai projects distressing images from recent news events, whether masked hospital workers in protective gear, refugees fording rivers, riot police confronting Hong Kong protesters or migrants encircled by chain link fences.

"We are lost!" sings the chorus in the third act, as images of billy clubs, chokeholds and tear gas fill the screens.

Lyniv, 44, said Ai's strong visual symbolism perfectly fit the intentions of Puccini.

"From the first bars, you feel this apocalyptic character in the air, of what will happen," said Lyniv of the opera which was left unfinished with Puccini's death in 1924.

After wowing critics and audiences alike in Bayreuth last year, Lyniv made history again in January when she was named chief conductor of Bologna's opera, the first time an opera house in Italy has been led by a woman.

- Use your voice -

Hailing from Ukrainian city of Brody, about 100 kilometres (62 miles) east of Lviv, Lyniv said she conducted "Turandot" for the first time eight years ago in Odessa.

Many members of Odessa's orchestra, ballet corps and chorus were now defending Ukraine, she said.

From the ominous opening five notes, the audience is plunged into an uncertain, violent world and 64-year-old Ai Weiwei never lets up the pressure Handout OPERA DI ROMA/AFP/File

Ai said this particular moment was "a gift to the artists like us, still alive, who still have a voice" to defend peace.

The artist also has his own personal connection with "Turandot" – he appeared as an executioner's apprentice in Franco Zeffirelli's production of the opera at Lincoln Center 35 years ago.

His new version is performed without the ending added by Puccini's contemporary, Franco Alfano, increasing the opera's ambiguity.

Lyniv said the "open-ended" finale challenges the audience to decide, in observing the principal characters, "what role you have in this society" – implacable, cruel Turandot, risk-taking refugee Prince Calaf, or Liu who sacrifices herself for love.

The chorus was particularly relevant today, she said, as it is seen obeying, never questioning, the decisions of the blood-thirsty Turandot.

*The Financial Times*
24th March 2022

FT FINANCIAL TIMES

# Ai Weiwei's Turandot – artist's opera debut places politics over Puccini

Rome staging turns the story into a rallying cry for the world's oppressed but too many allusions feel tenuous and forced

Ai's bizarre, unfocused staging offers few meaningful insights © Fabrizio Sansoni

**James Imam** MARCH 24 2022

Ai Weiwei will seemingly turn his hand to any medium. The artist and activist has explored some of his preoccupations — forced displacement, autocratic power, popular uprising — with enormous sculptures, porcelain plates and documentaries in recent years. Now he has embraced arguably the most complex art form of them all. Ai's new production of *Turandot* at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, postponed from two years ago because of the pandemic, is his first foray into opera; as he has repeatedly said in interviews, it will also be his last.

Ai transforms Puccini's tale of love's victory over brutality into a rallying cry for the world's oppressed. The line-up of musicians inadvertently underlined the

timeliness of this vision. Ukrainian conductor Oksana Lyniv has conducted written a defiant open letter to Vladimir Putin and taken to conducting with a sash in the colours of the Ukrainian flag wrapped around her waist. In the Rome production, she is joined by her compatriot Oksana Dyka in the title role.

But Ai's bizarre, unfocused staging offers few meaningful insights. This sprawling multimedia production — for which the artist has provided the scenery, costumes and videos — is saturated with references to his best-known installations, with bomb-shaped headpieces, graphics of surveillance cameras and projected documentary footage depicting the Wuhan lockdown, Hong Kong protests and Rohingya refugees. Confusingly, Ai mixes lavish gowns, dragon-dancing and other picture-postcard depictions of traditional China with futuristic, bug-inspired garments. An inexplicable large frog clings on to Calaf's back for much of the first act.

Oksana Dyka is in the title role

There are rare flashes of poignancy: video images of the Hong Kong protests accompanying the baying crowds of the first act powerfully evoke a sense of struggle; moving footage from a refugee camp is shown when Liù sings the words "Noi morrem sulla strada dell'esilio!" ("We will die on the road to exile!"). Other allusions feel tenuous and forced, not least when the projected faces of Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden turn "Nessun dorma" into a generalised paean to a sleepless struggle against oppression.

If the central drama feels neglected, it does not help that Lyniv's coarse reading of the score fails to breathe life into the characters. Playing is generally loud and lacking in nuance, and passages of potentially transportative exoticism are devoid of magic. Ai has cut the final love scene that Franco Alfano wrote after Puccini died, meaning this staging ends with Liù's death rather than the usual redemption. Given the wooden performances on the opening night, this curtailment was not unwelcome.

Michael Fabiano's full-throated Calaf is vocally impressive but one-dimensional while Dyka's piercing Turandot has little chance to develop the character, given the cut. Francesca Dotto offered profound moments as Liù, but the spirited Ping, Pang and Pong (Alessio Verna, Enrico Iviglia and Pietro Picone) failed to cut through the overloaded staging. This production contains enough content to rival Ai's new retrospective exhibition in Vienna. The problem is that there is little room for Puccini.

★★☆☆☆

*Designboom*
26th March 2022

designboom®

## ai weiwei exhibits colossal glass sculpture of bones and viscera at roman national museum

### A TORTUOUS CASCADE OF BONES AND VISCERA

**roman national museum and berengo studio** have announced the debut of **'la commedia umana' by chinese artist and activist** ai weiwei, one of the largest murano glass works ever constructed. the huge chandelier consists of over two thousand pieces of hand-blown glass cast by master glassmakers of berengo studio, taking shape as **a cascade of bones, skulls, and black glass organs**. the installation is **now on display at the baths of diocletian**, the historical core of the roman national museum since its establishment in 1889. with its colossal dimensions, spanning over six meters in width, about nine in height, and weighing around four tons, the monumental sculpture will leave viewers in awe and admiration.

all images by daniele peruzzi unless stated otherwise

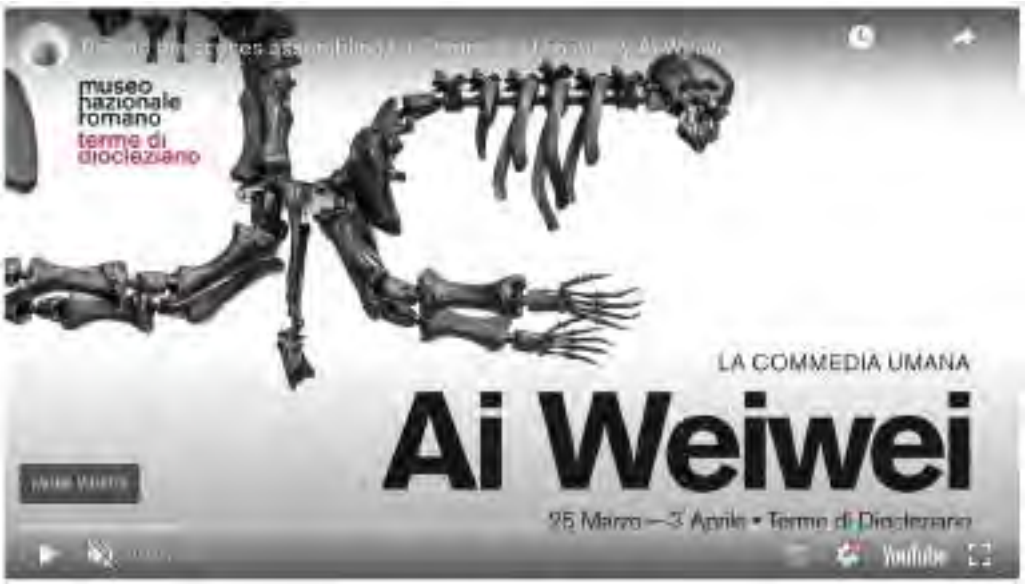
## 'LA COMMEDIA UMANA' BY AI WEIWEI

suspended from the ceiling one of the ancient bath's halls. the installation is the result of a collaboration between the [illegible] artist, and the [illegible] studio. **'la commedia umana' translated as 'the human comedy'** appears rather as a warning than a monument to the human loss, in an attempt to talk about *'death in order to celebrate the life,'* as the artist stated. through his work, ai weiwei creates food for thought about the future. questioning what remains **beyond the bones of our broken bodies.**

the work was started before the pandemic, but gradually became **a metaphor for the loss** during this difficult period. and now, it lights up under the war that causes misery to so many souls. *'la commedia umana shows the liberated content of a human body: our open interiority, the bowels of life laid bare and exposed to the view of all. our mortality expressed by the multiple parts that define our own form.'*

image by francesco allegretto

*'glass is a material that continually manifests its own mortality and I believe this is one of the reasons why so many artists are now deeply attracted to it. since I founded berengo studio in murano, around thirty years ago, we have witnessed a real rebirth in the world of glass. contemporary artists are no longer afraid of experimenting with this material, and all that it can offer for sculptural art. glass has this unique quality, its weighted symbolism. it was a personal journey for me to see the seed of ai weiwei's idea grow.'* **says adriano berengo, founder of berengo studio.**


museo
nazionale
romano
terme di
diocleziano
LA COMMEDIA UMANA
Ai Weiwei
25 Marzo—3 Aprile • Terme di Diocleziano

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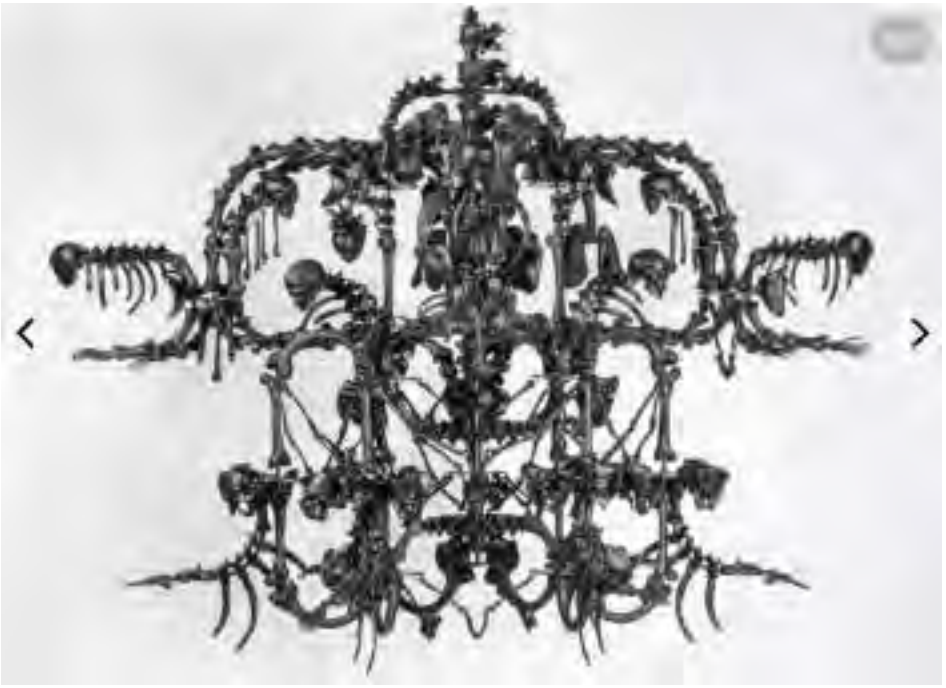

**project info:**

**name:** la commedia umana
**organised:** by the national roman museum **and** berengo studio **along with the** fondazione berengo
**artist:** ai weiwei
**dates:** from 25 march to 3 april 2002
**location:** baths of diocletian, national roman museum
**photography and videography:** daniele peruzzi

christina petridou | designboom mar 26, 2022

*Designboom*
29th March 2022

designboom®

# ai weiwei brings contemporary issues to debut opera 'turandot' in rome

## AI WEIWEI'S FIRST AND LAST OPERA

for his most recent creative undertaking, artist and activist ai weiwei has turned his hand to opera with a new reading of puccini's 'turandot', postponed for two years due to the pandemic. 'turandot' will be weiwei's first and only opera production and it's scheduled at the teatro dell'opera in rome from march 22 to 31, 2022.

showcasing his creative versatility, the artist has conceived every aspect of the new staging, including direction, set design, costumes, and video projections.

*'it is exciting to immerse yourself in the historical development of opera and dramaturgy, relating them to my personal experience and to my idea of the stage, performance, narrative, representation,' explains ai weiwei. 'opera is an incredibly rich form of art that stimulates the best qualities of human ingenuity, commitment, mastery, excellence. it will be my point of view, the opera immersed in the contemporary.'*

all images courtesy of opera di roma

## A CLASSIC TALE MEETS CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

first performed at milan's la scala theater in 1926, giacomo puccini's 'turandot' is an epic tale of love and violence set in an imagined version of china. in this latest theatrical direction of the famous opera, ai weiwei offers a modern interpretation, imbuing the original narrative with his thoughts on the great tragedies of today's world.

*'my turandot is still related to the classic understanding of love, hatred, revenge, and about people trying to accomplish something which is impossible,'* says weiwei.

for the costumes, set design, and video projections, weiwei created a total stage experience with powerful images and sculptural forms.

the artist decided to take on this opera in particular because, at a very young age, he had been an extra in zeffirelli's production of turandot at the metropolitan in new york. *'new york itself is like opera,'* comments weiwei. *'but I never could have imagined, 35 years later, I would become a director of the same opera performance... I am very fortunate to have the opportunity to do it.'*

ukrainian conductor oksana lyniv says, *'turandot is for me a work of great symbolic value. with his latest opera, puccini, the greatest italian composer of the twentieth century, rather than giving answers, he asks us questions. it is a suspended doubt, like the reality we are experiencing. through turandot I want to be the interpreter of the message that puccini wanted to leave to posterity in the last moments of his life, namely that love in the end is what matters more than anything else.'*

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4/5

**project info:**

**name:** turandot
**direction, scenes, costumes, video:** ai weiwei
**location:** teatro costanzi, opera di roma
**dates:** march 22-31, 2022

lynne myers | designboom

mar 29, 2022

*The Federalist*
1st April 2022

*the*
FEDERALIST

# Ai Weiwei's Memoir Tries To Tell Chinese History Honestly

BY: HELEN RALEIGH | APRIL 01, 2022

**Chinese artist and dissident Ai Weiwei's new memoir, 'A 1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows,' is a personal history of the tragedies wrought by Chinese communism.**

The Chinese Community Party (CCP) never likes an honest account of history. It has spent tremendous amounts of time and resources revising Chinese history, hiding the atrocities the party committed while casting the party in the most favorable light.

For some Chinese, preserving their memories has become one of the most potent ways to hold the CCP accountable. Chinese artist and political activist Ai Weiwei adds his voice in such an effort by publishing a new memoir, *A 1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows*.

In the book's foreword, Ai Weiwei wrote, "Ideological indoctrination exposed us to an intense, invasive light that made our memories vanish like shows." Ai felt a sense of urgency to provide his teenage son Ai Lao with a written record of the lives of himself and his father.

Ai Weiwei grew up in China and is the son of a famous Chinese poet, Ai Qing. The book's first half is about Ai Qing's life, especially his sufferings between 1957 to 1976.

Mao Zedong launched the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957 to purge intellectuals who criticized the CCP's policies. As a well-known cultural figure in China, Ai Qing was forced to undergo a spiritual and ideological "reform through labor."

The Chinese authorities first expelled Ai Qing and his family to the cold wilderness of China's northeast region. Then they relocated the Ai family to Xinjiang, a far western region where the CCP is committing genocide against Uyghur Muslims and minorities today.

The Ai family suffered the most during the cultural revolution, and they were sent to the Gurbantunggut Desert, known as "Little Siberia." Some of the best writing of this book occurs when Ai Weiwei uses almost poetic language to describe the humiliating and inhuman punishment his father had to endure.

Sixty-year-old Ai Qing was ordered to clean 13 communal toilets, "whose facilities consisted mainly of a row of squatting stations above a cesspit." The work was labor-intensive, especially during the winter months "when the feces would freeze into icy pillars." But here's how Ai Qing took it, "Before he began to apply himself to each latrine, Father would always light a cigarette and size up the work, as though admiring a Rodin sculpture." Yet Ai Qing's health, including his eyesight, quickly deteriorated due to overwork and poor nutrition.

As difficult as Ai Qing's sufferings were, many of his contemporaries endured far worse and some never made it out alive. Ai Qing survived the Cultural Revolution, and he and his family returned to Beijing. Later the government restored his pay and status. Many people in Ai Qing's generation, including Ai Qing himself, chose not to talk about their experiences because they didn't want to risk provoking the Chinese authorities and bringing more harm to their families.

## Disgust as Inspiration

The CCP has also worked overtime to revise its country's history between 1949 to 1979. The result is that generations of Chinese born after the 1980s have no knowledge of the real history from that period. Ai Weiwei wrote that even if today's younger generation of Chinese knew the actual history, "They might not even care, for they learn submission before they have developed an ability to raise doubts and challenge assumptions."

But Weiwei cares because he not only bore witness to his father's suffering but also had the front-row seat of experiencing how an authoritarian regime worked. His early life experience planted the seed of a rebellious attitude toward authorities, especially the CCP. In the second half of the book, Ai Weiwei gives a detailed account of his journey to become an artist and political activist and how the state punished him, just like his father endured decades ago.

Ai Weiwei's artistic output spans many genres, from photos to documentary films to large installments. Ai is known for being a provocateur, and Ai's art and his political activism often go hand-in-hand.

One of his most famous photos was is of him giving a middle finger in front of the Heavenly Peace Gate in Tiananmen Square, a place that often serves as a symbol of Communist China. Another piece of Ai's public art was the display of 9,000 backpacks, which he used to memorialize school children who were killed in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, as a result of the CCP failing to enforce adequate building codes.

Speaking of his art and activism, Ai Weiwei wrote, "My inspiration and boldness came from disgust and exasperation. My impatience with the timidity of my father's generation... I openly declared my opposition to the status quo, reaffirming, through the act of non-cooperation, my responsibility to take a critical stance."

While Ai earned international fame, his art and political activism eventually got him arrested. The Chinese authorities detained him for 81 days in 2011. After releasing him, the Chinese authorities accused him of tax invasion – Ai said it was a trumped-up charge – and demanded Ai to pay more than $2 million as a fine. His passport was confiscated, and he wasn't allowed to travel abroad for several years. Today, Ai Weiwei lives in the United Kingdom as an exile. He has said many times that if he returns to China now, he would be arrested for sure.

The best quote in the book is when Ai Weiwei explains why he would remain outspoken despite the danger. He wrote, "People asked me, *How do you dare say those things on your blog?* If I don't say them, it will put me in an even more dangerous situation. But if I say them, change might occur. To speak is better than not to speak; if everyone spoke, this society would have transformed itself long ago. Change happens when every citizen says what he or she wants to say; one person's silence exposes another to danger."

## Preserving Memories

This book is well-written but not without shortcomings. Ai is not a Trump supporter and has issued many public criticisms of Trump, especially on Trump's border wall. In this book, Ai compared Trump's "late-night tweets" during his presidency with Chairman Mao Zedong's daily directives during the early days of the Cultural Revolution. Many people who dislike Trump point to this comparison as evidence that Trump is a dictator, just like Mao.

But Ai's comparison of Trump and Mao was wildly misplaced because there is little resemblance between Mao and Trump. During his presidency, the corporate media united with big tech and other institutions to collectively reject Trump and undermine his policies. Trump had no other outlets to get his messages out accurately than through social media. Also, there are always many competing voices on social media, and Trump never had the power to compel any American to listen to him and social media platforms eventually banned him.

In contrast, Mao wielded absolute power. He controlled all the media in China, and his messages were the only ones that appeared in Chinese media. His voice was the lone voice Chinese people were allowed and required to listen to daily during Mao's rule, and no alternative voices or messages were allowed. The differences between Trump and Mao are so vast that insisting these two were similar undermines Ai Weiwei's stated goal of recording history truthfully.

Another shortcoming of the book is that Ai Weiwei avoids discussing fair criticism of his work. Some accuse him of "using contemporary political issues" only to make a name for himself, regardless of others' feelings.

For example, in the afterword of the book, Ai mentioned several art pieces he had done to highlight the plight of the Mediterranean refugee crisis. Yet Ai omitted to mention one particular piece, in which he posed as the drowned three-year-old Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi in a photo for an Indian magazine. The image was widely criticized because many consider it "Lazy, cheap, [and] crass."

Ai Weiwei said he wrote the book to tell his son who he truly is. However, by omitting fair criticism and without self-reflection, it seems his son and readers don't get a complete picture of Ai.

The title of the book came from one of Ai Qing's poem written after he visited the ruins of the ancient Silk Road. Ai Qing wrote:

*Of a thousand years of joys and sorrows*

*Not a trace can be found*

*You who are living, living the best life you can*

*Don't count on the earth to preserve memory.*

Books such as Ai Weiwei's certainly help preserve memories for someone who may care to know the truth in the future, including his own son.

*Channel 4 News*
8th April 2022

8 Apr 2022

## 'I don't think democracy exists in today's politics' – Ai Weiwei

Krishnan Guru-Murthy
Presenter

Chinese dissident Ai Weiwei is a world-famous artist and activist.

Krishnan speaks to him about China's relationship with the West, his father's exile and whether democracy really exists.

His new exhibition, The Liberty of Doubt, is currently on display at Kettle's Yard gallery in Cambridge.

Produced by: Freya Pickford

*Artnet News*
14 April 2022

artnet news

Art World

# 'I'm Very Interested in These So-Called Useless Objects': Watch Ai Weiwei Describe How He Chooses a Format for Pointed Critiques

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

**Artnet News**, April 14, 2022

Ai Weiwei, 2022. Photo: Helen Dickman.

On a spring morning back in 2011, then-mayor of New York City Michael Bloomberg welcomed visitors to the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's first major public sculpture project in Grand Army Plaza, near Central Park. The momentous occasion was marred of course, by the artist's inability to attend the opening—because he was in the midst of an 81-day long incarceration by the Chinese government.

A staunch activist who makes no compromises, despite ongoing threats of surveillance and censorship even after his release from imprisonment, Weiwei's art blends traditional Chinese imagery with contemporary concerns for human rights and social issues. Right now at Kettle's Yard at the University of Cambridge, an exhibition

titled "Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt" features many of the artist's seminal works, along with new installations.

In an exclusive interview filmed back in 2011 as part of Art21's *Art in the Twenty-First Century* series, the artist discusses some of his early sculptures, such as the security camera he produced in marble, stripping it of its utility and power.

Ai Weiwei, *Surveillance Camera with Plinth* (2014). Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio.

"I'm very interested in these so-called useless objects," he says in the video. As for the security camera, "surveillance has a very clear meaning. This is to monitor, or secretly monitor, people's behavior. But once it's become marble, it's only being watched."

The exhibition in Kettle's Yard explores themes of authenticity and globalization, which are on display in the artist's juxtaposition of historic Chinese objects purchased at auction alongside replicas from later years, often indistinguishable from one another. In other cases, the artist's own works, created in the manner of similar vessels, blur the definition of original, as in the *Han Dynasty Urn with Coca Cola Logo* (2014). The show's title, "The Liberty of Doubt," invokes Weiwei's observation that in China, "the concept of 'truth' is also part of nature, and hence not an absolute."

*Watch the video, which originally appeared as part of Art21's* Art in the Twenty-First Century *series, below. "Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt" is on view at Kettle's Yard at the University of Cambridge, U.K., through June 19, 2022.*

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

*Forbes*
26th April 2022

Forbes

# Venice Biennale 2022: Highlights From The Olympics Of The Art World

**Joanne Shurvell** Contributor ©
*I write about travel, food, culture and fashion.*

Na Chainkua Reindorf in front of her work at The Ghana Pavilion of the 59th International Art ...
(+) PAUL ALLEN/ANDPHOTOGRAPHY

The Venice Biennale, often described as the Olympics of the art world, can be a gruelling experience as there's so much to see and experience. This year's main exhibition features 213 artists from 58 countries, alone. There are also two other venues, the Giardini and the Arsenale, as well as countless offsite venues, official and unofficial. This year's biennale is heavily female focused with 90% female artists in the main exhibition. And the artistic director of the 2022 biennale is Cecilia Alemani, curator of New York's Highline contemporary art project. Golden Lion winners

were just announced as American artist Simone Leigh for her brilliant sculpture in the Arsenale and Sonia Boyce's UK pavilion.

With so much art in the two main venues, the 29 country pavilions in the Giardini and the former shipyard, the Arsenale as well as in churches, palazzos and shops, it's difficult to choose highlights but here are 18 must see exhibitions. And if you can't make it to Venice this year, take a virtual tour of the biennale with Great Art Cities Explained: Venice Special.

The 59th International Art Exhibition in Venice GETTY IMAGES

**Julian Opie, Ai Weiwei, St Regis hotel**

Julian Opie, Running in Venice at St Regis, 2022 GALLERIA MARIANE IBRAM

British artist Julian Opie is best known for digital artworks using LED screens which allow the artist to convey movement in his figures through a simple grid of alternating lights. However, the Venice government forbade the use of such technology on the grand canal so four of Opie's aluminium sculptures are on show outside of the city's newest luxury hotel. Inside is a spectacular Venetian glass chandelier by the controversial Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. Made of clear glass from the workshops of the best of the island of Murano's master craftsmen, at first glance the piece appears as a traditional Venetian chandelier but contains some of Ai Wei Wei's trademark surprises upon a closer inspection.

*La Vanguardia*
17 May 2022

LA VANGUARDIA



Es omnipresente. El artista más global. Su trabajo es sinónimo de denuncia al poder autoritario y de lucha a favor de los **derechos humanos**. La obra de Ai Weiwei se entiende mucho mejor después de leer sus **memorias** y de conversar con él sobre su vida (y la de su padre), marcadas por el exilio y la represión

*"A veces me pregunto si dejaré huella"*

# AI WEI WEI

***Inconfundible*** [illegible]

## Vida nómada, obra universal

*Rey Midas* de la disidencia política y la agitación artística

[illegible] Ai Weiwei es el rey Midas del exilio: de lo que toca, convierte arte. Desde su destierro de Pekín en 2015, se ha convertido en una especie de embajador de la causa de la libertad de expresión. Su obra es política, pero no panfletaria. Es conceptual, pero no hermética. Es personal, pero no excluyente. Es provocadora, pero no gratuita. Es crítica, pero no destructiva. Es política, pero no partidista. Es ética, estética y humana. Una combinación que sirve para denunciar los abusos de los poderosos, la falta de respeto por los derechos humanos, la represión de las minorías, el desprecio a los refugiados y la destrucción del planeta.

En las últimas líneas de sus memorias, las tres generaciones de Ai Weiwei, su padre y su hija, quedan unidas. ¿Después de escribirlas ha cambiado? ¿Se siente más completo? ¿Más libre?

[illegible]

El último, al final, un retrato de China en el último siglo. Y el deber que supone ser hombre. ¿Es cada vez más difícil ser hombre como varón de nuestra tradición? ¿Es el caso de la lectura Peng Shuai, que denuncia una violación y luego se retracta?

HORACIO VILLALOBOS / GETTY

**ICONOCLASTA**
*'Soltando una urna de la dinastía Han', de 1995, es uno de los manifiestos que mejor definen al artista: destrucción y unión de la herencia, el futuro y la protesta política*

**HUMOR PROVOCATIVO**
*'Urna de la dinastía Han...', de 1993, Ai plantea con un logo ajeno a la cultura milenaria china los nuevos derroteros capitalistas de un régimen autoritario*

»» La lucha de China en el último siglo es fea. El sufrimiento siempre está ahí: el siglo pasado y este. Esa lucha interna afecta a lo más básico, que es la distribución de poder y su legitimidad. Y lo que queda es la ocultación de información por parte de China para mantener a los ciudadanos en la ignorancia. Hoy en día, el sufrimiento de la gente de Hong Kong o el caso Peng Shuai demuestran solo una pequeña parte de lo que está sucediendo (en China). La fotografía completa es mucho más brutal que eso.

**En las memorias salen muchos poetas: su padre, Ai Qing, y Pablo Neruda eran amigos. Cesare Pavese decía aquello de *Lavorare stanca*: trabajar cansa. ¿Usted se cansó escribiendo? ¿Fue liberador?**

Escribir es como viajar en un túnel. Te sientes muy solo y es muy cansado. Tenía que responsabilizarme de todo lo que escribía, no por mí sino por la generación de mi padre y su historia. Eso constituía una presión enorme... y la verdad es que acabarlo de escribir fue un alivio descomunal.

**En una librería de Barcelona vi un libro de su padre editado en inglés y en el que usted firmaba el prefacio. Usted ha relanzado la voz de su padre. ¿Cree que les ha dado esperanza a millones de chinos?**

Los intelectuales de la generación de mi padre atravesaron tiempos muy brutales. Fueron sometidos a un rodillo político ante el que no podían hacer frente, no tenían tanta fuerza para ello. Yo espero, con certeza, que Occidente tenga una oportunidad, o varias, de entender que la situación de China es muy diferente de la que ve y reconoce desde aquí.

**Si algo ha logrado es estar en todos lados y no solo en las redes... ciudades, campañas, debates, exposiciones. ¿Siente que se ha multiplicado?**

Me gustan las palabras "en todas partes" y "omnipresente" como una metáfora, como el viento y el agua. Lo que quiero, simplemente, es que mis pensamientos y mi trabajo calen, penetren y se filtren en el mundo del humanitarismo, los derechos individuales y la libertad de pensamiento. Esos son aspectos que emergen en todos lados, así que me he esforzado bastante en ese cometido.

**Sorprende el hecho que, como admite, nunca escribiera ningún tipo de diario. Sin embargo, los detalles son precisos y están ahí. ¿Fue a buscarlos o le buscaron?**

En realidad, lo que explico en las memorias son detalles muy diseminados de lo que constituyó mi realidad desde que era niño. Hay muchísimo más. Lo que he dejado patente se podría comparar a unas flores secas. Nos podemos imaginar cómo llegaron a ser, porque se han quedado sin agua, y sus colores, su olor, han mutado o desaparecido.

**¿Hay algo que añore especialmente de China?**

La comida, la lengua.

**Usted siguió a su padre por campos de reeducación sin tener un hogar fijo. ¿Usted es quien es justo por eso? ¿Es la figura global que es por esa vida nomádica y sin echar raíces a la que se vio obligado se diría casi hasta hoy en día?**

Mire, es cierto: nunca he tenido un hogar propiamente dicho. Viví con mi padre represaliado en cuevas excavadas y refugios en el noroeste de la China y con cambios que siempre fueron muy drásticos. No me sentía en casa porque no tenía familiaridad. Eran lugares donde vivíamos pero siempre se trataba de casas temporales. Este año cumplo 65 y puedo decir que sigo siendo aquel que carece de hogar. Pero no es algo que me pase solo a mí. Hay demasiada gente en el mundo que ha dejado su lugar y su familia y se van desplazando de aquí para allá o que se han visto forzados al exilio. Y las condiciones de vida de esas personas son muy miserables.

**Usted y otros han sido siempre disidentes y han plantado cara al poder, pero siempre con humor socarrón. ¿Es un salvavidas ante toda la presión y represión que ha sufrido desde niño?**

> "NUNCA TUVE UN HOGAR; CON MI PADRE REPRESALIADO VIVÍ EN CUEVAS Y REFUGIOS"

Es lo que debería ser. Desde que tengo uso de razón, todo lo que me rodeaba se contradecía con la idea del mundo que yo tenía en la cabeza. Solo el humor tiene esa especie de poder de subvertir esas contradicciones y curar las heridas.

**El humor parece conectarle con artistas que también fueron revolucionarios como Duchamp y Warhol.**

La verdad es que esos dos señores que cita tienen un sentido muy agudo del humor y me hacen reír mucho.

**¿Qué más cosas le hacen reír?**

Cualquier cosa que la realidad nos depara, la política me suele hacer reír. De hecho, para ir bien, tendríamos que estar riéndonos a carcajadas cada día.

**Cuando le tocar crear, ¿qué necesita? ¿Un estado de concentración o de dispersión? Igual no es ni una cosa ni la otra, o una mezcla. Igual la pregunta no...**

Sí, sí, la pregunta tiene sentido porque cuando consigues estar muy concentrado, antes has tenido que estar disperso dando vueltas a cuestiones mundanas, a contradicciones internas, a la banalidad que envuelve la realidad con una actitud humorística y burlona. Es precisamente esa actitud la que me da una perspectiva introspectiva y crítica al mismo tiempo.

**Usted define el arte como "un arañazo en el ojo". ¿Es lo que intenta conseguir? ¿Lo que espera de otros artistas?**

Cada obra de arte que despierta mi interés representa una vibración visual y espiritual que, a veces, me deja una marca muy profunda. Analizo mis trabajos desde la misma lente. A veces me pregunto si dejaré huella en la historia de la Humanidad en concepto de estética, ética y filosofía.

**Una de sus muestras en cartel es *La libertad de la duda* en Cambridge. ¿Ai Weiwei es cartesiano?**

Vaya, es una manera interesante de plantearlo y hasta ahora no lo había pensado demasiado, pero sí: dudo, luego existo.

**¿Cuáles son sus nuevos proyectos?**

Es uno que funcionará a largo plazo, que teje todo lo que he hecho hasta ahora. De hecho, no tenemos una idea clara de nuestro comportamiento hasta que miramos atrás para revisar nuestros procesos y ponerlos en el contexto adecuado y con una perspectiva correcta. En realidad todo lo que hago es intentar descubrirme y entenderme a mí mismo. ▬

FOTOS CORTESÍA DE EDITORIAL DEBATE

**AI LAO EN LA TATE**
*El hijo del artista juega con un puñado de los millones de pepitas de girasol que Ai instaló en la galería londinense en el 2010*

**LA VOZ DE LOS REFUGIADOS**
*El artista, en Lesbos en el 2016, se ha manifestado contra los abusos a todo tipo de refugiados, de los sirios a los rohinyás*

**DAME UNA BICICLETA...**
*...Y moveré el mundo. El artista trabaja muchas de sus esculturas con uno de los símbolos chinos por excelencia*

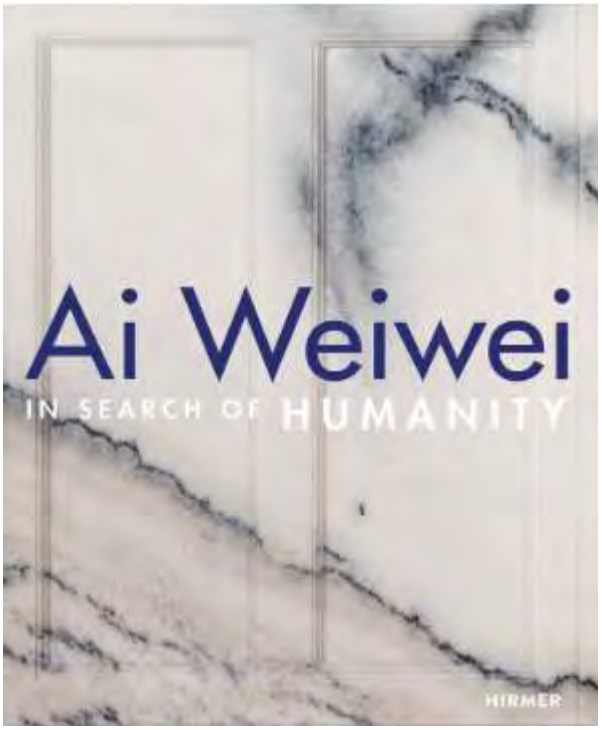
**F*** THE POWER**
*La obra se llama, simplemente, 'Plaza de Tiananmen Pekín, 1995', y es una de las obras icónicas del artista*

*Cosmopolis*
1 June 2022

COSMOPOLIS

# Ai Weiwei: In Search of Humanity

Jun 01, 2022 at 15:55




Until September 4, 2022 the work of the Chinese artist, human rights activist and critic of authoritarian systems Ai Weiwei (*1957 in Beijing) can be discovered at the *Albertina Modern* museum at Karlsplatz 5 in Vienna in his most comprehensive retrospective to date. Guest curator Dieter Buchhart, together with Elsy Lahner, assembled a unique show presenting 144 objects. Here comes my book review of the accompanying catalogue: *Ai Weiwei: In*

*Search of Humanity* (Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk, Amazon.fr, Amazon.de).

The catalogue *Ai Weiwei: In Search of Humanity* offers three essays by Dieter Buchhart, John Tancock (regarding the readymade and beyond) and Roger M. Buergel (about grief, suffering, rage in the artist's works and their political dimension) as well as depictions of all 144 works exhibited in Vienna, ranging from his early works to New York and Beijing photographs, Tiananmen Square Massacre works, studies of perspectives, works on cultural heritage, bicycles, the Sichuan Earthquake, arrest, imprisonment, war, flight and migration, the U.S. presidential elections, corona and more. A short biography is added at the end of the 336-page catalogue.

At the beginning of his essay, Dieter Buchhart quotes Ai Weiwei with his words from 2010: "Everything is art. Everything is politics." This surely holds true for the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. Dieter Buchhart draws a comparison between the Dada artists in Zurich who responded to the madness of the First World War with their "anti-art" and Ai Weiwei who himself was and is in search for humanity in another period of horrors.

According to Dieter Buchhart, Ai Weiwei's felt loss of humanity in the face of the suffering of migrants and refugees, the continuation of war, misery, authoritarian regimes and fascism in our own day began already in the 1980s, after the general loss of faith in modernism, when Ai Weiwei made objects influenced by Marcel Duchamp (German article on Duchamp) and Dadaism; read also my review about the 2011 Winterthur exhibition *Interlacing* in which Ai Weiwei stressed the importance of Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol for his work.

Dieter Buchhart stresses that in each of these works, there is also a direct link to Ai Weiwei's own history, the past, or current events. He expanded Duchamp's dictum of "artist—artwork—beholder" to a "chain between artist (thinker, cultural critic, concept maker)—readymade—(exchangeable object with no inherent value)—beholder" with objects where readymades, like pieces of clothing, serve as artistic material but are transformed into new objects. The artist's old shoes, for example, form a circular sculpture, while an umbrella jammed into a briefcase make up a Quintessential Communist Umbrella Briefcase, which by way of the sprayed-on Communist symbols of a hammer and sickle refers to the Cold War.

Dieter Buchhart writes that the next event that shaped Ai Weiwei's search for humanity happened when the artist was living in New York: the violent crushing of the student-led protests at Tiananmen Square in Beijing which led to the death of up to 10,000 people. In 1993, the artist returned to his ailing father in China, who died in 1996. That was when Ai Weiwei began to stick his middle finger at Tiananmen Square as a sign of resistance, and subsequently at all monuments around the world that symbolize power and domination.

After his return to CCP China, Ai Weiwei began collecting antiquities, including furniture and ceramics, and publishing underground texts of the Chinese avant-garde. In 1995, he created a series of photographs in which he deliberately dropped a Han dynasty urn so that it smashed to pieces on the ground. In the process, he demonstrated that the destruction of the historical is necessary to create the new. Dieter Buchhart underlines that it was not only the actual demolition of objects, but also of concepts and "isms," that made it possible to build anew. Ai Weiwei subsequently pulverized several ceramics

from the Neolithic period for the installation *Dust to Dust*, preserving the dust in glass vessels. By adding the Coca-Cola logo to Han dynasty urns, he transformed them into symbols of present-day consumer society and, as contemporary reworkings, a mirror of our period and the link between the two worlds, that of the West and the Far East, between which Ai Weiwei moved and continues to move today.

