



Royal Academy of Arts
Ai Weiwei

Ai Weiwei

Main Galleries

19 September – 13 December 2015

Supported by:

DAVID MORRIS **LISSON GALLERY**
THE LONDON JEWELLER

In September 2015, the Royal Academy of Arts will present a landmark exhibition of the Honorary Royal Academician, Ai Weiwei. Although Ai is one of China's leading contemporary artists, his work has not been seen extensively in Britain and the Royal Academy will present the first major institutional survey of his artistic output. The exhibition will include significant works from 1993 onwards, the date that marks Ai Weiwei's return to China following more than a decade living in New York. Ai Weiwei has created new, site-specific installations and interventions throughout the Royal Academy's spaces.

On his return to China in 1993, Ai began to work in a direction that was both embedded in Chinese culture and reflected the exposure he had had to Western art during his twelve year sojourn in the US. Citing Duchamp as 'the most, if not the only, influential figure' in his art practice, Ai continues to engage with creative tensions between complex art histories, conceiving works with multiple readings in the process. To this end he employs traditional materials and interventions with historic objects throughout his work from Neolithic vases (5000-3000 BCE) to Qing dynasty (1644-1911) architectural components and furniture. By creating new objects from old, Ai challenges conventions of value and authenticity in modern-day China. These artworks include *Table and Pillar*, 2002, from his *Furniture* series, and *Coloured Vases*, 2015.

Ai works in a variety of different contexts, scales and media. He transforms materials to convey his ideas, whether in wood, porcelain, marble or jade, testing the skills of the craftsmen working to his brief in the process. Some pieces take months to create and pass through lengthy periods of experimentation, pushing the boundaries of the formal qualities of a material. Sculptures such as *Surveillance Camera*, 2010 and *Video Camera*, 2010, both masterpieces in craftsmanship, monumentalise the technology used to monitor, simultaneously rendering it useless and absurd. A new artwork, *Remains*, 2015, will also be included in the exhibition. Fabricated in porcelain, the work replicates in meticulous detail a group of bones that were recently excavated at a site of a labour camp that operated under Chairman Mao in the 1950s.

One of the key installations within the exhibition will be *Straight*, 2008-12, part of the body of work related to the Sichuan earthquake of 2008. Fabricated from ninety tonnes of bent and twisted rebar (the steel rods used in the construction of reinforced concrete buildings), collected by the artist and straightened by hand, it is a sober monument to the victims of the earthquake. The subject of

destruction, whether by demolition or as a consequence of natural disasters is one of a number of recurring themes and motifs that Ai returns to within his body of work.

Ai Weiwei said: "I'm honored to have the chance to exhibit at the Royal Academy of Arts. Tim Marlow and the rest of the exhibition team have a history of producing outstanding exhibitions. I'm very happy to be a part of it. This exhibition is my first major survey in London, a city I greatly admire. The selected artworks reflect my practice in recent years, and also include new works made specifically for this show."

Tim Marlow, Artistic Director and co-curator of the exhibition, said: "Ai Weiwei is one of the most important artists in the world today but his work has not been seen anywhere near as much as it should have been in the UK. This exhibition will begin to redress that balance and give an extensive new audience the chance to experience a creative phenomenon that is at once radical, political, architectural, historical, poetic, materially inventive and transformative ... even before they've walked through the Courtyard."

Adrian Locke, co-curator of the exhibition said: "Working with Ai Weiwei has presented us with new challenges but his ability to comprehend space, even without having experienced it first hand, and the clarity of his vision for the use of that space in relation to his work has been revelatory."

In 2011, Ai was detained for 81 days by the Chinese authorities and his passport confiscated. In an act of solidarity and support from his fellow artists and architects, Ai was elected an Honorary Member of the Royal Academy of Arts in May 2011. This exhibition will follow in the Royal Academy's tradition of celebrating its Royal Academicians, continuing the strand of programming that has showcased some of the most significant living artists including Anish Kapoor, David Hockney and Anselm Kiefer.

