

AIWEIWEI **PARADIGM**



AA

AIWEIWEI **PARADIGM**

WW

WE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AI WEIWEI STUDIO

YUN-HUA CHEN, CUI XING, GUI NUO, THOMAS HABBE,
CAZMIR LEENHEER, LI DONGXU, JENNIFER NG,
NADINE STENKE, XIA XING, XU YE

AMP ASSOCIATES

CATARINA TRAVASSOS, JOÃO COSTA PEREIRA

MATÉRIA RARA

RUTE VENTURA

NEUGERRIEMSCHNEIDER

DR. FELIX VON LÜTTICHAU

SÃO ROQUE

ANTÓNIO AFONSO LIMA, BERTA MARTINS, CATARINA GONÇALVES,
JOÃO LUDOVICE, LEONOR AMARAL, MARTA PEREIRA,
TERESA PERALTA, VALTER BEZERRA

SAKIP SABANCI MUSEUM

DR. NAZAN ÖLÇER, HÜMA ARSLANER

AND

STACEY PIERSON

SPECIAL THANKS TO RUTE VENTURA FOR HER COLLABORATION,
PROFESSIONALISM AND PATIENCE, WHO IS LARGELY RESPONSIBLE
FOR THIS PROJECT COMING TO A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION.

SPONSORSHIP







FOREWORD

PREFÁCIO

MÁRIO ROQUE

If having Ai Weiwei in São Roque is surprising, an exhibition of the artist's porcelain and Lego pieces is even more so.

Some might even say that it has nothing to do with São Roque's core artist's theme. But they are mistaken!

The artist's deeply rooted passion for Chinese ceramics, of which he is a renowned collector, is wholly in line with my predilection for 16th and 17th century Portuguese faience, given its evident syncretism with Chinese porcelain.

Privileged relations between Portugal and The East imposed Lisbon as the main European market for exotic goods. The allure of the Orient dominated the Portuguese cultural and artistic role models from the second half of the 16th century onwards, and porcelain was certainly not left out. This environment fostered the development of a singular type of faience, inspired by eastern models, which would later impact all other European productions. This faience gave rise to the earliest chinoiserie, well before the transposition of the orientalist taste into furniture, painting and any other reach of the decorative arts, which in the 18th century absorbed this aesthetic, mainly in France and England.

The Portuguese potters' creativity allowed for the insertion of western elements in Chinese environments, and vice-versa, either in depictions of landscapes, or by the introduction of selected anthropomorphic and zoomorphic elements. At any rate, it is noteworthy the unawareness of the symbolic meaning of the Chinese porcelain ornamentation, which was reinterpreted through ingenious decorative solutions of as much simplicity as beauty.

In the same way that Portuguese craftsmen integrated elements from oriental influence, so does Ai Weiwei adds and transforms such ancient patterns into contemporary expressions. Limited not just to porcelain but expanded in other materials such as his own version of *Girl with a Pearl Earring* by Vermeer here presented in Lego bricks. There's a belief in fusion of not just ancient and modern but also between cultures—in this case Portuguese and Chinese of which *Pazar* offers a glimpse reporting us to the work of Bordalo Pinheiro, a reference point to a country in which the artist chose to live.

The exhibition conforms perfectly to our 'mission': the fusion of cultures. São Roque's project aims at the convergence of people, cultures and religions, as well at the cohabitation that we have so often mentioned and shared. We hope that by praising equality—*Todos Diferentes, Todos Iguais* (All Different, All Equal)—we can contribute to the promotion of globalization and to put an end to discrimination. We thus consider that Ai Weiwei's exhibition, in his fight for freedom of expression and against totalitarianism, meets, head on, our purpose.

Thank you Ai Weiwei!

Se ter Ai Weiwei na São Roque é surpreendente, muito mais o é uma exposição de porcelana e peças em Lego do artista.