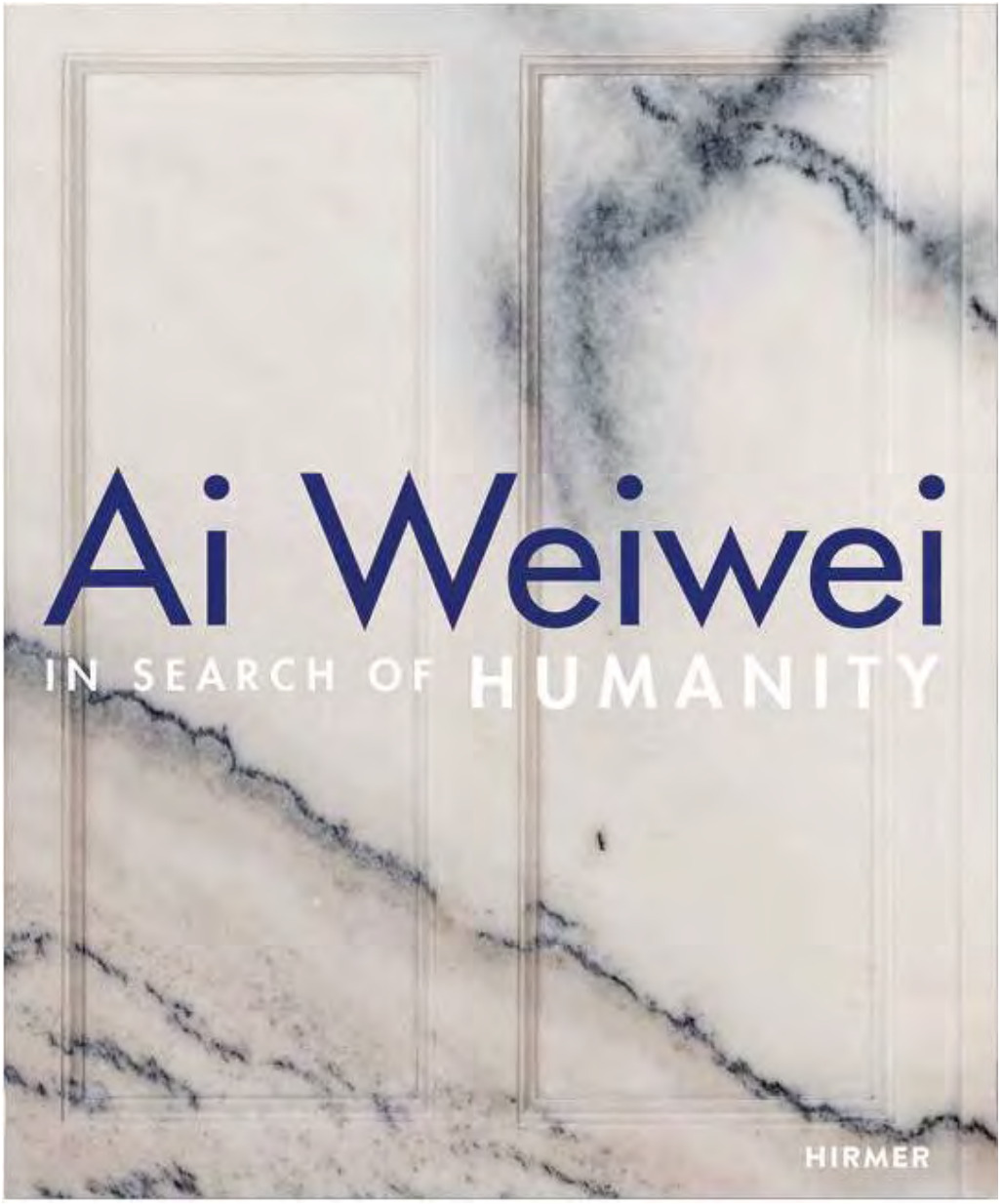
According to the *Ai Weiwei: In Search of Humanity* curator, Ai Weiwei's intense engagement with antiquities and the idea of cultural goods as a sign of the past opened up new space for the artist to think about both historical existence and our present-day global way of living. In addition, Ai Weiwei was fascinated by the craftsmanship behind such objects—tables, stools, vessels. He drew on these cultural techniques as he continued his work with readymades from the 1980s, albeit now using valuable antiquities to create his own objects. Accordingly, he dispensed with nails and screws when he interlinked two tables from the Qing dynasty in *Tables with Crossed Corners*. With this defamiliarization and new construction of his objects out of selected historical pieces, the antiquities lost their functionality and became material for his sculptures. In this way, Ai Weiwei robbed them of their character as objects of use, but not of their link to the past.

Dieter Buchhart concludes that Ai Weiwei holds up a mirror to us, showing us our personal abysses and those of society today. Through his art, he tells us to commit ourselves to humanity.

This and much more can be discovered in the Albertina Modern retrospective as well as in the accompanying

catalogue, which both span until Ai Weiwei's present day works.

*Ai Weiwei: In Search of Humanity*. Edited by Dieter Buchhart, Elsy Lahner, Klaus Albrecht Schröder. With contributions by D. Buchhart, R. Buergel, E. Lahner, J. Tancock. Hirmer Publishers, 2022, 336 pages with 180 colour illustrations, 24 × 30 cm, hardcover. Order the English edition of this book from Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk, Amazon.fr, Amazon.de.



For a better reading, quotations and partial quotations in this book review are not between quotation marks.

Book review added on June 1, 2022 at 15:55 Austrian time. Details added at 20:27.

*ARTnews*
9th June 2022

ARTnews

# Ai Weiwei Gets the Big Retrospective He Deserves, For Better and For Worse

Ai Weiwei, *Illumination*, 2019
COURTESY AI WEIWEI STUDIO AND LISSON GALLERY

**When a 40-work survey** of Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei's art traveled from Japan to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., a decade ago, the show drew massive crowds and made the artist a star. Earlier this year, a retrospective more than four times that show's size opened in Vienna at the Albertina Modern to no such fanfare.

What accounts for this? It's possible we're burnt out on Ai's work by now, which makes sense, considering that there were four separate institutional surveys of his art last year alone. But there is nothing like a retrospective's ability to offer the fullest possible view of an artist's career, and whether you like it or not, that makes the Albertina Modern's retrospective a must-see, even for Ai skeptics. With almost all of Ai's greatest hits assembled in one space, it is the largest show ever devoted to him, and it certainly feels epic to walk through it.

These days, Ai is best known for his provocations dealing with the refugee crisis, surveillance in his home country of China, and his own struggles with censorship. You likely know the Han Dynasty vase that Ai painted with a Coca-Cola logo, for example, or his room-sized installations of assemblages of stools, which are references to labor in China or Marcel Duchamp's readymades, or both, depending on whom you ask.

Those works vary significantly in quality, but they are impossible to avoid when surveying Ai's output. But really, what makes this retrospective special is its focus on Ai's early works, which are much stranger—and often much slyer in their political critique—than what the artist is now known for.

During the '80s, while he was based in New York, Ai began to put his own spin on Dada, the early 20th-century movement which in the eyes of many will forever be associated with Duchamp. In fact, the paradigm that Duchamp began with his readymades—take an object, do something to it, do something else to it, to quote Jasper Johns—is quite nimble, and can be applied to all sorts of things in all sorts of ways. Ai's intervention was to interweave his own upbringing in Maoist China, meditating on the oppression associated with life lived under the Communist Party.

*Ai Weiwei, Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn, 1995.*
COURTESY AI WEIWEI STUDIO/PRIVATE COLLECTION

An umbrella spears a briefcase emblazoned with a hammer and sickle in one sculpture; a shovel covered partly in fur doubles as a Dada allusion (to Duchamp's 1913 *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, for those keeping score) and as a reference to the labor Ai's father, Ai Qing, a poet whose political sensibilities did not align with Mao's, performed while in exile in Xinjiang. These are truly strange artworks that are hard to digest. Not so surprisingly, they don't get talked about a lot when we talk about Ai.

The aforementioned umbrella and briefcase are all rendered unusable in Ai's hands, but in some sense, Ai is destroying them to generate new meaning. The show's curator, Dieter Buchhart, casts that line of thinking within the context of the destruction of the *si jiù*, a Cultural Revolution–era concept related to the undoing of old Chinese ways to make way for new Communist ones.

Ai has continued to create readymades, though they have begun to buckle under the weight of all the meaning they're supposed to carry. Take *U.S. Mail* (2020), a beat-up U.S. Postal Service mailbox that supposedly refers to Donald Trump's claims of mail-in voter fraud during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. Ai deems this a work advocating "for free elections and for democratic rights," but one would strain to see any of that manifesting here, even with the context. Unfortunately for Ai, sometimes a mailbox is just a mailbox.

Ai Weiwei, *A Metal Door with Bullet Holes*, 2015.
COURTESY AI WEIWEI STUDIO

**A colleague once remarked to me** that Ai had become a better activist than an artist, and this retrospective would seem to confirm that assessment. It is chock full of works with urgent political messages that need to be heard. But Ai's protests are often shouted so loudly that they accidentally call more attention to himself than the subjects he's seeking to bring awareness to.

It wasn't always that way. The Albertina has wisely included some of Ai's early photographs. A shocking one from 1989 features a New York policeman dragging away a demonstrator from an AIDS protest. Adding a level of mystery to this image is a trio of three men in suits who seem both fascinated and unperturbed by this instance of police brutality.

Just one work since then has been able to summon the same kind of impact: *81* (2013), an installation that recreates the cell where Ai was imprisoned by Chinese officials on charges that he says were never clear to him. He committed this dour space to memory, and recreated it, mold stains and all, in the form of this work, which viewers can walk into. Only once they leave do viewers realize there are three security cameras nestled inside, and that footage is being streamed on monitors nearby.

Ai can lay claim to that cell and that AIDS protest—he was there for both. But it's not clear why he thinks he can make art that deals with, say, the police killing of Eric Garner. For one 2019 painting made out of Legos, the phrase "I can't breathe," which was uttered by Garner as well as by the murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi before his death, is situated on the Saudi Arabian flag. (The work predates the murder of George Floyd in 2020, but the wall text erroneously draws out that link, too.)

Whether accidentally or not, Ai suggests that Garner and Khashoggi's deaths were in some way comparable—which, of course, they were not. The Biden administration has reported that Khashoggi's killing was approved by the Saudi Arabian Crown Prince himself, while Garner was stopped by police in the U.S., who suspected that he was selling cigarettes. These killings occurred more than 6,500 miles away from each other, and there is a gulf separating their contexts as well, but Ai seems to have paid no mind to this.

Then there are the works about refugees, which famously got Ai into trouble back in 2016, when he posed as Alan Kurdi, a drowned Syrian toddler who had washed ashore. (Mercifully, that Ai photograph is not included here, but sure enough, there is a Lego painting based on the original source picture. It's all just as well—the painting isn't much better than the Ai photograph.) Rather bleakly, the show closes out on this series, which includes, among other things, a sculpture with a giant glass ball perched atop a series of life vests—it can help us gaze into the future, the Albertina claims.

The work that really bothered me wasn't that one, however. It was instead a video in which Ai sits on a raft that he found in a European sea. He floats through the ocean, and the camera remains still in a sort of mournful way, as if to suggest that he, too, could be a migrant lost at sea. He couldn't be that refugee, however, because most refugees don't get big retrospectives at major institutions like the Albertina. They also don't get paraphernalia emblazoned with their image, though Ai sure does —you can buy posters of him when you exit through the gift shop after viewing that video.

*Prospect Magazine*
16th June 2022

Prospect

# Ai Weiwei: the BBC and CNN are "very biased"

*The artist and activist argues that freedom of expression is under threat in both China and the west*

By David McAllister June 16, 2022 JULY 2022

Image: John Watson

Ai Weiwei wakes up at six every morning. If he is in Cambridge—he splits his time between the English city, Germany and Portugal—he will take his son to school; otherwise, he says, he does "basically nothing." That sounds unlikely. In the past two years, he has produced a memoir of his childhood, two feature-length documentaries, several exhibitions and, this March, a debut opera production of *Turandot* in Rome. Over a decade since the work that

brought him to western audiences—the millions of ceramic sunflower seeds spread out in the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall—the Chinese artist remains as active, and outspoken, as ever.

I ask Ai, over email, how he sets out on a new project. "I am a natural person," he says. "I am a leaf floating in a river. Carried downstream by the current of the river, what the leaf sees along the shore changes all the time." The most important aspect is not the finished work but the process, which "is the carrier of my expression."

## Weiwei knows what it's like to lose one's freedom

As an activist, Ai is at his most passionate when defending freedom of expression, which has led him to make some unlikely allies. This May he surprised many of his followers by tweeting that Elon Musk's attempted purchase of Twitter would make the platform "much better."

When I ask for his thoughts on social media, Ai's response is somewhat gnomic. "Social media is a lighthouse," he writes. "It indicates our position but also points out potential danger." Likely alluding to Donald Trump, he says that "when Twitter deleted some unfavoured politicians' accounts, it was a gesture of an authoritarian society"—and that without the "basis of free expression," platforms like Twitter and Facebook are no better than China's state-controlled WeChat. "Even though I find some thoughts stupid and ridiculous, their existence is my most important belief," he says.

Ai is evidently as dissatisfied with the state of western media as he is with China's: CNN and the BBC, he says, are "very biased" and "carried away by political correctness." He is furious at our indifference towards the case of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, who faces extradition to the US over espionage charges and a 175-year prison term. "Western society can hardly advocate [its] principles of so-called freedom and press independence" so long as Assange remains in limbo, Ai says.

Ai knows what it's like to lose one's freedom. When he was a boy his father, the renowned poet Ai Qing, fell foul of Mao; the family were exiled to Xinjiang, where Ai Qing was tasked with cleaning communal toilets. In 2011, Ai himself was held in confinement for 81 days by Chinese authorities on spurious charges of tax evasion. After his release, he created a series of miniature dioramas showing his experience, which included being watched by guards as he showered. Unlike western commentators moaning about online cancel culture, when Ai says "stopping people from speaking up is the start of authoritarianism," his words carry real weight.

Social media, in any case, has become personally less important to Ai as a vehicle of free expression. Outside China he has "other possibilities" to express himself: namely his exhibitions, his documentaries. I ask him if there are any artistic projects currently in the pipeline. "I have never had any artistic projects that are currently in the pipeline," he replies.

"What I do is respond to the demands of society... If there are such demands, I would actively react to them. If not, I would try to look for things that I find fun."

*Widewalls*
July 2022

WIDEWALLS

# Documentary on Ai Weiwei to Be Screened Exclusively at Glastonbury Festival 2022

In partnership with Amnesty International, movie-goers will all be given postcards to write messages to prisoners of conscience around the world.

2022 edition of Glastonbury Festival, one of world's most recognizable music and performing arts showdowns, will be screening the 2019 Ai Weiwei biopic. *Ai Weiwei: Yours Truly* is the most personal documentary on the Chinese artist yet, to be shown at the June festival ahead of the island-wide release.

The movie is a moving narrative of father and son and how one small act of kindness had a profound influence on the artist's life and career. Other details from his childhood are aplenty, with a special focus on the family's years of exiled privation. The screening takes place at 4 pm in the Shangri – La Field at the Gas Tower, June 23rd and 24th.

Featured Image: Film Still from documentary Ai WeiWei Yours Truly courtesy of Cheryl Haines and Four-Six Foundation

*i News*
1st July 2022

i News

# Ai Weiwei: 'The British Government's Rwanda policy is unthinkable – it's racism'

Ai Weiwei speaks about the UK's contentious asylum policy, his life in exile, the enduring trauma of imprisonment, and using art to give voice to those without one

When I speak to Ai Weiwei, the Chinese dissident and conceptual artist, it is the morning after a British deportation flight to Rwanda carrying asylum seekers has been grounded following an injunction from the European Court of Human Rights. Weiwei, whose work explores themes of human displacement, freedom and corruption, has been following the story with despair. "It's unthinkable, what [the British] Government is doing," he says, via video call.

"It's racism and discrimination to a very high level in a very public way. It's something I find hard to accept in today's politics. It's not just [in Europe], it's everywhere. That's why, as artists, we have to defend our principles. We have to define who we are and what kind of society we want to live in. It's not by choice. We have been pushed into this position to defend humanity."

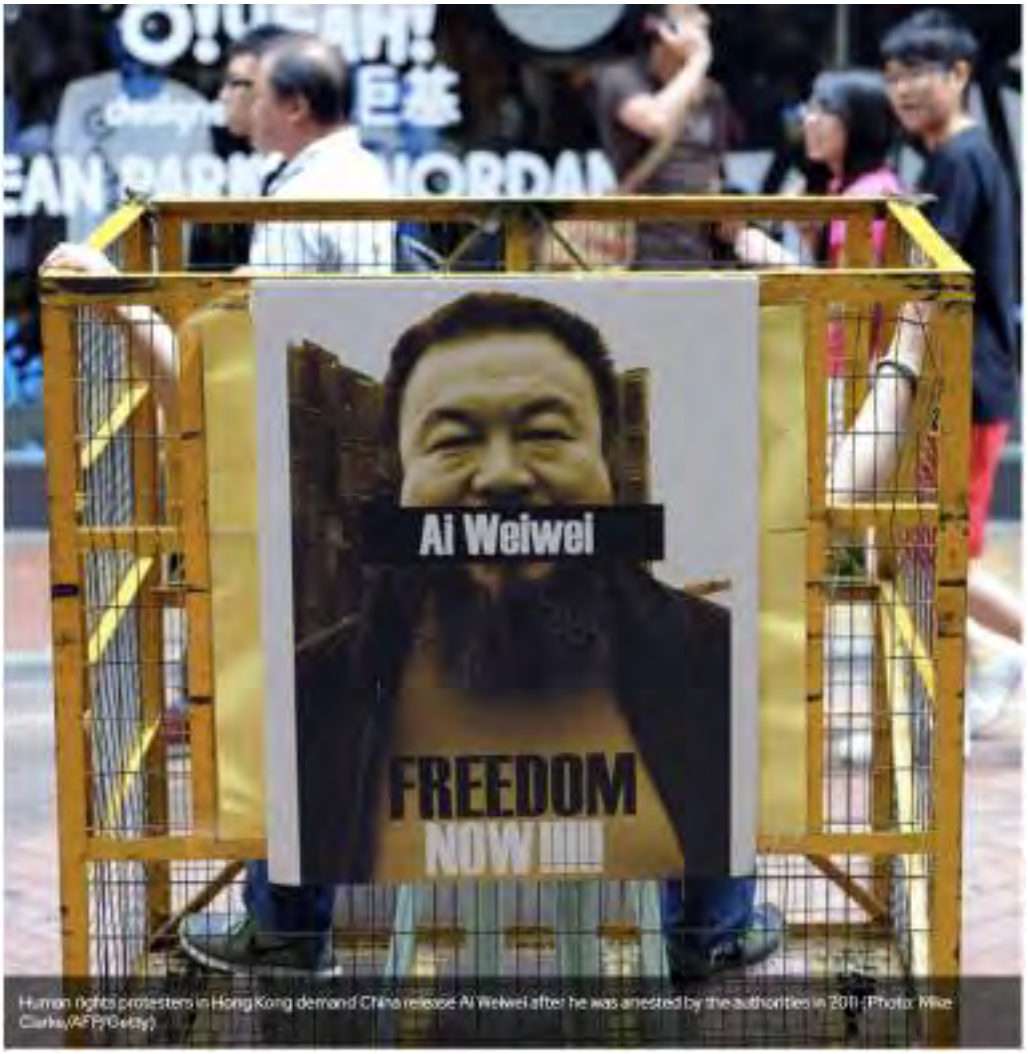
It would be hard to find a clearer statement of Weiwei's principles on the migrant crisis than his 40ft sculpture, *Arch*, the construction of which he is currently overseeing in Stockholm, Sweden. A gleaming cage-like structure containing the outline of two huddled figures, *Arch* was originally part of an outdoor show in New York called Good Fences Make Good Neighbours. The show opened in 2017, a few months into Trump's presidency when building works began to create a border wall between the US and Mexico.

In its new home outside the National museum in Stockholm, *Arch* has become a symbol of gratitude to its host nation – which has a record of welcoming refugees – and of solidarity with the Ukrainians forced to flee their homes following the Russian invasion, explains Weiwei.

"The millions of people in Ukraine who have been forced out have lost their neighbourhoods, their personal belongings, their sense of safety," he reflects. "They will no longer be near relatives and their children will lose their school. It's hard for humans to survive this kind of loss. To lose your home is to lose part of your humanity."

Weiwei knows this better than most. In 1957, the year he was born, his father, Ai Qing, one of China's most [illegible] poets, was declared an enemy of the state by Chairman Mao.

As part of a purge of "rightist" intellectuals who had criticised the government, Qing and his family were sent to a series of labour camps in the north-west of China, including one called "Little Siberia" where they lived in a dug-out that was formerly a shelter for livestock. (They were eventually allowed to return to Beijing in 1975.) "So I lost my home from the day I was born," Weiwei says. "Home never existed for me. My father said it is wherever our legs take us, which I accept."



Human rights protesters in Hong Kong demand China release Ai Weiwei after he was arrested by the authorities in 2011 (Photo: Mike Clarke/AFP/Getty)

Today, he describes himself as "a citizen of Europe". His son, with his partner, the filmmaker Wang Fen, is at school in Cambridge, while he has studios in Beijing and Berlin. He also has a house in Portugal "though I'm rarely there as I'm always travelling. Now I'm in different locations, I still cannot establish a place I can call home." That must be hard, I say, but he shakes his head: "You can't feel loss over something you never had."

In his mid-twenties, Weiwei moved to New York, where he stayed for 12 years. There he encountered the work of Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp, which opened his eyes to what art could be and inspired his first forays into conceptual art.

He returned to China in 1993, where he began his career in earnest, covering ancient artefacts with corporate logos and using traditional mediums to make bold political statements. After discovering cameras and listening devices installed by the Chinese authorities in his studio, Weiwei made *Surveillance Camera with Plinth*, a statue of a CCTV camera rendered in white marble. Even more provocative and hard-hitting was

remembering, a wall of children's backpacks commemorating the 5,000 schoolchildren who died in the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, a tragedy that the Chinese government tried to cover up.

In 2011, Weiwei was detained without charge by the Chinese authorities for 81 days, and kept in solitary confinement. His imprisonment prompted international outrage; London's Tate Modern lit up its upper floors with the words "Ai Weiwei".

On his release, the authorities confiscated his passport and refused to return it for four years. Weiwei, who later replicated scenes from his confinement in a life-size diorama called *S.A.C.R.E.D*, says his imprisonment left him with lasting trauma. "In many ways, I think I'm quite crippled because of my experience," he tells me. Does he mean emotionally? "Emotionally, yes" he says, with a look that says not to press him further.

Ai Weiwei speaking at the Kite Festival in Kidlington, Oxfordshire in June (Photo: Lorne Thomson/Getty)

This hasn't stopped him from continuing to protest corruption and human rights abuses in China and beyond. In his 2021 memoir, *1,000 Years of Joys and Sorrows*, Weiwei describes his art as increasingly "preoccupied with the tangled connections between politics and reality". He has frequently turned to filmmaking to highlight injustice: the 2017 film *Human Flow* explored the global refugee crisis, while 2020's *Coronation* documented the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong.

Earlier this year, he turned his hand to opera, with a production of Rossini's *Turandot* at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, which he transformed into an impassioned cry for oppressed people. Learning new skills for each project is, he says, "like a chess game. You want to refine your skill and to meet the challenge. For me, it is an internal challenge. It's not trying to convince anybody. My challenge is to make myself satisfied with my actions... We use different mediums to extend our expression and set up some kind of communication. Culture is a sharing of values between human beings."

He is not concerned with notions of good and bad art, but about whether the work has been understood. "The art work itself is the product of the artist's idea. He must ask himself: is that idea challenging enough? Does he have the skill to carry that concept?"

Ai Weiwei unveils 'Arch', one of Ai Weiwei's most significant artworks, at the Nationalmuseum on June 15 in Stockholm, Sweden (Photo: Michael Campanella/Getty)

Weiwei nonetheless feels the weight of responsibility towards his vast audience, which has been bolstered by his use of social media.

"There are so many people who have no voice and will never be heard," he says. "I always think what I am saying is what they want to say. This is why I'm very happy to meet people on the streets. It could be a vendor or a doorman or a policeman. They come to me and say: 'Can we take a selfie together because what you did was important?' I take that as the highest reward. It means I have successfully communicated to people who are not within the art circle."

Weiwei employs hundreds of people across several countries to help execute his vision – he always has multiple projects on the go, all at different stages of completion. In the autumn he will be curating a show at London's South Bank on British prisons; he is not ready to share details yet, though he says the aim is to humanise inmates by telling their stories.

Last weekend, the 2019 documentary film *Ai Weiwei: Yours Truly*, in which Weiwei and his family discuss their years in a labour camp, and the impact of an anonymous postcard of support sent to Weiwei's father, was shown at Glastonbury Festival. Attendees were each given a blank postcard, supplied by Weiwei, on which they could write messages to prisoners of conscience around the world.

These days, Weiwei waits for people, or institutions, to come to him with proposals for new projects. "I only get work because certain museums ask me: 'Why don't you have this show?' I don't have that need [to initiate work], even as the most exhibited artist in the world. If no one contacted me I would be perfectly settled." What would he do with his time, I ask? "I'd look after my pets. I'd play chess, I would do some cooking and some gardening." He smiles, and adds: "I would be happy."

Ai Weiwei's *Arch*, part of a new public artworks by Bellyard Kinsely, is on display outside the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm

*Dezeen*
12th July 2022

de zeen magazine

**Ai Weiwei unveils cage-like Arch installation in Stockholm**

Cajsa Carlsson | 12 July 2022

Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's steel sculpture Arch has been installed outside the Nationalmuseum gallery in Stockholm ahead of getting a permanent home in the city.

The 12-metre-tall (40-foot) cage-like structure was made from polished steel and has a cut-out at its centre that depicts two intertwined human figures.

*Arch is located outside Nationalmuseum in Stockholm*

Appearing to break through the steel bars that surround them, these characters represent the "free passage of all populations, and appealing for a world without borders," said creative foundation Brilliant Minds, which organised the installation.

The organisation recently installed Arch outside the Nationalmuseum national gallery on the Blasieholmen peninsula in Stockholm's archipelago.

*The 12-metre-tall sculpture aims to promote a world without borders*

The sculpture, which was first shown in New York in 2017 as part of the Good Fortune: Make Good Neighbours installation, is the first in a series of "cultural exhibits" that Brilliant Minds will support in Stockholm over the next five years.

It will remain in place for a year, after which Arch will be moved to an as-yet-undisclosed permanent site in the city.

*It will be given a permanent home in Stockholm*

Brilliant Minds, which was established in 2015 by Spotify founder Daniel Ek and entrepreneur Ash Pournori, holds annual events in Stockholm that aim to support creative individuals and help them come together on "world-changing" ideas.

Ai was one of the speakers at this year's event, which took place in Stockholm in June.

"Now more than ever, as the world is spinning at its fastest and most challenging we must broaden our minds, share our experiences, and work together to create a brighter future," Brilliant Minds CEO Annastasia Seebohm said.

"The aim of Brilliant Minds is to spark impassioned conversations, encourage questions, and seek answers, and the unveiling of Arch, and our new program of public cultural exhibits, will ensure we continue the important conversation for change," she added.

Ai is known for his political artworks, which also include a fingerprint flag that symbol for human rights that was created to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

*Two cut-out silhouettes emerge from its centre*

The artist, who currently lives in Portugal, was arrested in China in 2011 and held for 81 days without charge, after which he was detained in the country until 2015.

He has since shown images of his Beijing studio being torn down by Chinese authorities. Recently, the artist designed a home extension with hexagonal ends for a weekend home in New York.

*The photography is by Jean Lapin.*

*The Art Newspaper*
4th August 2022

THE ART NEWSPAPER

# Ai Weiwei to curate exhibition of works created by UK prisoners

The Chinese activist, detained in 2011, has visited prisons across the country

Gareth Harris

4 August 2022

Ai Weiwei will judge the 15th edition of the annual Koestler Arts exhibition
Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

An exhibition of works created by prisoners and people across the UK's criminal justice system, opening at the Southbank Centre in London this autumn, will be overseen by the Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei. The *Freedom* show, to be held in the exhibition space of the Royal Festival Hall (27 October-18 December), marks the 60th anniversary of the Koestler Awards, a prizes initiative organised by the Koestler Arts charity which exhibits and sells works by detainees.

The Southbank exhibition will include works created by individuals in prisons, secure mental health facilities, immigration removal centres, young offender institutions and people on community sentences across the UK. 'The vision for the exhibition is inspired by the artist's [Ai Weiwei's] visit to the Koestler Arts building [next to HM Prison Wormwood Scrubs in west London], which currently holds over 6,500 works entered into this year's awards,' say the organisers in a statement.

Ai Weiwei can draw on his own experiences for his new curating role. In 2011, he was detained by the Chinese government and spent 81 days in a secret prison on charges of tax fraud. At the 2013 Venice Biennale, he showed a series of dioramas (*S.A.C.R.E.D.*) depicting his prison cell complete with model guards.

In an interview with The Art Newspaper last year, he discussed how autocratic governments fear art and freedom of expression, saying: "When a society is dominated by one idea or one belief, then the restriction on freedom of expression is always there."

Ai says in a statement: "This [*Freedom*] exhibition focuses on the role that the act of thinking and creating plays in life under constraints. Notable works of art and literature in history were created when the artist was restricted, oppressed, and challenged, rather than being completely free." The artist also visited HM Prison Wormwood Scrubs and other UK prisons as part of the curatorial process.

Koestler Arts invites people within the criminal justice system to submit works of art across 52 categories for the annual Koestler Awards. Entrants receive feedback and certificates, can be selected for public exhibitions or mentoring, and may sell their works. The first round of Koestler Awards took place in 1962. Past curators of the Southbank exhibition, now in its 15th year, have included the artists Antony Gormley and Sarah Lucas.

*ARTnews*
4th August 2022

ARTnews

# Ai Weiwei Will Curate London Exhibition of Works Created by Incarcerated People

BY TESSA SOLOMON August 4, 2022 2:10pm

Ai Weiwei in Berlin.
PHOTO BY MICHAEL KAPPELER/PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA/AP IMAGES

This fall, Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei will curate a show of works created by incarcerated people in London.

The exhibition, titled "Freedom," is organized by the Koestler Arts charity, which promotes and sells works by incarcerated people, and will open at the Southbank Center this October. It's intended to mark the 60th anniversary of the Koestler Awards, a prize initiative honoring the artistic achievements of detainees across the U.K. criminal justice system.

"Freedom" will reflect a diversity of people's experiences with incarceration, with works created by individuals in prisons, mental health facilities, immigration detainment centers, and youth offender institutions. "The vision for the exhibition is inspired by [Ai's] visit to the Koestler Arts building [in west London], which currently holds over 6,500 works entered into this year's awards," the exhibition organizers said in a statement.

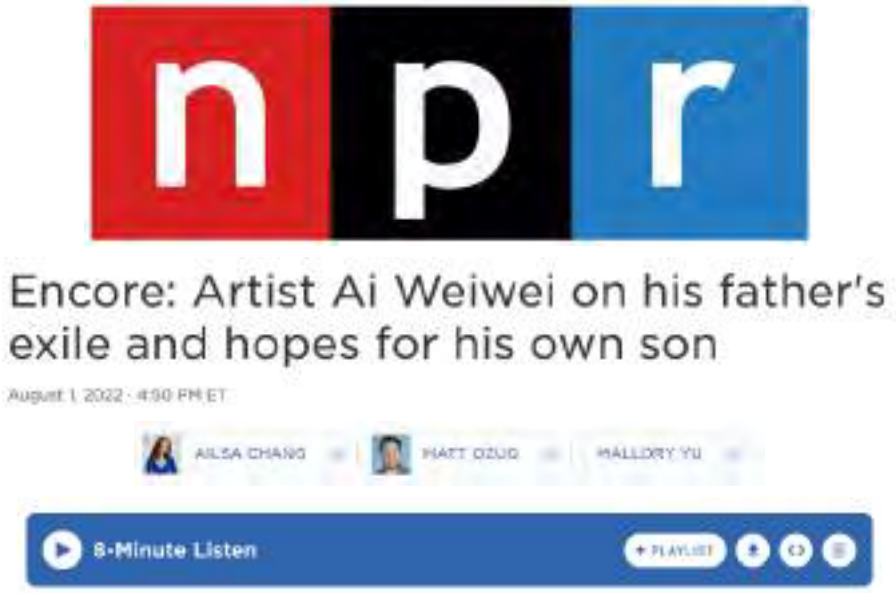
Ai, perhaps China's most prominent artist, was detained in 2011 in Beijing for his criticism of China's authoritarian regime during a crackdown on human rights lawyers, writers, and bloggers. He spent 81 days in prison on charges of tax fraud. In several interviews conducted following his release, he said he was subject to frequent interrogations and constant surveillance. In 2016, he offered the public a glimpse into the brutal experience with *S.A.C.R.E.D.*, a group of near-life-size dioramas depicting the artist and two watchful guards inside small steel boxes.

"This exhibition focuses on the role that the act of thinking and creating plays in life under constraints," Ai said in a statement. "Notable works of art and literature in history were created when the artist was restricted, oppressed, and challenged, rather than being completely free."

Earlier this year, Koestler Arts invited people within the criminal justice system to submit artworks across the genres of art, writing, design, or music for the annual Koestler Awards. Entrants receive feedback, and a select few will have their work exhibited publicly.

According to the show's curators, Ai is spending the summer reviewing thousands of entries of visual art. In honor of the Koestler Arts' 60th anniversary, Ai said he wants the 2022 exhibition to be "the most ambitious yet."

*NPR*
1st August 2022




In this encore presentation, NPR's Ailsa Chang speaks to artist Ai Weiwei about his memoir, *1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows*.

AILSA CHANG, HOST:

Over the decades, Ai Weiwei has become one of the most influential artists and activists of our time, which is why the Chinese government has long fixed its gaze on him. In 2011, Chinese authorities secretly detained Ai Weiwei. And while in detention, the artist thought often about his father, how incomplete his understanding of his father was and how much he wanted to avoid that same disconnect with his own son. So Ai Weiwei decided to set down his thoughts and memories in his book "1,000 Years Of Joys And Sorrows."

It's a story passed down through fathers, a work that ponders freedom of expression, how art can move ideas and the beauty that can emerge from life's ugliest struggles. His own father, Ai Qing, was a famous poet who was branded as a so-called rightist during the Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong. When we spoke last fall, I began by asking Ai Weiwei why his thoughts kept wandering to his father while he was in detention.

AI WEIWEI: I realize I don't really know him because I never really directly ask him a single question about his past, you know, going through all those difficulties and the struggles. Until I was arrest, I realize I may have a same kind of relationship with my son. That time, he was just over 2 years old. And the authority told me, after 10 or 12 years, you'll finish your sentence, and your son certainly will not even know you are his father.

CHANG: Well, you were eventually released. But may I ask - when you think back, when you were a boy, did you understand at the time why your father was sent there? Did you have a deep sense as a child that the Chinese government was basically punishing your father for his ideas?

AI: No way to understand. Nobody even understands. At that time, we are totally, like, dropped into water. You got totally wet, and there's no way to have another choice or another possibility. The whole nation was under this very highly political class struggle. Not only my father being punished but over a half-million other intellectuals being punished. They're writers, translators or educators, you know?

CHANG: Between you and your father, growing up, how would you characterize your relationship with him? Would you have described the two of you as close back then?

AI: No, I never even think we are close. Also, I never see any family have a close relationship during that period. Love is never a word to be mentioned in any family. The love only belongs to the party and the Chairman Mao, the party's leader. Everybody's so scared.

CHANG: Yeah.

AI: Even all those parents gave the - their children, newly born children - the name is love the country or love the party.

CHANG: Names that would make the Chinese Communist Party happy.

AI: Whole generation have maybe - half of the population would have same kind of name.

CHANG: You know, there is so much in this book that reflects how your life later as an artist inside the Chinese communist system - how that life echoed so much of your own father's life, not just your time in detention but the constant monitoring you faced every day when you lived in China. And I want to ask you - how do you think that constant surveillance by the Chinese government, that constant observation helped you relate to your father better?

AI: Well, modern surveillance is - because technology, of course, I have been under surveillance - 25 cameras around my studio, people following me, hiding behind bushes, take photos to see who I meet and, you know, all those kind of ridiculous.

CHANG: Right.

AI: I start to understand that generation, how difficult for them. Today, I have internet. I can easily have my voice being heard. But during that time, they cannot even whisper to their loved ones about what's in their mind.

CHANG: Well, as I listen to you talk about how much of an adversary the Chinese government has played in your life, in your father's life, you know, it made me wonder because, yes, the Chinese government has played a destructive role in your life but, also, in a way, the Chinese government has played a strangely creative role, too.

Like, I'm curious. Where do you think Ai Weiwei the artist would be without the Chinese government being such an oppositional force in your life, driving you to understand what is important to you, what to fight for, what to stand up against? Do you think you could be the same artist without the Chinese government?

AI: No way. No way. It's not possible. Once this interrogator - he already interrogated me for over a year. He asked me very sincerely, without us, you can never be so famous. I said, yes, it take a real enemy to make a soldier. And also, I'm grateful I can really exercise my individual struggle and freedom of speech.

CHANG: Yes.

AI: So I have something to say about it.

CHANG: Without that struggle, you wouldn't have the same things to say.

AI: Without struggle, we don't have life. Life is about the struggle.

CHANG: Well, as we mentioned this book, it is in large part, a written record for your son, Ai Lao, so that Ai Lao can better understand who his father is. And, you know, you write at one point of your own father. You say, quote, "although he never tried to influence my decisions and never asked anything of me, like a star in the sky or a tree in the field, he was always there as a compass point and in a quiet and mysterious way, he helped me to navigate in a direction all my own." Let me ask you - how much do you want a similar relationship with Ai Lao?

AI: I want he recognize he does have a father and that person have his own principle. But I want to be there so he can see me as there.

CHANG: And when you think about your own struggles, what do you want most for Ai Lao's life?

AI: I want him to have independent thinking and to a healthy life - I would say that's a healthy life.

CHANG: That's exactly what my parents say they want for me.

Ai Weiwei, thank you so much for sharing this time with us. (Speaking Mandarin).

AI: (Speaking Mandarin).

CHANG: (Laughter, speaking Mandarin). Ai Weiwei said, "thank you," and he complimented me on my Mandarin. His book is called "1,000 Years Of Joys And Sorrows."

(SOUNDBITE OF NATHAN KAWANISHI'S "LEISURELY TRAIN RIDE")

*The Art Newspaper*
28th August 2022

THE ART NEWSPAPER

# A black chandelier of skeletons and surveillance cameras: Ai Weiwei unveils his first show of glass sculptures in Venice

The dissident artist has created the one of the world's largest suspended Murano glass artworks

Portrait of Ai Weiwei with detail from his sculpture *The Human Comedy*.
Photography: Edward Smith

"No! it's not about creating cute little beauty pieces" Ai Weiwei tells *The Art Newspaper* from his home in Lisbon. He's referring to his monumental glass work *The Human Comedy*—one of the largest suspended Murano glass sculptures ever created. It is the centrepiece of a show of 32 new and recent sculptures by the Chinese dissident artist, staged in a 16th-century church on the Venetian island of San Giorgio Maggiore.

At around 6m long and 9m high, the giant glass sculpture, which resembles a black chandelier, is composed of 2,000 handblown glass pieces, including human skulls, skeletons, internal organs, bones, crabs, bats, and surveillance cameras. Weighing in at 2,700kg, its title references Dante's epic poem from the 14th century, the *Divine Comedy*. Though work on the sculpture began before the Covid-19 pandemic, it serves as a tribute to the many lives lost during this time.

Ai Weiwei's *The Human Comedy* (2022) installed at the Basilica San Giorgio Maggiore.
Photo: Francesco Allegretto

"The theme of the show is death. The chandelier is made up of skeletons and the bones of humans, animals and mystical animals. It's also about humanity" says Ai. "Death is always there accompanying us. But we don't like to acknowledge it—we tend to think of it as something that happens to other people".

This is the first time Ai will stage an exhibition of glass works, a medium he is not well-known for. The show is the result of a three-year collaboration with the Berengo Studio in the Venetian island of Murano, where much of Murano glass has been produced for the last few centuries.

For three decades, the studio, which is helmed by founder Adriano Berengo, has been working with artists from all over the world to realise projects in glass. "Ai has always known how to subvert and play with power structures and this work is no different," Berengo said in a statement. He began smaller collaborations with the artist when he visited him under house arrest in Beijing.

Detail of Ai Weiwei's *The Human Comedy* (2022)

But it's not the first time the 64-year-old artist has worked with glass. "I am a collector of old ancient artefacts from China. So I have a long history in dealing with old glasses," Ai says. Included in the show is his 2009 work *Study of Perspective in Glass*, a glass sculpture of a hand with its middle finger extended. "Glass is a material that is fragile and precious," the artist says. "In ancient Greek tombs, glass was used to make tear bottles which contained the tears that the living shed for the dead."

The exhibition also includes *Remains* (2015), which resembles an archaeological site and is composed of porcelain reproductions of human bones excavated from the site of a labour camp that operated under Mao Zedong in the late 1950s. "The human bones belong to my father's generation. And there are so many exiled intellectuals that were just [left for] dead" Ai says, referencing China's 1958 Anti-Rightist Campaign, which culminated in the purging of thousands of intellectuals including the artist's father, the famous poet Ai Qing.

Ai Weiwei's *Study of Perspective in Glass* (2009)

Elsewhere in the exhibition, the sprawling sculpture *Glass Root* shows the root system of the ancient Pequi tree, a critically endangered species indigenous to Brazil. The roots were left over from deforestation and natural causes. In order to produce cast-iron replicas, wooden sculptures were moulded. The work has added significance given that, Ai's father, had written a poem about how trees could communicate with each other underneath the earth. From the age of 10, Ai lived in a dugout with his father.

Memories of his father are central to another exhibition Ai is involved with this year. He is curating a show of works created by prisoners and people across the UK's criminal justice system at the Southbank Centre in London this autumn. "All these works allowed me to try and understand how people behave within limited spaces because of criminal punishment," he said. The artist says he's well prepared given his own life experiences with the penal system. The artist's father was sentenced to six years imprisonment in the 1930s. Ai himself was secret detained for 81 days by Chinese authorities in 2011.

