



Royal Academy of Arts

Ai Weiwei

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Main Galleries

19 September – 13 December 2015

Supported by:

DAVID MORRIS **LISSON GALLERY**
THE LONDON JEWELLER

The Royal Academy of Arts presents 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 presents the first major institutional survey of his artistic output. The exhibition includes 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, is also 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 is *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 has created site specific sculptural installations for the Royal Academy's spaces, including his monumental *Tree* displayed in the Annenberg Courtyard, consisting of eight individual trees, each measuring around seven metres tall. It is the largest installation of this work to date and to enable the work to be displayed, the Royal Academy launched a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign, where £123,577 was raised; the largest amount ever raised for a European art project on Kickstarter. Ai has also created a new work for the Wohl Central Hall, featuring a chandelier made of Forever bicycles, a recurring subject in his work. Ai first began working with chandeliers in 2002 and this is the first time Ai has combined the two ideas, creating a chandelier from bicycles.

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 Main Galleries."

Adrian Locke, co-curator of the exhibition said: "Ai has greatly enjoyed the installation of his exhibition at the Royal Academy, constantly taking photos, finding time to sign autographs and take selfies with visitors as well as engaging with the technicians on site. For him, being part of the process has been an emotional one, as it is nearly five years since he was last directly involved with overseeing an exhibition of this scale and complexity being put together."

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 took 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 virtually navigated the spaces from his studio in Beijing, through video footage of the galleries and architectural plans. The curators also made regular visits to his studio. Ai Weiwei regained his passport in July 2015 and travelled to London for the final installation period of the 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.

A new site specific installation of Ai Weiwei's *Forever*, was installed outside 30 St Mary Axe (the Gherkin) on the 4 September as part of Sculpture in the City, in partnership with the Royal Academy of Arts exhibition. For more information, please go to: <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/sculptureinthecity>

SUPPORTERS' STATEMENTS

David Morris

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."

Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery Curatorial Director Greg Hilty said, "Lisson Gallery has pioneered the presentation of international contemporary art from its London base for nearly 50 years. Known for its work with leading figures in art including those associated with Minimalism, Conceptualism, New British Sculpture and subsequent key artistic directions, the gallery continues to champion both emerging and renowned artists globally. We have a long and deep relationship with the Royal Academy, an artists' institution without comparison, devoted to bringing art of the greatest range and quality to a large public. We are proud to represent Ai Weiwei, an artist and cultural figure of the highest importance, and to be able to support the Royal Academy in realising this outstanding exhibition of his work."

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.

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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

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For further press information, please contact Johanna Bennett at the Royal Academy Press Office on tel: 020 7300 5615 or email press.office@royalacademy.org.uk 15.09.15