

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Ai Weiwei **2016: Roots and Branches**

5 November – 23 December 2016
504 W 24th Street, New York

For his first solo exhibition with Lisson New York, Ai Weiwei populates the gallery with felled, cast-iron tree trunks, nearly sixteen feet in length, and a series of iron root sculptures set against the backdrop of a new wallpaper installation. Situated among the beams of the High Line exposed entirely in this exhibition for the first time, the seven sculptures on display combine to create a forest of displaced objects and reveal the artist's interest in tradition and contemporaneity as well as the prevalence of displacement in post-modern societies.

Natural objects – from the sunflower seeds that carpeted Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in 2010 to his series of porcelain rocks and watermelons – have been an ongoing source of inspiration for Ai Weiwei, with trees recurring as a spiritual motif in his work since 2009. These monumental wooden or iron multipartite sculptures are all composites of different parts of different trees gathered by the artist from various parts of China in reference to the ancient Asian tradition of collecting dry fragments of trees for contemplation of their complex forms.

Fragments also play an important part in Ai Weiwei's work as they force attention on foundational elements and the most basic units that combine to create a whole. Here, in line with the artist's worldview, the whole is not greater than the sum of its parts but rather each individual part is equal and of unique importance. This focus on equality is evidenced in recent projects by the artist that take as their starting point the refugee crisis and challenges to freedom of speech.

The iron roots and tree trunks shown in New York are presented in a natural, untreated state, appearing at first glance as organic forms, yet upon closer inspection, reveal their artificiality. Not born of nature but made by human hands, the works, themselves contorted by the surrounding landscape, represent a society uprooted by industrialization and modernization, illustrating how progress can often come at the expense of cultural and societal well-being. By eliminating their original function and value, Ai Weiwei imbues the objects with new meaning and forces us to confront them in a new light.

Elsewhere in New York, Mary Boone Gallery will present a parallel solo exhibition of work sharing the title '2016: Roots and Branches', while Jeffrey Deitch will debut a new body of work by the artist titled 'Laundromat'. In London this November, Lisson Gallery will exhibit Ai Weiwei's immersive installation *Fondation* (2011). Ai Weiwei's work was recently presented alongside the iconic pop artist Andy Warhol, who Ai Weiwei first encountered when he lived in New York in the late 1980s, in the critically acclaimed touring exhibition 'Andy Warhol | Ai Weiwei' at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, PA. Palazzo Strozzi's exhibition 'Ai Weiwei. Libero', the first retrospective dedicated to the artist in Italy, runs from September 2016 until January 2017, when his work will also be the subject of a major exhibition at the Meijer Gardens in Michigan.

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About Ai Weiwei

Ai Weiwei (b.1957, Beijing, China) lives and works in Beijing and Berlin. He attended Beijing Film Academy and later, on moving to New York (1983–1993), continued his studies at the Parsons School of Design. Major solo exhibitions of his work has been staged at numerous venues around the world, including the Belvedere Museum, Vienna, Austria (2016); Royal Academy, London, UK and Helsinki Art Museum, Finland; (2015), Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin, Germany (2014); Indianapolis Museum of Art, IN, USA (2013); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., USA (2012); Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan (2011); Tate Modern, London, UK (2010); and Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2009). Architectural collaborations include 'Genius Loci – Spirit of Place' at the 14th Venice Biennale of Architecture, Venice, Italy; the 2012 Serpentine Pavilion and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Stadium, with Herzog and de Meuron. In 2008, Ai Weiwei won the lifetime achievement award from the Chinese Contemporary Art Awards, and in 2011, he was awarded the Wall Street Journal Magazine's 'Innovator of the Year Award' and was made Honorary Academician at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. In 2012 he was awarded the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent from the Human Rights Foundation in New York. Most recently in 2015 he was awarded the Ambassador of Conscience Award by Amnesty International.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, it pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. In its second decade it introduced significant British artists, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Julian Opie and Shirazeh Houshiary. Today it continues to support a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza and many more. Across two exhibition spaces in London, one in Milan and a fourth under the High Line in New York, the gallery supports and develops 51 international artists.

Opening Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm.

Lisson Gallery exhibitions

London, 27 Bell Street: Jason Martin
Until 7 January

London, 52 Bell Street: Ai Weiwei *Fondation*
Until 7 January

Milan: Wael Shawky
Until 13 January

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