"Also in British prison, I visited Julian Assange, who is still in Britain's most highly secured prison for no reason but as a political prisoner," he says. In June, the WikiLeaks co-founder had his extradition from UK to US approved by the British authorities. If found guilty by a US court, he could be sentenced to 175 years in prison. It is evident that Ai is not slowing down on presenting political works that show the tension between liberty and freedom. For him, a crucial role of the artist is to cross boundaries, however perilous.

"If I see a boundary, the first idea is to cross it; to be on the other side. So of course that is dangerous and can cause hurt. The mass presumption cannot catch up with what an individual mind wants to do. But unfortunately, as an artist, that's what we think is most important to do: to go through this uncertainty, and to tell people to be creative. It's dangerous, but it's necessary."

• Ai Weiwei's La Commedia Umana: Memento Mori, *Basilica di San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, until 27 November 2022*

*The Washington Post*
30th August 2022

The Washington Post

# Opinion | Why Xi's 'united front' is vital to the artificial concept of a 'Chinese nation'

Chinese President Xi Jinping, front row center, at the closing ceremony for the 19th Party Congress at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing in October 2017. (Ng Han Guan/AP)

*Ai Weiwei is an artist and the author of "1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows: A Memoir." This column was translated from Chinese by Perry Link.*

Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered a major speech in Beijing late last month at a conference on United Front Work. As the state-run news agency Xinhua reported, Xi "stressed promoting the unity and hard work of Chinese people at home and abroad to pool strength for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." And he described the "united

front" effort, the agency said, as one that would "truly unite all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation from different political parties, ethnic groups, social strata and groups, as well as those with different beliefs and living in different social systems."

The speech's unifying principle seemed vaguely to be ethnic, linguistic or cultural. But its main point, barely hidden, was to build fealty to the Chinese Communist Party.

The term "united front" has a long history with the CCP. In 1939, Mao Zedong said the party had thrived during its first 18 years thanks to three "magic weapons": solid party-building, armed struggle and the united front. The party, an unchallengeable entity, established its dominance using force and ideological control. The word "unity" is a superficial fabric that it has spread, for eight decades now, over its bullying of people into a condition of spiritual slavery.

Despite its successes, the CCP has been plagued by a lack of confidence, for at least two reasons. One is a profound uneasiness about its right to rule. This is a long-standing problem, both unavoidable and insoluble. The CCP presents itself to the Chinese people and to the world as the legitimate representative of a nation and its people, but its leaders know that the Chinese people did not choose the party. The people have no right to vote freely or even to speak freely. Even the right *not* to speak — to maintain silence — has sometimes been denied. There is no free press or independent judiciary. Social order depends, ultimately, on force. This system works, but its "unity" is a veneer.

A second reason for the CCP's insecurity, and a reflection of it, is the party's constant need for an enemy against which to define itself — and to justify the craving for a "united front." In 1925, Mao famously began an essay with two questions: "Who are our enemies? Who are our friends?" No CCP thinker has ever put this key point more succinctly. Actual friends and enemies of the CCP have come and gone over the years, but the fundamental need for an Enemy has never changed. How can we know a friend if we don't have an enemy?

One might think ideology could help sort out friends and enemies, but no. Over the years, the party has imitated the Soviet Union and denounced it, excoriated capitalism and embraced it, attacked Confucius and praised him. The enemy might change, but the need for one does not.

The CCP seeks today to draw a line between "the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation" and the rest of humanity. But the "Chinese nation" is an artificial concept. The people who live in China or come from it are a jumble of more than 50 ethnic and linguistic groups. Much of the history of these ethnic groups are sorry tales of conflict, exclusion and forced or unforced assimilation.

The treatment today of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region, who have been herded into "reeducation" camps and stripped of their native culture, then "united" with the CCP mainstream, is but an egregious example of a story that Tibetans, Mongols and other smaller and weaker ethnicities can tell as well.

But don't people in these groups sometimes *want* to assimilate? Maybe some do. But to learn what they want, one would need first to give them the power of self-determination, and this is precisely what the forced concept of the "Chinese nation" denies them.

Xi's emphasis on the "Chinese dream" of "rejuvenation" reveals the insecurity inherent in the CCP's rule. One would not need to promote a dream over reality if one were confident that reality was doing well.

Looking at the standoff today between the CCP on one side and Hong Kong and Taiwan on the other, we can see that the terms "China" and "the Chinese" no longer refer to land or nationality. The burning question now is whether CCP culture will spread or not. Will all distinctions of language, class, religion and so on be destroyed by the CCP and buried with it when the party finally goes? That would be tragic. But we're unlikely to see it in our lifetimes.

In the interim, there are many things — poetry, art, calligraphy, Daoism, cuisine and more — that "sons and daughters of the Chinese nation" around the world might proudly identify with. It is an odd choice to pin

one's identity to a self-serving and corrupt group that stands atop a brutal historical record.

*abc News*
3rd September 2022

abc NEWS

# Artist Ai Weiwei warns against hubris in 'troublesome' times

Chinese dissident and artist Ai Weiwei lampoons the surveillance state and social media with his first glass sculpture, made on the Venetian island of Murano

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press
September 3, 2022, 4:49 PM

Chinese artist Ai Weiwei poses in front of his unveil glass body of work 'La Commedia Umana' a huge hanging glass sculpture otherwise referred to as a 'chandelier' at the San Giorgio deconsecrated church in Venice, Italy, Friday, Aug. 26, 2022. Chinese artist... Show more

The Associated Press

VENICE, Italy — Chinese dissident and artist Ai Weiwei warns against hubris in what he calls "such a troublesome time" with his first glass sculpture, made on the Venetian island of Murano, with the foreboding subtitle: "Memento Mori," Latin for "Remember You Must Die."

Russian bombs fall on Ukraine. China is flexing its military muscle in the Taiwan Strait. Migrants die repeatedly at sea as smugglers' boats sink. The Earth warms, creating drought, collapsing glaciers and triggering violent storms. The pandemic lingers.

"We are talking about many, many things. We are talking about immigrants, about deaths, about the war, about many, many issues," Ai told The Associated Press in Venice on Friday.

He stands by his 9-meter (29.5-foot), nearly 3-ton black glass sculpture, which is suspended over

the central nave of the church of San Giorgio Maggiore, located opposite Venice's St. Mark's Square. Titled "The Human Comedy: Memento Mori," the sculpture is the centerpiece of an Ai exhibit at the church that opens Sunday.

The huge hanging artwork is part chandelier, part ossuary, with intricately hung molded glass skeletons and skulls, both human and animal, balanced with glass-blown human organs and scattered likenesses of the Twitter bird logo and surveillance cameras, hinting at the darker side of technology.

"We see the environment completely disappearing, being destroyed by humans' effort ... and that will create a much bigger disaster or famine. Or war, there's a possible political struggle between China and the West" as China asserts greater control over Hong Kong and threatens control over Taiwan, Ai said.

"We have to rethink about humans and legitimacy in the environment. Do we really deserve this planet, or are we just being so short-sighted and racist? And very, very just self-demanding, selfishness," the artist added.

The exhibit also features smaller glass sculptures. One depicts Ai himself as a prisoner, a reference to his months in a Chinese prison in 2011. Another imposes his distorted face on a replica of an 18th-century statue titled "Allegory of Envy." A wooden sculpture of a tree trunk fills a sacristy. Colored glass hard hats save places in the choir. Lego-brick portrait replicas of famous paintings and the Chinese zodiac line the walls of adjacent rooms.

Ai said he thinks Russia's invasion of Ukraine gave Chinese authorities a "potential model" to understand how such an operation might play out in Taiwan, without serving either as encouragement or warning.

"I think China is part of the global power struggle that reflects our modern understanding and the classic notion about territory and who has the right to do what," he said. "What what happens in the Russian and Ukraine conflict gives China a clear maybe mental exercise about what they want to do in Taiwan, if it is needed."

But the artist says any Chinese invasion of Taiwan would be a mistake and a misunderstanding of Taiwan's history.

"The Chinese think that Taiwan belongs to China, but in reality China and Taiwan have been apart for over 70 years. They have their own social structure, which is more democratic and more peaceful than in China," he said. Any moves by China to claim Taiwan by force will result "in the ultimate struggle."

He sees the struggle in China as one for legitimacy of authorities' control, while the challenge in the West is the continual need to defend democracy and with it freedom of speech. The West's Achille's heel is its economic dependency on China's cheap manufacturing, he said.

"That is why China is so confident," Ai said. "They know the West cannot live without China."

He cited instances of Western hypocrisy, including the rejection by festivals in Europe and the United States of films he made during the pandemic depicting Wuhan's first lockdown and the struggles in Hong Kong.

After praising the films, festivals ultimately give "the last words, we cannot show it," out of fear of losing access to the Chinese market, Ai said.

His artworks travel more smoothly, he said, because his artistic language is harder to interpret.

"My work is about a new vocabulary, so it is difficult for somebody who has completely no knowledge. It requires study," Ai said. "I don't make some piece to please the audience. But I always want to say something that is necessary."

Tourists wandering in from the water bus were delighted that they had stumbled into an exhibit by the renowned dissident artist.

"It is metal? When I first saw this I thought it represented hell," Kenneth Cheung, a Hong Kong native now living in Toronto, Canada, said as he checked out the imposing glass sculpture. "Being in a church, it is even stronger, more powerful."

The main sculpture took three years to realize with assistance from artists at a glass studio on Murano employing three techniques: traditional Murano blown glass, wax molds and injection molds. Studio owner Adriano Berengo said he pursued Ai for years to secure a collaboration with an artist he admires for his strong political beliefs.

"He shows his face. He doesn't hide. He is ready to risk his life, and he did in China," Berengo said.

The exhibit runs through Nov. 27 in Venice. From there, the hanging sculpture will go to the Design Museum in London and then, hopefully a buyer, Berengo said.

"It has to be a big museum. Otherwise, how can you keep an artwork like that?" he said.

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This story has been corrected to show that the church of San Giorgio Maggiore is a working church, not deconsecrated.

*Artforum*
15th September 2022

# ARTFORUM

Ai Weiwei. Photo: Alfred Weidinger/Flickr.

September 15, 2022 at 6:14pm

## AI WEIWEI AND SANAA WIN PRAEMIUM IMPERIALES FOR SCULPTURE, ARCHITECTURE

Dissident Chinese artist Ai Weiwei won Japan's 2022 Praemium Imperiale Award for sculpture while Tokyo-based architecture firm Sanaa received the honor for architecture. The international prize has been awarded annually since 1989 by the Japan Art Association, which is under the patronage of Prince Hitachi, and additionally encompasses the fields of painting, theater/film, and music. Giulio Paolini, Wim Wenders, and Krystian Zimmerman won the awards in those categories. Each recipient of the honor is awarded ¥15 million ($104,500).

Ai was cited particularly for his 2009 project *Remembering*, which honors the 5,000 children who died in the Sichuan earthquake of 2008, crushed inside shoddily constructed schools. The group show "Freedom," which Ai is curating, opens at the Southbank Centre in London October 27. The show, which will occupy the exhibition space of the Royal Festival Hall through December 18, features work made by those incarcerated in the UK as well that made by individuals in the country's secure mental health facilities, deportation centers, and juvenile institutions and people doing community service. Ai himself has been incarcerated having been arrested on charges of tax fraud by the Chinese government in 2011 and held for eighty-one days in a secret prison.

Sanaa, who are tasked with the expansion of Moscow's Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, are the architects behind the recent transformation of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, a transparent glass structure sitting atop a pair of defunct World War II oil tanks. The firm additionally designed the Louvre Lens in northern France; 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan; the Serpentine Galleries in London; and the New Museum in New York.

*The Art Newspaper*
15th September 2022

THE ART NEWSPAPER

# Ai Weiwei and museum architects Sanaa win £100,000 Praemium Imperiale art prizes

The annual award, under the patronage of Japan's Imperial Family, spans five categories including painting, sculpture and architecture

Ai WeiWei at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, UK (2022)
Photo: Jim Stephenson

The Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei has been awarded the 2022 Praemium Imperiale Award for "sculpture", which comes with a £100,000 prize pot (15m Yen). He is among the five international recipients of the award presented by the Japan Art Association, an organisation under the patronage of Prince Hitachi. The other winners are the Japanese architects Sanaa (Architecture), Giulio Paolini (Painting), Wim Wenders (Theatre/Film) and Krystian Zimerman (Music) who all receive £100,000 each.

In a film shown at the award presentation today in London, praise was given to Ai's project *Remembering* (2009), a work honouring the 5,000 children who died in the Sichuan earthquake of 2008 as a result of poorly built schools. Prize officials described his work as being "driven by an indignation at the injustices he sees around him". "My vocabulary has no taboo," the artist said in the film.

Ai is currently curating an exhibition of works created by prisoners and people across the UK's criminal justice system, which will open at the Southbank Centre in London next month. The *Freedom* show, to be held in the exhibition space of the Royal Festival Hall (27 October-18 December), marks the 60th anniversary of the Koestler Awards, a prize initiative organised by the Koestler Arts charity which exhibits and sells works by detainees.

The Tokyo-based firm Sanaa have designed major museums worldwide including the Louvre Lens in France, which was unveiled in 2012. Their latest creation, the expansion of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, features an airy glass-fronted new building above a pair of decommissioned Second World War oil tanks.

In 2021, it was announced that Sanaa would oversee the expansion of Moscow's Garage Museum of Contemporary Art into the historic Hexagon pavilion next door, which was built almost a century ago in Gorky Park.

All laureates are selected from lists submitted by "international advisors" across a number of countries. The advisors and their committees propose names to the Japan Art Association after which specialist committees in Tokyo convene and make the final selection. Men outnumber women among past laureates (Louise Bourgeois and Rebecca Horn stand out on the sculpture award list that includes Antony Gormley, El Anatsui and James Turrell).

A £30,000 (5m Yen) grant for young artists, also awarded annually by the Japan Art Association, goes this year to the Kronberg Academy Foundation in Germany which offers advanced training for young musicians.

*Artnet News*
16th September 2022

artnet

# 'My Mother Tells Me Not to Go Back to China': Ai Weiwei Gets Personal as He Accepts the Praemium Imperiale

He won the prestigious honor alongside SANAA, Wim Wenders, and several others.

**Vivienne Chow**, September 16, 2022

STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN - JUNE 15: (EXCLUSIVE COVERAGE) Artist and activist Ai Weiwei, together with Brilliant Minds, unveils "Arch", one of Ai Weiwei's most significant artworks, at Nationalmuseum on June 15, 2022 in Stockholm, Sweden. (Photo by Michael Campanella/Getty Images for Brilliant Minds)

Ai Weiwei's 90-year-old mother has repeatedly warned the Chinese artist-activist not to return to China despite being forced to separate from her son, who has been living in exile since 2015.

"I have a mother who's 90 years old," the artist said recently. "She calls me all the time, and she tells me not to go back to China."

Ai's mother, Gao Ying, campaigned for the release of her son in 2011 when he was arrested and detained by Beijing authorities. She even

opened Ai's 2013 Venice exhibition of his installation *S.A.C.R.E.D.*, which depicted scenes of the artist under detention.

"I don't trust them," Gao said in a 2011 interview, speaking of the Chinese authorities. "I used to be an employee of this country, I used to believe in this government, in this party, but they've gone too far. They say and do whatever they want."

Ai is the recipient of the Praemium Imperiale sculpture prize for 2022. His comments came during a ceremony for the prize at the Asia House in London on Thursday. The artist added that he could end up in some "undesirable places" should he set foot in his home country again.

"I remember a security bureau officer clearly told me, 'you are always asking for freedom, but you might end up in jail for years, just because you are asking for that,'" he recalled.

Ai Weiwei, recipient of the Praemium Imperiale 2022 sculpture award, and Chris Patten, chancellor of the University of Oxford and one of the international advisors of the Japanese arts awards, at Asia House, London, on September 15, 2022. Photo: Vivienne Chow.

The artist was speaking with University of Oxford chancellor Chris Patten, one of the international advisors to the coveted annual arts awards, which is given by the Japan Art Association.

The award was established in memory of the late Prince Takamatsu, and has been given to global artists in various disciplines since 1989. This year's award recipients were selected by a panel of advisors including political and cultural heavyweights from around the world: former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton; Lamberto Dini, a former Prime Minister of Italy; former French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin; Klaus-Dieter Lehmann, former president of the Goethe-Institut; and Patten, who also served as the last governor of Hong Kong (he held the post until June 1997, when Britain handed the city over to Beijing and ended its 156 years of colonial rule).

The awards handed out a total of £500,000 ($569,075) this year to five artists in different artistic disciplines not covered by the Nobel Prize. Other winners this year are Japanese architects SANAA; Polish pianist Krystian Zimerman; Italian painter Guilio Paolini; and German filmmaker Wim Wenders.

In response to Patten's questions about Ai's politically charged works, which range from sculptures depicting the atrocities experienced by refugees to films such as *Cockroach* (2019), about the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the Chinese artist said that being an activist was not his original intention.

Ai said that he was only "doing his job" as an artist, "to use my language and my vocabulary to share my concerns."

The artist is also currently curating "Koestler Arts: Freedom," an exhibition of work by incarcerated people in the U.K. That show, hosted by the Southbank Centre, marks the the 60th anniversary of the Koestler Awards which encourages "people from the UK's criminal justice system to change their lives through the arts."

*ARTnews*
16th September 2022

ARTnews

# Ai Weiwei Wins $105,000 Praemium Imperiale, Philadelphia Museum of Art Workers Plan One-Day Strike, and More: Morning Links for September 16, 2022

Ai Weiwei speaks at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm in June.
MICHAEL CAMPANELLA/GETTY IMAGES FOR BRILLIANT MINDS

## The Headlines

**ARTIST UPDATES.** It's Friday! Why not enjoy a bevy of newly published artist profiles with a coffee or cocktail? The always incisive text artist **Jenny Holzer** is in *Vogue*, on the occasion of her current **Hauser & Wirth** show in New York. **Jamie Diaz**, a Mexican American trans woman who has been making radiant watercolors while incarcerated, is in *NBC News*, in conjunction with her exhibition at **Daniel Cooney Fine Art** in New York. The rules-flouting cartoonist **R. Crumb** is in *The New York Times Magazine*, and the polymath **Linda Goode Bryant** is in *Harper's Bazaar* in advance of the **Museum of Modern Art**'s survey of **Just Above Midtown**, the trailblazing venue for Black artists that she ran in Manhattan in the 1970s and '80s. Fellow artist **Lorna Simpson**, who showed there, told the magazine, "I really see her as making this genuine effort to create meaningful culture at a time when things were really open but also very shut down and segregated too—in some ways, very similar to the time that we're in now."

**IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME.** British painter **Glenn Brown** will open a museum of his work in central London next month, timed to **Frieze Week**, the *Art Newspaper* reports. Brown is backing the effort himself, and plans to integrate pieces by historical figures into the displays. Across the Atlantic, the **Art Gallery of Nova Scotia**'s chair, **Grant Machum**, said at a meeting this week that private donors have pledged CA$30 million (about US$22.6 million) for the construction of a new waterfront home for the institution, *CBC News* reports. That construction plan had been put on hold by the province's premier, **Tim Houston**, earlier this summer, when the estimated cost spiked some CA$25 million ($18.8 million) above the original CA$137 million (US$103 million) figure. The museum cited inflation for the increase. The government's deputy minister for culture said at the meeting that his "department remains committed to the project."

**The Digest**

Unionized workers at Philadelphia Museum of Art said that they will stage a one-day strike today amid contract negotiations that have been underway for 22 months. [Artnet News and WHYY/PBS/NPR]

This year's winners of the **Praemium Imperiale** awards, which are presented by the **Japan Art Association** and come with ¥15 million (about $105,000), include **Ai Weiwei** for sculpture, **Giulio Paolini** for painting, and **SANAA** founders **Kazuyo Sejima** and **Ryue Nishizawa** for architecture. [Artforum]

The photo-focused Aperture Foundation is moving from its rented fourth-floor home in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood to the Upper West Side, after buying two floors of a building right by the **American Museum of Natural History** for $8.95 million. It plans to open in the new location in the summer of 2024. [The New York Times]

Billionaire businessman **Ronald S. Lauder**, the founder of the **Neue Galerie** in New York, and an *ARTnews* 200 Top Collector veteran, reportedly floated to **President Donald J. Trump** the idea of the United States buying Greenland from Denmark and offered to handle negotiations. Alas, Denmark rejected the possibility of a sale. [The New York Times]

A small painting that **Keith Haring** made on the wall of his childhood home in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, went for about $144,000 at **Rago Auctions** in Lambertville, New Jersey, beating its $50,000 high estimate. It was sold by the home's current owners, who plan to use the funds to help pay for their son's college education. [Reading Eagle]

The **Marian Goodman** gallery named as the executive director of its forthcoming Los Angeles space **Adrian Rosenfeld**, a **Matthew Marks** alum who ran his own San Francisco gallery from 2016 to 2020. It also tapped **Nathalie Brambilla**, of **Simon Lee Gallery** in London, to be a director at its Paris location. [Press Release/ArtDaily]

**The Kicker**

**FIT TO PRINT. The Print Shop**, the legendary Manhattan dealer of maps, prints, and the like that dates back more than a century, is relocating from its longtime Murray Hill home to a new place nearby, and the *New York Times* checked in with the family that owns it mid-move. They uncorked some superb stories about former customers (**Andy Warhol**, **President Franklin D. Roosevelt**). The shop's president, **Robert Newman**, also counseled against being overly cautious when it comes to caring for and displaying prints. "When the conservation departments get hold of museums, they get less interesting," he told the paper. [NYT]

*Designboom*
16th September 2022

designboom®

# SANAA and ai weiwei among recipients of 2022 praemium imperiale art award

## THE FIVE LAUREATES ANNOUNCED FOR 2022 AWARDS

The five laureates awarded the [illegible] have been announced, including [illegible] for his contributions in sculpture, and SANAA founders Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa for their contributions in architecture. The other winners are Giulia Paolini in the category of Painting, Krystian Zimerman in the category of Music, and Wim Wenders in the category of Theater or Film.

The global prize is awarded annually by the Japan Art Association, and has become a mark of the arts since its inauguration in 1989, with this year being the prize's thirty-third edition. All laureates are selected from lists submitted by 'international advisors' from a variety of countries. Each of the five award recipients have been granted a prize of $15 million yen (over $100,000 USD).

ryue nishizawa and kazuyo sejima at TOTO GALLERY·MA exhibition opening (see here)
image © designboom | header image: La Samaritaine © Simon Garcia

## AI WEIWEI AND SANAA: WINNERS OF SCULPTURE AND ARCHITECTURE

SANAA co-founder Kazuyo Sejima had worked for Toyo Ito, himself a 2010 winner of the Praemium Imperiale [illegible] before beginning her own practice in 1987 where she employed Ryue Nishizawa – still an architecture student at that time. The two founded the renowned [illegible] SANAA in 1995 and have since realized a vast collection of masterworks. These include the [illegible] in New York, the [illegible] in France, [illegible] in Connecticut, and the [illegible] renovation in Paris. In 2010, the duo was chosen as the laureates of the Pritzker Prize.

Meanwhile, Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei was celebrated for his project *Remembering* (2009) which honors the 5,000 children who died in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake due to poorly built schools. Awards officials comment that his work is *'driven by an indignation at the injustices he sees around him.'* **The artist notes in the film:** *'My vocabulary has no taboo.'*

ai weiwei exhibits colossal glass sculpture of bones and viscera at roman national museum (see here)
image by Daniele Peruzzi

## THE PRAEMIUM IMPERIALE ART AWARD

Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa of SANAA join a legacy of architects who have won the Premium Imperiale award in the past, including Frank Gehry, Renzo Piano, Toyo Ito, Zaha Hadid, and Kenzo Tange. Meanwhile Ai Weiwei joins winning sculptors James Turrell, Antony Gormley, Issey Miyake, Louise Bourgeois, Christo & Jeanne-Claude, and Richard Serra. The complete list of laureates totals to 168 since the award's inauguration over three decades ago.

**Ai Weiwei comments:** *'I am happy the Praemium Imperiale comes from Japan. I have great respect for Japan as a nation: they gave me my first museum show. Japanese culture values the arts and they have protected that tradition, and they sincerely have respect for their past.'*

**Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa of SANNA continue:** *'There are five senior Japanese architects who have received the Praemium Imperiale, including Kenzo Tange, Tadao Ando, Fumihiko Maki, Yoshio Taniguchi and Toyo Ito and we are truly honored to join them.'*

*The Guardian*
16th September 2022

The Guardian

# Ai Weiwei says mother, 90, warns him against China return

**Artist and activist tells event in London he is not clear in own mind about whether struggles for freedom were 'worth it'**

Ai Weiwei is curating an exhibition of art by prisoners in UK jails, which will open at the Southbank Centre on 27 October. Photograph: Design Museum/PA

The Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei has said his desire to be reunited with his 90-year-old mother could lead him to return to China, but that she has implored him not to give up his British exile.

The sculptor and activist, who divides his time between Cambridge and Portugal, spent 81 days in custody in Beijing in 2011 and fled his home country four years later on the return of his passport.

Asked by Chris Patten, the former governor of Hong Kong, at an event in

London whether people who had left Hong Kong after the recent political crackdown should return, Ai, 65, explained his own daily dilemma.

"I can't answer for others and I think every individual has to make up their minds according to their circumstances," he said. "My situation is I have a mum who is 90 years old and she calls me all the time on the phone. She thinks I am her little boy ...

"Always the last sentence she would say: 'Do not come back.' So, it's very hard to answer a question like that. I feel perfectly reasonable to go back because my mum is my only parent there. [But] if anything should stop me from going back it is my mum. Of course, there is strong potential that I can never come home or end up somewhere not very desirable."

Ai's father was the poet Ai Qing, a member of the Chinese Communist party and an intimate of Mao Zedong. Ai Qing was sent to a labour camp in Beidahuang, Heilongjiang, during a purge when Ai Weiwei was one year old. The family was subsequently exiled to Shihezi, Xinjiang, and only returned to Beijing in 1976 after Mao's death.

The artist's first major clash with the Chinese Communist party came when he orchestrated the gathering and publication of the names of 4,851 children who died in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. Their deaths were said to be a direct consequence of corruption and the unsafe construction of school buildings.

Ai's arrest on charges of tax evasion in April 2011 at Beijing airport where he was due to get on a flight to Hong Kong led to an outpouring of international condemnation. His mother, Gao Ying, was a prominent in demanding her son's release, at one point describing Chinese officials as "creepy, crooked, evil" despite the risk to her own liberty.

Ai, who was speaking to Lord Patten at Asia House in central London where he was one of the five recipients of a Praemium Imperiale award, which includes £100,000 to each winner, said he was not clear in his mind whether his struggles for freedom were "worth it".

He said: "I remember a security bureau person who interrogated me, before I got released, he said: 'You are always asking for freedom. For that freedom, you might end of up in jail spending years just because you are asking for that.' He is very sincere, very honest and he has no answer. Just says think about it, if it is worth it. I cannot say it is worth it."

Ai is curating an exhibition of art by prisoners in UK jails, which will open at the Southbank Centre on 27 October. Ai said the works that would be on show from people "serving time", including in HMP Wormwood Scrubs, were "truly impressive". He added: "I have seen many masterworks."

*The Financial Times*
18th October 2022

FT FINANCIAL TIMES

# The tiger who came to Ai Weiwei

**Beatrice Hodgkin** OCTOBER 18 2022

"Is it hugging? Or is it killing?" The big cat depicted on Ai Weiwei's interpretation of a Tibetan tiger rug is lying on its back, facing up – an inversion of the traditional woven wool design that dates back to the 19th century – its claws ready to engulf whoever stands on it. Ai considers the question. "I don't want to come with this common motif, just the back showing the stripes... I see a tiger behind the rug. I see more about their pose and their tail and all those things. I think that it is funny and friendly. It's more like hugging."

The Chinese artist and activist's rug will be exhibited at Sotheby's from 24 to 29 November and sold for £150,000, the finale of a philanthropic project and exhibition, *Tomorrow's Tigers*, curated by Artwise. It is part of a last fundraising push for WWF's Tx2 campaign to double wild tiger numbers by 2022. At the mission's launch in 2010, tigers were on the brink of extinction; numbers had dropped to 3,200, 95 per cent lower than 100 years before, due to poaching, the illegal tiger trade and habitat destruction. This July, the IUCN Red List released an estimate of 4,500. The latest update is expected next year.

Ai Weiwei's rug, The Tiger, commissioned for Tomorrow's Tigers and WWF-UK. © Artwise

"We're on the right track... but progress is fragile," says Becci May, WWF's senior programme adviser for Asia. "This year is key to getting a renewed commitment from governments to consolidate the successes being seen in places such as Nepal." (The country has nearly tripled its wild tiger population to 355 individuals since 2009.) "It's a rare glimmer of hope for biodiversity that one of the world's most ambitious conservation goals has reversed decades of decline."

The plight of the tigers is "pitiful", says Ai. "If you look at human relations with animals, you understand our society is suicidal. We don't know ourselves by not understanding other species... [We] ask too much, giving too little." Through the rug design, he says, "I hope to be able to do something for tigers; the meaning of their existence surpasses the scope of our comprehension."

> **66**
>
> **I see a tiger behind the rug. I think that it is funny and friendly**
>
> Ai Weiwei

His design plays on the abstracted patterns of the original Tibetan tiger rugs, fewer than 200 of which remain. They are an enigma, thought to have been created as symbols of protection for monks during meditation. "We loved the idea that we could do a contemporary version to protect the tigers that the Tibetan monks believed were protecting them," says Laura Culpan of Artwise. In 2019, she and Susie Allen asked 10 artists, including Anish Kapoor, Rose Wylie and Raqib Shaw, to create fundraising tiger rugs; Ai's is a last hurrah for the project, alongside a new edition of eight by Peter Doig.

Peter Doig's original artwork and sample for his rug, Tiger Fight © Thierry Bal, courtesy of Artwise

Ai himself collects Tibetan tiger rugs and his own design has "two intentions: first is to carry the tradition. The second is to make it appreciated in the modern way." To that end, the knotting is coarse, 25 knots per inch, and the colours are natural – undyed white and black sheep's wool, together with

oranges created using a mixture of saffron, yellow larkspur and madder. It's a restricted palette that, Ai says, reflects his creative process to "say no to too many choices and temptation... to reduce those unnecessary seductions of the so-called free choice". The rug's defining difference is its square shape.

Pounce rug by Kiki Smith © Artwise

Inspired by this "precision about his view", Matthew Bourne, co-owner of UK-based rug makers Christopher Farr, commissioned weavers in Afghanistan to make Ai's rug, arranged through Turquoise Mountain, the NGO co-founded by King Charles and Rory Stewart (now run by Soshanna Stewart, wife of Rory) to preserve the country's ancient skills and crafts. "You can feel the breeze around the rug maker," says Ai. "And this different landscape clearly gives the energy."

But the rug shouldn't be the focus, he asserts. The focus should remain on the tigers. "Protection of endangered animals is a kind of self-love," says Ai, "without which we would all be living in a savage land."

"Tigers are an apex predator; so when numbers decline, it has multiple associated impacts," says WWF's May. "By conserving tigers we also conserve some of the world's richest ecosystems. Forest landscapes protected for tigers store more carbon, on average, than other forests in the region. Tiger habitats overlap nine globally important watersheds, which supply water to as many as 830mn people. They also provide disaster risk reduction against flooding, tidal surge and landslides." Notably, Pakistan is one of five countries where tigers are believed to have become extinct. It is one of the 15 (including India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Russia) deemed by a new report, Restoring Asia's Roar, to be part of the potential 1.7mn sq km tiger range recovery area.

With the Weight of Each Step by Maya Lin. © Artwise

Now The Global Tiger Recovery Programme 2022-2034 is launching. Already, in Nepal's Terai Arc landscape, a planned railway line is being rerouted to take it outside the Chitwan National Park, home to hundreds of species including tigers; in India, stretches of national highway 44, which passes through Pench Tiger Reserve, have been elevated to ensure wildlife can move freely.

"Of course, the human race also struggles to survive, but the way to survive is not to exploit other species," says Ai, of the challenges of protecting both vulnerable human communities and animal populations. "It's just very simple; a child would understand: you have to keep some places untouched." The message of this project "should get out loud, like tigers", Ai says, then – quite literally – roars. "The mountain shakes and every animal listens to it."

*The New York Times*
20th October 2022

The New York Times

# No, Capitalism and the Internet Will Not Free China's People

Elaine

**By Ai Weiwei**

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

Communist Party rule of China has been punctuated by one mass public campaign after another, each designed to commandeer Chinese minds in service of the state.

There was the Great Leap Forward, the industrial reform campaign begun in 1958 that precipitated a devastating famine; the political witch hunts of the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution, which nearly tore China apart; and many more, some more damaging than others, and each targeting some political, social or economic imperative of the day. Their cumulative effect is one of the Communist Party's greatest achievements: a near-perfect symbiosis between dictatorial government and subservient population.

The government's nearly three-year-old zero-Covid campaign may be the worst of all.

It's an affront to science and common sense, yet — reminiscent of the mindlessness of the Cultural Revolution — officials and citizens around the country go to ridiculous lengths to execute it. Entire cities are shut down even for small outbreaks, and coronavirus tests are conducted on fish and other food products, cars, even construction materials. It has brought chaos and suffering for China's people, who have been repeatedly locked down, been detained for missing coronavirus tests and lost jobs or businesses. When Chengdu, a city of 21 million people, was locked down in September, residents were blocked from leaving their flats even when an earthquake struck.

Past campaigns of mass control have come and gone, but this one will have lasting consequences thanks to its most insidious aspect: the surveillance technology rolled out nationwide to suppress Covid but which allows citizens to be tracked by authorities, their movements circumscribed. Government officials used this system to restrict the movements of people who wanted to take part in a protest in central China in June. Those officials were later punished, but the fact remains that the government now has a system that Mao Zedong could only have dreamed of, powered by data and algorithms, to monitor and control the people.

The West has been wrong about China. It was long assumed that capitalism, the emergence of a middle class and the internet would cause China to eventually adopt Western political ideas. But these ideas cannot even begin to take root because the Communist Party has never allowed the intellectual soil needed for them to germinate. And it never will.

Chinese minds have in fact never truly been free. China has been a largely united, centralized state for most of the past 2,000 years, and similar ethics and a similar relationship between ruler and ruled have endured throughout. No fundamental change is possible; China's lowly people are expected to merely obey.

When the Communist Party seized state power in 1949, hope for a new era flickered briefly. My father, Ai Qing, then one of China's leading poets, had already enthusiastically joined the party. But Mao shrewdly capitalized on China's ancient power dynamic, enshrining the party as the new unquestioned ruler. Like many intellectuals, my father soon came under attack during Mao's repeated political campaigns to root out those who dared think independently. China's spiritual, intellectual and cultural life withered.

In 1957 — the year I was born — Mao launched the Anti-Rightist Campaign. My father was branded a rightist, subjected to fierce public attacks, and we were driven to internal exile in a bleak corner of the remote Xinjiang region. Some of his peers committed suicide.

He came under attack yet again during the Cultural Revolution, paraded through the streets in a dunce cap to public gatherings where abuse was hurled at him. He came home one night, exhausted, his face black after someone at a political rally dumped a pot of ink over his head. In an example of the helplessness and resignation of China's people, he suggested that we just imagine that grim place had always been our home, accept our lot in life and get on with it. China's people still live under this mentality of surrender today.

When I ran afoul of authorities in 2011 after criticizing the government, the police threatened me with an "ugly death" and said they would tell all of China about the absurd allegations they leveled, like tax evasion, to discredit me. I asked if China's people would believe their lies. Ninety percent will, an officer told me. In China, where all "truth" comes from the party, he may have been right. Three years later, at an art exhibition in Shanghai, pressure from local government officials led to the abrupt removal of my name from a list of exhibitors. Not one of the Chinese artists whose work was on display, many of whom knew me well, came forward to defend me.

Things have only worsened in the past decade. Authorities have smothered remaining traces of independent thought, decimated Chinese civil society and cast a chill over academia, media, culture and business.

To be fair, individual thought and expression are constrained in Western democracies, too. Political correctness forces people to hold in what they truly believe and parrot empty slogans to superficially comply with prevailing narratives. And Western engagement with China has been driven by the pursuit of profit rather than values. Western leaders criticize Communist Party violations of human rights, free speech and spiritual freedom, but long have continued to do business with Beijing. U.S. hypocrisy about independent thought is evident in its approach to the WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who stands for freedom of information but whom the U.S. government is prosecuting.

Millions of Chinese take pride in modern China's growing wealth and power. But this feeling of well-being is a mirage conjured by superficial material gain, constant propaganda about the decline of the West and suppression of intellectual freedom. China is in fact decaying morally under the influence of the party. In 2011, a 2-year-old girl was run over by two vehicles in southern China and left bleeding in a street. Eighteen people passed by without doing anything, some even swerving aside to avoid her. Don't think, don't get involved, just keep walking. The girl later died.

Millions of Chinese take pride in modern China's growing wealth and power. But this feeling of well-being is a mirage conjured by superficial material gain, constant propaganda about the decline of the West and suppression of intellectual freedom. China is in fact decaying morally under the influence of the party. In 2011, a 2-year-old girl was run over by two vehicles in southern China and left bleeding in a street. Eighteen people passed by without doing anything, some even swerving aside to avoid her. Don't think, don't get involved, just keep walking. The girl later died.

Ai Weiwei (@ajyww) is a Chinese artist based in Europe and author of the personal memoir "1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows."

*The New York Times Style Magazine*
22nd November 2022

PEOPLE, PLACES, THINGS

# A New Range of Honey From the Gardens of LeBron James and Ai Weiwei

Plus: Norman Teague's culturally minded furniture and more from T's cultural compendium.

**Nov. 22, 2022**

Ai Weiwei in his estate in Monsaraz, Portugal, where Richard Christiansen of Flamingo Estate installed a hive.

**Sample the Terroir of Ai Weiwei, Tiffany Haddish and Julianne Moore's Estates**

Flamingo Estate honey, from hives hosted by Ai and the actress Julianne Moore.
John van Pamer

Since the spring of 2020, Richard Christiansen's Flamingo Estate has grown from selling produce boxes to offering a wide array of made-in-California products, including garden-scented candles, wine and regeneratively farmed olive oil. But before all of that, there was honey. The first thing Christiansen — the founder of the ad agency Chandelier Creative — did upon moving to his densely vegetated seven-acre property in Los Angeles's Highland Park in 2016 was establish some beehives. As a child in rural Australia, he had been surrounded by his parents' hives: "It's just this timeless, beautiful thing that everyone can do," he says. Earlier this year, Christiansen installed hives in the gardens of a few famous friends and fans of Flamingo Estate, with all proceeds from the resulting honey sold this holiday season going to a number of charities, including Cancer for College and Refugees International. In southern Portugal, the artist Ai Weiwei's bees are feasting on olive trees. Will Ferrell, Tiffany Haddish and LeBron and Savannah James have hives in different parts of Los Angeles, and Julianne Moore has been hosting hers in Montauk, on Long Island. "These bees are like my children, so I only wanted them to go to the best places," Christiansen says. (His own swarm was used for the Los Angeles sites; elsewhere, he relied on trusted local apiarists.) Going forward, he plans to introduce his bees to other fabulous gardens. As he sees it, it's a kind of vacation for these industrious insects. "These bees wake up," he says, "and they fly out to the most amazing view." *From $250, flamingoestate.com. — Ella Riley-Adams*

## Designs That Build on the Legacies of Black Creatives

The artist and designer Norman Teague sitting on his Africana chair in his Chicago studio, with his Sinmi stool and other works in progress. Courtesy of IIDA, photographed by Vasia Rigou

The artist and designer Norman Teague describes his work as being "of the African American culture." In the case of the two chairs he's currently developing for Knoll, that meant taking inspiration from the quilters of Gee's Bend, Ala., direct descendants of enslaved people who became icons of American craft. The details of the chairs, which he hopes to debut in 2024, are still under wraps, but he promises vibrant color and "a certain level of sexy" to go along with the old-fashioned patchwork.

Having grown up on the South Side of Chicago as the son of a Baptist preacher, Teague was in the M.F.A. program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2015 when he joined a group of students presenting at Salone del Mobile in Milan. His Sinmi stool, an experimental bentwood rocking chair, earned a place in the Art Institute of Chicago's permanent collection. "It was a big deal to go from student to exhibitor," says Teague, now 54, whose pieces since have been acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, among other institutions.