Dir-me-ão que não tem nada a ver com o fio condutor da São Roque. Enganam-se!

A grande paixão do artista pela cerâmica da China de que é, para além do mais, um grande colecionador, vai de encontro à minha predileção pela faiança portuguesa dos séculos XVI e XVII, dado o sincretismo evidente com a porcelana chinesa.

As relações privilegiadas entre Portugal e o Oriente, fizeram com que Lisboa se impusesse como o primeiro mercado europeu de produtos exóticos, entre os quais a porcelana. O fascínio pelo oriente dominou o padrão cultural e artístico luso, a partir da segunda metade do século XVI e, a porcelana a ele não escapou. Este ambiente foi propício ao desenvolvimento de uma faiança singular, seguindo os modelos orientais, que mais tarde iria influenciar toda a produção europeia.

A faiança portuguesa deu origem às primeiras "chinoiserie", muito antes da transposição deste gosto orientalista para o mobiliário, a pintura ou outro tipo de artes decorativas, que vieram a assumir esta estética mais tarde, já no século XVIII, quer em França, quer em Inglaterra.

Os oleiros deram largas à sua imaginação e criatividade, inserindo elementos ocidentais em ambientes marcadamente chineses e vice-versa, tanto nas representações da paisagem, como na introdução de diferentes elementos antropomórficos e zoomórficos. Em todos os casos, é notório o desconhecimento do simbolismo da ornamentação da porcelana chinesa, que vai ser interpretada através de ingénuas soluções decorativas, com tanto de simplicidade, como de beleza.

Da mesma forma que os portugueses integraram nas suas criações a estética oriental, Ai Weiwei modifica e/ou acrescenta contemporaneamente aos padrões antigos. E não só na cerâmica: fá-lo também noutros materiais, como na sua versão da "Menina do Brinco de Pérola" de Vermeer, em Lego, que integra a exposição. Acredita na fusão, não só da antiguidade com a modernidade, mas também de culturas, neste caso portuguesa e chinesa, de que é exemplo a obra "Pazar", inspirada no trabalho de Bordalo Pinheiro, uma homenagem ao país que escolheu para viver.

E enquadra-se perfeitamente na nossa "missão": fusão de culturas. O projeto da São Roque visa a aproximação de povos, diferentes culturas e religiões e a miscigenação de que tanto temos falado e partilhado. Esperamos que, enaltecendo a igualdade—"Todos Diferentes, Todos Iguais"—ajudem a promover a globalização, contribuindo para pôr fim às discriminações. Consideramos que a exposição de Ai Weiwei, na sua luta pela liberdade de expressão e contra o totalitarismo, vai de encontro ao nosso objetivo.

Obrigado Ai Weiwei!

AI WEIWEI

PARADIGM

RUTE VENTURA

Renowned for his fearless exploration of political and social themes, Ai Weiwei (b. 1957, Beijing) is one of the most prominent artists working today. His diverse multi-disciplinary practice incorporates sculpture, film, photography and literature. This intimate exhibition at *São Roque Too* centers on porcelain, a material extensively considered and explored by the artist.

Paired alongside a new series of LEGO portraits, the porcelain sculptures underscore themes of social and political tension, freedom of expression, authenticity, value, and craftsmanship. These sculptures reflect the artist's reinterpretation of traditional Chinese porcelain techniques fired in Jingdezhen, the epicenter of China's porcelain production since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644).

Each artwork serves as a paradigm, telling the trajectory from image to iconoclastic action, or juxtaposing tradition with contemporaneity, by attributing centuries old decorative art techniques to artistic expression. Ai Weiwei challenges these concepts in works such as *Ghost Gu Descending a Mountain* (2007) or *Blue & White Porcelain Plates (small)* (2017). Made ten years apart, each represents different concerns in their subject motifs, whether it's reflecting on the attributed value and meaning of antiquities during and following the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) or the plight of migrants and conflict—they develop with the artist's intention and increasingly reflect a heightened awareness of the urgency of humanity.