The exhibition has been developed in close collaboration with Ai, who has taken an architectural approach to the layout of the exhibition, within the Royal Academy's spectacular Main Galleries, befitting the monumental character of many of his pieces. The artist has virtually navigated the spaces from his studio in Beijing, through video footage of the galleries and architectural plans. The curators have also made regular visits to his studio. Ai Weiwei regained his passport in July 2015 and will be travelling to London for the Royal Academy's exhibition.

Biography

Ai Weiwei was born in 1957 in Beijing where he lives and works. He attended Beijing Film Academy and later, on moving to New York (1981–1993), continued his studies at the Parsons School of Design. Major solo exhibitions include Martin Gropius Bau (2014), Indianapolis Museum of Art (2013), Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C. (2012), Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan (2011), Tate Modern, London (2010) and Haus der Kunst, Munich (2009). Architectural collaborations include the 2012 Serpentine Pavilion and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Stadium, with Herzog & de Meuron. Among numerous awards and honours, he won the lifetime achievement award from the Chinese Contemporary Art Awards in 2008 and the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent from the Human Rights Foundation, New York in 2012; he was made Honorary Academician at the Royal Academy of Arts, London in 2011. Most recently, he was awarded the Ambassador of

Conscience Award from Amnesty International in 2015.

ORGANISATION

Ai Weiwei has been organised by the Royal Academy of Arts, London. The exhibition has been curated by Tim Marlow, Artistic Director and Adrian Locke, Senior Curator at the Royal Academy of Arts, in close collaboration with Ai Weiwei.

SUPPORTER'S STATEMENT

David Morris owner and CEO, Jeremy Morris said, "Our association with the Royal Academy of Arts embodies the creative inspiration behind the past 50 years of David Morris. David Morris embraces the very ethos of British modernism and tradition: a creative tension between the new and the old bound by a unique culture and heritage. This creativity and individuality of design is what sets David Morris, the London Jeweller, apart. Supporting the traditional home of British arts and culture, an institution that continually seeks to explore new boundaries through its chosen artists and exhibitions, is therefore the absolute personification of that spirit and creativity."

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with contributions from Tim Marlow, Artistic Director, Royal Academy of Arts, Adrian Locke, Senior Curator, Royal Academy of Arts, John Tancock, independent art historian and Daniel Rosbottom, Head of the School of Architecture at Kingston University and co-director of drdharchitects.

DATES

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Open to public: | Saturday 19 September – Sunday 13 December 2015 10am – 6pm daily (last admission 5.30pm) |
| Late night opening: | Fridays until 10pm (last admission 9.30pm) |

ADMISSION

£17.60 full price (£16 without Gift Aid donation); concessions available; children under 16 and Friends of the RA go free. All tickets include a multimedia guide.

TICKETS

Tickets for *Ai Weiwei* are available daily at the RA or visit www.royalacademy.org.uk. Group bookings: Groups of 10+ are asked to book in advance. Telephone 020 7300 8027 or email groupbookings@royalacademy.org.uk

IMAGES

Publicity images for *Ai Weiwei* can be obtained from Picselect, the Press Association's image service for press use. Please register at www.picselect.com and once registered go to the Royal Academy of Arts folder in the Arts section of Picselect.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Sign up to Royal Academy of Arts social media channels.
www.twitter.com @royalacademy #AiWeiwei

www.facebook.com/royalacademy

ABOUT THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS

The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768. It has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

HONORARY ROYAL ACADEMICIANS

Each year the RA appoints Honorary Royal Academicians who are distinguished artists that reside overseas. These currently include Georg Baselitz, Frank O. Gehry, Prof Arata Isozaki, Jasper Johns, Anselm Kiefer, Per Kirkeby, Jeff Koons, Daniel Libeskind, Mimmo Paladino, I. M. Pei, Renzo Piano, Julian Schnabel, Cindy Sherman, Frank Stella, William Kentridge, Jim Dine and Ai Weiwei.

For public information please print 020 7300 8000 and www.royalacademy.org.uk

Royal Academy of Arts, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J OBD

For further press information, please contact Alexandra Bradley at the Royal Academy Press Office on tel: 020 7300 5615, fax: 020 7300 8032 or email press.office@royalacademy.org.uk