Along with the Knoll project, he's consulting on furnishings for exhibit galleries at the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park and serving as one of the inaugural fellows of the artist Theaster Gates's Dorchester Industries Experimental Design Lab, a partnership with the Prada Group that funds and promotes Black creators. Currently on view at the Art Center Highland Park is Teague's eight-foot-tall cabinet of curiosities. "Historically, that type of cabinet has been for rich white men in places of power to house things like stuffed ducks," he says. Instead, he'll invite his fellow creatives to, in his words, "preserve Black moments," envisioning a showcase full of everything from poetry and whiskey bottles to sneakers and art. Also in progress is an arts space on the South Side, which will offer various workshops and house his fabrication studio.

But right now, his top priority is helping his mother, Jean Carol Teague, renew her passport in time to join him next spring at the Venice Architecture Biennale, where his designs will be in the United States Pavilion. Says Teague: "My mama is so proud." — *Allison Duncan*

*The Guardian*
4th December 2022

The Guardian

Phuong Le

Sun 4 Dec 2022 17.19 GMT

# Ximei review – Ai Weiwei produces inspiring portrait of Chinese Aids activist

★★★☆☆

Liu Ximei, who was diagnosed with HIV at 10, is shown as a dauntless campaigner whose home provides a warm haven for patients still neglected in China

Astonishingly resilient ... Ximei

Produced by Ai Weiwei, this is a rousing portrait of Liu Ximei, an astonishingly resilient Aids activist; it also sheds light on a controversial government campaign that accelerated the epidemic in 1990s China. During the first half of the decade, poor farmers were encouraged to donate their blood in exchange for money. Due to a lack of health and safety standards, a staggering number of donors as well as those who received transfusions contracted HIV. In Ximei's province of Henan, more than 300,000 villagers live with the debilitating effects of the condition, all while facing societal discrimination and neglect.

In following Ximei's day-to-day routines, the film captures the gruelling reality of simply making your voice heard in an environment that is determined to strip HIV-positive people of their humanity. The lively thread that binds this stigmatised community together, Ximei makes endless trips to the central hospital where she demands better medical treatment on behalf of other HIV-positive people, many of whom are elderly and illiterate. In contrast to the indifference of government officials, the warm atmosphere of Ximei's home, a haven for those living with HIV, attests to the importance of community and grassroots organisation. Ximei herself was abandoned by her birth parents; later, when she was diagnosed with HIV at the age of 10 after a blood transfusion, it was her foster family that nurtured her sense of compassion.

Shot over seven years by director Andy Cohen under surveillance and interference from Chinese officials, this film, like Ximei's tireless work, feels like a miracle. In juxtaposing her activism and the hardships of her condition with intimate moments such as her wedding, the documentary beautifully shows how the lives of Ximei and many others are not defined by their HIV status.

● Ximei is released on 1 December in cinemas.

Link to the trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AwKcy8dNCw

*The Guardian*
21st December 2022

The Guardian

# Did I know anything about putting on an opera? No, but I wasn't going to let that stop me

*Ai Weiwei*

In 1987 I was an extra in Turandot, alongside operatic legends – little did I know I'd be directing the show 35 years later

Wed 21 Dec 2022 08.00 GMT

Francesca Dotto as Liù and Antonio Di Matteo as Timur in Ai Weiwei's production of Turandot at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. Photograph: Ai Weiwei

It was 1987 in New York, I had been in the city for six years, and I was an artist who had nothing to do. So when we saw there were opportunities to work as extras in a production of Giacomo Puccini's Turandot by Franco Zeffirelli and James Levine at the Metropolitan Opera, both my brother Ai Dan and I went for the audition – and were accepted.

At the time, performing in the opera didn't evoke any strong feelings in me, even though we were performing with famous opera singers like Éva Marton and Plácido Domingo. All I wanted then was to receive my fees after rehearsals and go to Gray's Papaya on Broadway to feast on hot dogs.

Thirty-five years later, I was invited by Teatro dell'Opera di Roma to direct a new production of Turandot. I accepted it mainly because of my participation in that performance 35 years before. This time I worked as the director, set and costume designer and video artist.

It took me a long time to prepare for this opera - I was very unfamiliar with the field, and had to work on my understanding of music, characters and plot development. The picture above, showing Francesca Dotto as Liù and Antonio Di Matteo as Timur, was taken on 22 March this year from that production at the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome.

I was pleased with the result. In the videos projected at the back of the stage, I included the many issues that human beings have faced in recent years and my interpretation of them, including wars, refugee crises, the Covid pandemic, Hong Kong's cry for freedom, the Ukraine war, possibilities of larger disasters in the future, and general feelings of uncertainty.

Happily - especially given I was much more invested this time around - my version of Turandot was very well received.

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

*The Art Newspaper*
30th January 2023

THE ART NEWSPAPER

# From a marble toilet roll to a giant Lego structure: Ai Weiwei's new London show looks at the value of objects

Exhibition at the Design Museum will include the artist's works drawing on the Covid-19 pandemic

**Gareth Harris**

30 January 2023

Ai Weiwei's *Marble Toilet Paper* (2020, right) will be included in the show
Portrait: Rick Pushinsky; Toilet Paper: © Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

The Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei heads to the Design Museum in London this spring with a major new show unveiling works drawing on the Covid-19 pandemic (*Ai Weiwei: Making Sense*, 7 April-30 July). Three toilet paper sculptures will go on show—two life-size rolls, one in marble and one in glass—demonstrating the demand for basic disposable products during the coronavirus crisis.

The exhibition—described as the first to frame Ai's work through the lens of architecture and design—also focuses on the Sichuan earthquake of 2008 and the changing urban face of Beijing over the past three decades.

"[The show includes] things we think of as worthless in ordinary times, something as worthless as a toilet roll, which during the pandemic suddenly became precious … that for him was a real signal of how objects can gain and lose value depending on the context of our times," said Justin McGuirk, the chief curator at the Design Museum and the exhibition curator, at an online press launch. Crucially, "we are not presenting Ai Weiwei as a designer and architect… [but] using his work and his thinking to reflect on design and architecture," he added.

*Untitled (LEGO incident)*
© Image courtesy of Weiwei Studio

A number of site-specific installations, comprising hundreds of thousands of objects arranged in sections known as "fields" form the centrepiece of the show. These consist of works collected by Ai in recent year, encompassing items such as Stone Age tools and Lego bricks. The show will also include Ai's largest work ever made out of Lego.

"This is a show about values; it is a meditation on cultural values and how they shift over time. It presents a history of making over thousands of years," McGuirk said. "When you collect so much… it tells you about human society," Ai said at the launch.

One of the "fields", entitled *Left Right Studio Material*, includes fragments from Ai's porcelain sculptures that were destroyed when his Left Right studio complex in Beijing was demolished by the Chinese state in 2018. "They [the pieces] have a moral value," Ai said. The Lego "field" will display bricks donated to the artist after the company briefly stopped supplying him with material in the wake of his portraits made in Lego of political prisoners.

Another "field" includes almost 2,000 neglected neolithic stone tools which Ai started collecting in the 1990s at places such as flea markets. "Nobody paid attention to them… they [market vendors] were really surprised I wanted them," Ai said.

Between the 200,000 porcelain spouts from teapots and wine ewers and the 100,000 porcelain balls alongside them, another of the fields shine a light on ancient handcrafted works. "We often say modern people do not know how to wash a dish," Ai said. "In some senses, we are less understanding… about the touch, texture and shape of forms made by human hands." The field sections in the exhibition will not be cordoned off to visitors.

Ai Weiwei's *Spouts* (2015)
© Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

The tension between handmade and industrially produced items underpins the show, added McGuirk, highlighting the period of turbulence and transition that China has gone through in the past 30 years. Ai charts the changing face of Beijing following "the tremendous scale of urbanisation and development which brought a lot of destruction, a devaluing of history, a wiping away of streetscapes and architecture", McGuirk added.

Meanwhile the coffin-like *Rebar and case* (2012), references the earthquake that devastated Sichuan province in 2008, claiming 70,000 lives. More than 5,000 students were crushed under the rubble of their collapsed school buildings. The new work *Nian Nian* (2022) consists of 26 prints representing more than 1,000 names handcarved in a jade seal using calligraphy, creating a graphic memorial to the children who died.

Some works will be shown outside the exhibition space including *Coloured House*, the timber frame of a house that once belonged to a family in Zhejiang province in eastern China during the early Qing dynasty (1644-1911). "The loss of cultural memory is very much one of the themes of this show… Ai is bringing ancient and modern together," McGuirk said.

*The Independent*
30th January 2023

INDEPENDENT

# Artist Ai Weiwei to launch 'long overdue' first design-focused exhibition

The exhibition, opening in April, will feature hundreds of thousands of objects collected by the Chinese artist, from Stone Age tools to Lego bricks.

Ellie Iorizzo

Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei is to take over London's Design Museum with his first installation using design and history as a lens through which to consider what we value (Design Museum/PA) (PA Media)

Ai Weiwei is preparing for a takeover of London's Design Museum with his first installation using design and history as a lens through which to consider what we value.

Hundreds of thousands of objects, which have been collected by the Chinese dissident artist since the Nineties as part of his ongoing

fascination with artefacts and traditional craftsmanship, will be at the heart of the exhibition in a series of five expansive "fields".

The fields include Still Life, which will feature 1,600 tools from the Stone Age highlighting the origins of design rooted in survival, and Left Right Studio Material, which consists of thousands of fragments from Weiwei's porcelain sculptures that were destroyed when his studio was demolished by the Chinese state in 2018.

Another field, Spouts, will feature 200,000 porcelain spouts crafted by hand during the Song Dynasty.

Two untitled fields feature an estimated 100,000 cannon balls from the Song Dynasty, and Lego bricks which Weiwei began working with in 2014 to produce portraits of political prisoners.

Lego briefly stopped working with the artist as a result but a response from social media led to donations from the public and it is these donated bricks which will be presented for the first time as a fully-formed artwork at the exhibition, which runs from April 7 to July 30.

Weiwei, who is best known for working on the design of Beijing's Olympic stadium and filling the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall with hand-crafted porcelain sunflower seeds in 2010, said: "This is an exhibition focused on a very specific concept: design.

"I had to think about how we use the space in the Design Museum as a whole, and the exhibition offers a rich experience of what design is, and how design relates to our past and to our current situation."

Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei is to take over London's Design Museum with his first installation using design and history as a lens through which to consider what we value (Design Museum/PA) *(PA Media)*

It is the artist's biggest UK show in eight years and features dozens of objects and artworks from throughout his career exploring tensions, including his Han Dynasty urn emblazoned with a Coca-Cola logo which epitomises these clashes.

Highlights also include a number of Weiwei's objects transforming something useful into something useless, including a worker's hard hat cast in glass and a sculpture of an iPhone cut out of a jade axe-head.

There are also works that refer to the Covid-19 pandemic, with three toilet paper sculptures on display shown in the context of China's rapidly changing urban landscape which Weiwei has documented through photographic and film works.

Ai Weiwei: Making Sense will feature large-scale works installed outside the exhibition gallery in the museum's free-to-enter spaces as well as outside the building, including a piece titled Coloured House featuring the timber frame of a house that once belonged to a prosperous family in Zhejiang province in eastern China during the early Qing Dynasty.

Weiwei has painted the frame with industrial colours and installed it on crystal bases, and it is the first time it has been seen in the UK.

***Ai Weiwei's fields are extraordinary, and they tell a story of human ingenuity that spans millennia***

Justin McGuirk, Design Museum

Justin McGuirk, chief curator at the Design Museum and curator of Ai Weiwei: Making Sense, said: "Ai Weiwei's fields are extraordinary, and they tell a story of human ingenuity that spans millennia. The fields are a meditation on value – on histories and skills that have been forgotten, and on the tension between the industrial and the hand-made.

"Their scale is unsettling and moving, and, in trying to make sense of these works, the visitor is challenged to think about what we value and what we destroy."

Design Museum director and chief executive Tim Marlow said: "Ai Weiwei is one of the most compelling artists and activists working today, but his practice is profoundly pluralistic, encompassing film, architecture, design and collecting.

"This exhibition is, therefore, long overdue and I'm proud that the Design Museum is the first institution to frame the work of Ai Weiwei through the lens of architecture and design and to collaborate in new ways with one of the great creative forces of the 21st century to date."

*designboom*
3rd February 2023

designboom®

## 'ai weiwei: making sense' marks the artist's first-ever design-centered exhibition

### AI WEIWEI: MAKING SENSE IN LONDON'S DESIGN MUSEUM

The Design Museum in London celebrates Ai Weiwei's very first design-focused exhibition with its 'Ai Weiwei: Making Sense'. Running from 7 April to 30 July 2023, the show will feature works never shown before in the UK, as well as major new pieces by Ai Weiwei including large-scale works installed throughout the venue. Visitors are invited to engage with the stunning installations and wander among them, *'encountering thousands of years of human ingenuity'*.

*'This is an exhibition focussed on a very specific concept: design. I had to think about how we use the space in the Design Museum as a whole, and the exhibition offers a rich experience of what design is, and how design relates to our past and to our current situation.'* said the Chinese contemporary artist.

Ai Weiwei, Colored House, 2013. © Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

## LARGE SCALE INSTALLATIONS TAKE OVER THE GALLERY

Well-known for his powerful art and activism, Ai Weiwei's practice glides across many disciplines embracing art, design, architecture, curation, photography, film, and social, political, and cultural crafts. *'Ai Weiwei's fields are extraordinary, and they tell a story of human ingenuity that spans millennia. The fields are a meditation on value – on histories and skills that have been forgotten, and on the tension between the industrial and the handmade. Their scale is unsettling and moving, and in trying to make sense of these works the visitor is challenged to think about what we value and what we destroy,* **shares Justin McGuirk, the Curator at the Design Museum (see more here) and the exhibition.**

According to the press release, a series of major site-specific installations will take over the core of the exhibition. From Stone Age tools to Lego bricks, dozens of objects will be spread across the gallery floor in a series of five expansive 'fields'. These items have been collected together by Ai Weiwei since the 1990s and are 'the result of his ongoing fascination with artefacts and traditional craftsmanship'. The five work fields include: 'Still Life', 'Left Right Studio Material', 'Spouts', 'Untitled (Porcelain Boils)', 'Untitled (Lego Incident)'.

© Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

Throughout the gallery, visitors will discover objects and artworks from Ai Weiwei's vast career that *'explore the tensions between past and present, hand and machine, precious and worthless, construction and destruction.'* Highlights are his 'Han dynasty urn' decorated with a Coca-Cola logo, as well as a number of examples of Ai's day-to-day objects that turned into something useless but valuable. For example, a worker's hard hat is cast in glass, gaining both a strong and fragile silhouette, and a sculpture of an iPhone that has been cut out of a jade axe-head. Furthermore, on display will be pieces that reference the Covid-19 pandemic which exposed human dependence on humble things. Three toilet paper sculptures: two life-size rolls (one in marble and one in glass) as well as a 2-meter-long sculpture in marble which is being displayed for the first time.

Large-scale installations like the 'Colored House' will be installed outside of the exhibition gallery, enticing passers-by's attention. The timber frame of a house once belonged to a prosperous family in Zhejiang province, in eastern China, during the early Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911 CE). Utilizing industrial colors, Ai Weiwei has painted the house blending ancient and modern touches and has lodged it on crystal bases 'giving presence and status to this unlikely survivor'.

Ai Weiwei, Still Life, 1993-2000 | © Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

Ai Weiwei at the Design Museum, September 2022. © Rick Pushinsky for the Design Museum

Untitled (LEGO Incident) | © Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

Untitled (LEGO Incident). © Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

Ai Weiwei, National Stadium, 2005-2007 | © image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

Ai Weiwei, Spouts, 2015 | © image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

Ai Weiwei, Marble Takeout Box, 2015 | © image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

Ai Weiwei at the Design Museum,September 2022. © Rick Pushinsky for the Design Museum

© Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

Ai Weiwei, Marble Toilet Paper, 2020. © Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

Ai Weiwei, Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo, 2014. © Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

Untitled (LEGO Incident). © Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studi

Ai Weiwei, Untitled (Porcelainails), 2022. © Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

Ai Weiwei, Glass Helmet, 2022. © Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

© Image courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

**project info:**

**exhibition name:** Ai Weiwei: Making Sense
**artist:** Ai Weiwei
**location:** The Design Museum, London | Kensington
**dates:** 7 April - 30 July, 2023

christina petridou | designboom feb 03, 2023

*The Guardian*
23rd February 2023

The Guardian

# From potato worlds to dancing vaginas: Ai Weiwei leads a dip into witchcraft and weird nature

Inspired by a Dartmoor witch's cauldron, Earth Spells features magnificent oddities, including a human-headed hen, while Super Natural, another south-west show, ties wisdom to the Earth, not least in Ai Weiwei's tree root sculpture

Ashish Ghadiali

Gawdy work … Kiri Lemajou's Baubo Dance presents a pair of laughing, dancing taunted vaginas on legs, recalling the motif Greek goddess Baubo. Photograph: Stanislav Stepashko

In search of the roots of our current ecological crisis, the writer Amitav Ghosh, in his most recent book The Nutmeg's Curse, looks back to the suppression of witchcraft in 16th-century Europe. He views this as the moment human violence towards the natural world came to supersede an older wisdom, inherent in magical practices around the world, that "landscapes are neither inert nor mute, but imbued with vitality".

It's a theme that plays out with dramatic effect in two major exhibitions currently running across south-west England – Earth Spells: Witness of the Anthropocene at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (Ramm) in Exeter and Super Natural at the Eden Project in Cornwall.

**## The Quechuan language has 5,000 names for potato varieties – and over 30 words for the potato itself**

Gestated through the Covid pandemic years, Earth Spells was curated by Lara Goodband and Gemma Lloyd, who were inspired by the donation to Ramm of a small cauldron that had belonged to Elizabeth Webb (circa 1840-1913), AKA the White Witch of Dartmoor. The idea was to explore cosmologies and ecological relationships that the object's storied history pointed them towards. Stepping inside the exhibition, you're immediately confronted by Mercedes Mühleisen's Lament of Fruitless Hen, a disorienting video installation where a hen's body has been fitted with an egg-shaped human head that spews words without meaning.

Cucking hell … Mercedes Mühleisen's Lament of the Fruitless Hen. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist

Around the corner, Estonian artist Kris Lemsalu's Baubo Dance fuses Greek myth and folk culture with bawdy effect to present a pair of laughing, dancing toothed vaginas on legs, recalling the story of the misfit Greek goddess Baubo, who lifted the grief of Demeter for her lost daughter Persephone by flashing her vulva and making her laugh.

Elsewhere, Caroline Achaintre's hand-tufted wool hanging, Ghost Duck, and Florence Peake's multidisciplinary work The Lichen Exists lead us through a liminal space of veils suspended from the ceiling into the experience of an animate Earth – "the lichen exists," writes Peake, "the moss exists / And has no trouble in its own place, life, situation / You are a disturbance."

New films fill the space with mesmerising soundscapes of drumming, wind and rain: Ferocious Match by Peake, where the artist performs gestures of inner turmoil as an act of surrender to a storm, and Labour: Birth of a New Museum, where, in the privacy of a closed exhibition hall at Ramm, the 2022 Jarman film-award winner Grace Ndiritu leads a circle of pregnant women on a shamanic journey in search of the soul names of their unborn children. These rooms generate an intensity that rises to a fever pitch beneath Emma Hart's Good Vibrations, a cluster of 13 ceramic pieces painted with concentric circles that protrude awkwardly from the wall, occupying a strange hinterland between 2D and 3D in a way that carries feelings of an eerie presence, and where Kiki Smith's tapestry Sojourn (2015) renders plant and animal subjects as cohabitants of a mythical realm.

Cornwall resident Lucy Stein's explosive paintings, augmented by her energetic engagement with the Ramm archive, crown the multisensory experience of this exhibition, reflecting the artist's intimation of "fertility as a psychic space". In works including Ill Eternity and Misericord, her striking palette evokes the colours of a lithium flame and speaks to Stein's interest in the liquid layers of the Earth, the lithium-rich Cornubian basin that runs beneath the surfaces of Cornwall and Devon.

Toil and trouble ... the cauldron used by Elizabeth Gross, one of Lucie-Smith's Welsh Witches of Dunmow. Photograph: Simon Turner/Image Arts/Saffron Walden Museum Art Gallery, Essex City Council

Here, her vision of place is always bursting with the richness of secret, inner worlds and the juxtaposition of objects selected from the archive to set around her own work – bronze age vessels from Devon, an ancient goddess from Gaul, a bangle from Tripoli, a set of stuffed owls – moving time and histories to collapse in on one another with dizzying effect.

No less accomplished, the curatorial vision of Misha Carson and Hannah Hooks that drives Super Natural at Eden establishes a conversation between diverse cultural histories, pointing us all the time towards an underlying, unifying wisdom that runs through a shared experience of the planet.

On the grounds of Eden, Swedish artist Ingela Ihrman, whose exhibition Nocturne also runs at Gasworks in London until 30 April, repeats a sculpture, First Came the Landscape, made last year for the Uppsala konstmuseum. A beech tree, toppled in a storm, is chopped up and remade on the ground as an anatomically precise, giant skeletal figure. Perhaps it depicts the remnants of a whale or even primordial man. It's a childlike gesture that will remain where it is to interact with the coming seasons, inviting us to observe its decay and providing a meditation on fragility that's at once playful and profound.

Inside, the main exhibition is introduced by the visionary film Matrix Vegetal by Chilean artist Patricia Domínguez, an eco-futurist installation displayed inside a sculpture of a mandrake plant. Inspired by the ayahuasca-supported teachings of Domínguez's shaman guide Amador Aniceto, the work takes us on a journey through indigenous wisdom into the inner structures of vegetal life. This journey has echoes in the collaboration between Eduardo Navarro and philosopher Michael Marder, the audio piece Vegetal Transmutation, in which we hear evolutionary ecologist Monica Gagliano implore the listener not to "horde thoughts in your brain, instead let them circulate like sap in a plant."

Grace Ndiritu's Protest Carries Motherhood; on wall, Labour – Birth of a New Museum. Photograph: Simon Tatton/Courtesy of Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery

Meanwhile Ai Weiwei's cast-iron sculpture of a giant Brazilian tree root gives form to the dynamic structures of rooting and uprootedness, themes he also explores in relation to human migration in his 2017 film Human Flow. The hidden life of plants emerges as a related space where we can make sense of dimensions of human existence from the historical to the physiological to the metaphysical, and this realisation in turn points us towards a sense of our own interconnectedness with multispecies life in all its forms.

Similarly, in the hands of Keisha Coakley and Iman Datoo, everyday food items – from the passion fruit and persimmon to the potato – point us towards greater recognition of how histories of slavery and empire underpin our age of ecological collapse. Coakley's installation Horticultural Appropriation interrogates the conventions of the collector's cabinet, rendering objects from her daily life as tactile, bronze miniatures and placing them on her own version of the colonial shelf to raise questions about how meaning and value are bestowed and what reparation might mean in light of uneven environmental histories.

Datoo's film Kinnomic Botany is a brilliant dissection of the potato's cultural history. It opens our eyes to the reductive lens that European colonisation has wrought on our sense of the planet and reminds us that while 15 kinds of potato are readily available in UK supermarkets, the Quechuan language has 5,000 names for potato varieties and "over 30 words for potato itself". Embodying the role of the shaman in her own style, Datoo instructs us to look again and see how "the potato in your hand is a multiworld".

With such strong work on display across these two exhibitions, it's thrilling to see emerging British artists like Coakley and Datoo thriving, too, placing themselves at the leading edge of environmentally focused art.

– Earth Spells: Witches of the Anthropocene is at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, until 7 May; Super Natural is at the Gillett Project, Cornwall, until 1 May

*Wallpaper**
9th March 2023

Wallpaper*

# Ai Weiwei at the Design Museum: a snapshot of design history across eight millennia

Ai Weiwei digs deep into design history, gathering everything from Neolithic tools to Lego bricks for his new show at London's Design Museum. We visit him at home in Portugal for a preview

Ai Weiwei photographed in February 2023 at his 17-acre property in Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal
(Image credit: Jermaine Francis)

BY TF CHAN
PUBLISHED 21 DAYS AGO

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM
JERMAINE FRANCIS - PHOTOGRAPHY

Ai Weiwei is not known to do things in half measures. For his installation at Documenta 12, in 2007, the artist famously brought 1,001 Chinese citizens to Kassel, Germany, for staggered week-long stays, using his blog to recruit volunteers between the ages of two and 70. Titled *Fairytale*, the ambitious artwork seemed to herald his homeland's arrival on the world stage ('To explore the world is a right that you acquire when you are born, and these travellers were exercising this right for the very first time,' he wrote in his recent autobiography), while speaking to contemporary global issues, such as mass migration and dramatic population growth. Three years later, invited to take over the Turbine Hall at London's Tate Modern, Ai commissioned 1,600 ceramicists in the pottery town of Jingdezhen to handcraft 100 million sunflower seeds in porcelain, which he then poured into the cavernous exhibition space to create a seemingly infinite landscape – a simple motif elevated into a powerful statement on the rise of 'made in China'.

## Ai Weiwei: 'Making Sense' at the Design Museum

The artist's study, with *Sunflower Seed* in Lego (2016)

(Image credit: Jermaine Francis)

Though slightly more modest in scale, the centrepiece of Ai's upcoming exhibition at London's Design Museum, which opens in April 2023, will similarly evoke the cumulative power of the humble object. Taking over the main gallery are five 'fields', each between 44 and 72 sq m and filled with readymades ranging from Neolithic stone tools to Lego bricks, which collectively offer a snapshot of design history across eight millennia.

Titled 'Making Sense', this is Ai's first exhibition focusing on design, which seems surprising coming from a conceptual artist. But Ai has always been fascinated with material culture, an interest that he credits to his life story. The son of Ai Qing, one of modern China's most famous poets, Weiwei was born in Beijing in 1957. He grew up in the northwest province of Xinjiang as a consequence of his father's political exile. Denied proper accommodation, the family lived in a dugout – a picture of which remains the lock screen on the artist's iPhone today – where they slept on a platform covered with wheat stalks, had no electricity, and constantly had to fend off rats and lice. Such squalid conditions necessitated improvisation: Ai remembers assembling a simple shelf from a board, four nails and a piece of string, and building a stove to offer some respite from the bitter winters. These experiences informed his early understanding of design, not as an aesthetic pursuit but as 'people using rudimentary, found materials to try and better their lives', he explains on a crisp February morning, as we speak on the back porch of his home in Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal.

(Image credit: Jermaine Francis)

Ai's house was the first property he visited in Portugal. Its tiled roof, similar to those of traditional Chinese buildings, appealed to the artist, who bought the former holiday home on the spot. 'I didn't know anything about Portugal. Three years later, I think I made a good decision. I always make big decisions before I know it; it gives me joy to gradually discover everything'

(Image credit: Jermaine Francis)

That notion of design as a survival tool was turned on its head when Ai moved to the US in 1981, becoming one of the first Chinese students to study in the West during an era of reform. He wound up in New York (where he briefly attended the Parsons School of Design), which gave him his first experience of 'extreme capitalism'. But, in 1993, when Ai returned to Beijing to visit his ailing father, he found that China had become a capitalist state too, and was pursuing economic growth at all cost: 'Even though I'd returned to my native land, I felt more foreign than ever.'

It was then that he began to frequent antique markets with his brother. 'We spent at least four to six hours every day, going through thousands of pieces and trying to imagine the past. Because of the Cultural Revolution, we never had a history education,' he explains. 'And in the United States, everything was new. So these markets gave me the chance to really look into each object. I started to collect, and to understand the past through material culture. I developed an interest in human efforts [at shaping objects]: how they made sense, why they made sense, how they dealt with materials. And how styles completely changed from the Han dynasty to the Tang dynasty, or from the Tang dynasty to the Song dynasty. Then I understood that even a perfect language can completely disappear under different political circumstances. There's nothing left. That gave me a lot of perspective on the human mind.'

Ai's Design Museum show will feature *Spouts* (2015), a 'field' of discarded antique teapot spouts (Ai mobilised an entire village in China to amass these)

(Image credit: Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio)

As his stature and resources have grown, Ai's collecting has become more prolific over the years. While he says that he only collects things that fascinate him, without regard to their potential usage in art installations, his collections now form the basis of the five fields at the Design Museum. *Still Life* comprises around 1,800 Neolithic stone tools, liberated from archaeological context. Adjacent, *Spouts* features over 240,000 spouts from the Song dynasty (960-1279), believed to have been cut off from teapots that didn't meet quality standards. Nearby is *Untitled (Porcelain Balls)* (2022), featuring 100,000 porcelain projectiles from a similar period. 'What fascinates me is that they're not machine made, they're handmade with such care, and none of them are exactly the same size, but they're made to the greatest possible degree of perfection,' enthuses Ai.

*Untitled (Lego Incident)* (2015), which refers to Lego's refusal to supply Ai with bricks to be used in 'political works'

(Image credit: Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio)

The final two fields are filled with contemporary materials. The blue porcelain fragments were salvaged from destroyed artworks in the artist's Beijing studio, which was razed by Chinese authorities in 2018. (His Shanghai studio had likewise been torn down in 2011. In an act of reclamation, Ai is now rebuilding that studio on his Portuguese estate.)

Meanwhile, Lego bricks have been a favoured material for Ai since 2014, when he created Lego portraits of activists, prisoners of conscience, and advocates of free speech from around the world for an installation at Alcatraz. For three months in the following year, the toymaker declined bulk orders from the artist, citing a policy that prevents its bricks from being used in 'political works'. Ai responded with a crowdsourcing campaign: 'People supported me by sending in their sons' and daughters' Lego bricks. It became a little social movement,' he remembers. At the Design Museum, the bricks 'show my understanding of how design not only comes out of our minds, but also exists as a product of human struggle'.

*Hanger* (2011), a symbol of Ai's 81 days in detention made using traditional Chinese joinery techniques (Image credit: Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio)

In his use of readymades, Ai pays homage to Marcel Duchamp, whom he calls 'the engineer and designer of modern cultural activity'. He first encountered the French conceptualist's work at the Philadelphia Museum of Art when he arrived in the States. Realising that 'art is in our minds, rather than in our vision', Ai created *Hanging Man* (1986), a wire hanger bent in Duchamp's profile. This is part of the new exhibition, along with three more recent pieces that resemble hangers, alluding to the 81 days in

2011 that Ai spent in secret police detention, for alleged 'economic crimes'. He petitioned for a month before the police would allow him six plastic hangers, so he could dry his T-shirts. 'At one point, I thought I would be imprisoned for 13 years,' says the artist, who has since remade his symbol of oppression in wood, stainless steel and Venetian glass. In a similar vein, the show includes handcuffs in hardwood and in jade, a material with great historical and spiritual significance in China.

*Marble Takeout Box* (2015), which questions the lasting environmental impact of disposable objects (Image credit: Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio)

Within the same display case, visitors will encounter other everyday motifs refashioned in noble materials. A Styrofoam takeout box, remade in white marble, calls our attention to the environmental impact of disposable objects and the dark side of China's economic development, while a construction helmet cast in glass suggests the fragility of labour protections in an economy built on the backs of migrant workers. While the material shifts prompt us to look at the objects in a new light, the choice of mundane typologies nods to another of Ai's artistic heroes, Andy Warhol, who taught him that 'what we do every day has profound meaning'.

The plight of the dispossessed is a recurring theme for Ai, who bemoans that, in spite of economic and technological progress, humans 'remain a species with no compassion, selfish and short-sighted'. In 2008, he was spurred to action by a magnitude 7.9 earthquake in Sichuan province. It killed at least 69,000 people, many of them schoolchildren, whose schools collapsed due to shoddy construction to which corrupt government officials had turned a blind eye. Ai channelled his despair into a citizens' investigation published on his blog, and began to use backpacks and steel rebar as motifs for his artwork. On view at the Design Museum will be two calls for remembrance – *Snake Ceiling* (2008), a 16m-long serpentine installation made of backpacks, and *Rebar and Case* (2014), which sees three pieces of mangled rebar remade in marble and entombed in wood.

The dumpster-shaped *Cabinet* (2014)
(Image credit: Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio)

A wooden cabinet, also made in 2014, was inspired by a different tragedy. In 2012, five boys were found dead in a dumpster bin in Guizhou province. They are believed to have lit a charcoal fire in the bin to keep warm and been poisoned by carbon monoxide. The piece 'is like a Ming-style classic cabinet, made with the finest materials by the best craftspeople. There are no nails, just hidden joints.' But by modelling its form after the dumpster bin, Ai is also making a powerful political statement about the people who

are left behind while China becomes more prosperous. 'It comes from my understanding of "it could have been my life",' he explains. A similar logic has inspired the more recent installations in the show, comprising life vests collected from the Greek island of Lesbos, bringing to light the global refugee crisis.

*Glass Helmet* (2022), a symbol of the plight of migrant construction workers
(Image credit: Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio)

Alongside Ai's sculptural and design output, there's documentation of Beijing's rapidly evolving built environment in the early 2000s, when the government eagerly knocked down older buildings and replaced them with looming towers. Four films take the viewer on a journey across the city's main streets, while a photo series, *National Stadium* (2005-7), shows the construction of the Bird's Nest stadium ahead of the 2008 Summer Olympics. Ai worked with Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron on its design, but later dissociated himself from the project and boycotted the opening ceremony. 'I realised that architecture is political. It doesn't matter how good the building is, still, after we've designed it, it becomes an element of state propaganda,' he says. In the 15 years since, we've seen more flagrant instances of sportswashing – among them last year's Winter Olympics in Beijing and World Cup in Qatar. With this in mind, does Ai still believe that his disavowal of the stadium was worth the personal cost he has endured?

'Very often, speaking up is not going to work, because the powers you're against are so massive. And whether the Olympics or the World Cup, it's really about profit. You have to remember this one line in the movie *All The President's Men*: "Just follow the money". Then you can understand most political intentions,' Ai replies. Even so, he insists on taking a stand against misinformation and the loss of human life: 'You always have to be prepared to speak out, no matter how big the consequences, to protect the most profound meaning of being human.'

A Chinese-style daybed, designed by Ai, in his study, with *Self-Portrait in Lego* (2017) in its presentation box
(Image credit: Jermaine Francis)

That belief in free speech, and in standing up for one's convictions, informs Ai's *Study of Perspective* series. The innocuous title belies the images' defiant intent: it shows the artist pointing his middle finger at sites of political and cultural power, such as Tiananmen Square and the White House. A selection of these studies will be on view at the Design Museum.

Free speech is likewise the theme of *The Animal That Looks Like a Llama But is Really an Alpaca 2023* (2023). Previewed on the limited-edition cover of Wallpaper's April 2023 issue, the colourful pattern is being made into a wallpaper that will wrap around the museum's atrium. Among its motifs are surveillance cameras, handcuffs, chains, steel rebars, alpacas and Twitter birds. The alpacas are a reference to a Chinese meme that pokes fun at internet censorship, and a testament to humour as a tool against authoritarianism. Meanwhile, the birds reflect Ai's unwavering faith in the power of social media. He became a household name in China thanks to his blog, which started in 2005 and had 17 million readers in its four-year lifetime, and remains an avid user of Instagram and Twitter today. Though he acknowledges social media's deleterious effects on individual attention spans and its potential as a vehicle of misinformation, Ai points out that 'we don't have another choice. This is the only time in human history which equips us to be individuals. The overflow of information means we can make our own judgments and express ourselves independently.'

At his home in Portugal, Ai is building a replica of his Shanghai studio (torn down by the Chinese authorities in 2011), working with local construction workers and using traditional Chinese techniques (Image credit: Jermaine Francis)

While drawing on specific contemporary concerns, 'Making Sense' speaks to universal human themes, says Justin McGuirk, the museum's chief curator. 'It takes a step back from the detail of design, and really looks at design as a way of being that hasn't changed. Weiwei shows us that design

is a language that communicates to us across generations, through which we can understand something about our ancestors.'

Ai is measured in his assessment of his own impact. He points out, for instance, that he's not hopeful he will see a democratic China in his lifetime. This being said, as a believer in cumulative power, he is ultimately optimistic that things can change for the better: 'My work may just be one drop of water in the ocean, but the ocean is made of water. So I want to remind people, whether in China or the West or elsewhere, that we have to understand one another, and treat one another with compassion. We have to see humanity as one.'

*'Ai Weiwei: Making Sense' is showing from 7 April – 30 July at Design Museum, 224-238 Kensington High Street, London W8*

*designmuseum.org*
*aiweiwei.com* ★

*Wallpaper**
11th March 2023

# Wallpaper*

## Ai Weiwei's limited-edition cover for Wallpaper* explores surveillance, free speech, and humour as activism

Ai Weiwei takes over the limited-edition cover of the April 2023 issue of Wallpaper*. Ahead of the artist's major Design Museum show on 7 April, we explore the story behind the cover

Ai Weiwei's 'The Animal That Looks Like a Llama But Is Really an Alpaca 2022' (2022) features on our limited-edition cover. The pattern will be made into a wallpaper that will wrap around the atrium at London's Design Museum during Ai's upcoming show
(Image credit: Ai Weiwei)

BY TF CHAN
PUBLISHED 19 DAYS AGO

There is a hint of William Morris to the limited-edition cover of the Wallpaper* April 2023 issue. But the repeating pattern of intertwining colourful forms did not come from the hand of the 19th-century British designer and leader of the Arts & Crafts movement, but rather from pioneering 21st-century artist Ai Weiwei.

As explored in our exclusive profile on the artist, Ai's cover takeover anticipates his first museum exhibition focusing on design, 'Making Sense', which opens at the Design Museum, London on 7 April 2023. The cover artwork is a preview of the wallpaper that will wrap around the museum's soaring atrium, and bring a playful jolt of colour to a space characterised by neutral tones.

The motifs relate to surveillance and free speech, which are Ai's longstanding pre-occupations. Long before he went into exile in Europe in 2015, his outspoken criticism of corruption and defence of human rights had incurred the wrath of the Chinese government. In 2018, when a magnitude 7.9 earthquake in Sichuan province killed at least 69,000 people, he launched a citizens' investigation to expose the corrupt officials responsible for the shoddy construction of school buildings that collapsed. In retaliation, the government put him under close watch.

'Surveillance cameras sprouted up everywhere around the perimeter of my studio. During the day, plainclothes officers would take turns standing watch outside, and at night they would huddle up inside an unmarked white sedan,' the artist wrote in his 2021 memoir, *1,000 Years of Joys and Sorrows*. 'Having nothing to hide, I had nothing to fear [...] transparency would work in my favour.'

Ai Weiwei in February 2023 at his 17-acre property in Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal, photographed for Wallpaper's April 2023 issue
(Image credit: Jermaine Francis)

The surveillance cameras in the wallpaper pattern – an instrument of control neutralised into a decorative object – nod to this episode, as do the steel rebars. Distraught by the sight of twisted rebar at collapsed schools, Ai brought more than 200 tonnes of the material back to Beijing and employed a dozen workers to hammer every one of the pieces back into shape, as though they had just come off the manufacturing line. At his solo show at Washington DC's Hirshhorn Museum in 2012, this rebar was laid on the ground in an undulating pattern to form the installation *Straight*, which used an act of repair to cast a bitter light on an irreversible loss.

Meanwhile, the handcuffs allude to the 81 days in 2011 that Ai spent in secret detention, purportedly for tax evasion (he soon realised the allegations were a pretext for political persecution – when police raided his studio, they left his accounting books intact), and the Twitter birds refer to the artist's prolific use of social media, which gave him in independent voice in a cultural landscape saturated by propaganda.

Then there's the alpaca, which gave the wallpaper its title – *The Animal That Looks Like a Llama But is Really an Alpaca 2023* (2023). This bit requires a bit of explanation for non-Chinese viewers. The alpaca looks 'harmless, naive, innocent', says the artist during our interview in February, at his home in Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal. But it's in fact an allusion to an internet meme that first appeared in January 2009, about a type of alpaca called the 'grass mud horse'. A viral video in the style of a children's song described the grass mud horse from the Gobi Desert whose existence is threatened by an evil river crab.

In fact, 'grass mud horse' in Mandarin Chinese sounds very much like a commonly deployed pejorative about another person's mother. 'Everyone in China who sees this would laugh,' Ai says. The meme was coined to poke fun at China's censorship regime, which has clamped down on humour as a form of protest (in recent years, it also removed images of Winnie the Pooh in response to comparisons that netizens have drawn between the cartoon character and the Chinese president).

Pausing a YouTube video of the grass mud horse that he has gleefully played at full volume, the artist elaborates, 'the authoritarian police [in China] has no sense of humour. But they can't stop our use of humour as a means of confrontation. Humour makes them feel powerless, and so it's an asset that can really melt down their foundation.'

In making the grass mud horse a protagonist of his wallpaper design, Ai not only brings a chuckle to those in the know, but also reminds us of the potency of humour as a political statement, as he does best.