Ai Weiwei frequently revisits porcelain as a medium to tell a story that is often grounded on the idea of transliteration. The breadth of work unveils a materiality that has metamorphosed to one evocative of memory. They recall events such as the Sichuan earthquake of 2008 with *Porcelain Rebar* (2014) while *He Xie* (2011), encapsulates a counter culture meaning by being a homophone for harmony, otherwise slang for censorship.

At the height of Ai's persecution by Chinese authorities, several works were created addressing freedom of expression. These are represented in *Freedom of Speech Puzzle* (2018), a map of China rendered in parts, adorned with the expression 'free speech'. *Remains* (2014) presents a porcelain reproduction of human bones, gifted to the artist following an archaeological excavation of a labour camp

active in the 1950s. This period coincided with Ai's father, the poet Ai Qing, being ostracized and sent away for re-education during the aftermath of the Hundred Flowers Campaign, a moment also evoked in the delicate flower bed work *Blossom* (2015). They are in effect sculptures that lean on symbols of resilience, lived generations apart.

In both Eastern and Western artistic traditions, the portrayal of natural forms has remained a consistent theme. *The Wave* (2015), recalls the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake whilst holding the cultural reference point of Ma Yuan and Katsushika Hokusai's distinctive illustrations of the sea. In *Ruyi* (2012), a reference to imperial longevity scepters is re-adapted to remind us of human fragility through the depiction of internal organs. *Porcelain Stool with Sunflower Seeds motif* (2014) is a work that derives from the expansive installation *Sunflower Seeds* (2010) and retains this idea as it projects it to a domestic use. The sprawling installation *Pazar* (2017), pays homage to exuberant vegetables and fruits in street markets and it also connects vividly with the Portuguese vernacular presence of fruit and vegetables decorations in many households.

It is particularly through iconoclastic actions that a cross section of Ai Weiwei's work can be perceived. *Hanging Man in Porcelain* (2009), a portrait of Marcel Duchamp rendered in a porcelain-made hanger, is a reminder of the impact that Surrealism and Dadaism have had on Ai's formative years as an artist. By reconsidering everyday objects—*ready-mades*—it expands the possibility of redefined meaning through creative action. *Ai in Dripping* (2022), a portrait of the artist made with LEGO bricks, counterbalances Duchamp's. The iconography is matched to *Girl with Pearl* (2022), upending Johannes Vermeer painting from 1665. Using a labour-intensive process of image making by utilising toy blocks, Ai is continually pushing the boundaries of material.

In *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (2015), the artist is depicted destroying a priceless ancient urn. The defiant gesture captured in photography some 30 years ago is ambivalent, it condemns and celebrates the act of destruction to create something new and to cast a debate on hierarchies of value and agency and who attributes these to cultural objects. In *Dragon Vase* (2017), a facsimile of an antique

vase sold at auction for a significant sum is crafted with the exact same ancient technique as its original, except for the distinctive extra claw the artist placed on the mythical figure. Similarly, with *Set of Spouts* (2015) a group of Song Dynasty (960–1279) teapot spouts are over-glazed by the artist himself. Produced over a thousand years ago, these spouts were once rejected, broken and buried by their makers for not being sufficiently perfect before resurfacing again as contemporary objects.

Many works in the exhibition draw parallels with Portugal's long-standing tradition and appreciation for this medium as well as many archetypes derived from it. From the introduction of blue cobalt from China in the 16th century to the widespread use of tile-covered façades and the recurrent nature-inspired motifs—ceramics have consistently left a mark on the collective memory. This profound cultural influence was not overlooked in the artist's reflections on the country.