*The Art Newspaper*
17th March 2023

THE ART NEWSPAPER

Ai Weiwei
News

# Stick 'em up! Ai Weiwei invites you to give the middle finger in new online art project

So far targets on the platform developed in collaboration with Avant Arte have included landmarks, political buildings and even artworks

Gareth Harris

17 March 2023

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Ai Weiwei at his studio in Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal | Ai Weiwei's superimposed hand flips off *The Art Newspaper*'s London office

The Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei is known for raising his middle finger to authority in one of his most famous series *Study of Perspective*. But now, members of the public can post their own "raised finger" works for a new online digital work.

Ai Weiwei's finger overlayed on Banksy's Well Hung Lover (2006) in Bristol, England
Courtesy of Avant Arte

Ai has teamed up with the company Avant Arte, providing a platform called *Middle Finger* where participants can superimpose Ai Weiwei's outstretched arm over various searchable locations. Users can also download a high resolution "cut-out" of Ai's arm to overlay on images of their own. "The archive of images will be on display on avantarte.com and people are invited to use #studyofperspective when sharing on social media," a project statement says. Many notable landmarks have been chosen such as the Statue of Liberty, the Eiffel Tower and Trump Tower. Other targets include the bank Credit Suisse as well as works of art by Vincent Van Gogh, Hans Holbein The Younger and Banksy.

Ai Weiwei's *Middle Finger in Red* (2023), 24hr print edition with Avant Arte
Image courtesy of Avant Arte

The *Middle Finger* project heralds a new show of Ai's works at the Design Museum in London. Avant Arte is also selling a time-limited silkscreen print edition, *Middle Finger in Red* (€410) for 24 hours on 30 March (65% of profits from the sale will be donated to the Design Museum).

In a previous interview with *The Art Newspaper*, Ai discussed the decision by M+ museum in Hong Kong to remove Study of Perspective from the exhibition displaying the collection of Uli Sigg. In March 2021, M+ released a statement saying it had no plans to show the piece.

*The Guardian*
20th March 2023

The Guardian

Ai Weiwei

# Ai Weiwei's Lego re-imagining of Monet's water lilies to go on show in London

**Exclusive: 15-metre-long work made up of 650,000 Lego bricks to form part of artist's biggest UK show in eight years**

Caroline Davies

Mon 20 Mar 2023 14.13 GMT

Ai Weiwei's re-imagining of Monet's Water Lilies in Lego, at the Design Museum, London. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Claude Monet's monumental triptych Water Lilies 1914 -26, which depicts nature's tranquil beauty as part of the French impressionist's world-famous series, will take on new meaning in a giant recreation by artist and activist Ai Weiwei in his new London exhibition.

Monet's brushstrokes in his water and reflection landscapes are replaced by about 650,000 studs of Lego bricks, in 22 vivid colours, in the 15-metre-long work at the centre of Weiwei's biggest UK show in eight years, opening next month.

Entitled Water Lilies #1, it is the largest Lego artwork by the celebrated global artist since he first adopted the medium in 2014 to produce portraits of political prisoners, and will span the entire length of one of the walls of the Design Museum gallery in Kensington, west London, where his first design-focused exhibition opens on Friday 7 April.

In the original masterpiece, Monet depicts one of the lily ponds in the gardens of his home in Giverny, near Paris, one of a series of paintings of the lily ponds with which the artist was infatuated. Yet, though his works are seen as a celebration of the natural world, the pond and gardens were human-made, designed and created by Monet at the turn of the 20th century. He even had the nearby river Epte partially diverted to perfect his idealised landscape.

In recreating the famous scene, Ai Weiwei aims to challenge ideas of reality and beauty. The oil brushstrokes are replaced with the "depersonalised language of industrial parts and colours", said the museum's chief curator, Justin McGuirk, while the "pixel-like blocks suggest contemporary digital technologies which are central to modern life, and in reference to how art is often disseminated in the contemporary world".

Ai has intensified the colours compared with the original. He has also personalised his version, which arrived at the museum in 10 preassembled panels.

Included on the right-hand side and "brutally puncturing the watery paradise", said McGuirk, is a dark portal. This is the door to the underground dugout in Xinjiang where he and his poet father, Ai Qing, lived in forced exile in the 1960s.

Ai said: "Our world is complex and collapsing towards an unpredictable future. It's crucial for individuals to find a personalised language to express their experience of these challenging conditions. Personalised expression arises from identifying with history and memories while creating a new language and narrative.

"Without a personal narrative, artistic narration loses its quality. In Water Lilies #1, I integrate Monet's impressionist painting, reminiscent of Zenism in the east, and concrete experiences of my father and me into a digitised and pixelated language.

A closeup of Ai Weiwei's largest Lego work since he started working with it nine years ago. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

"Toy bricks as the material, with their qualities of solidity and potential for deconstruction, reflect the attributes of language in our rapidly developing era where human consciousness is constantly dividing."

Water Lilies #1 will be seen alongside another major new Lego artwork by Ai, Untitled (Lego Incident), part of a series of five expansive "fields" where hundreds of thousands of objects will be laid out on the gallery floor. This field comprises thousands of Lego blocks donated by members of the public after Lego briefly refused to sell their products to him in 2014. Another will comprise 200,000 porcelain teapot spouts from the Song dynasty dating from 960-1279CE, while another features 1,600 neolithic stone tools.

McGuirk said: "Several of the works in this exhibition capture the destruction of urban development in China over the last two decades. With Water Lilies #1 Ai Weiwei presents us with an alternate vision - a garden paradise.

"On the one hand he has personalised it by inserting the door of his desert childhood home, but on the other he has used an industrial language of modular Lego blocks. This is a monumental, complex and powerful work and we are proud to be the first museum to show it."

Other exhibition highlights include dozens of objects and artworks from throughout his career exploring the tensions between past and present, hand and machine, precious and worthless, construction and destruction, such as his Han dynasty urn emblazoned with a Coca-Cola logo, which epitomises these clashes.

A number of examples of Ai's "ordinary" objects, where he has transformed something useful into something useless but valuable, will also be shown. These include a worker's hard hat cast in glass which becomes at once strong and fragile, and a sculpture of an iPhone that has been cut out of a jade axe head.

Large-scale Ai Weiwei works will also be installed outside the exhibition gallery, in the museum's free-to-enter spaces as well as outside the building.

***Ai Weiwei: Making Sense*** runs at the Design Museum from 7 April to 30 July 2023. Tickets are available to pre-book now.

*Evening Standard*
21st March 2023

Evening Standard

# Ai Weiwei has made a giant version of Monet's Water Lilies out of Lego... and it's coming to London

The work will go on show at the Design Museum next month

By Elizabeth Gregory | 21 March 2023

Ai Weiwei has recreated Monet's Water Lillies out of Lego, a giant artwork that is coming to London as part of his upcoming Design Museum exhibition.

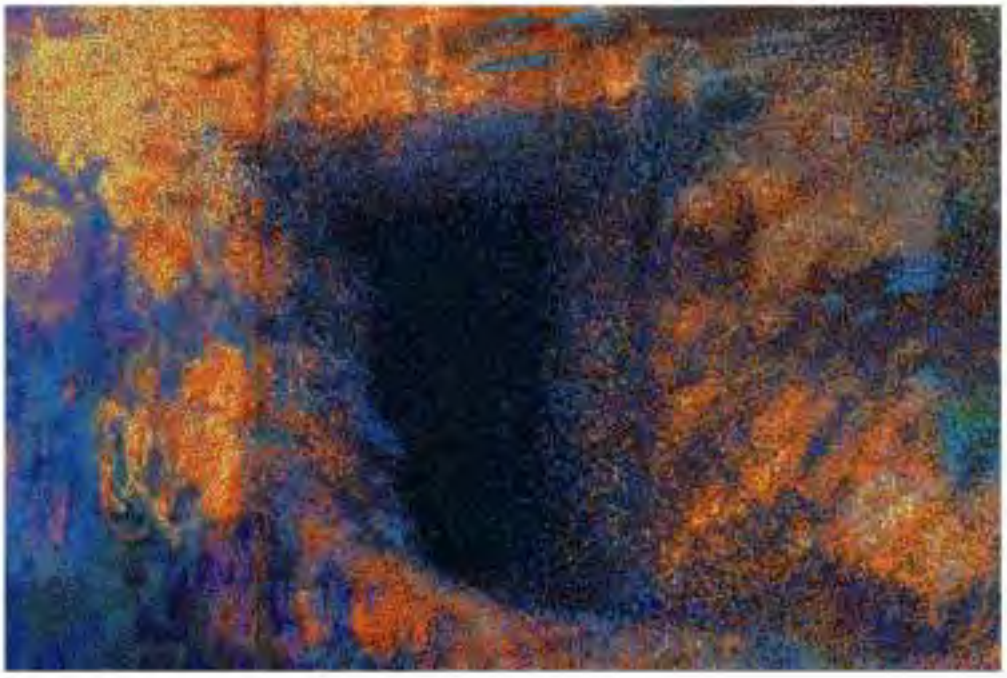
Water Lillies #1 is 15 metres long, made of 650,000 Lego bricks in 22 colours, and spanning an entire wall of the Design museum; this reimagination of Monet's celebrated triptych is going to be one of the centrepieces of the highly-anticipated show opening next month.

"In Water Lilies #1 I integrate Monet's Impressionist painting, reminiscent of Zenism in the East, and concrete experiences of my father and me into a digitised and pixelated language," said Ai. Although the Lego bricks are physical, they hint at digitisation when they are viewed close up, as the image of the water lilies turns into thousands of tiny blocks that look like pixels.

The upcoming exhibition, Ai Weiwei: Making Sense, will be the Chinese visual artist's biggest show in the UK for eight years, and will include works made up of hundreds of thousands of objects that Ai has collected since the Nineties, many of which will be turned into giant 'fields'.

One of these fields will include fragments of Ai's sculptures which were destroyed when his studio was razed by Chinese authorities in 2018 (it was not clear whether Ai had been specifically targeted as the Chinese government had been demolishing large areas of Beijing to create new urban areas at the time).

Ai Weiwei: Making Sense will include both recent work and specially developed work, and will be the first exhibition where Ai's work is presented as a commentary on design. Bridging past and present, the artist will explore urban development in China and the history of demolition by playing with historical Chinese artefacts and ideas. In the show he questions what is valuable, and why some things are deemed precious while others are deemed worthless.



A close up of Ai Weiwei's Water Lilies #1 / Ela Bialkowska/OKN Ostudio

Water Lilies #1 will be the largest Lego work Ai has ever made. Monet's Water Lilies series were painted over three decades, from the late 1890s to his death in 1926, and were inspired by the water lily pond which he created near his property in Giverny, Normandy. While Monet's paintings are often viewed as an example of the beauty of nature, the garden was in fact created by Monet himself, therefore making the exquisite water lilies a man-made, rather than natural, feat. In Water Lilies #1, Ai explores ideas around reality, beauty, construction and technology.

There will also be another Lego work at the upcoming show, called Untitled (Lego Incident). The artist started using Lego in 2014, when he created Lego portraits of 176 activists and political prisoners using information pulled together by Amnesty International.

Untitled (Lego Incident) will be made up of thousands of Lego bricks which were donated to the artist by members of the public after he was apparently unable to buy bulk amounts of the plastic blocks from the toy manufacturer.

Previously Ai accused Lego of "censorship" after the company allegedly refused to send the artist a large order of the plastic bricks for an 2015 exhibition in Australia. Lego's vice-chairman said that the company's refusal to sell the Lego was an "internal mistake".

"Several of the works in this exhibition capture the destruction of urban development in China over the last two decades. With Water Lilies #1 Ai Weiwei presents us with an alternate vision – a garden paradise," said Justin McGuirk, chief curator at the Design Museum. "On the one hand he has personalised it by inserting the door of his desert childhood home, and on the other he has depersonalised it by using an industrial language of modular Lego blocks."

"This is a monumental, complex and powerful work and we are proud to be the first museum to show it," McGuirk added.

At the Design Museum there will also be large-scale works by the Chinese artist in the gallery's non-exhibition, free-to-use, spaces.

*Ai Weiwei: Making Sense, Design Museum, April 7 to July 30; designmuseum.org*

*CNN Style*
22nd March 2023

CNN style

# Ai Weiwei recreates Monet's water lilies using 650,000 Lego pieces

Jacqui Palumbo, CNN

When the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei opens his new show in April, visitors will encounter a familiar scene at London's Design Museum: Claude Monet's famed water lilies. But rather than being composed of the French painter's impressionist brushstrokes, the monumental recreation is made from the studs of Lego bricks — a whopping 650,000 of them in 22 different colors.

Titled "Water Lilies #1" the nearly 50-foot-wide piece is the largest Lego artwork Ai has ever made, according to the museum.

Ai Weiwei

His version depicts the idyllic lily ponds of Monet's home in Giverny but includes, on the far right-hand side, a "dark portal" alluding to Ai's childhood in China's Xinjiang region. The patch of dark Legos represents the door to an underground dugout where the artist lived with his father in exile during the 1960s, according to a museum press release.

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**Inside China's crackdown on tattoo culture**

"In 'Water Lilies #1' I integrate Monet's impressionist painting, reminiscent of Zenism in the East, and concrete experiences of my father and me into a digitized and pixelated language," Ai said in a statement. "Toy bricks as the material, with their qualities of solidity and potential for deconstruction, reflect the attributes of language in our rapidly developing era where human consciousness is constantly dividing."

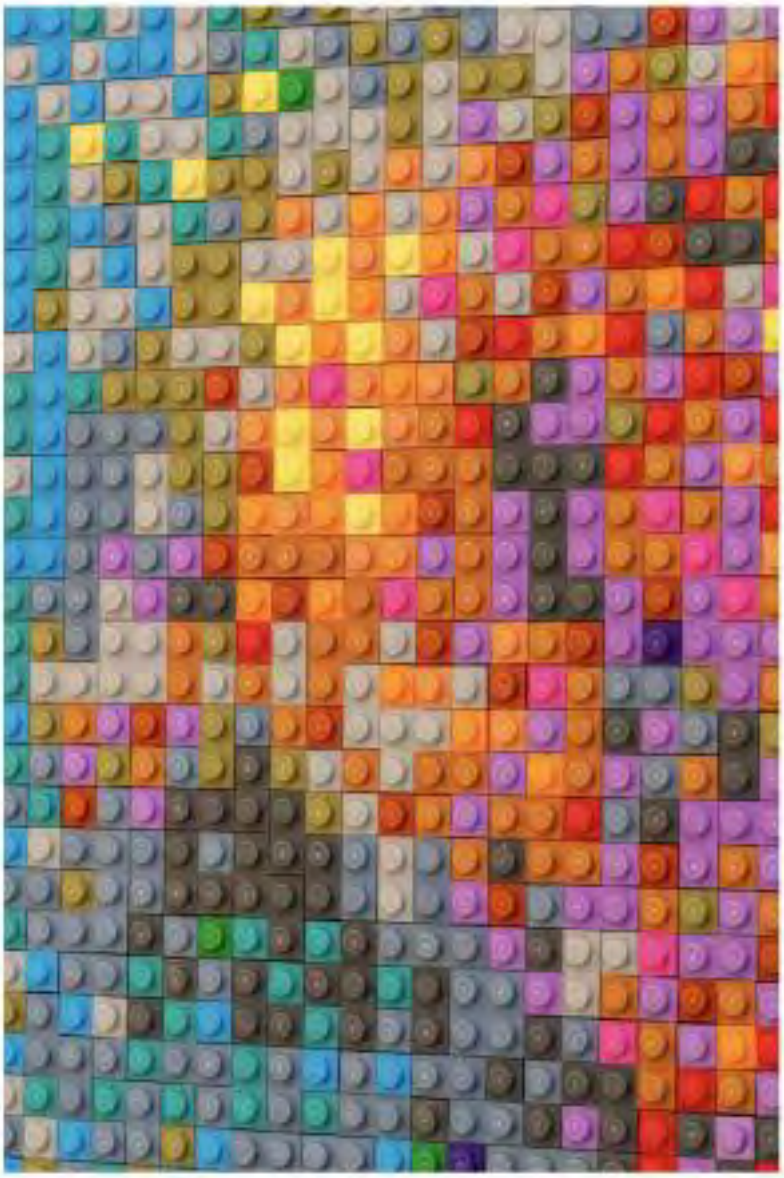
Ai Weiwei's recreation of Monet's water lilies required hundreds of thousands of Lego bricks

Ai has used a range of materials in his installations and conceptual artworks, from pottery, wood and porcelain to film, photography and found objects. In the late 2000s, the artist and activist added Lego bricks to his repertoire.

Related:
**Photo of a man posing with a Coca-Cola bottle in 1981 symbolized a cultural shift in China**

These colorful, meticulous works include hundreds of portraits of political prisoners and exiles, created by Ai for a 2014 exhibition. The following year, the artist made headlines when Lego refused his studio's request for bulk orders of the bricks for a new project, a move he described as "censorship" (The Danish company later reversed its decision).

During the controversy, Ai's fans and members of the public sent him their own Lego blocks, and these donated bricks will also be displayed at his new London show in an installation called "Untitled (Lego Incident)."



The nearly 50-foot-long piece will take up an entire gallery wall at the Design Museum in London. Credit: Ed Stobart/Design Museum

The exhibition, "Ai Weiwei: Making Sense," will include other installations created on a colossal scale, including 200,000 porcelain spouts from Song dynasty-era teapots and thousands of fragments of Ai's own sculptures that were destroyed when his Beijing studio was demolished by the city's authorities in 2018.

Related:
**Hong Kong museum removes controversial Tiananmen painting**

The scale of Ai's installations are "unsettling and moving," said the museum's chief curator Justin McGuirk in a statement. "And in trying to make sense of these works the visitor is challenged to think about what we value and what we destroy."

On "Water Lillies #1" McGuirk said: "On the one hand (Ai Weiwei) has personalized it by inserting the door of his desert childhood home, and on the other he has depersonalized it by using an industrial language of modular Lego blocks. This is a monumental, complex and powerful work and we are proud to be the first museum to show it."

*"Ai Weiwei: Making Sense" is showing at the Design Museum in London, UK, from April 7 to July 30.*

*The Times*
26th March 2023

THE TIMES

# Ai Weiwei: 'It's a miracle that the Chinese let me stay alive'

**The dissident artist is unveiling a new show at the Design Museum and is looking at the world more peacefully — but he still has China, Credit Suisse and Lego in his sights**

Christina Lamb | Sunday March 26 2023, 12.01am, The Sunday Times

It's the day after Mother's Day and China's most famous artist hasn't seen his mum for more than eight years. "She's 90 and I miss her," he says. "I call her every day and I think, should I risk going back? But things have got tighter and tighter, and she tells me not to. She can't bear more suffering, having seen both my father then me in detention."

Ai Weiwei is also China's most famous dissident — he has been in exile since 2015 after a spell in detention and his name cannot be mentioned there. Were anyone in China to retweet this article or mention his forthcoming exhibition at

the Design Museum in London, it would, he says, be deleted. "It's ironic to see such a powerful state that cannot accept an individual's expression or even just ignore it," he says with a shrug.

That morning, before we met, he had got up, as always, at 5am and gone straight on to Twitter, "getting involved in some silly argument and checking the news". The Chinese president, Xi Jinping, had just arrived in Moscow and was shaking hands with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, calling him "dear friend" only days after Putin's international arrest warrant for war crimes was issued.

"They are on the same wavelength against the West," Ai says. "The current leader [he never uses Xi's name] thinks this is an opportunity for China to establish a new world order. Even the US and Europe are starting to understand this is not about ideological differences, but the game is going to be changed, and China thinks this is the biggest opportunity in 100 years for it to be a game-changer."

He also shared some satisfaction at the news of the potential bankruptcy of Credit Suisse, with which he has a long-running fight after it closed his account on the basis that he had a "criminal record" in China. "I told them that's a lie — this was the suppression of a human rights defender being smeared by the state. I was never tried or convicted, but they said, 'No, we can't let you.'" (The bank claimed it closed the account because he didn't provide the right paperwork.) Ai retaliated by taking a selfie raising a middle finger at the bank. "What can a stupid individual artist do?" he says, smiling. "Flip a bird and laugh about it."

Indeed, last week he launched an online campaign called Middle Finger, inviting people to download an image of his outstretched finger to overlay on images from an archive including Credit Suisse and Trump Tower, or pictures of their own, then share them.

In Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal
CHRISTINA LAMB

Like much of his work, it's witty, a play on how artists hold up a finger or pencil to measure their subject and get the perspective right.

In case you are wondering what most of this has to do with art, that morning his recreation of Monet's *Water Lilies* was unveiled at the Design Museum in west London. It is more than 15m long. OK, it's in Lego, another company he had a fight with in 2015 when it refused a bulk order for him to create images of political dissidents. He clearly has no shortage now — supporters sent in millions and this is his largest Lego artwork, with 650,000 toy bricks replacing Monet's brushstrokes to challenge our ideas of beauty.

Many artists have used their work as social or political commentary, but Ai seems to have redefined art as activism. That morning he retweeted about the 20th anniversary of the war in Iraq and Julian Assange, who he thinks should be freed. He has made films about Covid, the Rohingya and Hong Kong, and wrapped 14,000 discarded lifejackets around the pillars of the Berlin Konzerthaus to highlight the plight of refugees.

Ai Weiwei: "It's almost a miracle that the Chinese let me be alive or out"
CATARINA DEMONY/REUTERS/ALAMY

Is he an artist or activist, I ask. "I never really think I'm an artist first, but a human being," he replies. "I have compassion for other human beings. If I wish my son to have a good education and I see hundreds of thousands of refugee children, their lives wasted, and I don't feel conscience, I must be morally handicapped.

"Also, as an artist I think I should give my voice to people who would never have the chance to be heard. That's very little to give and only helps me to say I did the right thing."

We are sitting in the sun on the terrace of his sprawling estate in Alentejo in central Portugal, overlooking the pool where he never swims and drinking tea made from goji berries. A black and white cat — one of seven — winds through our legs. "Cats are the best animals," he says. His slow, soft voice is often hard to hear over the loud chirping of an African lovebird in a tallblack cage.

He moved here during lockdown and says it is his first real home. When I ask why Portugal, he shows me the screensaver on his phone — a black-and-white photo of a dark hole in the earth. "We lived in this black hole in the Gobi desert for five years, with rats and lice," he explains.

"The year I was born, 1957, my father was exiled. He was a poet and considered an enemy of the state, and we were exiled to Xinjiang, the furthest place on the Chinese map, in a place called Little Siberia. Growing up as the son of an enemy of state was the hardest possible identity you could have in Chairman Mao's China."

Ai was almost 20 when Mao died and the family could return to Beijing. A few years later he went to New York and stayed for 12 years. "When I returned to China [in 1993] it had changed so completely under Deng Xiaoping, all about getting rich and early capitalism, that I'd become a foreigner again."

He was asked to help to design the Bird's Nest stadium for the 2008 Olympics, but then refused to attend the opening, arguing that it was being used for propaganda. He also organised for underground books to be disseminated, held exhibitions for local artists, got a computer and learnt to type, and started a blog.

"Suddenly I'd found a home, which was on the internet, where I could communicate with people and express my ideas every day. Never in the history of China did an individual have such a tool; not even an emperor can reach his people so easily every night. Basically, I created a riot in China in the minds of many young people till I got into all kinds of trouble."

Ai wrapped lifejackets from the Greek island of Lesbos, used by refugees, round the pillars of the Berlin Konzerthaus in 2016

MEHMET KAMAN/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES

In 2011, as he was about to board a flight, he was arrested at Beijing airport. He was held for 81 days and repeatedly interrogated, then went into what he calls "self-detention" for four years until his passport was returned and he left the country. First he went to Berlin, where he still has a studio, but moved to Cambridge five years later. Then, three years ago, he visited Portugal for the first time. "I thought, 'I'm quite old, I have to take care of the rest of my time. I need a place where there's sunshine and quiet.' I drove on a road and liked it, and thought, 'This is the place I should settle' — it was that simple."

Does he worry that the Chinese secret service might try to assassinate him? "I don't think so," he replies. "They have enough other problems. They are not like Russians to put something in the coffee." He laughs. "For me it's almost a miracle they [the Chinese] let me be alive or out," he adds. Ai shows me round the house. Surprisingly, there is no art apart from three of his black- and-white Lego portraits. In his study he works at a vast wooden table from China covered in books and facing a grand piano, which is strange because he says he does not like music. It turns out to be for his son, Ai Lao, who has just turned 14 and is in Cambridge with his mother, but will visit next week for Easter. "I work in silence," Ai says. "I have never in my life turned on music because I lived my first 20 years in silence under that black hole and I think music is a learnt habit."

On the worktop of his kitchen is a tray bearing hundreds of small speckled stones. "I think they are nice," he says. Ai has been an inveterate collector since he returned to China in the 1990s and started frequenting antiques markets, which at that time were flooded with artefacts because everywhere people were digging new highways and cities, and finding things.

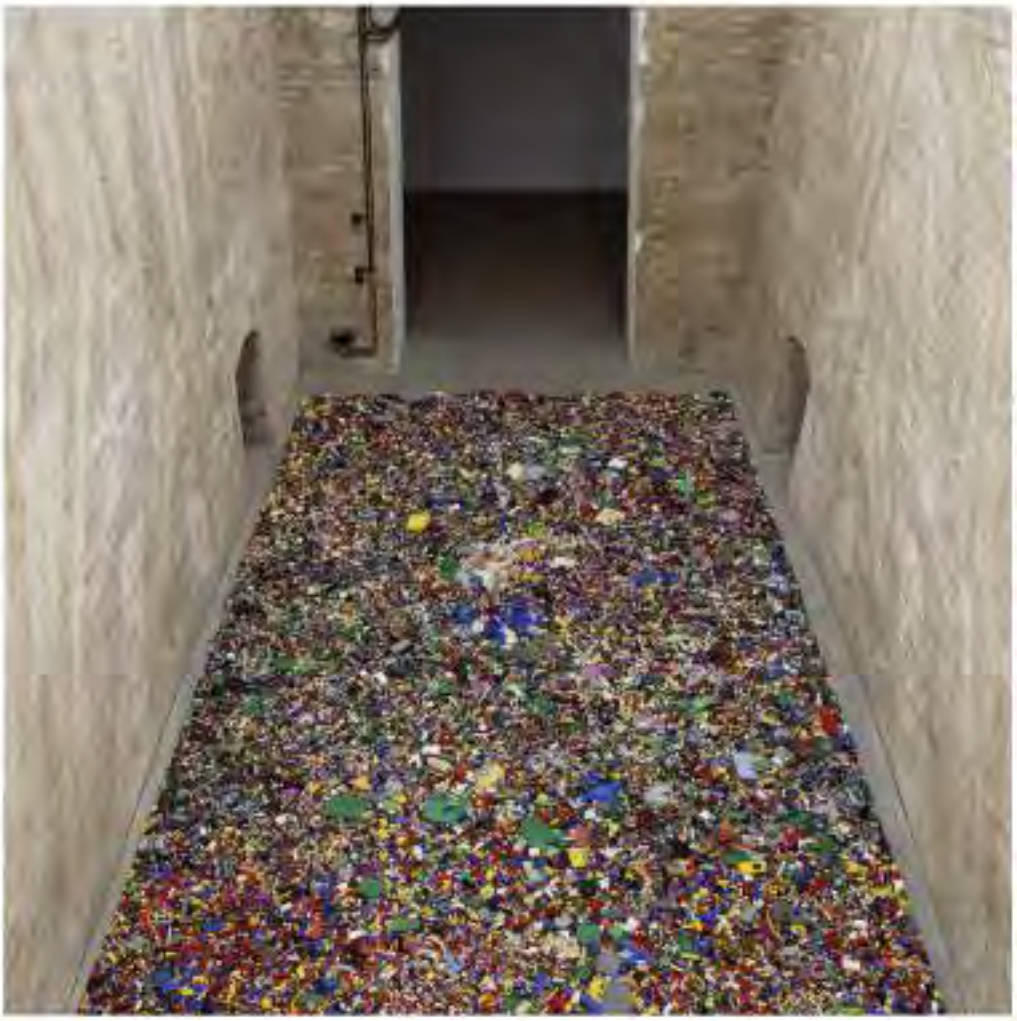
Sunflower Seeds at Tate Modern, 2010

PETER MACDIARMID/GETTY IMAGES

"I went every day for six years to look through all the porcelain, jade and bronze, and to try to understand our history [that the Cultural Revolution had tried to wipe out]," he explains. "I have different ideas of collecting, not items of value but historical evidence to reflect conditions of the time." Ai does not do things in moderation. Among his previous collections are 100 million handmade porcelain sunflower seeds, which covered the floor of the Turbine Hall in Tate Modern in 2010-11.

His new exhibition at the Design Museum will include five fields of objects: one of his contraband Lego bricks; another of 200,000 porcelain spouts from rejected teapots and wine ewers; and one of 100,000 cannonballs from the Song dynasty about a thousand years ago.

"Actually, I have 500,000 cannonballs," he says. "People found them in a river under a castle wall in an old town near Beijing where there must have been a lot of fighting.



Untitled (LEGO Incident)

IMAGE COURTESY AI WEIWEI STUDIO

"They were handmade in porcelain at high temperature and all perfectly the same shape. To do that takes about 30 procedures, just like making a vase, which I thought fascinating, so I started collecting them."

What does he do with all these things? "You don't know how big a warehouse I have," he replies. "I have three — in Berlin, Beijing and Portugal. But the 100 million sunflower seeds from the Tate I don't know what to do with. I may give them to an institution, if you know anyone interested."

I wondered if he had any message for the artists of Ukraine? "I admire people fighting for their nation and if I was Ukrainian, I would do the same, but war is not the answer," he says.

"We have to stop the war no matter what, stop killing the innocent, and if they really want war, the two presidents [Putin and Zelensky] should have a duel, like that which killed Pushkin — that would be a heroic act. But don't use young people and national resources."

He does not agree with Ukrainian calls to boycott Russian art. "The Met [Metropolitan Museum of New York] just announced they will change titles of their artworks from *Russian Dancers* to *Dancers in Ukrainian Dress*. This is not the right answer to rename things, to destroy statues, to fire conductors or opera singers from some state you hate. Then you're on the side of your enemy, you belong to exactly the same ideology as anyone trying to deny history."

Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola logo, 2014

IMAGE COURTESY AI WEIWEI STUDIO

He questions whether the West can really claim to be democratic. "What is democracy if it is not about social justice and individual freedom?" he asks. "Because both are in a very questionable state, as is freedom of speech and independent press. What about human rights, what about the refugee situation? It is hard to argue with China if they are asking why Julian Assange is still in jail — is it because he harmed the establishment? Or why the British have to push those refugees to Rwanda — that's not very graceful."

But, that, as he says, is a long conversation and he has something he wants to show me. We walk down to near where his land meets the road and an intriguing wooden structure where workmen are slotting huge pine beams together like a puzzle, with no nails.

"It's a location," he says. "I won't call it a studio as I'm not going to make things there. And I won't call it a gallery as I am a private person. For now, it's a building with no function. To stay here, to make it feel more like home, I needed to create some problem to solve, otherwise I'm like a tourist on vacation. It's my gift to Portugal."

"This is my last work," he insists. "I don't need to do any more. "I made enough noise and don't think people listen, they think I'm crazy. Well, I am crazy and have been for some time. Now I have to settle down and look at the world more peacefully."

For the man who says he relaxes by working, somehow I wonder.

*Ai Weiwei: Making Sense, Design Museum, London W8, Apr 7-Jul 30. A new series of his Lego works will be on show at the Lisson Gallery, London NW1, Nov 16-Jan 2024*

*T Magazine – The New York Times*
30th March 2023

The New York Times Style Magazine

# Natural Wines That Channel Berlin, Down to the Spray-Paint Label

Plus: Ai Weiwei's first design-focused exhibition, Italian Easter pastries made with balsamic vinegar and more recommendations from T Magazine.

March 30, 2023

VISIT THIS

## At London's Design Museum, Ai Weiwei Focuses on Fragments

Ai Weiwei's "Sprouts" (2015), one of the installations featured in the "Ai Weiwei: Making Sense" exhibition, opening in April at the Design Museum in London.

By Malaika Byng

Visitors expecting shiny new things from the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's first design-focused exhibition will be in for a surprise. "Ai Weiwei: Making Sense," which opens at London's Design Museum on April 7, features broken ceramics and historic relics, including spouts of wine ewers from the Song dynasty (960 to 1279) and fragments of the artist's own sculptures destroyed in 2018, when the Chinese authorities demolished his Beijing studio. Born in 1957, Ai grew up during the Cultural Revolution in China, a time when the government, as he puts it, went to great lengths to erase evidence of the past that might contradict its rule. Now based in Portugal, the artist says that ruins are slices of history that are essential to human development. "Every 'advance' is built on failures," he explains. "It's only through these fragments that we have the possibility of redefining history." As its title suggests, the show will encourage people to make sense of these objects, which are strewn across the Design Museum's floor alongside Stone Age tools and Lego bricks that Ai has collected over the years. While viewers explore the exhibition, Ai wants them to question what they value and why. Sculptures of toilet rolls — mundane objects that became almost sacred during the pandemic — cast in marble and glass should bring home the point. *"Ai Weiwei: Making Sense" is on view from April 7 to July 30, designmuseum.org.*

LISSON GALLERY

*ArtReview*
31st March 2023

ArtReview

# The Top 10 Exhibitions to See in April 2023

**ArtReview** Previews 31 March 2023 artreview.com

**From Ai Weiwei's Lego and Simone Leigh's 'Sovereignty' sculptures to Gwangju Biennale, our editors on the exhibitions around the world to catch this month**

Ai Weiwei, *Untitled (Porcelain Balls)*, 2022. © and courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

**Ai Weiwei: *Making Sense***

**Design Museum, London,** 7 April – 30 July

Touted as Ai Weiwei's first exhibition focusing on design, *Making Sense* features a number of works that address the artist's interdisciplinary art activism, including *Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo* (2014) and *Coloured House* (2013). Notably, however, the exhibition also features five 'major' site-specific works that are either brand new or have never before been exhibited in the UK. Weiwei has been collecting many of these objects since the 1990s as part of his focus on craftsmanship. *Still Life* (1993–2000) lays flat 1,600 tools that date to the Stone Age; *Left Right Studio Material* (2018) is the remains of Weiwei's Beijing studio, demolished in 2018; *Spouts* (2015) displays hundreds of thousands of teapot spouts dating back to the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE); *Untitled (Porcelain Balls)* (2022) includes about a hundred thousand cannonballs made during the same historical period; and *Untitled (Lego Incident)* (2014) comprises Legos donated to the artist by the public after the company stopped selling products to him. *Mary Reinte*

Florian Ameon, *Kinetic Spectacle, Courgeroy #12*, 2017. Courtesy the artist

**14th Gwangju Biennale: *soft and weak like water***
**Various locations, Gwangju,** 7 April – 9 July

I've never heard anyone talk about a teapot as compellingly as Bruce Lee in his 1971 interview with Pierre Berton. The way his tone of voice magnifies the importance of the vessel, his sharply raised eyebrow, the way he leans back, assured, relaxed... it almost makes you forget all about the water bit. Anyway, the point is that Bruce Lee's philosophical gem, which is often quoted during trying times (say, when an authoritarian regime is on the make), actually comes from Lao Tzu's book Tao Te Ching, where he writes: 'there is nothing softer and weaker than water, and yet there is nothing better for attacking hard and strong things'. And that's the curatorial thinking behind this year's Gwangju Biennale (titled *soft and weak like water*), which wants to 'imagine our shared planet as a site of resistance, coexistence, solidarity and care' – using water as a metaphor to look at how art is an 'undercurrent' force in our everyday lives (and also during real-world crises, apparently). Perhaps, though, the real wisdom is in choosing a theme that is so fluid you can fit 79 artists from around the world (who will present their works, including over 40 new and commissioned projects, across five locations in Gwangju) into the same teapot. *Fi Churchman*

Sohrab Hura, *The Coast* still, 2020. Courtesy the artist and Zeitz MOCAA

***Indigo Waves and Other Stories: Re-Navigating the Afrasian Sea and Notions of Diaspora***

**Gropius Bau, Berlin,** 6 April – 13 August

Paths to understanding the social, cultural and political dynamics of regions and nations have often been found in the bodies of water that stand between them. As we approach the 30th anniversary of Paul Gilroy's seminal *The Black Atlantic* (1993), these modes of analysis abound today: the forthcoming *These Bodies of Water* by Sabrina Mahfouz; *After the Mediterranean*, an exhibition at Hauser & Wirth Menorca curated by Oriol Fontdevila; and now *Indigo Waves and Other Stories* at Berlin's Gropius Bau, are but three notable examples. Co-curators Natasha Ginwala, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and Michelangelo Corsaro seek to elucidate the stories and experiences of the Asian and African regions that surround the Indian Ocean, described as 'a communal horizon that reveals shades of cultural, linguistic, political and historical passage from ancient times to the present'. The exhibition's first iteration, at Zeitz MOCAA last year, boasted Madagascan artist Malala Andrialavidrazana's ongoing *FIGURES* series, of collaged historical atlases, album covers, bank notes; Cinga Samson's at once ethereal and antagonistic paintings; Ayesha Hameed's uncanny earth-spills across the gallery floor; and Sohrab Hura's sensual, poetic film *The Coast* (2020). In Berlin, the curators promise to adapt the story to its landlocked, 'pluriversal' city.

*Alexander Lazaris*

Isaac Julien, *What Freedom Is To Me – Homage*, 2022. © Isaac Julien. Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

**Isaac Julien: *What Freedom Is To Me***

**Tate Britain, London,** 26 April – 20 August

Filmmaker and artist Isaac Julien is presenting his first UK survey at Tate Britain that will span more than four decades of his career. The exhibition begins with Julien's early films made during the 1980s as part of Sankofa Film and Video Collective, which he cofounded with a group of London art students during a period of racial and economic social unrest in Britain (his 1983 directorial debut *Who Killed Colin Roach* reflects on the circumstances in which the death of a young Black man occurred at the premises of a police station) and follows his work through its development towards recent largescale video art installations such as *Lessons of the Hour* (2019). Arranged over 10 variously-sized screens and focusing on the life of African American abolitionist, writer and freed-slave William Douglass – via his influential speeches including 'What to the Slave Is the 4th of July?' (1852), 'Lecture on Pictures' (1861) and 'Lessons of the Hour' (1894). This video installation is a reflection of Julien's longstanding investment and engagement with social activism and the politics of image-making, one that ties back to a black-and-white photography series of the same title made by the filmmaker in 1983. Julien's latest film, *Once Again… (Statues Never Die)* (2022), examines the relationship between US collector Albert C. Barnes and cultural critic and 'Father of the Harlem Renaissance' Alain Locke. This exhibition will be its first premiere in Europe. Not to be missed. *Fi Churchman*

Simone Leigh, *Jay*, 2022, stoneware, 198 × 102.9 × 116.2 cm. Courtesy ICA Boston, Nasher Triennial Artwork © Simone Leigh

**Simone Leigh**

**ICA Boston,** 6 April – 4 September

Leigh's work presided over last year's Venice Biennale, both physically – with her large scale woman-hybrid bronze sculptures setting the tone in both the Arsenale exhibition and her thatched-roof remake of the US pavilion 'Sovereignty' – and conceptually, sharing a historic Golden Lion award with Sonia Boyce. This show at ICA Boston is the first chance to see this body of work from Venice in the US, drawing from Sovereignty's bronze figures and clay chimera alongside previous works from throughout her career. While one strand of her work has surfaced recently of a more direct portraiture – using the gestures of craft to place quieter moments of reflection and subsistence in the realm of monumental public art – this show is sure to include her more surreal and historically loaded sculptures, where the Black female body melds and adapts with clay pots, cowrie shells and architectural forms. This exhibition is the first iteration of a tour, on to the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC and then to LACMA and the California African American Museum over the next two years. *Clint Fite-Wassilak*

Young man arrested at the National Stadium being identified and photographed by military personnel, Santiago, Chile, 09/22/1973. Photo © Evandro Teixeira, IMS Collection/Evandro Teixeira Collection

**Evandro Teixeira: *Chile 1973***

**IMS Paulista, São Paulo,** through 31 July

Earlier this year a group of scientists established the presence of bacteria *Clostridium botulinum*, a poison, in the exhumed remains of Paulo Neruda. They couldn't incontrovertibly confirm the left-wing Chilean poet and politician was murdered, but it strongly supports long-held suspicions that his hospital death in the aftermath of General Pinochet's US-backed military coup was not natural. A few days after the poet's demise, Evandro Teixeira took a picture of Neruda's widow bending over her husband's coffin. It is not necessarily the finest composition – it was taken hastily, with her permission, but without that of the newly installed regime whose security apparatus circled the medical unit – but it's perhaps one of the most poignant and timely in IMS's new survey of the Brazilian photojournalist. Matilde Urrutia bends down, her arm outstretched in grief, knowing her life and the country had irrevocably changed. Equally chilling is Teixeira's photograph of a young man, handsome and fashionable, surrounded by soldiers at the Estádio Nacional, the sports stadium in Santiago that was the site of the thousands of political detentions and assassinations. The photographer's assignments in Chile were for *Jornal do Brasil*, and more images document his own country's slide into autocracy, as well as moments of resistance, not least his now iconic pictures of the 1968 March of the One Hundred Thousand. *Oliver Basciano*

Christian Jankowski, *Heavy Weight History*, 2013, video, sound, 25 min 46 sec. Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London

***WORLD CLASSROOM: Contemporary Art Through School Subjects***
**Mori Art Museum, Tokyo,** 19 April – 24 September
To mark its 20th anniversary, the Mori Art Museum is approaching art through the lens of the classroom. Through the work of 50 artists – including Ai Weiwei, Aoyama Satoru, Shilpa Gupta, Jakarta Wasted Artists, Lee Ufan and Tsai Charwei – *WORLD CLASSROOM* navigates a classic school curriculum. 'Language and Literature' features Joseph Kosuth's conceptual language-plays, while Miyagi Futoshi explores the complexities of identity in language; the largest section, 'Social Studies', confronts globalisation and geopolitical (eco-)histories through the works of Yasumasa Morimura, Dinh Q. Lê and Gu Minja; 'Philosophy' considers aesthetic and ontological queries via Tatsuo Miyajima and Lee Ufan; 'Mathmatics' looks at the topic's relationship to art through, for example Aki Sasamoto's mathematical installations; 'Science' explores the natural world through works of Aiko Miyanaga and Peter Fischli & David Weiss, reminding us that artists were 'some of the first to sound warnings about the climate crisis'; 'Music' looks at its role conceptually and socially through the works of Manon de Boer and Aziz Hazara; 'Phys. Ed.' largely presents performance art such as that of Klara Lidén or Christian Jankowski; lastly 'Transdisciplinary' acknowledges arts interdisciplinary tendencies. *Mary Recinto*

Kao Chung-Li, *ASA to the power of N*, 1983-2023. Courtesy the artist and Taipei Fine Arts

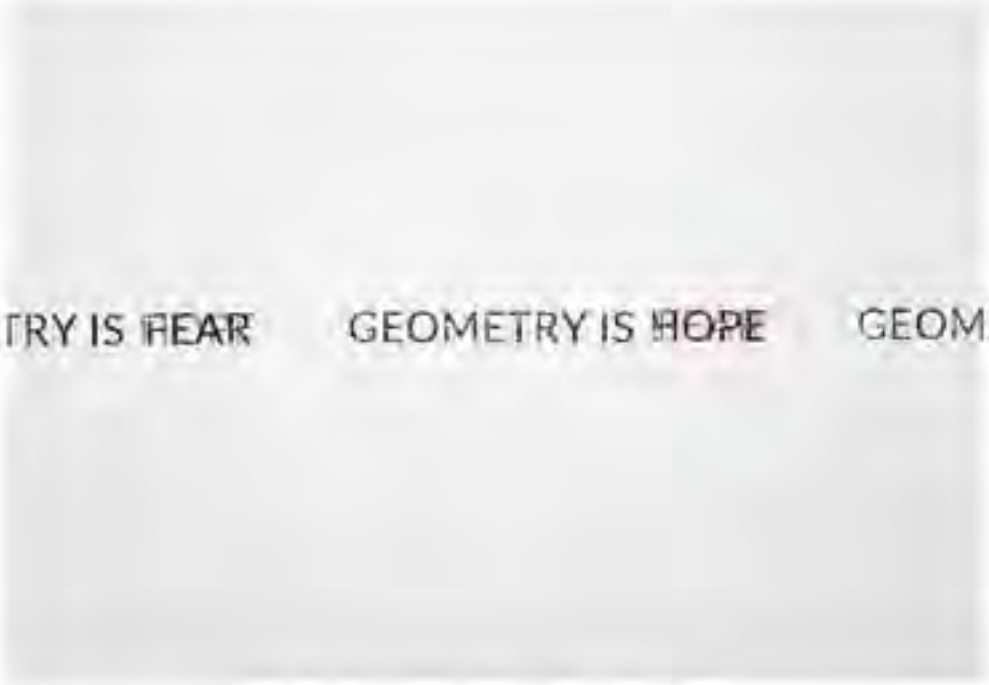
**Kao Chung-Li**
**Taipei Fine Arts, Taiwan,** through 25 June
Kao Chung-Li's new solo exhibition surveys the Taiwan artist's four-decade career, from his early mixed-media paintings to kinetic installations produced this year. The exhibition's Chinese title 'life determines consciousness' recalls Karl Marx's famous precept – and the works on view show a persistent fascination with different artistic 'means of production' and how the politics of audio-visual technologies have framed the contemporary discussion. Among the works on view, *Belated Punctum: La Jetée II* (2015) utilises still archival images to investigate the unfolding of time and the construction of memories, paying tribute to French filmmaker Chris Marker's 1962 *La Jetée*; while *Cinemas in Suitcases Series* (2006-2015) and *Coin-operated Binocular Machine View-Master* (2023) play on illusory devices ranging from the nineteenth-century phenakistoscopes to a peep-show-like street arcade machine. If Kao's practice resembles that of a media archaeologist, the exhibition itself also – somewhat reflexively – traces the methods of analogue and digital viewing. *Yuwen Jiang*

Pacita Abad, *L.A. Eclectic*, 1993, acrylic, cotton yarn, plastic buttons, mirrors, gold thread, painted cloth on canvas and padded canvas, 270 × 147 cm. Courtesy the Pacita Abad Art Estate

**Pacita Abad**

**Walker Art Center, Minneapolis,** 15 April – 3 September

Pacita Abad is increasingly being recognised as among the trailblazers of diasporic Philippine artists in the late twentieth century. Abad is often thought of as Philippine-American (having lived in the US on and off between 1970 and 1994, and whose husband was American, making her a US citizen), but her residencies in numerous countries (such as Bangladesh, Kenya and Dominican Republic) and nonstop travel for her husband's economic work made her particularly empathetic to the cultural and political effects of globalisation on society. Her practice became an amalgamation of the diverse cultures she worked and found herself in by introducing local art techniques such as Indonesian batik or Korean ink brush painting. This first-ever retrospective, then, brings together the breadth of Abad's work, from her traditional paintings to her hybrid trapunto works of quilted stuffed canvases. Through these works, Abad articulated her own 'special obligation to remind society of its social responsibility'. Mary Kerneis




Courtesy the artist and Base / Progetti per l'arte

**Runo Lagomarsino: *we are here because you were there***
**Base / Progetti per l'arte, Florence,** through 15 April
Relax: it's not too late to catch Runo Lagomarsino's new show in Florence. The Swedish-Brazillian artist has often in his work mined the experiential interaction between political urgency and emotional yearning, engendered by the certain intermediacy or placelessness of migration, cross-border memory and colonial heritage. Here – in a show which shares a title with Ian Sanjay Patel's recent book tracing the origins of the UK Government's 'hostile environment' policy – Lagomarsino has installed a large photo-collage on fabric (made from a reproduction of Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo's *Il Quarto Stato*, 1902), a series of hand-blown glass capsules, and repetitions of stamp-printed text ('Geometry is Hope/Fear', layering words à la Bruce Nauman's *Vices and Virtues* [sic]). History, he varyingly suggests in each, is a lattice of outlines we might use as pathways to the present; or a search for the tangible amid its dizzying expanse; or an array of words, images and stories competing for our just attention. Take your pick.
*Alexander Coish*

*iNews*
5th April 2023

iNews

# Ai Weiwei: Making Sense, Design Museum, review: A frenetic journey into the artist's mind

Crowded together, the works reflect Ai's bewildering, interconnected jumble of ideas and concerns ★★★

Florence Hallett

Billed as using "design and the history of making as a lens through which to consider what we value", the Design Museum's major new exhibition, dedicated to one of the contemporary art world's foremost figures, the artist and activist Ai Weiwei, is disconcertingly like a journey into the artist's mind. His first UK show in eight years, it's as frenetic and bewildering as you might expect for an artist who is comfortable working with ceramics and readymades, video and sculpture, and whose exile and continued conflict with the Chinese authorities has long been a visible, and intrinsic part of his work.

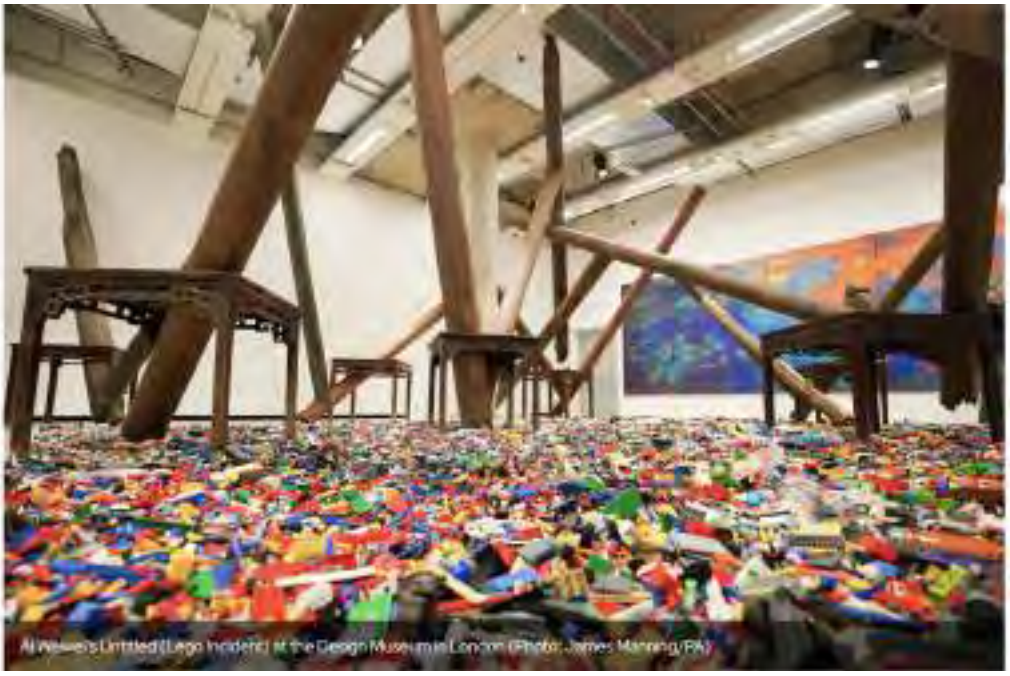
Wondrous at times, but more often self absorbed and messy, an artist's mind is emphatically not a good model for an exhibition, and though the removal of walls at the Design Museum has opened up an impressive, swimming-pool sized area, it does nothing to dispel the impression of a chaotically disordered space. A cacophony of ideas and objects compete for our attention, some old, some new, but none of them really given the space they need to make sense, as the show's title, *Making Sense*, rather hopefully suggests. Instead, we are witness to the artist in the process of making sense: inevitably, some things would have been better off had they remained as thoughts inside his head.

A case in point presents itself on the approach to the museum, a pair of easy chairs rendered in marble the preliminary to a gigantic marble toilet roll several steps further on. Toilet roll – a luxury when the artist was growing up in China in the 1960s but now the risible emblem of misplaced priorities at the beginning of the pandemic – is typical of the sort of object that interests him, an ordinary, everyday item from which clues about the values and preoccupations of a society can be gleaned.

But it's at this point that ideas ought to be moderated by feelings, because Ai's decision to make, literally, quite so much of a toilet roll is in strikingly poor taste. Marble on a monumental scale draws quite deliberately on the language of memorial. But a toilet roll is – well, a toilet roll, and surely none of us is ready for the Covid disaster to be memorialised in that way. If the pandemic does have a funny side, it's far too soon to start trying to find it.

Two further, actual size sculptures of toilet rolls occur inside the gallery, one of marble and another of glass, where they form part of a series of other utilitarian objects – a builder's hard hat moulded in glass, a jade "iPhone" – made useless, if precious, by being rendered as sculptures. A curious, disconcerting deviation from the series occurs in a vitrine titled *Remains*, 2015, in which are displayed porcelain replicas of human bones excavated from a labour camp where thousands of Chinese, including Ai's father, Ai Qing, were interned or murdered in the 1950s.

In a variation on this theme of transformation through materials, and at a dramatically contrasting scale, Ai has produced his largest Lego work to date, a recreation of one of Monet's Water Lily paintings that extends across an entire wall, in which Lego units represent pixels in a laboriously handcrafted interpretation of the painting as a digital image. Towards the centre, a shadowy door emerges, which represents, we are told, the entrance to the underground hideaway in Xinjiang province where Ai and his father lived in forced exile in the 1960s.



Ai Weiwei's Untitled (Lego Incident) at the Design Museum in London (Photo: James Manning/PA)

Such sudden, unexpected references to brutality and murder reveal a deeply unsettling undercurrent to an exhibition underpinned by themes of excavation and destruction, in which China's industrial scale mass production doubles as a code for human suffering and exploitation, and where modernisation and "progress" are mostly deeply detrimental to society's weakest.

Human misery is powerfully evoked, all the more for never being made explicit, in the exhibition's centrepiece of five fields of objects acquired by Ai Weiwei since the 1990s, and arranged across the gallery's vast floor. Here they are presented as "evidence", and the arrangement according to size and type of more than 40,00 Stone Age tools is suitably analytical. Next to it, a field of thousands of rejected Song dynasty teapot spouts like tiny, dismembered arms – testament to industrial scale production 1,000 years before mechanisation. A further field of porcelain canon balls an odd, dissonant use of a material associated with finery and good manners more than war and slaughter.

In the fourth field, Ai Weiwei introduces a more personal focus, in an expanse of broken porcelain taken from his Beijing studio, which was demolished in 2018 by the Chinese authorities. When in 2014 he began making Lego portraits of political prisoners, Lego briefly refused to supply him; the Lego pieces that make up the fifth field were donated by members of the public in response to the ban. It's in these fields of discarded objects that we find the values of different people at diffident times.

Ai's inclusion of a biographical element signals accountability and continuity, in which the fields are framed as a form of record-keeping that spans 4,000 years, from the Iron Age until the present day. There's a sort of relentless continuity too in the sound of traffic coming from a group of small video installations on the gallery walls, films in which Ai has tracked the expansion of Beijing through by following the construction of its ring roads. These, alongside photo series documenting the rampant demolition and construction in Chinese cities, stand as another form of record keeping. If films and photographs aren't quite real enough, the columns of a Qing dynasty temple, and in the foyer, the brightly painted frame of a wooden house rescued from the bulldozers' jaws offer a more visceral testimony to the onward march of modernisation, in which labour is cheap, dissent is violently suppressed, and the evidence, along with history itself, buried in concrete.

Ai Weiwei's Study of Perspective (Photo: James Manning/PA)

That the concrete itself is shoddy and dangerous is at the heart of Ai's *Rebar and Case*, 2012, a work that suffers hugely in the overpacked gallery, and that, given the nature of its subject, ought to have more space afforded to it as a matter of decency. Here, a length of buckled rebar, the steel used to reinforce concrete, is reproduced in marble, resting on top of a small, coffin-like case. The rebar was retrieved by Ai from the rubble of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake in which more than 90,000 people died, the substandard buildings collapsing all too easily.

It's an incredibly moving piece of work, and here the use of marble is spot on, the stone serving both as dignified memorial and rock solid evidence of malpractice. Ai's intensely moving memorial to the 5,197 schoolchildren killed in the earthquake is also on display here too.

Ai Weiwei has been beaten, imprisoned and forced into exile as a result of his remarkable acts of courage and resistance. The extent and constancy of his determination to bear witness to the daily atrocities that beset his homeland is not to be underestimated. Crowded together, his works reflect Ai's bewildering, interconnected jumble of ideas and concerns. But if he is to be regarded as an artist first and foremost rather than a political activist, his work needs to be afforded the space and consideration to make sense.

To my Italy

*The Independent*
5th April 2023

INDEPENDENT

# Ai Weiwei, Design Museum review: The master provocateur creates timeless beauty from historical objects

★ ★ ★ ★

The exiled Chinese artist turns his industrial-scale collecting into another quietly moving, meditative work in Making Sense

Mark Hudson • Wednesday 05 April 2023 12:27

Ai reconfigures his treasures into artworks that try to 'make sense' of who we are
(Design Museum)

An artist notorious for smashing ancient vases may not seem the most reliable custodian and curator for our collective material heritage. Ai Weiwei's 2011 detention without trial by the Chinese authorities made him an international celebrity and a major art world player. Yet the artist gained almost equal infamy when it emerged that he had dropped and smashed a 2,000-year-old Han Dynasty urn in a 1995 artistic action – entitled *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* – designed to question the value and power we bestow on certain cultural objects.

If that gave the impression of an artist actively hostile to history, we now know this is very far from the case. Since the 1990s, Ai has created a vast archive of China's artistic and architectural past, including ceramic works numbered in the millions and entire buildings, alongside vast numbers of valueless modern mass-produced objects.

Ai's industrial-scale collecting is at once a response to the wholesale destruction of China's past in the massive urbanisation drive of the past three decades, and an art activity in its own right. He reconfigures his treasures into artworks that try to "make sense" – to paraphrase this show's title – of who we are and where we are going through our attitudes to objects: the things we keep and the things we discard.

And whether he's dealing with a Stone Age axe-head or a child's polyester backpack, Ai's approach to these things is far from precious.

To get into the Design Museum to see the artist's first "design-focused exhibition" we have to pass through the carved wooden frame of a merchant house from the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912). Filling most of the foyer, it's painted in garish colours redolent more of Toys "R" Us than Tate Modern. The surrounding walls are covered in wallpaper patterned with emblems of surveillance and imprisonment: CCTV cameras, handcuffs. A straightforward display of Ai's favourite antiquities and design objects this certainly isn't.

The exhibition centres on five new site-specific installations in which hundreds of thousands of objects are laid out in what are described as "expansive fields" each around 6 x 10 metres. Neolithic hand tools – axe-heads, knives, chisels – are laid out in meticulous rows in one; porcelain cannonballs – each a thousand years old and handcrafted to kill – fill another. A low-lying heap of Song dynasty porcelain teapot spouts – around a quarter of a million of them – are all from vessels smashed in 12th-century attempts at quality control. Farmers finding such objects in their fields apparently bring them to Ai knowing of his interest. But that is still a lot of teapot spouts.

Most perplexing is a mass of large blue ceramic shards that look too shiny to be old. They are in fact the wreckage of one of Ai's own pivotal works. When his studio was demolished by the Chinese authorities at the time of his 2011 incarceration – for "economic crimes" – a number of large ceramic "bubble" forms, designed to test the technical capacities of porcelain, which could not be moved, were simply smashed.

A Coca-Cola vase
*(Design Museum)*

While one can imagine that finding an entire aspect of your life's work randomly destroyed would make anyone sceptical about attaching value to objects – or indeed trying to create anything – Ai has doggedly reconfigured the shattered remains into this quietly moving work.

At the end of the space, beams from a demolished temple are turned into a steeply pitching abstract sculpture, projecting from the floor out of some brightly coloured material that proves on close inspection to be Lego.

The wall beyond contains a full-size, 15-metre-wide Lego recreation of one of Claude Monet's panoramic waterlily paintings. From a distance the swirling textures look reasonably convincing, before the 650,000 plastic bricks come into focus. A dark rectangle not present in Monet's painting represents the entrance to the dug-out bunker in which Ai and his father, the dissident poet Ai Qing, were imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s in Mao's China. Even amid transcendent beauty, the work implies, we never quite escape the world's horrors.

Water Lilies #1
*(Ela Bialkowska/OKNO studio)*

There are more dark resonances in the snake-like forms writhing across the adjacent wall. One, composed of backpacks commemorates the thousands of children killed in the Sichuan earthquake of 2008. Ai's claims that corruption and shoddy building methods were substantially responsible led directly to his 2011 imprisonment. The other serpent shape, formed from life vests, is dedicated to those drowned at sea during the current migrant crisis.

Video footage of the new China's busy freeways seen beside the fields of ancient objects doesn't deliver quite the jolt you might hope for. A Han Dynasty urn painted with a Coca-Cola symbol feels a touch glib as the embodiment of incompatible value systems – though as with the notorious dropped urn you find yourself wondering how authentic the "ancient" object actually is.

While this show reflects on the disruption and destruction wreaked by the tides of culture and politics, its effect is oddly soothing. Ai's installations have a timeless abstract beauty. For all their sinister connotations, his fields of objects, whether whole or shattered fragments, have a meditative quality that recalls the gardens seen around Chinese temples. They invite us to contemplate the passage of time and the larger purpose of human endeavour. There's a reassuring sense that humanity's instincts for order and beauty will endure long beyond the existence of mere things.

***Ai Weiwei: Making Sense runs at the Design Museum from 7 April until 30 July***

*The Evening Standard*
6th April 2023

Evening Standard

# Ai Weiwei at the Design Museum: "We're building a society on greed and selfishness"

'I always pay attention to all the refugee situations, not because I'm a refugee, but I'm trying to see where our humanity is going to be... those boats carry our trust in humanity'

VIEW 1 COMMENTS

By Nancy Durrant Culture Editor @nancydurrant | 06 April 2023

Ai Weiwei is exasperated. "That's a *design*," he says scathingly, regarding the sleek can of water he's just been handed, and its baffling variation on a ring-pull.

"It's very unfamiliar," he says, turning it up and down and eyeballing its silky pale grey finish. "You have to see what's going on here, you know, it could be a tear gas bottle. It looks so serious. So unfriendly."

I reach over and show him how to shove the tab to reveal the drinking hole, and the renowned activist artist breathes a tiny sigh of gratitude.

We've been talking about design because this week is the opening of his new exhibition at the Design Museum in Kensington. It's the first to look at Ai's art through the lens of design, but though one body of work here refers to his co-creation of the Birds Nest stadium in Beijing with the architects Herzog & de Meuron (a project he later distanced himself from to avoid becoming a tool of government propaganda), it's not as if China's most internationally famous dissident artist has suddenly developed a sideline in fancy chairs.

Indeed, his idea of design is very different to that in the West. "Actually in China we don't have that word. Design can be anything as long as a human is consciously trying to give an idea a new form or language, or even vocabulary, which can give a new definition. That is a design."

The show is titled Making Sense, which he calls "a very broad idea", but seems to be very much about making sense of the world as created by humans, or at least exploring its many, often seemingly contradictory layers.

Daniel Hambury/Stella Pictures Ltd

It comprises one room, albeit a massive one, containing 42 works from sculpture to photography and film, many of which have not been seen in the UK before, and several of which are going on display for the first time.

Among them are a number of photo series, including his documentation of the construction of the Bird's Nest, which highlights the labour of tens of thousands of largely rural migrant workers. Another, Provisional Landscapes, captures the empty spaces left by demolition during the unprecedented wave of development that crossed China in the 2000s. It's a meditation on the idea of progress, which, he says, often comes with an assumption that we must destroy the old to move forward.

One long wall carries what looks at first like the kind of cheerful thing you'd see in a classroom – two vast wiggling snakes, but Life Vest Snake is formed of life jackets, evoking the people who have struggled, and in many cases perished, on the terrible journey across oceans as refugees; the other, Backpack Snake, is a reminder of the children who died in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake due to shoddy school construction. Another work, Nian Nian Souvenir, is a graphic monument bearing the names of each of those 5,197 children, each stamped in an ancient script from a specially-carved jade seal.

This rather elegiac air is continued across the centrepieces of the show, his Fields, created from the mass of seemingly ordinary objects that Ai has been collecting since the 1990s. Collecting, he says, "is the act of gathering evidence; learning and trying to hold the past accountable for your behaviour."

Here great swathes of items neatly arranged in huge rectangles on the floor give an insight into human ingenuity, and how it and our cultural values mesh with our baser instincts for conflict and destruction. Still Life is made up of more than 4,000 late-Stone Age tools (that's somewhere around 39,000 to 50,000 years ago), from axe-heads to spindle whorls. You find them in museums across the world, but Ai found most of them cheaply in flea markets, challenging the idea of them as 'rare finds'. For him, they're a sort of geological layer of forgotten history, one which he finds quite moving, in that all of them are born out of necessity.

Daniel Hambury/Stella Pictures Ltd

"For thousands of years we didn't have any other tools," he says. Bowls weren't even a thing, "we used our hands to drink water, and that was very beautiful" (he indicates the offending can again, and says the way we drink water now, swinging our arms up, is "arrogant").

"It takes so much effort to make a tool which can fit into a human hand, because it was a rock, [and] a very hard rock because they have to use it to protect themselves. Those things are very interesting for me, to think about the life of our ancestors," he says.

Then there's Untitled (Porcelain Balls), a sort of carpet of perfect spheres which turned out to be beautifully crafted Xing ware cannonballs made during the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE). It blows his mind that these things, created to be shot out of a gun, were made to "such perfection", by hand, and on an industrial scale – there are over 200,000 of them here.

"You could pick up stones and put them in there!" he says. "War is very different now, we have a drones, we have people killing people without even seeing the enemy. But in ancient times, war meant something very different." He thinks that this perfection was tactical, to show an enemy your power, or superiority. He imagines "surrendering to someone who has a jade axe. That means this [person] is not a barbarian."

Most people by now know Ai's story. His father was the poet Ai Qing, considered an enemy of the state by the Maoist regime and exiled with his young son to a desolate spot in north-west China to live in a literal hole in the ground, with a roof of branches and rice stalks sealed with mud, while he was 're-educated', pilloried night after night by his neighbours (this hole appears in another of the works in the show, a huge reimagining of a Monet Waterlilies painting, made entirely of lego).

Ela Bialkowska

The younger Ai, now 65, has followed in his father's footsteps, speaking out against the oppressive regime and being severely punished for it – two of his studios were summarily demolished (the remains of porcelain sculptures destroyed in the process make up another of the Fields), his passport was revoked and in 2011 he was imprisoned without trial for 81 days. He eventually left China once his passport was returned in 2015, and has moved around since, including stints in Berlin and Cambridge, where his son, Ai Lao, is at school.

Technically, he's a refugee, though an impossibly privileged one now. I wonder if he's been paying attention to the 'small boats' debate that has been raging here.

"I always pay attention to all the refugee situations, not because I'm a refugee, but I'm trying to see where our humanity is going to be," he says. "You know, those boats carry our trust in humanity. When they cannot find a shore, they have to stay in the middle of the ocean for

days, sometimes months. Nobody wants them, they push them away, or they're sinking because the boat is poor.

"That gives the best definition of our time," he continues, beadily. "We are the generation that doesn't care. We are neglecting those people who are in need; that means we are not respecting life itself, and we are neglecting our future and our children's future, because we're not building a system or society with care or compassion, but with greed and selfishness, and blind."

Ai's not the easiest interview. Reserved, not at all expansive, and at several moments he picks up his phone and takes my picture while I'm asking a question, which is a slightly off-putting power move, especially when I have only 26 minutes and he's already declined to have his own picture taken earlier in the morning.

But there is warmth. He has recently moved to Portugal with his partner and is flexing his architecture muscles again to build a new studio, a jointed timber structure that draws on traditional Chinese architectre. I suggest he's made a home, but he corrects me gently.

Daniel Hambury/Stella Pictures Ltd

"A home never can be made, it is always in-the-making, it's a process," he says. "When I die, that will be my final home, in the coldness and darkness." He chuckles slightly at this morbid image. "But before that happens, for me, it is all about making home."

I wonder if he still feels like an exile.

"I don't feel like exile, but I feel as a foreigner or outsider," he says. "That means you're handicapped, and you're not being fully understood or you're being presented strangely. So that's my condition. And that's not necessarily bad. But it's challenging."

Does he think he'd feel like that in China? He smiles slightly. "From the year I was born my family has been seen as an enemy by my homeland," he says. "I'm more foreign in China than here, ironically. I'm more accepted here, by the West, than in my own country.

"They think I'm dangerous, they think I'm a troublemaker," he continues. "They think maybe I can subvert the state power, they give me all these titles."

Perhaps if they hadn't made such a vicious fuss in the first place then Ai might not have become the most famous Chinese artist in the world, and his work might not have had the impact that it has. As his period of imprisonment drew to a close, he says, he was talking to the head of security – "he said, 'Weiwei, I have a question. Is it because of us that has made you so famous?' I said, 'Sure, without you, how could I have achieved anything"? And he really took a long pause to think about that. I said, 'yes. The glory belongs to the party'."

His sense of China's future isn't optimistic. "There are basic values they have to accept, normally we call them common values, such as human rights, freedom, speech, independent law, and to have some kind of democracy. Now they don't have any of them. That's really backwards. It means being a state which has no legitimacy to control."

What about the next generation? Not much hope there either, by the sound of it. He tells me about an interaction he heard about that took place in China during the pandemic.

"The police came to [see] a young man who's about in his thirties to say, hey, if you don't do this vaccination, it will terribly affect your family and your next generation. And he answered, 'We are the last generation.'"

He shakes his head. "Shocking, right?"

*Ai Weiwei: Making Sense is at the Design Museum from April 7 to July 30; designmuseum.org/aiweiwei*

*The Times*
6th April 2023

THE TIMES

ART

# Ai Weiwei tells young people: Struggle is good for you

Jack Blackburn

Thursday April 06 2023, 12.00am, The Times

The artist bemoans lazy students, out-of-touch universities and loss of manual skills

While technology can bring us closer to others, Ai Weiwei argues that it makes us more distant from ourselves

MARK THOMAS/ALAMY

As the son of a political prisoner and a dissident in his own right, Ai Weiwei knows more about struggles than most and would not wish true hardships on anyone. However, the Chinese artist does think that younger generations of today could use a bit more toil.

Ahead of his new exhibition at the Design Museum, the Chinese artist has said that the lack of effort required in the modern world's daily life has made us less human.

"We were always taught by our hands but now we don't do that anymore," Ai said. "It's such a pity to see generations of young people — not just one generation probably — that are completely cut off from normal struggle."

Ai, 65, is one of the foremost artists in the world and perhaps best known for his exhibition of 100 million handmade porcelain sunflower seeds in Tate Modern in London 13 years ago. He has also suffered repression from China's communist regime, spending much of his childhood in Xinjiang in the remote northwest, before being arrested and exiled as an adult.

In wide-ranging comments, the artist bemoaned lazy students, out of touch universities and our loss of the need to do things manually. "Of course, nobody wants to have struggle," Ai said. "But not to make effort in daily life makes the human lose a lot of humanity: the memory, the skill, the understanding of our material."

In his exhibition, Making Sense, the smartphone emerges as a symbol of this disconnection from our more practical past. One exhibit is an iPhone cut from a Neolithic jade axe, a modern technology constructed from an ancient one we have lost the ability to make.

Ai's exhibition, Making Sense, opens at the Design Museum in London on April 7

MARK THOMAS/ALAMY

The latest modcons were meant to bring us closer to people, but Ai's suggestion is that they make us more distant from ourselves. "We just want a comfortable life," he said. "But that will paralyse our mind just to become another product of this simple desire for comfort."

Ai also reserved a particular dissatisfaction for universities, where he has spent some time, having taught at the Berlin University of Arts for three years. This proved frustrating.

"I quit, because students . . . are lazy, and they're just dumb but also I cannot teach someone who doesn't want to learn. It's not possible," he said. "I always attacked education because they mass produce a big amount of so-called knowledgeable products, which could structure the world or would give a new interpretation of our time, but it's such a failure because it's so detached from reality."

Ai is known for his activism against the Chinese government, which has resulted in his exiled from the country since 2015 after suffering 81 days of arrest.

Nevertheless, he reiterated his desire to return there in the admittedly unlikely event that he could do so with free expression.

"I would like to go back to China if they don't take my personal freedom away, if I can express myself freely and if they do not put me in jail secretly again," he said. "It's just about (the) very basic principles of surviving, so I cannot."

LISSON GALLERY

*BBC Culture*
8th April 2023

BBC CULTURE

# Ai Weiwei interview: Everyday objects that reveal the truth

As his new show opens, the acclaimed Chinese artist talks imprisonment, solutions, and making sense of the world. "Only in difficulties can we find ways to solve problems," he tells Precious Adesina.

Ai Weiwei is one of the best-known artists alive today. But asked recently when he first realised he wanted to be an artist, he responded: "Do I really want to be an artist? I'm still undecided." For anyone who has followed the Chinese contemporary artist-and-activist's 45-year-long career, such a response is unsurprising. While Ai has spent decades pushing the **boundaries of art**, **questioning** the practices of several institutions, and bringing **social issues** to the fore, he has always also offered a sense of provocation and humour.

Ai's oeuvre transcends mediums, having worked with sculpture, printmaking, photography, installation, writing, film-making and architecture. **Ai Weiwei: Making Sense** at London's Design Museum explores the 65-year-old artist's work through a design lens. "It will wrestle with what humans have made and continue to make; how they make; what they chose to keep and what to destroy," the museum's director Tim Marlow writes in the exhibition catalogue, noting that it will question "what all this reveals about our changing values socially, culturally, economically and, of course, politically."

*Ai's Coloured House is displayed outside the main exhibition space at the Design Museum (Credit: Courtesy of Ai Weiwei Studio)*

One of Ai's most famous pieces, a series of photographs titled Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn(1995), depicts the artist seemingly destroying a 2,000-year-old artefact. The images solidified Ai as the prolific iconoclast we know today. "As part of humanity, artists construct and deconstruct to create new definitions, constantly scrutinising and evaluating our value system and the possibilities of our existence," Ai tells BBC Culture. "This is how I always approach problems, by standing on the opposite side of the issue, or even the opposite side of myself. I believe this measure is the most trustworthy one."

**How have your personal experiences informed your work?**

To put it simply, everything I have done in the past, what I am doing now, and what I will do in the future is all directed towards one question: "who am I?" It's common knowledge that our understanding of ourselves is closely tied to our life experiences, memories, and how we respond to everyday situations. This can be a struggle since our self-perception is not something that can be easily detached from reality and memories.

It was rather late when I fully realised this. For over 50 years before 2011, I was very confused. On 3 April 2011, I was secretly detained. It was a very important moment for me because this experience forced me to re-evaluate my situation, where I came from, and who I truly was. After 81 days in secret detention, I was surprisingly released. It was then that I realised I needed to understand what happened in the past, why my father, a poet, was exiled, and how my time with him had influenced me.

*The new exhibition, Ai Weiwei: Making Sense, explores the value of everyday objects (Credit: Courtesy of Ai Weiwei studio)*

Even though I cannot fully comprehend why what happened to my father came back to me, I found that holding on to my personal experiences and expressing them was like holding on to something that kept someone sinking in water afloat.

**You have been exploring ancient artefacts for around three decades now. Has your understanding of them changed during this time?**

My interest in ancient artefacts began in 1993 when I returned to Beijing from New York. Beijing felt very unfamiliar to me as I had grown up during Mao's Cultural Revolution. It was very clear to me that I had a limited understanding of myself, my country, and the land.

Luckily, I slid into a period of time when a tremendous amount of ancient artefacts underground were discovered during China's rapid development. On the ground above, everything had been cleansed and destroyed, but underground, layers of earth and mud hid thousands of years of history.

Over a period of about 10 years, I dedicated myself to researching history through excavated artefacts. I studied how people used different ideologies, measures, materials and artistry throughout different dynasties. This was incredibly important to me because I felt that the world unknown to me was too vast.

*Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo, 2014 – Ai has been exploring ancient artefacts in his work from the start of his career (Credit: Courtesy of Ai Weiwei studio)*

This period of learning gave me a deep understanding of language and craftsmanship, including how the trends and changes in art and style throughout different time periods can serve as the most important basis for our understanding of the humanity of a particular period of time.

**You have had an interesting connection with Lego since 2014. What has Lego come to symbolise for you since then?**

In 2011, after my release, I was under constant surveillance and unable to leave the country for exhibitions. It was during this time that I discovered Lego. I was preparing for an exhibition on freedom that took place in Alcatraz, an old federal prison, which was ironic given my own lack of freedom. I realised that Lego could help me as it was convenient and could be produced by others, regardless of who produced the artwork, where, or at what time, without changing my initial creation. I came to understand that our understanding of freedom often arises from difficult situations. Only in difficulties can we find ways to solve problems and develop a suitable language.

Later on, I found that Lego provided unimaginable support for long-term concepts; the meaning of an artwork is defined by its concept, and measures, language and vocabulary are all critical components only when they support the concept. Lego gave me this possibility, and enabled me to face the fragmented and colourful worlds of politics and culture that were far removed from our conventional understanding.

*Ai believes that as an artist, using new languages is critical – pictured: Untitled (Lego Incident) (Credit: Courtesy of Ai Weiwei studio)*

As an artist, a new language is critical; an artist without their own language cannot survive. Without a language, artists would become pale and weak artisans. Lego helped me see the light at the end of the tunnel. By using this material, I could detach myself from my personal techniques, and it could be widely accepted by the public.

**In the exhibition, you have three toilet-paper sculptures made of glass and marble, referencing the pandemic. How do everyday objects become items that carry so much weight?**

In our everyday existence, life is experienced one day at a time. It is in the objects we encounter in our daily lives and feel secure in that we often find the most striking insights into our living conditions, both in terms of our understanding of them and our ability to subvert them. These objects, dubbed "readymades" by Duchamp, challenge the stable conceptual structures that we have come to rely on. Such subversive language has a powerful impact on our neural pathways and our value system, as it has the potential to undermine our pre-existing structures.

A case in point is the ubiquitous toilet paper. This object has the potential to remind us of the fragility of life and the instability of our understanding of social, national, familial and personal situations. While it may be overlooked in our daily routine, it has taken on a wider meaning and definition during the pandemic, much like the facial masks. It can be seen as a monument of this period of time, a tangible reminder of what truly matters in life.

*Marble Toilet Paper, 2020, considers the significance of everyday objects to humanity (Credit: Courtesy of Ai Weiwei studio)*

**Scale is an important part of your work. How would you say this influences how people experience or understand it?**

The size of an object is not the most important factor when it comes to scale. Rather, it is about finding an appropriate way to express the concept we wish to convey and determining the appropriate volume or magnitude of the work. For instance, the production of one porcelain sunflower seed requires the same amount of craftsmanship as the production of 100 million porcelain sunflower seeds. Yet creating a large-scale installation of sunflower seeds requires a significant amount of time and manpower, as well as emotional investment, which differs from the reasons for typical art creation. This is what I value.

I would like to blend my artworks into everyday life, much like how art can be integrated into our daily experiences. Often, we need a certain quantity of objects to perceive the passage of time, and our understanding of space can be distorted without an appropriate number of objects. That's why I create both large-scale and small-scale artworks. Unexpectedly, the small-scale works that hold great significance for me often go unnoticed by others. Meanwhile, large-scale installations may merely distort our perception of reality and reinforce our flawed judgments of the world.

***Ai Weiwei: Making Sense*** *is at the Design Museum, London, until 30 July 2023.*

*The Guardian*
9th April 2023

The Guardian

The Observer
Ai Weiwei

Review

# Ai Weiwei: Making Sense review – horror, playfulness and delight

Rowan Moore

Sat 8 Apr 2023 11.00 BST

59

Ai Weiwei's Coloured House, 2013 – the timber frame of a Qing dynasty house rescued from destruction by the artist – at the Design Museum.

## Design Museum, London

From neolithic tools to Monet in Lego, the artist contemplates the human freight of things made and of use – or useless – in a show that's at once elegiac and life-affirming

In the Sichuan earthquake of 2008 many children died, often as a result of the poor construction of their schools. They are commemorated in Making Sense, Ai Weiwei's new exhibition at the Design Museum in London: the names of 5,197 of them are printed in red on to framed sheets of paper, using hand-carved jade stamps individually made for each one. There is also *Rebar and Case*, an arrangement of coffin-like seats around a representation in marble, fragile and ghostly, of the steel reinforcement bars whose faulty or insufficient installation contributed to the collapse of the school buildings.

The compressed anger of these pieces, and their evocation of vanished and unseen lives, pervades the exhibition. People are mostly not visible in the show, except in videos and photographs by Ai of Beijing 20 or more years ago - a fight in a flea market; a 150-hour tour from 2003 of the narrow streets and alleys that were about to be swept away by redevelopment. Instead, there are hundreds of thousands of artefacts, each of which recalls the hands that made them, the hands that used them, and the bodies pierced, nurtured and otherwise served by the objects of war, work, hygiene and pleasure on display.

'An interaction between the living and the dead': Still Life, 1993-2000 (detail) by Ai Weiwei, an installation of around 4,000 stone axe heads from stone age China.

It's fair to ask why Ai, primarily an artist, should be exhibiting in a museum of design - of graphics and furniture and practical objects - but the question is answered by the installation: its subject is the human significance of things made and of use, which is definitely relevant to design. A multitude of lives are present in the room, but most of what you see are things. And alongside the glimpses of horror there are also playfulness and delight.