Lisbon 2024

CHALLENGING HISTORY

AI WEIWEI AND THE HISTORY OF CHINESE CERAMICS

STACEY PIERSON*

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ceramics, both as vessels and as a medium, have a very long history in China, where they were produced for and used by people at all levels of society. From the earliest surviving vessels made in the Neolithic Northeast to the ubiquitous porcelain of today, ceramic is a medium that is closely associated with China's national and international cultural identity. As is true with Chinese history in general, the history of ceramic production in China represents one of the longest such histories in the world. As a result, most types of ceramics that are known today were either developed in China, or first produced there on an industrial scale, including glazed stoneware such as 'celadons,' lead-glazed earthenware like 'sancai' figurines and perhaps the best known, 'blue-and-white' porcelain, which was first produced in China in the ninth century, the earliest blue-and-white ware in the world. There is some debate about whether the idea of using blue decoration on white ceramic originated in China, but certainly it was here that cobalt-blue decoration was first used on porcelain and high-fired white stoneware.¹ Today this type and style of ceramic is so familiar that it is difficult to consider that there was a time when such things did not exist. Blue-and-white porcelain is so popular, in fact, that it is also a symbol of China itself, for most of the world.

Within China, ceramics have played an important role in the construction of cultural identity. Certain 'antique' ceramics are displayed in Chinese museums as precious works of art and collectors worldwide consider them to be so. This has given rise to the fact that what might have been an ordinary eating bowl in the twelfth century is today elevated to the status of a rare and important art object, worth millions of dollars. This has occurred because, along with a long history of ceramic production and consumption in China, there is also an exceptionally long history of connoisseurship and

¹ WOOD, Nigel and TITE, Mike, 'Blue and White-The Early Years: Tang China and Abbasid Iraq Compared,' in PIERSON, Stacey, ed., *Transfer: The Influence of China on World Ceramics, Colloquies on Art and Archaeology in Asia* no. 24, London, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2009, pp. 21-45.

antiquarianism. From an early date, ceramic objects moved from the quotidian to the collected. For example, one of the earliest surviving collector's texts in Chinese, the *Essential Criteria of Antiquities* (*Ge gu yao lun*), which dates from 1388, devotes a whole chapter to ceramics, and within this, it assigns various types of ceramics to their place in a canon or hierarchy of vessels, one which is still, to some extent, current.²

The names given to many ceramics in this fourteenth century text by Cao Zhao are in most cases still in use today, and this confirms yet another important aspect of Chinese ceramics. The canonical ceramics noted by Cao Zhao represent not just the connoisseurship of the past but also historiography in China. Their dating, style, and the inscribed marks, which were in use from the fifteenth century onward reflect the dynastic periodization used to write Chinese history, with each period defined by the reign of a particular imperial ruling house. Thus, a Tang-period (618–906) ceramic can be seen to represent both Tang history and society. Since Tang ceramics also exist as collected objects in today's society, they can further represent the values of both periods in Chinese cultural history, the seventh to tenth century and the twenty-first century. We know, for example, that many of the surviving ceramics made in the Tang period were used for burial, and reflect the attitudes towards burial that were current at the time.³ The Tang ceramics collected today are antique and therefore 'precious' (but not necessarily in terms of market value), so they also represent current attitudes towards precious objects in society.

TECHNOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Some antique Chinese ceramics can also represent the technical virtuosity of China's past, bearing in mind that China has a very long

history as a manufacturing nation and that ceramics often reflected some of the most advanced technology of their time. This technology has for the most part continued to be used in the present day. Thus, a contemporary artist working in ceramic can tap into the expertise that has been built up over thousands of years in China, especially at Jingdezhen, which is located in Jiangxi province and is known as the 'porcelain city.' It was here that the porcelain, which went around the world in the early modern period originated and it was here that production of blue-and-white became industrialized. In the Yuan period (1279–1368), large quantities of blue-and-white porcelain were produced, and these were exported globally and consumed avidly, even though their decoration made few if any concessions to foreign taste. Among the most extensive collections of fourteenth century Chinese blue-and-white wares is that of the former Ottoman palace, the Topkapı Sarayı where most of the dishes have typically Chinese decoration. Yuan blue-and-white is still avidly collected today, with some rare examples fetching unusually high prices,⁴ and this indication of 'value,' along with the style and decoration of Yuan blue-and-white, has inspired contemporary potters and artists.