The display occupies a large single space, the partitions that usually subdivide it having been removed, whose floor is mostly taken up with five rectangular fields of stuff. One is made of 4,000 stone tools from the neolithic period, the next of 250,000 spouts broken from teapots and ewers deemed to be imperfect in the porcelain factories of the Song dynasty, approximately a millennium ago. Next are 200,000 handmade porcelain balls from the same period, used as ammunition in the artillery of the time.

Water Lilies #1 (2022), made using 650,000 Lego bricks. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

These installations manifest prodigious feats of collecting and storage by Ai, who discovered vast numbers of antique objects going cheap in flea markets, and otherwise accumulated troves of forgotten fragments. Next to the balls comes an oblong of chunky blue-glazed porcelain shards, the remains of his own sculptures that were destroyed when the Chinese state demolished his Beijing studio in 2018. The last field is made of Lego bricks, sent in by members of the public when the Lego company briefly stopped selling them to Ai, who was using them to make portraits of political prisoners.

Taken together, these five fields give material form to questions of value and use. The stone tools, thousands of years old, occupy the same space as mass-produced children's building bricks. What was once rubbish, the spouts, have been made venerable by the passage of time, albeit not so much that they are given usual museological levels of respect. Their unguarded arrangement on the floor makes it likely that some will be displaced by straying feet, visitors being another kind of human presence that the objects bring into the space.

Pendant (Toilet Paper), 2021 outside the Design Museum. Photograph: Ed Reeve

Further layers of understanding are offered by the room's other exhibits. Vitrines contain artworks by Ai, such as toilet rolls beautifully represented in marble and glass, intended as a comment on the fluctuating value of this ordinary product - suddenly precious during Covid, when it was scarce, and a luxury in Ai's childhood, when it was also hard to get. There is a sex toy rendered in jade, uncomfortably rigid, and a hard hat in glass, uselessly fragile. There are porcelain replicas of skull and bone fragments from a 1950s labour camp of the kind where Ai's poet father was sent.

The useful but humble are set alongside the useless but precious, and switches are made from one to the other. There are transmutations of materials and forms – things are made into something they are not. Connections are suggested and dead things animated. Ai makes a few of the spouts into sculptures, for example, that help you notice their resemblance, fleshy-coloured and oddly curving as they are, to body parts and bones, which associates them with the labour camp relics.

Glass Helmet, 2022. © Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

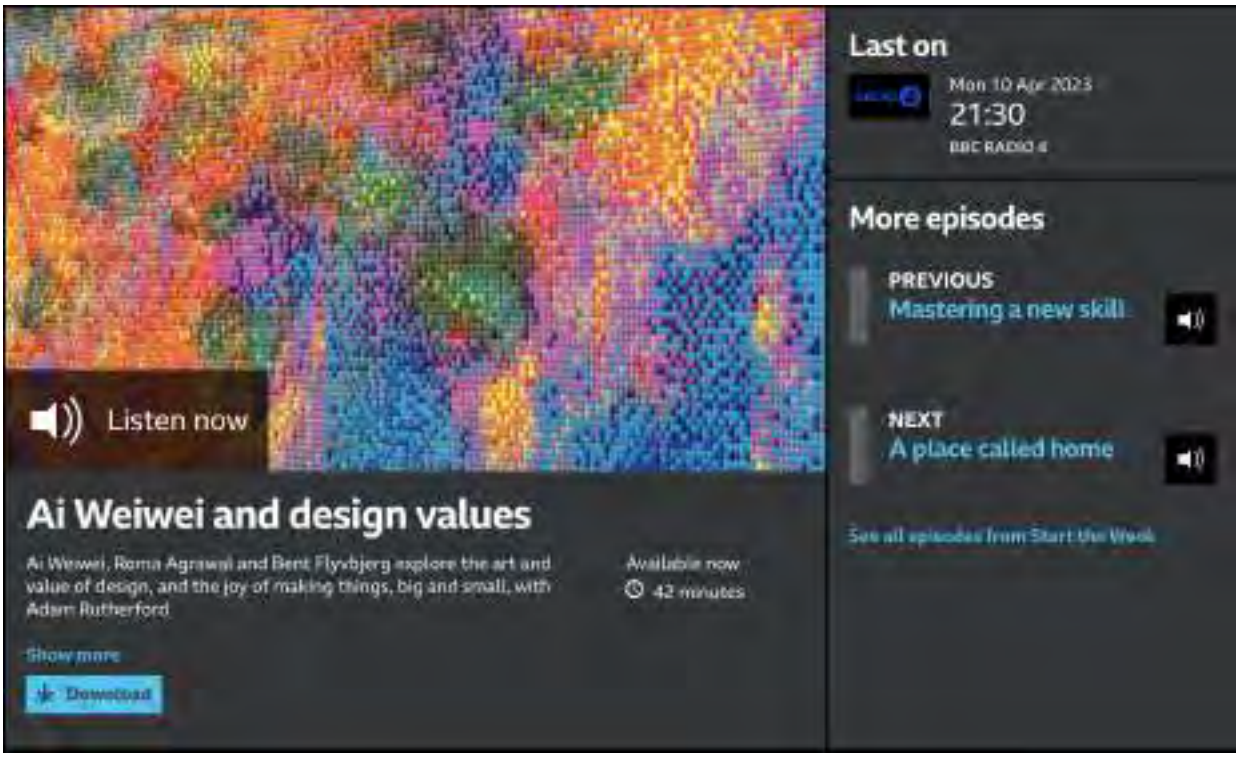
Taken as whole, the show is about making, by hand and machine. It is about creation and destruction, about the humanity and persistence of stuff. It is partly elegiac, paying tribute to the skills and memories that large-scale industrialised construction projects (which are depicted by photographs on the walls) threaten to destroy, but it is also affirmative. It joins making in the present to making in the past, across vertiginous timespans of many millennia, an interaction between the living and the dead mediated by dizzying numbers of artefacts. The apparent casualness with which old items are presented contributes to this end: it keeps the ancient in play.

Last, a shoutout to two of the most memorable exhibits. The atrium of the Design Museum, a somewhat forbidding void, is inhabited as never before by the timber frame of a Qing dynasty house rescued by Ai from complete destruction. He has had it painted with a confectionary shop range of modern industrial colours that, if not entirely respectful of heritage, bring it to life. And there is a wall-sized rendering in Lego bricks of one of Monet's water lily paintings, a meditation on the exhibition's themes of artifice and craft. A dark rectangle interrupts the potential idyll, representing the portal to the underground desert home where Ai and his father were forced to live in the 1960s. It takes you back to a spirit of resilience in extreme circumstances, which is what gives this show its authority.

● Making Sense is at the Design Museum, London, until 30 July

LISSON GALLERY

*BBC Radio 4*
10th April 2023



*Aesthetica*
21 June 2023

Aesthetica

# Must See in London: This Season

**Ai Weiwei: Making Sense | London Design Museum**

*Making Sense* is the first architecture and design-focused exhibition of Ai Weiwei (b. 1957). Through a consistent engagement with material culture, the contemporary artist has explored tensions in today's world: between past and present, hand and machine, precious and worthless, construction and destruction. The Design Museum displays some of the multidisciplinary creator's most established works, including a new version of the *Study of Perspective* series (1995-2003), and photographs of iconic landmarks around the globe with a flipped middle finger in the centre. An extensive array of newly commissioned pieces are arranged both in the gallery and outside of the building, showcasing the many facets of Ai's oeuvre. The centrepiece is a large-scale installation, comprising hundreds of thousands of collected objects displayed in expansive "fields." As an illustration of consumer society, visitors can walk amongst the vast array of laid-out items, encountering thousands of years of human ingenuity in the process. Until 30 July.

*ArtReview*
29 June 2023

ArtReview

# Ai Weiwei: Between Authenticity and Appropriation

**Wenny Teo** Reviews 29 June 2023 ArtReview Asia

**The Chinese artist gathers together artefacts from across time to interrogate the fine line between technological advancement and political control by design**

This is Ai Weiwei's first major solo exhibition in the UK since his 2014 retrospective at the Royal Academy, which opened when Ai's passport was still being held by Chinese authorities following his arrest and detention. While many of Ai's previous exhibitions have been overtly political both in terms of their content and context, the Design Museum seems to offer a more neutral ground upon which the artist has felt able to return to the formal and material building-blocks of his practice, exploring the affordances between authenticity and appropriation, form and function, making and meaning.

The exhibition takes place in a single room – the expansive space of the main exhibition hall – which is divided into five discrete 'fields' of accumulated objects, ranging from thousands of arrowheads and tools apparently dating from the Stone Age, neatly displayed like artefacts unearthed from an archaeological site; to a garish explosion of plastic Lego bricks, donated by members of the public after the transnational corporation stated that it was against company policy to supply their product for political works. The other fields are populated with a curious assortment of weaponry, castoffs and fragments: some 200,000 ceramic cannonballs crafted during the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE); a concatenation of bonelike teapot spouts also fabricated during the Song period, severed and discarded due to minute imperfections in the manufacturing process; and a jagged sea of blue-and-white porcelain shards from one of Ai's artworks, destroyed when his studio in Beijing was razed by Chinese authorities in 2018 without warning. These objects prompt us to reflect on ambivalent patterns of creative expression and suppression, standardisation and variation, and the dignity of labour and its exploitation.

*Spouts*, 2015, installation view at Design Museum, London. Photo: Ed Reeve. © and courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

As the art historian Lothar Ledderose has argued in his book *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art* (2000), some of the most remarkable examples of Chinese art, architecture and design over the course of millennia were made possible by the early development of modular systems: the mass fabrication of standardised units that could be reassembled into myriad configurations of form and function, producing objects in large quantities and of great variety. The most famous example of this is the Terracotta Army of the First Emperor Qin Shi Huang (259–210 BCE) consisting of several thousand lifesize sculptures assembled from a fixed repertoire of cast body-parts and individually finished by hand. It's testament to the wonders of China's technological advancement, artistry and innovation, but also a rigid, underlying infrastructure of political and social organisation, and control by design.

The surrounding wall space has been thoughtfully utilised to provide further context in this regard, displaying examples from a range of photographic series (some of them never exhibited before) that centre on the remarkable urban transformations in Ai's native city, Beijing, to which the artist has not been able to return following his political troubles. *Beijing Photographs* (1993–2003) takes us back to the period when Ai made his famous triptych *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995; in which the artist appears to drop the antique vessel, which smashes on the floor), documenting the artist and his brother's numerous visits to flea markets filled with antiquities, some real, some fake, from which many of the objects on display were acquired.

*Provisional Landscapes* (2002–08) features rubble-strewn voids in the urban fabric: all that remains of the traditional dwellings and silenced communities swept away by the tide of China's rapid modernisation and development. *National Stadium* (2005–07) chronicles the construction of the symbol par excellence of China's growing presence on the world stage in preparation for the watershed 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, which Ai designed in collaboration with Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron. Captured in various stages of completion, the stadium appears like a ruin in reverse, dramatising the fate of so many of these aspirational monuments of state power and spectacular infrastructure over the course of human history. Elsewhere we find other remains and part-objects – sometimes cast in different materials – that range from ordinary household items to the steel rebar and children's backpacks that Ai salvaged from schools that collapsed in the wake of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake; a natural disaster that formed the basis of Ai's citizen investigations into government officials who had siphoned money from building materials, resulting in the senseless death of thousands of people.

*Marble Takeout Box*, 2015, marble, 19 × 14 × 7 cm. © and courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio

Amidst the multitude of things on display, another portrait of Ai emerges – that of the artist as collector, bricoleur or, perhaps more intriguingly, hoarder. Nothing is discarded, and every object no matter how small and fragmentary has the potential to be repurposed, reframed and recombined into a new artistic assemblage. In this, *Making Sense* is an exhibition that prompts us to think about the ways in which art might intervene in and reconfigure what Jacques Rancière called the 'distribution of the sensible' – the laws, systems and structures of power in a given community that determine who has the right to be seen and be heard, to do and make.

**Making Sense** ***at Design Museum, London,*** *through 30 July*

**Wenny Teo** Reviews 29 June 2023 ArtReview Asia

*The Independent*
19 July 2023

INDEPENDENT

# Ai Weiwei: Censorship is 'suffocating' Chinese creativity

The Chinese artist has welcomed the publication of author Wang Xiaobo's work in English for the first time. By Prudence Wade.

Prudence Wade • Wednesday 19 July 2023 09:00

Ai Weiwei recently took part in a panel celebrating the work of writer Wang Xiaobo (Ai Weiwei Studio/PA)

Visual artist Ai Weiwei says censorship in his homeland of China is "suffocating" creativity.

Ai's work is all about speaking truth to power. This includes the Remembering, an installation dedicated to those who lost their lives in the Sichuan earthquake in 2008; and filling the Tate Modern's main hall with millions of hand-crafted porcelain sunflower seeds in 2010 – often interpreted as a symbol of how the people of China are able to stand up against the ruling Communist Party.

An outspoken critic of Chinese authorities, he was arrested at Beijing Capital International Airport in 2011 and detained for 81 days. In 2015 he left China for the last time, and is now based in Lisbon, Portugal.

Living abroad, Ai is free to express himself – something he knows isn't possible for artists in his homeland.

"Censorship certainly destroys a new voice," Ai says.

"Freedom of expression is the force of creativity. For the authorities, maintaining stability is much more important than so-called creativity."

The 65-year-old suggests those in power "sacrifice" creativity for order – and he keenly feels the effects of this.

"It's suffocating – you don't have fresh air, and it's hard to breathe."

Ai's work addresses political and social issues in China, and he says this approach is "important, [but] also not important when you have a society where honest, frank language has been forbidden, and [there is] strong censorship".

He suggests censorship limits language, meaning writers are less able to express their interior thoughts and feelings.

However, one writer who was able to do this was Wang Xiaobo, a Chinese novelist who died in 1997 at the age of 44.

According to Ai, Wang is still the country's most popular writer – and his work has never been taken off the shelves in China. "You can still buy it in bookstores," Ai reflects. "My writing you certainly can't – it's not online or in stores."

Wang's work has recently been published in English for the first time – his book of essays called Pleasure Of Thinking, and Golden Age, a satirical novel about life as an 'educated youth' in the Cultural Revolution. This was a 10 year period from 1966 where leader Mao Zedong purged capitalistic and traditional elements from Chinese society, and 'educated youths' were young people sent to work in the countryside.

Discussing Golden Age, Ai says: "Normally you don't read things like that. It's a very personal narrative about erotic moments", which was very surprising in "a very restricted society like the Cultural Revolution".

He continues: "It's very unique because the whole generation was being forced to not review [their] inner feelings – that could be considered a dangerous act."

For Ai, Wang's strength comes from his ability to write about his inner thoughts and emotions.

In a "society like China", he says, "You cannot really calmly expose yourself very often. Very often, even among writers, they don't have this kind of graceful style under the language [as Wang]... His writing is so honest."

While you can still read Wang's work in China today, Ai suggests if he was living and working today, he would likely be censored because his style is still "very, very subversive".

Golden Age isn't an outright critique of the Cultural Revolution, but darkness is lurking underneath the humour.

Ai suggests you can "sense" the reality of what is happening – Wang himself was an educated youth for two years, so the book can be seen as semi-autobiographical – and he successfully shows "the mental condition of that time".

In recent years, under the strict censorship of China, one blog writer who caught Ai's attention – who saw similarities with Wang's work. But this was "only for a few years online, then suddenly his voice disappeared… [He was] a very popular blog writer – probably the most popular one, but [he] suddenly disappeared [from the internet], because I guess it became too dangerous."

With the new publications, Western audiences will be able to read Wang's work in full for the first time – and Ai wants readers "to see China still has these very liberal and very intelligent writers, but they're just under this heavy political control. They cannot be introduced, or cannot even be published."

*Dezeen*
07 August 2023

**Every recognisable object is a "political work" says Ai Weiwei**

Multidisciplinary Chinese artist Ai Weiwei tells Dezeen why he thinks all objects have political significance in this exclusive interview.

Known worldwide for his use of art as a tool for activism, Ai has created decades' worth of projects spanning a range of media – from architecture and film to installations and performance art.

The artist recently presented his first design-focused exhibition, called Making Sense, at London's Design Museum. It featured vast collections of thousands of found objects, ranging from Stone Age weapons to crowd-sourced Lego bricks.

## "Even daring to name anything is political"

"Every object, if it can be recognised or has a name or a definition, is a political work," Ai told Dezeen at the museum. "Because of our judgment about values, even daring to name anything is a political act."

The political energy of the object comes from the user or observer, who will respond to it differently based on their own lived experience, Ai explained.

"We see things differently," he said. "Someone from London may see something in a different way to someone from Africa or from Asia."

"We are products of given conditions – our practice, our ability, even our knowledge or definition of ourselves. And so it's really the reaction of a given condition."

*Ai Weiwei worked with Herzog & de Meuron to create the National Stadium*

Born in Beijing in 1957, Ai has created work with a consistent political angle throughout his career. In particular, the artist is openly critical of the Chinese government. He has often expressed his belief that the country's architecture is stagnating under its Chinese Communist Party leadership.

While Ai collaborated with architecture studio Herzog & de Meuron to create the National Stadium – the main arena for the 2008 Beijing Olympics – he later distanced himself from the project in direct protest against the Chinese state.

*Ai's work often references the global refugee crisis. Photo is by Stéphane Bourgeois*

Despite this political focus, Ai said that he is cautious about pigeonholing his own artwork – or anything else – into distinct categories, including art or design.

"The problem with categorising is [it is] trying to take a shortcut. When people like to use fixed ideas, those concepts become emptier and emptier. It is truly a problem."

He argued that categorising things in this way "is an issue of education first", particularly citing the limitations that can arise from a lack of multidisciplinary learning at institutions such as schools and universities.

"You're trying to quickly tell people that [only] certain vocabularies are safe to use. But very often you see people use empty words. Because [these terms don't] really relate to emotions, consciousness or self-interpretation under judgment," reflected Ai.

"So we are living in a fast food, plastic or AI [artificial intelligence] world," he added. "We become handicapped."

**"We still know very little about humanity"**

The artist highlights the plights of various marginalised people in his projects, having previously installed three cage-like structures in New York City in protest against then-president Donald Trump's strict border-control measures, and created a wall of 2,000 life jackets in Québec that were worn by Syrian refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

"Human environments are never really fully developed or protected," he said. "Most of the time [they are] ruined by education, even with all the good intentions."

"We still know very little about humanity," added the artist.

Ai expressed his interest in the process of creating artwork, rather than solely appreciating the physical end result.

"A process itself is to recognise yourself and to make judgments about your approach," he explained.

*Ai advocates for more creativity within education*

Considering the value of creativity, Ai argued that "we are all born with the same ability" to create art, but that "art can never really be taught but can only be untaught" by our education systems.

"To do art is very different to becoming an artist because artists as professionals are selling works to support themselves. And very often, they're all bad," he said.

"And of course, when they [the artists] become sophisticated that's when they have to find a new language to illustrate the complexity of their thinking. But the ones who call themselves artists very often relate to public assumptions. So, it's not so pure, it's very much informed by the market."

Despite this, Ai confirmed his faith in the communal benefits of using art as a form of self-expression.

"I think it's part of humanity. If anybody does not really care about that, I think that is probably the biggest waste."

*The images are courtesy of the Design Museum unless otherwise stated.*

*HYPERALLERGIC*
22 May 2024

ARTnews

# Ai Weiwei to Get His First US Retrospective in a Decade at Seattle Art Museum

Ai Weiwei, the Chinese provocateur who ranks among the world's most popular artists, will have his first US retrospective in a decade at the Seattle Art Museum next year.

His last retrospective, held first at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. in 2012, was a hit, generating both critical acclaim and sizable crowds. This show will likewise feature a sampler of Ai's work over the decades.

Opening on March 12, 2025, the show will include more than 100 works and will be curated by Foong Ping, a curator of Chinese art at the museum. In a phone conversation, Foong said the show will explore both Ai's art and activism, and the intersections between the two.

"I'm trying to balance the important moments of his life, so his life story, with the art itself," Foong explained. "Why do we still look at it? What does it do that is so impactful?"

Ai's practice has included smashing ancient Chinese vases, raising his middle finger to cultural sites of importance as a conceptual gesture, and arraying vast spaces with bicycles, faux sunflower seeds, and more. In recent years, he's also become known for sculpting vast images out of Legos and rendering gigantic trees out of wood.

Foong said one goal is to shine a light on Ai's art of the 1980s and '90s, a period of his oeuvre that remains lesser-known in the US, even though he was based in the country for much of that era. During that time, Ai worked under the sign of Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, producing conceptual artworks that questioned authorship and invoked a number of social issues, from his status as a Chinese immigrant to the AIDS crisis.

Although many of those objects did figure in a sprawling retrospective mounted two years ago at the Albertina in Vienna, only rarely has Ai received expansive shows at this scale in the US.

Unlike many curators who've worked with Ai, Foong does not specialize in contemporary art. She mainly works with age-old Chinese works presented by the museum, and she said this moved to her to explore the art history that guides Ai. "My intention is to find some language that might describe trends and patterns, the things that have stood the test of time, the things that he thought about in his first decade and are still with him decades on," she said.

Controversy has tended to follow Ai. He has been detained by the Chinese government after criticizing it, and he has spoken out in support of immigrants while living in locales that have not been receptive to them. More recently, his comments on social media about Israel and Hamas led his representative, Lisson Gallery, to postpone an exhibition.

Foong said her show would not shy away from the various controversies that have embroiled Ai. "He's rebellious—he's a provocateur," she said. "That's his job."

While there are no other institutions currently set to host Foong's survey, titled "Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of Ai Weiwei," that may soon change. She said she is hoping to be able to travel the exhibition following the conclusion of its run in Seattle on September 7, 2025.

*Los Angeles Times*
06 June 2024

Los Angeles Times

# Column: What is the state of opera in L.A.? OperaFest LA tells only half the story

Los Angeles is not, historically, an opera city. Only in 1986 did it finally found a resident company, Music Center Opera, now Los Angeles Opera. Nor do we boast an actual opera house. The Dorothy Chandler Pavilion is a multipurpose theater. Dorothy Buffum Chandler disliked opera.

We've moved on. In 2002, L.A. Opera gave the stage premiere of a new ending by Luciano Berio that illuminated rather than falsely answered Puccini's questions about political and sexual oppression. More recent artists have probed more for our time, especially in a production by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei at Rome Opera two years ago. That ended where Puccini left off.

*Prestige*
06 June 2024

# PRESTIGE

## The 2024 Edition of Tokyo Gendai, a New Annual Art Fair, Runs From July 5–7

Following its successful launch last year, Tokyo Gendai has established itself as an important new addition to the international art calendar. Next month, the world is invited back to Japan to explore the country's rich and dynamic contemporary art scene.

Ai Weiwei's Zodiac Tiger in Lego bricks (2018), courtesy of Tang Contemporary Art

Apart from the aforementioned Manuel Ocampo, from The Philippines, there's not yet a great deal of Southeast Asian representation at Tokyo Gendai. And while there are a few globally established galleries with branches in this region participating – iPreciation Gallery (Singapore, Hong Kong), Mizuma Art Gallery (Tokyo, Singapore), and Over The Influence gallery (Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Bangkok) – their artists lists have yet to be released. Tang Contemporary (Hong Kong, Beijing, Seoul, Bangkok), meanwhile, revealed early on they will be presenting the Zodiac Animals in Lego bricks by renowned Chinese contemporary artist Ai Weiwei, and more recently news came in that Thai artists Kitti Narod and Benzilla will also be displayed.

*Forbes*
17 June 2024

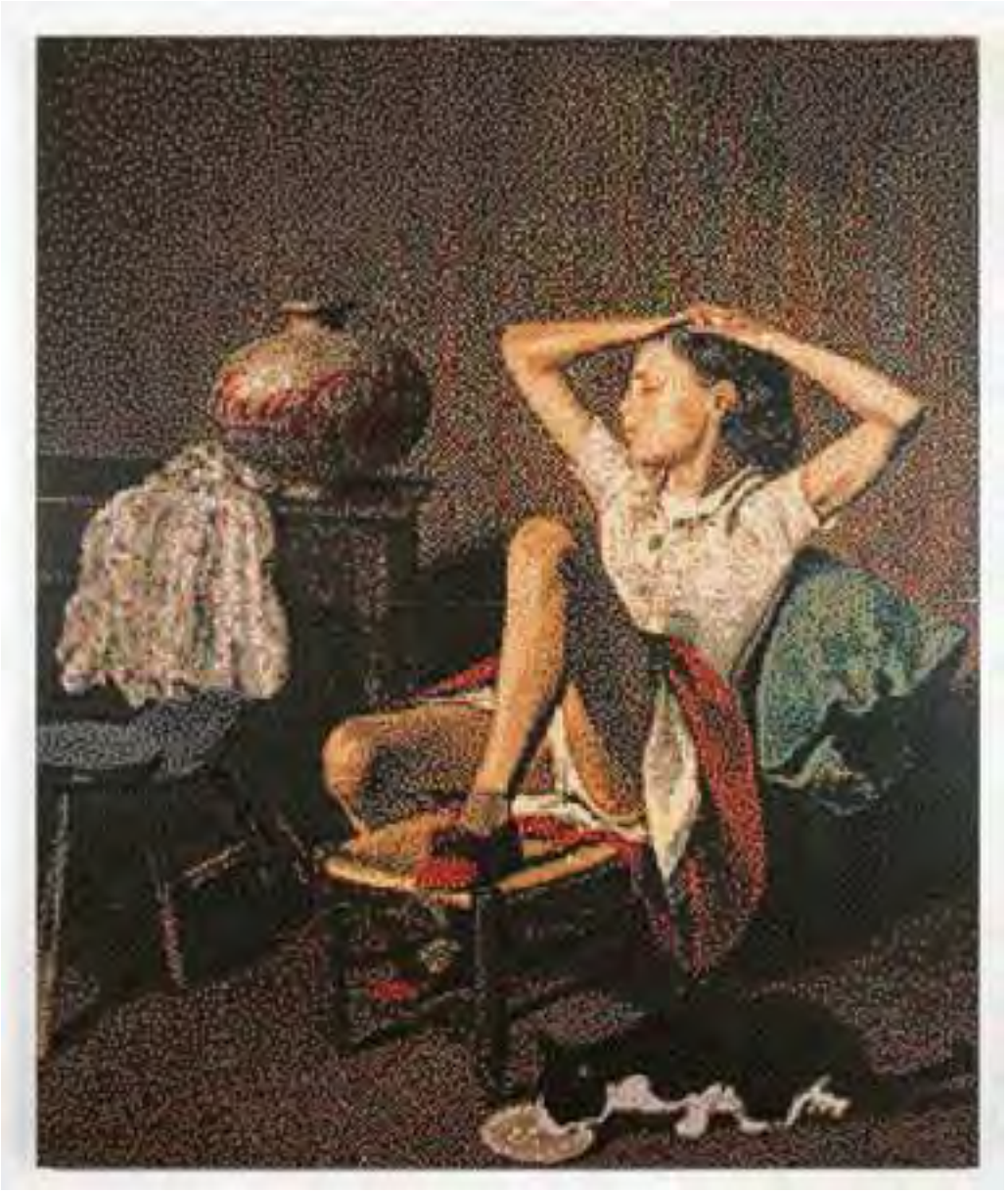
Forbes

# The Must-Sees Of Art Basel 2024

For its 2024 edition in Basel, Art Basel brings together 285 leading international galleries showcasing the highest quality work across all media, including painting, sculpture, photography and digital artworks. Twenty-two first-time participants have joined the lineup of international exhibitors returning from around the globe. For the first time, led by Maike Cruse, Director of Art Basel in Basel, the marquee Swiss fair is also featuring a reconceptualized Parcours sector curated by Stefanie Hessler Director of Swiss Institute, along with a new venue for continuous, around-the-clock artistic events and shows at a transformed former Hotel Merian.

Here are my highlights from this year's fair.

## Ai WeiWei's 'Therese Dreaming, 2024' at Galleria Continua



"I think we are on the same track together with writers and poets such as Arthur Rimbaud and Walt Whitman. Once you design the language, you can be in command. That is how to have a better understanding of my recent works. LEGO being used to carry personal messages, those stories related to me, my childhood and my education are embedded in them. Pixels, digitalization, segmentation, fragmentation and disconnection provide the unique freedom for reproduction, allowing for a qualitative and quantitative breakthrough in the formation of images that is distanced from the widely used order, method, and composition.

Detail Shot of Ai Weiwei Thanks Dreaming, 2004, Toy bricks (LEGO) Edition Unique (work Artwork size ... [+] ART BASEL, GALERIE CONTINUA

It is similar to the use of ancient mosaics, and the presentation of fabrics (silk, wool) and carpets, which have a long tradition. Like the wooden movable-type printing in Song Dynasty (ca. 1000 AD), the methods and means of production have replaced manual control, and this has led to a high level of accuracy and precision of the images completed." says Ai Weiwei about his work.

*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
**Clara Rodorigo**

PUBLISHED
**12 October 2020**

SHARE

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, 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.

*The Art Newspaper*
1 September 2020

THE ART NEWSPAPER

# 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.*

*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.

*The Observer*
22 March 2020

The Observer 22|03|20 the new review

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

Ai 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 religionsIt's easy to understand but I don't think people will do it in practice. So, in my work, I'd rather warn about wh at will happen if we are not more sympathetic towards refugees. And that's what I'm doing.

# Questions from readers

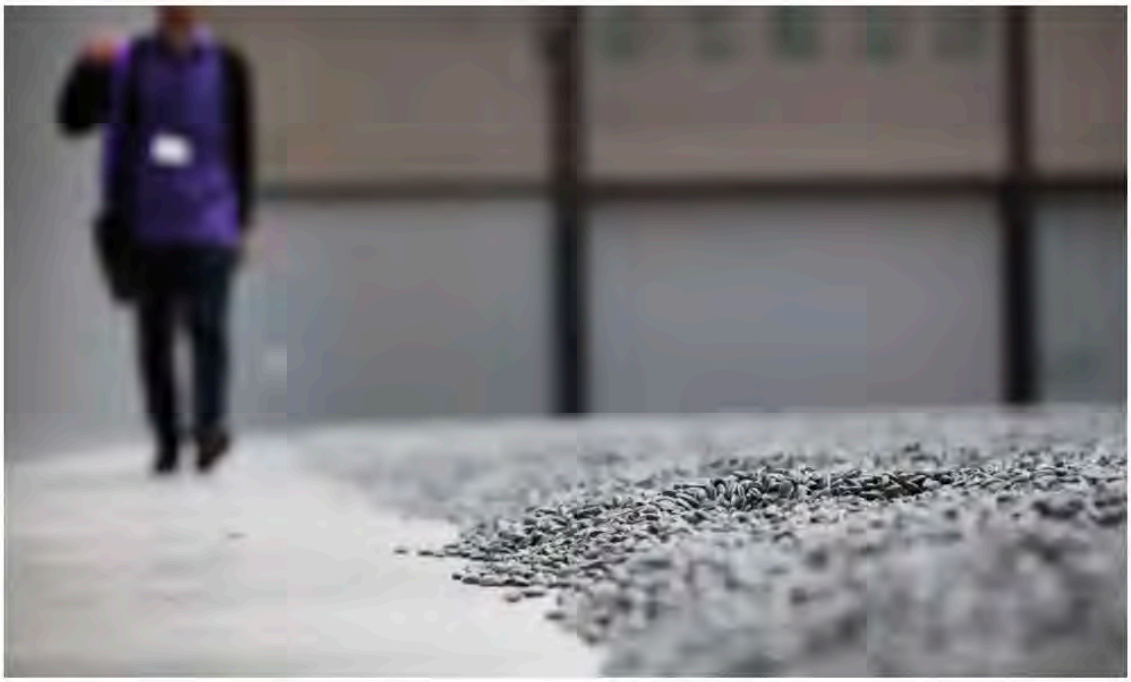
▲ Chinese students and their supporters hold a memorial for coronavirus whistleblower Dr Li Wenliang, UCLA, Westwood, California. Photograph: Mark Ralston/AFP via Getty Images

**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

The Guardian

# 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

Ai 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."

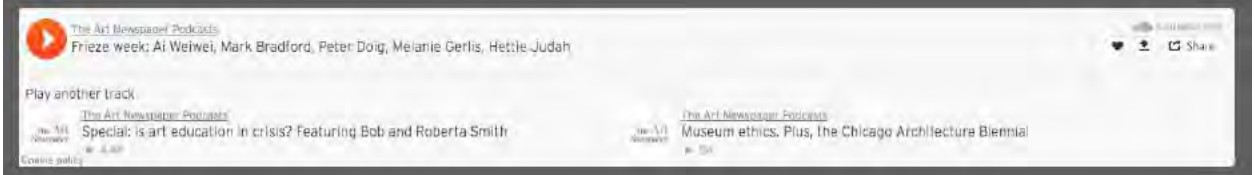
The second part of Omni drops the viewer into the centre of a migrant camp known as Cox's Bazaar, in Bangladesh just over the border from the refugees' home in Myanmar's Rakhine state, where they have fled persecution, ethnic cleansing and a military crackdown. The work provides a migrants'-eye view 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.

*The Art Newspaper, Podcast*
4 October 2019

THE ART NEWSPAPER




→ PODCAST

# 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

MORE

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***

*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.

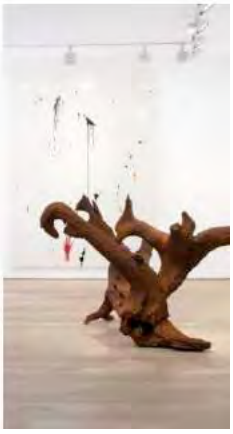
*Photo Megan Kellythorn*

## purple ART

[OCTOBER 4 2019]

## purple ART

[OCTOBER 4 2019]



*Elephant Magazine*
3 October 2019

ELEPHANT

CONTEMPORARY CLASSICS

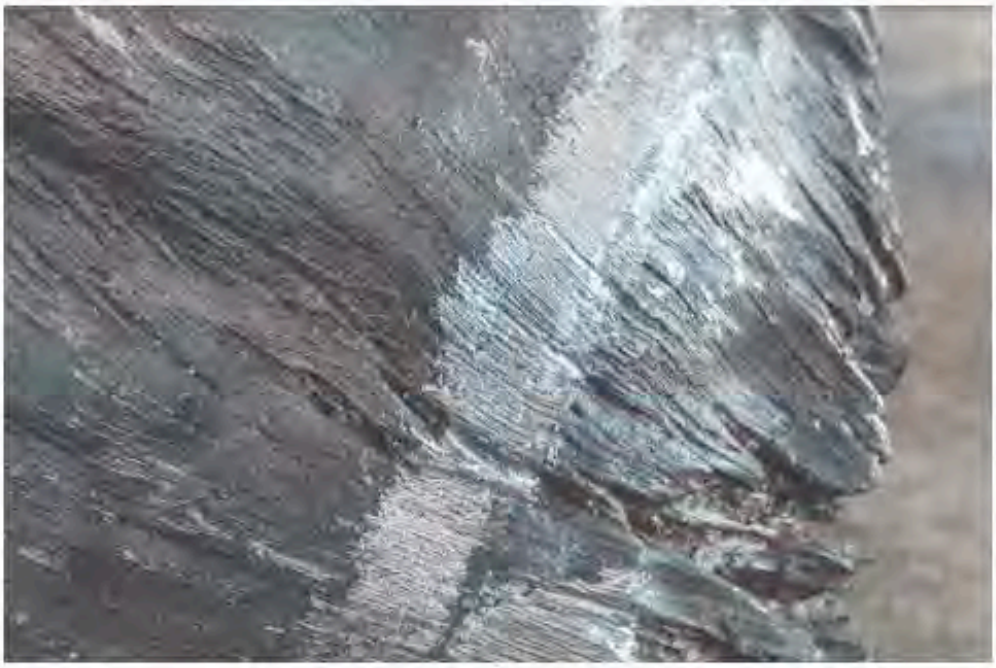
# Why Ai Weiwei's Roots Are More Relevant Now than Ever

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

Evening Standard.

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 ARTS

AI WEIWEI: ROOTS AT THE LISSON GALLERY - IN PICTURES

*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 C WILSON/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

*The Courier*
2 October 2019

THE COURIER
Local Matters
2 Albert Square, Dundee, DD1 1DD

The Courier & Advertiser (Fife Edition) | 2 Oct 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

Evening Standard.

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

*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.

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

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 rod, 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 clampdown 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.


## Related Stories

WHAT THEY SAY

Western Daily Press · 3 Oct 2019

*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 /

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.

*Time Out*
2 October 2019

# Ai Weiwei: Roots

Art Lisson Gallery, Marylebone Until Saturday November 2 2019

Ai Weiwei
'Roots' at Lisson Gallery

## 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 Brazillian 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.

LISSON GALLERY

*EuroNews*
2 October 2019

euronews.

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

Par **Maxime Biosse Duplan** – Londres | 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.

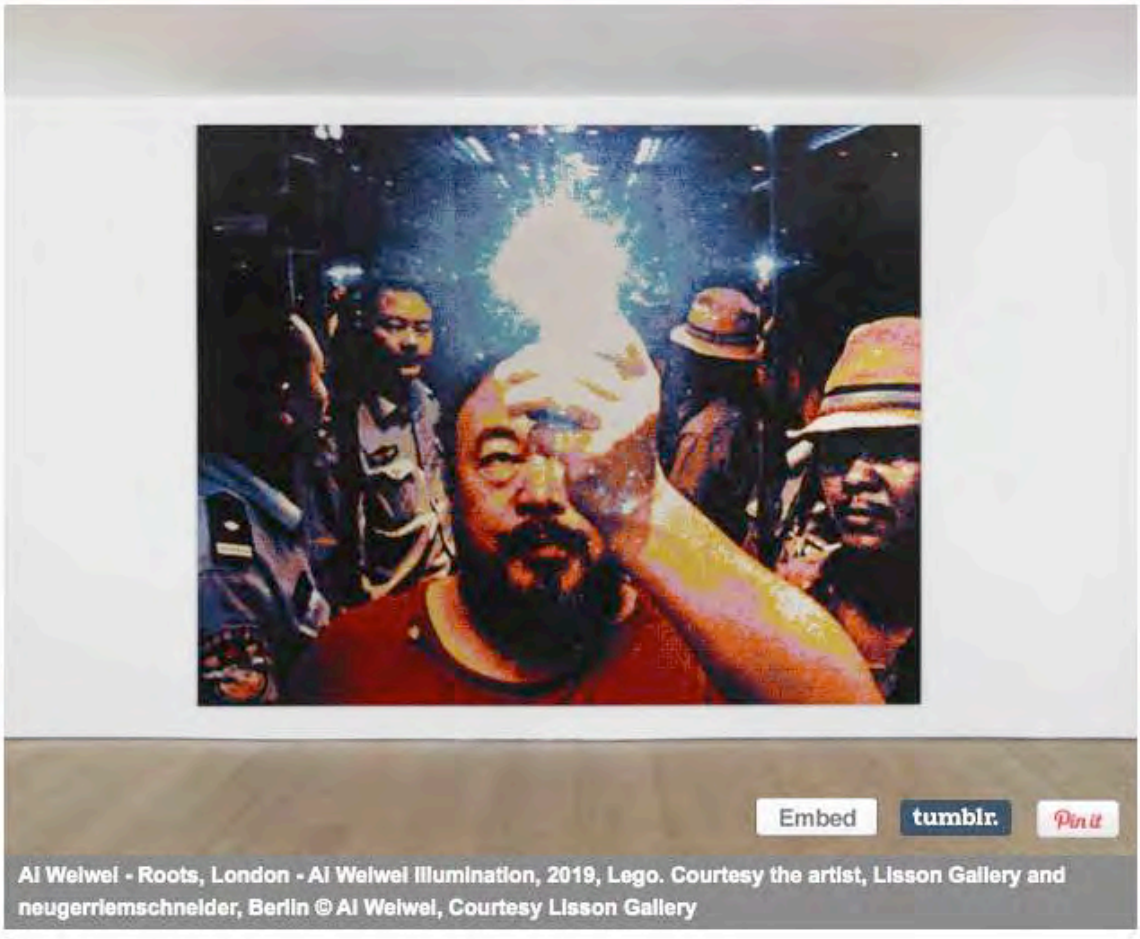
Greg Hilty, de la galerie Lisson : *"Il est très heureux de s'occuper de formes naturelles, de mythologie, des gens, mais tout se résume à la politique. Il est impossible de regarder le monde aujourd'hui sans voir en quoi il a été façonné par les forces de l'économie, par les politiciens et par les tensions 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.**

*London Town*
2 October 2019

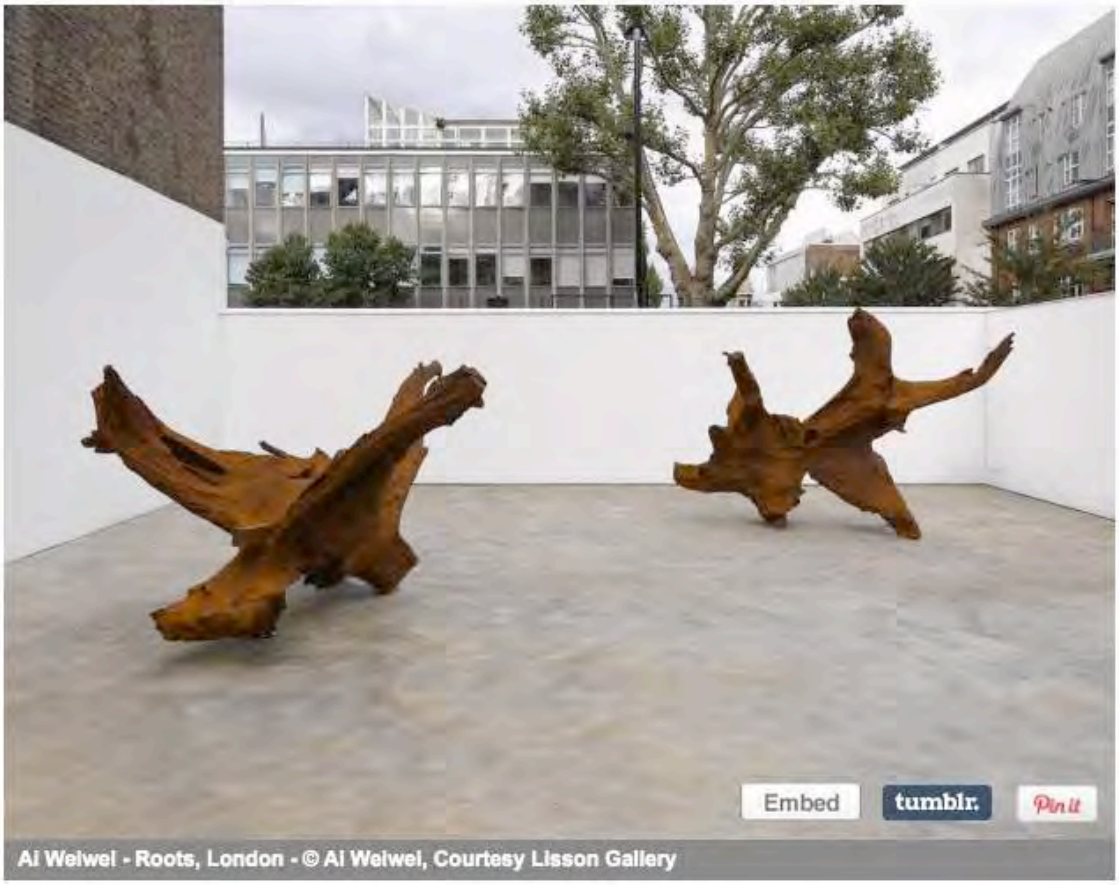
# Ai Weiwei - Roots

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 Oark, 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.

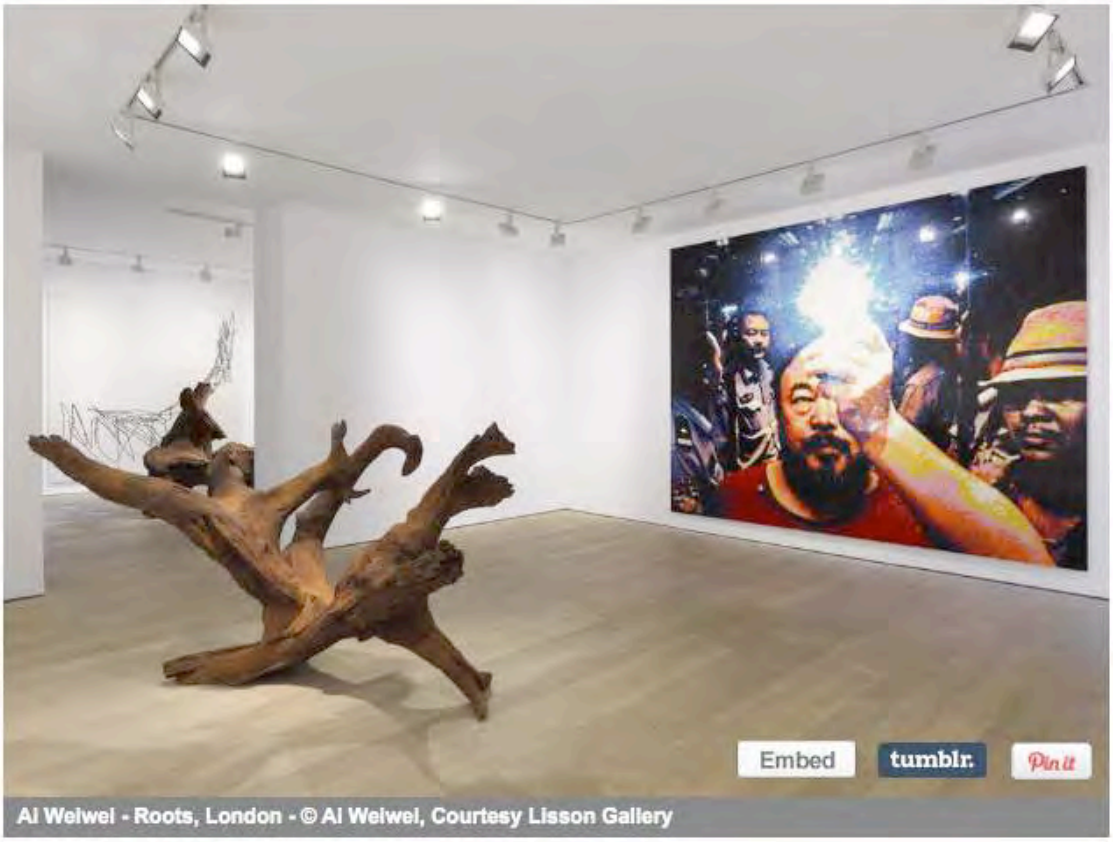



**Ai Weiwei - Roots, London - Ai Weiwei Illumination, 2019, Lego. Courtesy the artist, Lisson Gallery and neugerriemschneider, Berlin © Ai Weiwei, Courtesy Lisson Gallery**

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




Ai Weiwei - Roots, London - © Ai Weiwei, Courtesy Lisson Gallery

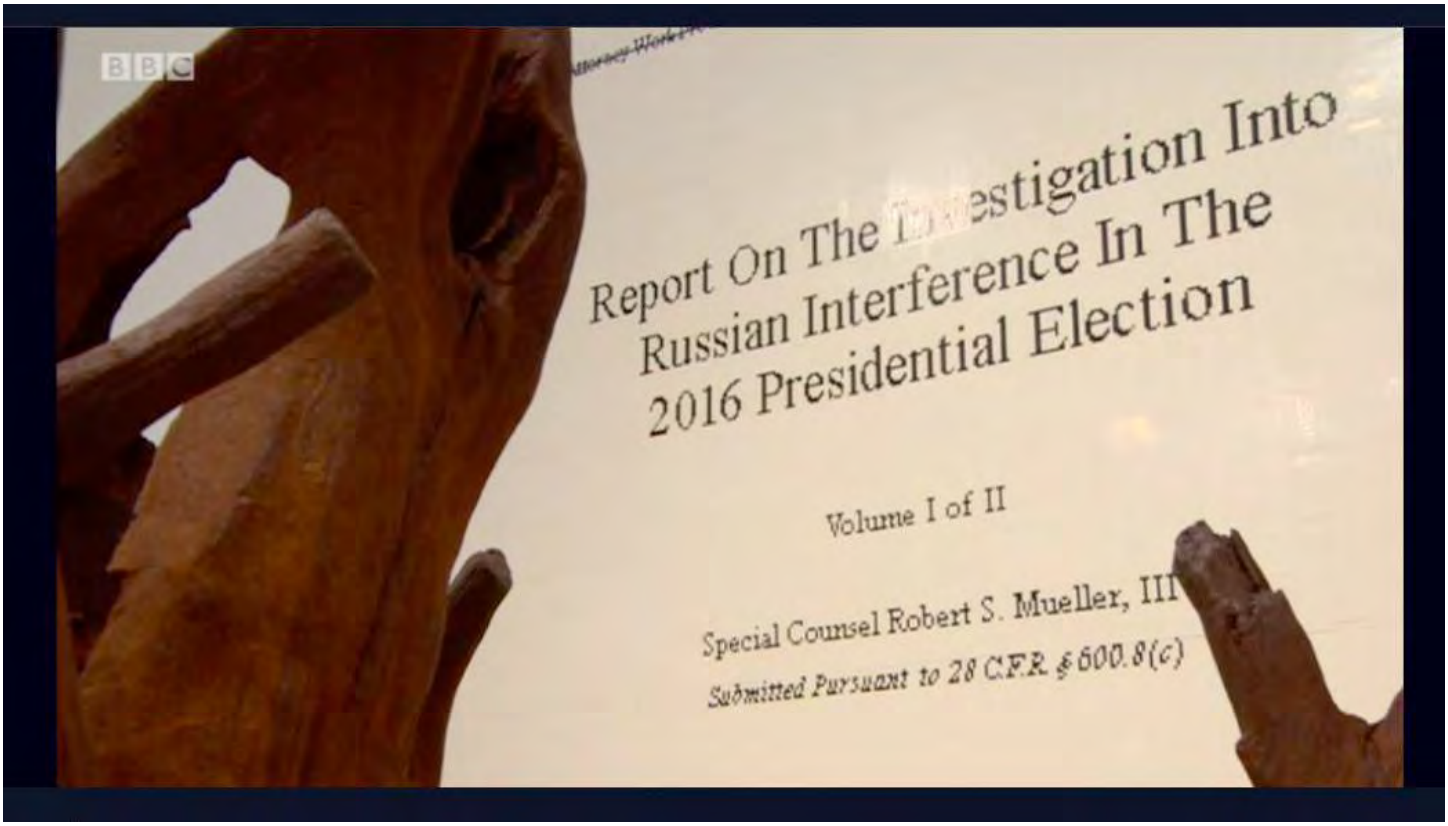



Ai Weiwei - Roots, London - © Ai Weiwei, Courtesy Lisson Gallery

LISSON GALLERY

*BBC London News*
1 October 2019

BBC
Ai Weiwei
Artist and activist
BBC LONDON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LISSON GALLERY

*ITV News*
1 October 2019

LISSON GALLERY

*Sky News*
1 October 2019

*ITV News*
1 October 2019



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."

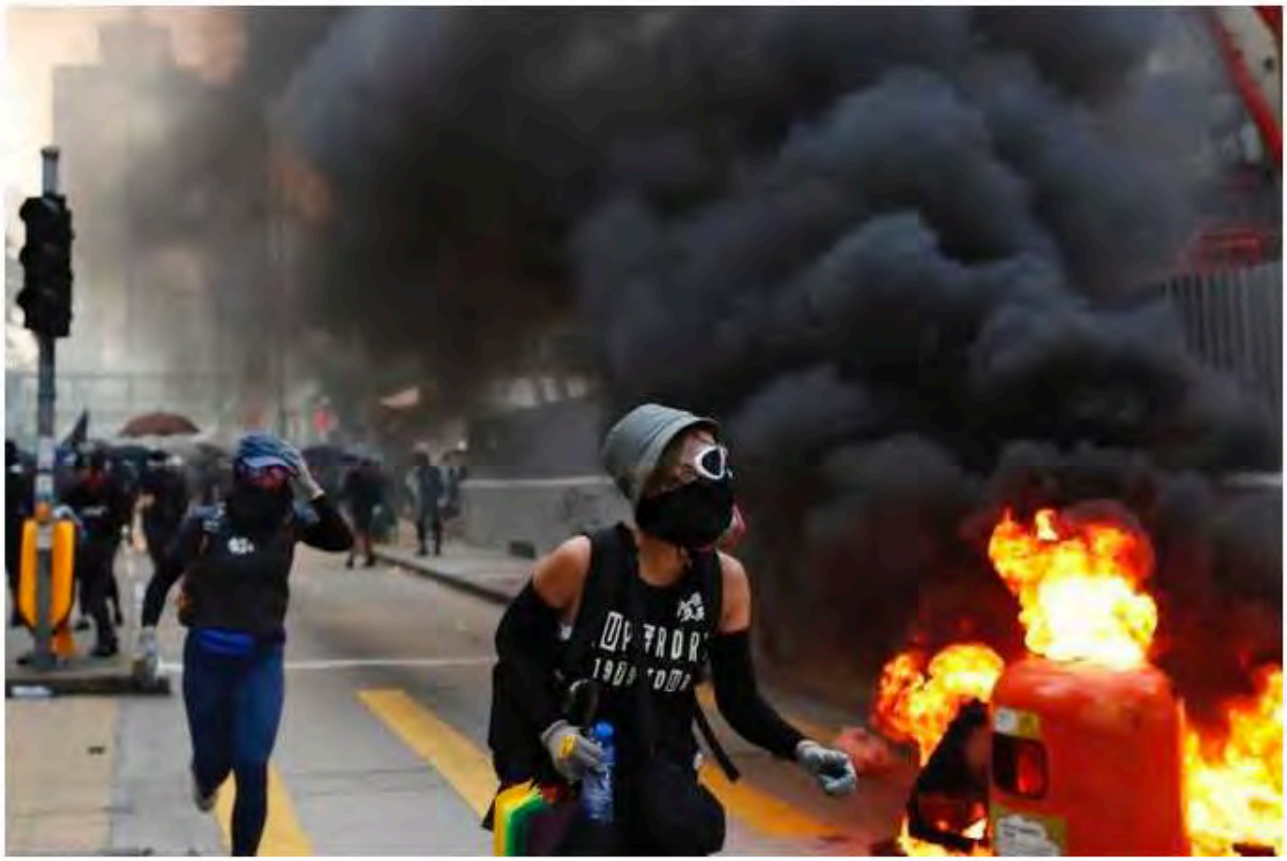
He said: "That ideology being shared by the West, Britain should be much more responsible, should speak clearly."

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*

*Artlyst*
1 October 2019

Artlyst

# Ai Weiwei Opens New London Show At Lisson Gallery

1 October 2019 / Art Categories Preview / Art Tags Ai Weiwei, Lego, Lisson Gallery, roots /

**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.**

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 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

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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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1 October 2019

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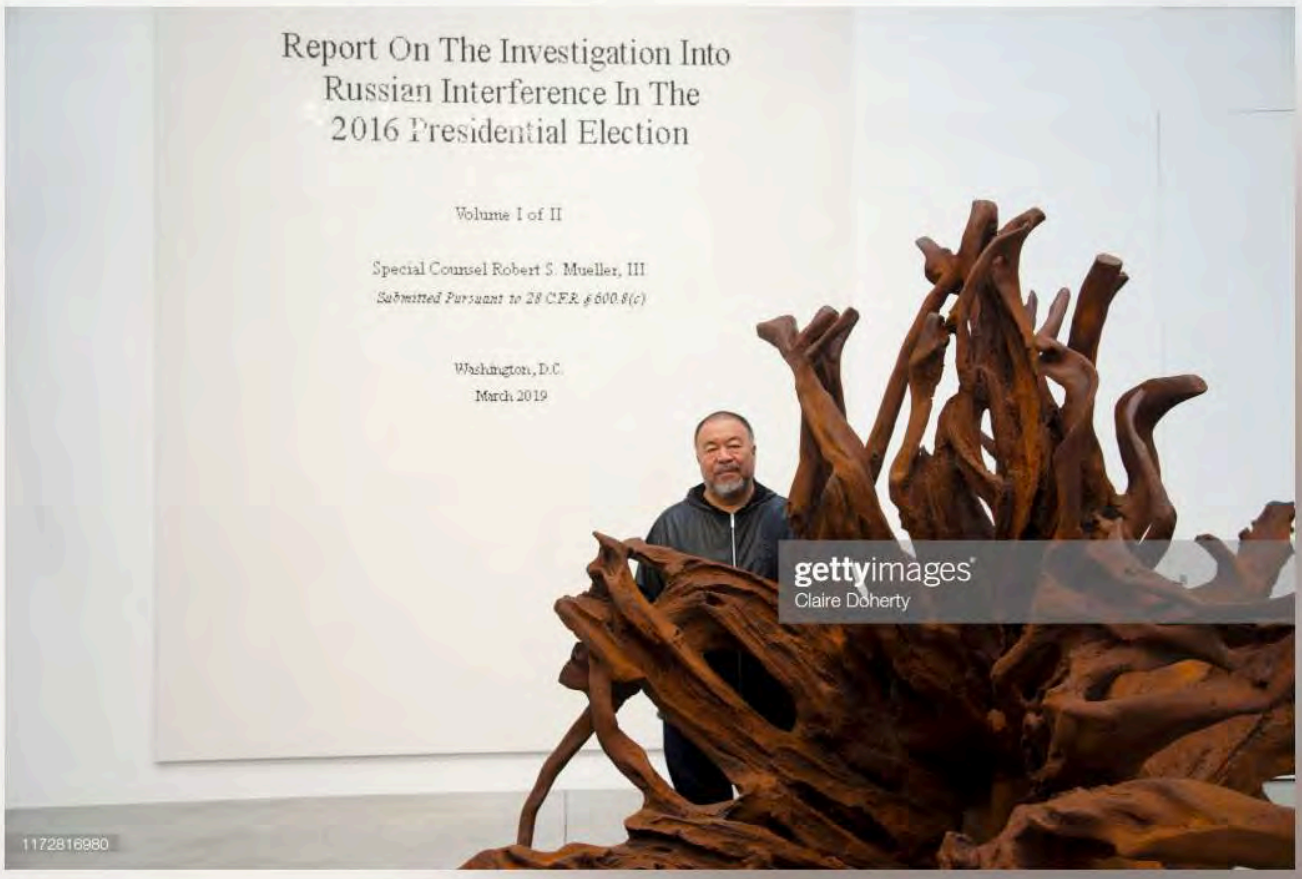
Ai Weiwei Exhibition Roots Opens

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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*RA Magazine*
1 October 2019

RA
Royal Academy of Arts

# 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.

## 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**

VIEW GOOGLE MAPS

*FAD Magazine*
29 September 2019

FAD magazine

# 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

ES.

# 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*

*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 Galley 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 chancellery.

**"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."

*British GQ*
October 2019

GQ

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

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

**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.

Grooming **Beth Alderson** Photography assistant **David Gilbey** Style assistant **Fiona Vosper** With thanks to the ME London Hotel

*The Telegraph*
16 September 2019

The Telegraph

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

Follow

JANE SHILLING

16 SEPTEMBER 2019 • 6:00AM

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

Over the centuries, a carnavalesque 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 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 16
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*
12 July 2019

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

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)

*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.

## '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.

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

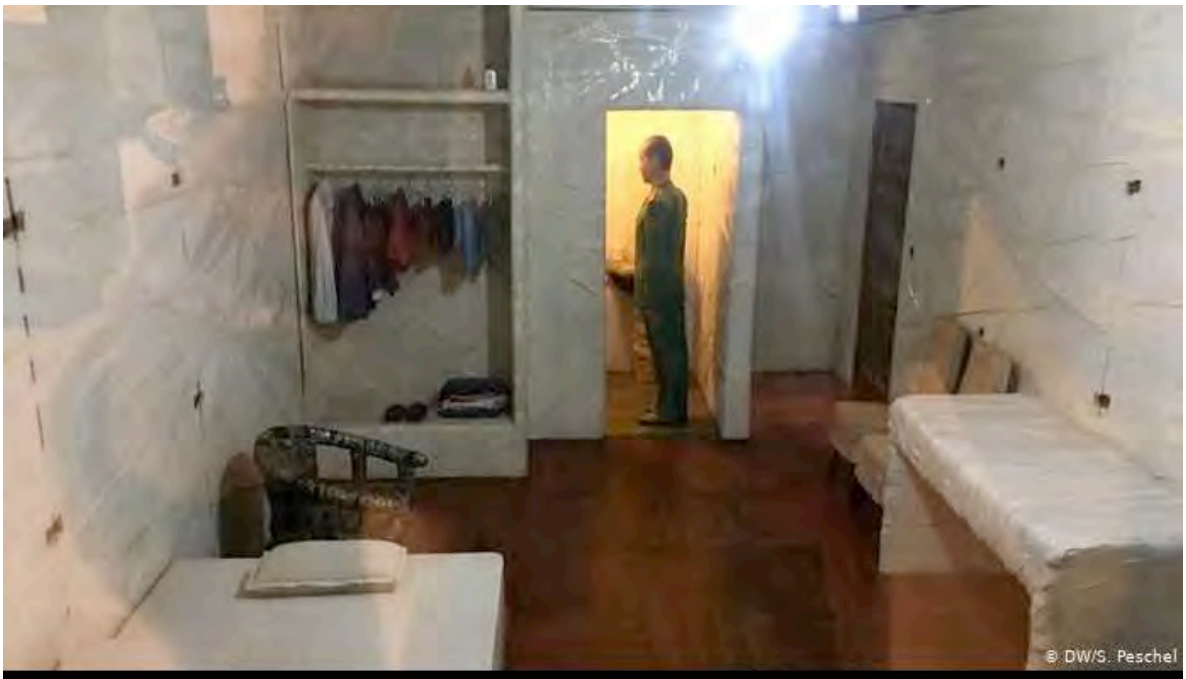
The wallpaper pays stylistic tribute to Odysseus, the protagonist in Homer's epic poem who spent years far from home. But the motives actually depict flight and migration. In front stands a marble camera symbolizing state surveillance, a recurring theme of the artist. In 2011, he was arrested in Beijing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

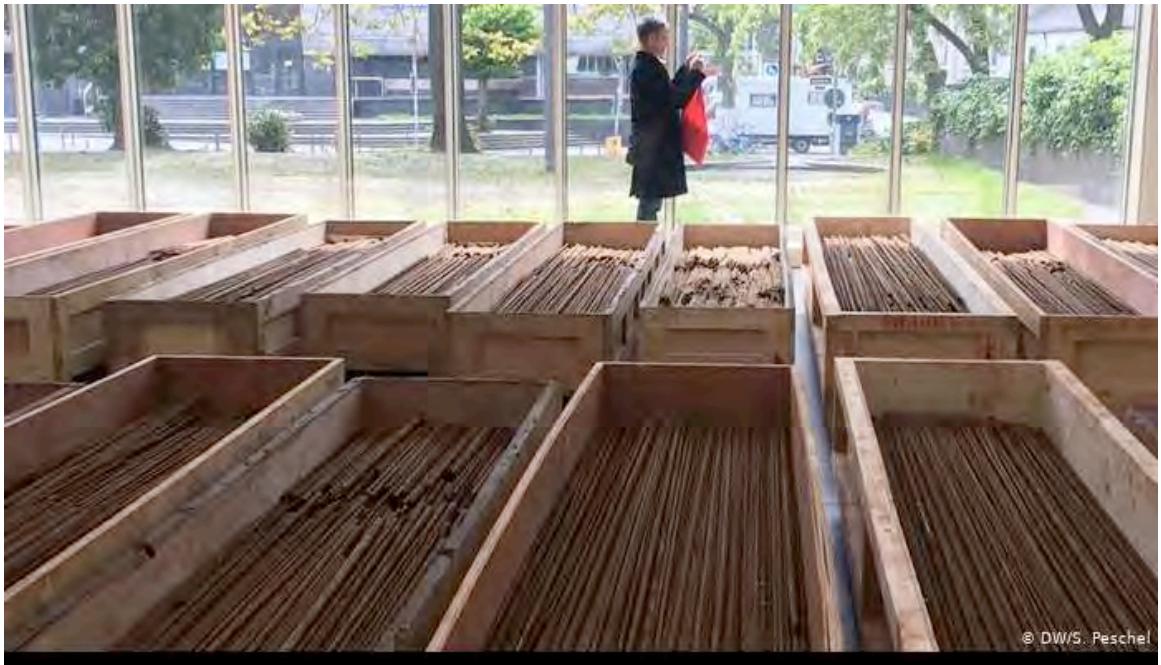
## 'Study of Perspective' (1995 to 2011/2014)

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.




## '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 though 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.




## '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.

# 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
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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**

*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

What 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

*theguardian.com*
16 March 2018

The Guardian
UK edition

# 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 spotlit 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-conde, 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 imigrantes 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 cachorros 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 da 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 benfeitas". 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 sugeri 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 ratães, 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 ateliês, que devem finalizar seus trabalhos no início de setembro, estará na Oca.

O restante foi enviado à China e só virá à 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 Roncato/Folhapress

*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 rightest. 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 o 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

LISSON GALLERY

*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.

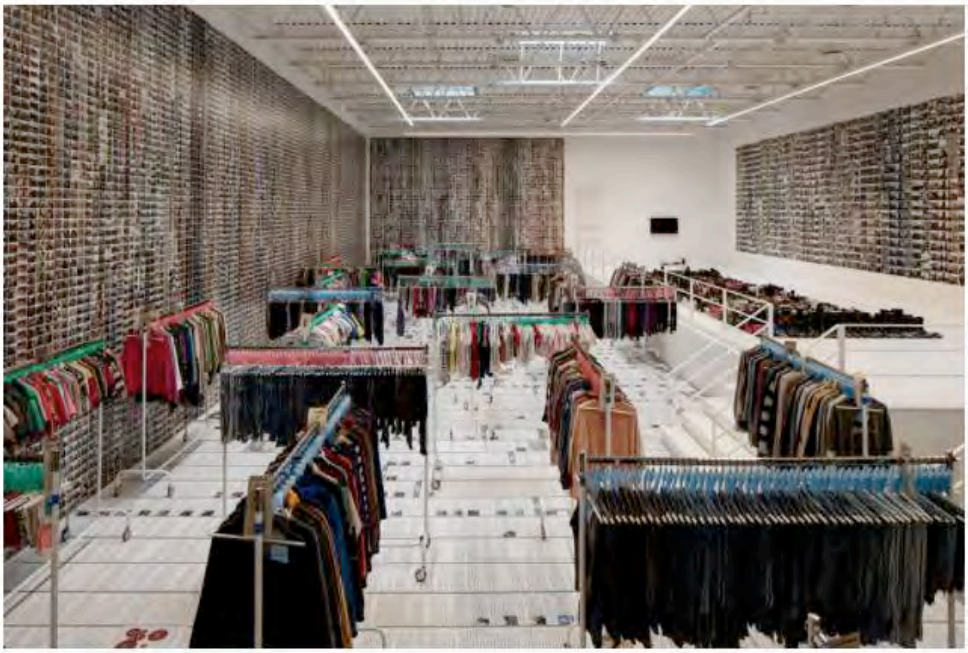
Laundromat also includes the film Idomeni (2016), which shows the everyday conditions of the refugees up to the moment when the camp was evacuated, and a work made from wallpaper of images that Ai took on his iPhone during the filming of Human Flow.

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.

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theartnewspaper.official Today we had the pleasure of interviewing the inimitable Ai Weiwei in his Berlin studio. Thanks for having us! #aiweiwei #artiststudio #contemporaryart #art #artstagram #instaart @aiww

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1 WEEK AGO

**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 it 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

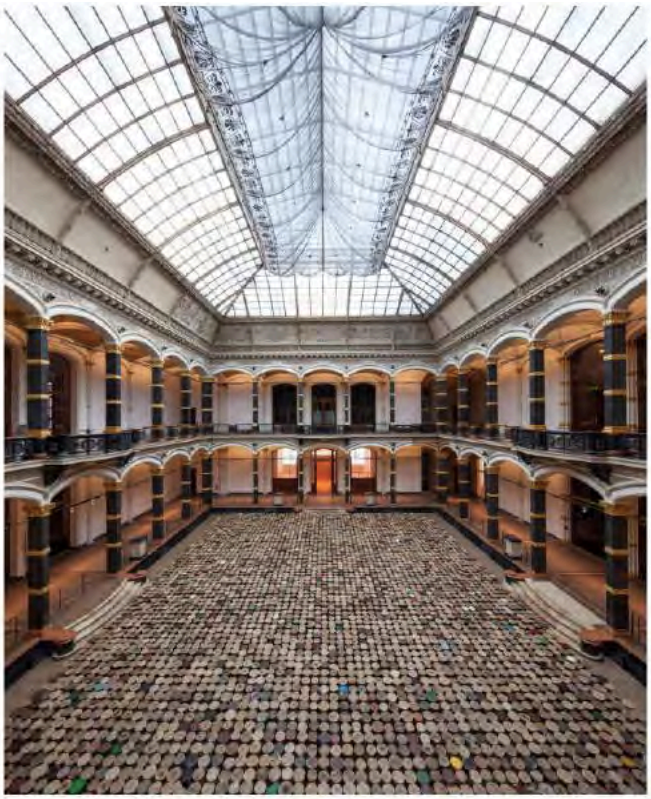
By Jori Finkel

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

*The Guardian*
7 December 2017

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
@PeterBradshaw1

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.

LISSON GALLERY

*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.**

*Porter Magazine*
January 2016

PORTER

# 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*

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

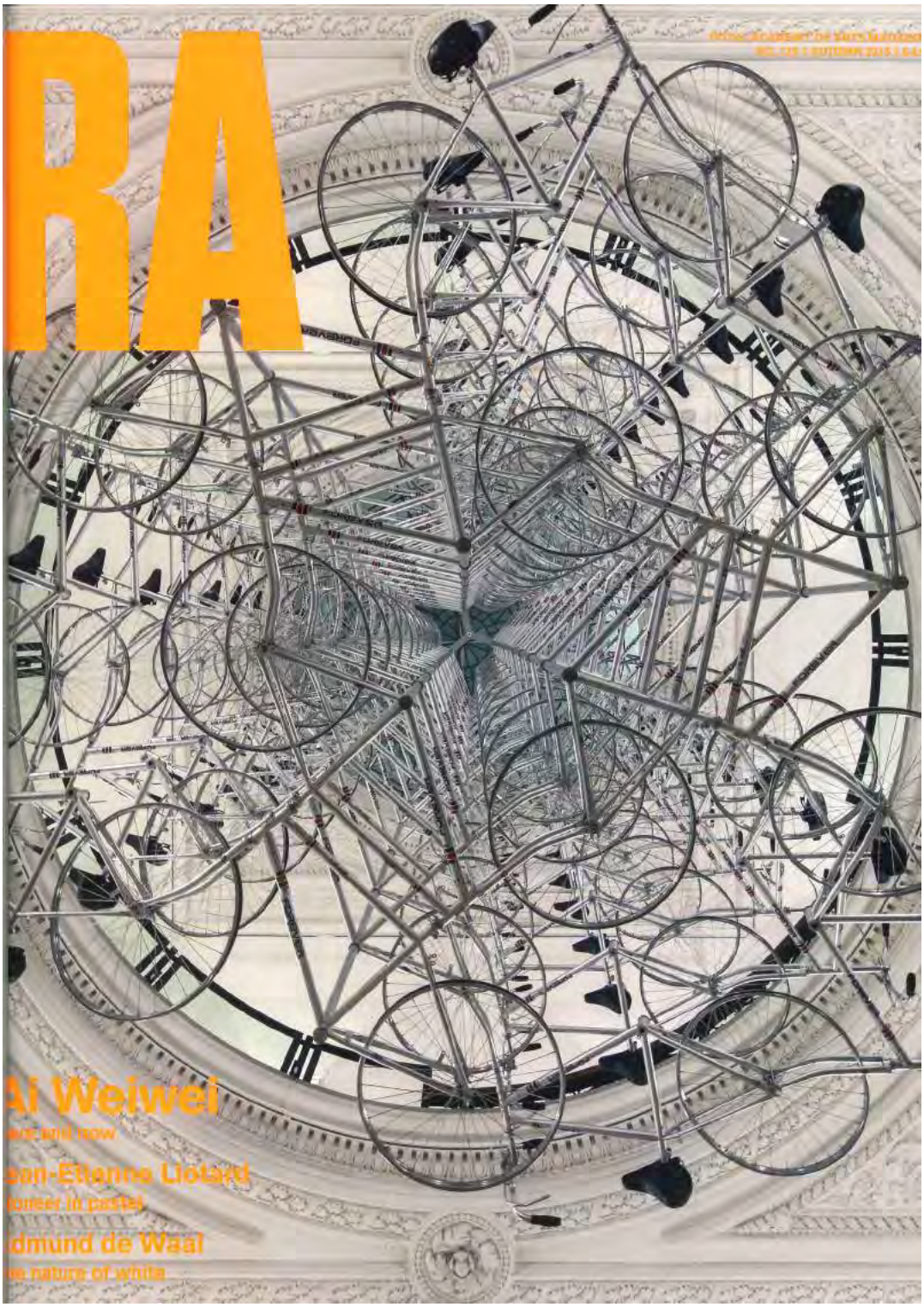

PHOTO © HARRY PEARCE/PENTAGRAM, 2015

**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

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.

**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

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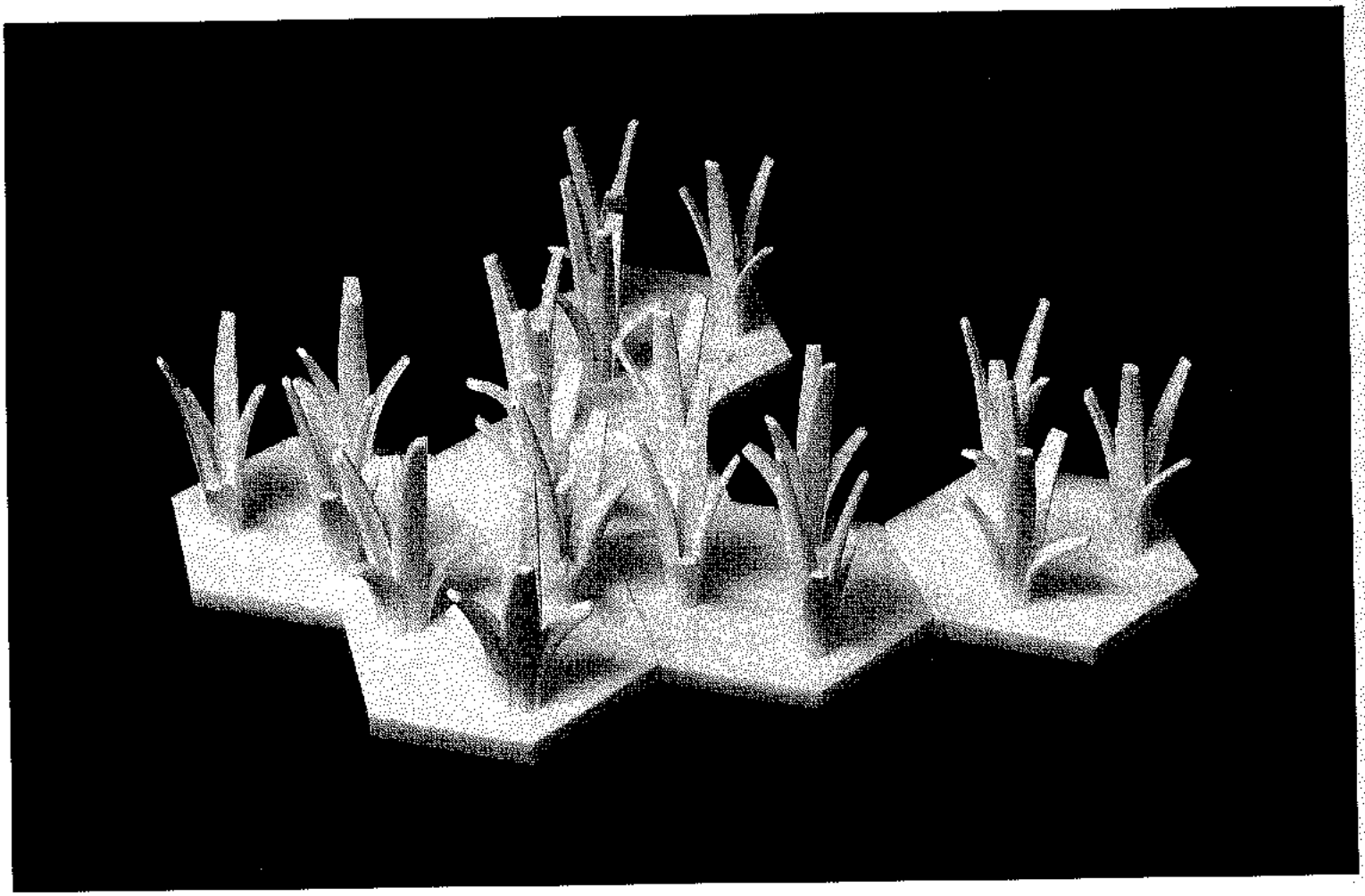
If *Marble Stroller* has a connection to Ai's son, it finds an echo in another new work, *Remains* (2015), which concerns Ai's father and, more broadly, the context into which Ai was born and raised.

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

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'.

**'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'**

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, 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**

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# 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**

ON THE AFTERNOON OF APRIL 2, 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."

AI 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 Republic 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.

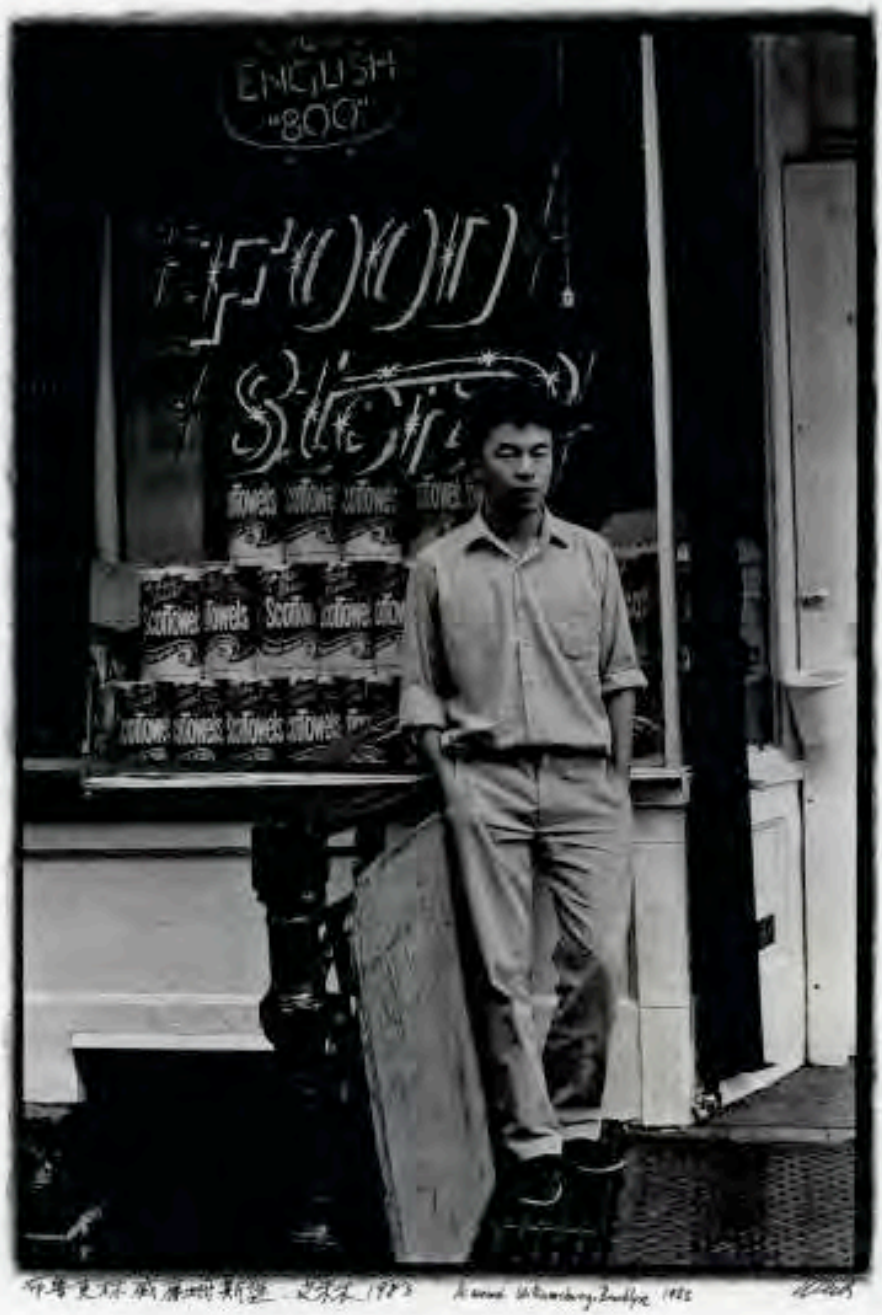
Two years later, frustrated and ambitious, Ai, now 24, quit art school and moved to New York with $30 in his pocket. He couldn't speak a word of English. In a later interview with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, he said he told his classmates, "Maybe 10 years later, when I come back, you'll see another Picasso!"

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.



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 southwest 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."

IN 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