In Ai Weiwei's recreation and reinterpretation of one particular Yuan-dynasty jar (*Ghost Gu*), the cultural references are numerous. In choosing this particular piece, he is first and foremost commenting on its high market value, which, until recently, was unusual for a blue-and-white jar from that period. Even fifteen years ago, Yuan blue-and-white was not considered 'precious' or valuable in the same way that, for example, a Ru ware vase from the preceding Song dynasty (960–1279) might have been. Ai Weiwei has also reproduced it in multiple versions, which reference and replicate the mass-production technique used to create the original model.

² ZHAO, Cao (14th century), *Ge gu yao lun (Essential Criteria of Antiquities)*, 3 juan, 1388 (Shanghai Shang wu edition, 1940); translated into English by Percival David and published as *The Ko Ku Yao Lun: Essential Criteria of Antiquities*, London, Faber, 1970.

³ For a general overview of burial ceramics in China, see PIERSON, Stacey, *Chinese Ceramics: A Design History*, London, V&A Publications, 2009, pp. 75–81. 4. See the Yuan blue-and-white jar, which sold for 15.7 million GBP at Christie's in London, Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, Including Export Art, July 12, 2005, lot 88. 5. These were recently published in ZIJP, Sue-an van der, and WILSON, Mark, eds., *Ai Weiwei*, Rotterdam: Groninger Museum; London: Art Data, 2008, pp. 86–87, 89.

⁴ See the Yuan blue-and-white jar, which sold for 15.7 million GBP at Christie's in London, Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, Including Export Art, July 12, 2005, lot 88.

Ai's reproductions, of course, are also reinterpreted, with some painted in red⁵ and others painted inside out, which is a technically difficult style to create. For example, most blue-and-white forms of this type, whether ancient or modern, are painted with cobalt blue under a layer of clear glaze on the *outside* of a circular form, such as the *guan*-type jar shown here in this exhibition. Painting on the inside of jar-like vessels does have a long history in China, the earliest examples being Neolithic, but it was not done on porcelain as early as the fourteenth century, when the original model would have been made. In fact, complex, figurative inside painting of the type seen here was actually developed in the eighteenth century for small-scale luxury items like snuff bottles. Thus, the technique of blue painting on porcelain in general is not difficult, but painting a round, closed vessel on the inside is. In many craft traditions, such techniques might have been lost over time, but this is not the case with ceramics in China. It is notable therefore that artists like Ai Weiwei can commission production of nearly any ceramic conceived of from Jingdezhen, a site where traditional and advanced techniques of ceramic production can still be sourced.

Another important feature of these 'inside-out' jars is that the decoration is visible only when the jars are viewed from above, and this has associations with another aspect of ancient Chinese ceramics, so-called *anhua* or 'secret' decoration, which can only be seen when the object is viewed up close. This type of decoration typically appeared on high quality, 'imperial' porcelains of the early Ming period (1368–1644). Its essential invisibility gave the owner of the vessel a privileged knowledge of what the piece actually features, a knowledge which can indicate social and cultural status. Similarly, in the case of Ai's *Ghost Gu* (2007), the narrative content of the decoration of the original Yuan-period jar was also attractive for its symbolism as it referenced an ancient moral tale, one which would have been known by an educated viewer, and therefore recognized.

Such narrative designs appear on Chinese ceramics from an early date, and in the Yuan period can be related to the development of woodblock-printed book illustrations at that time.

A similar approach to 'reproduction', which appropriates the visual, technical and cultural properties of an ancient ceramic that had made headlines when it was sold at auction, was adopted by Ai for *Dragon Vase*. This is a recreation of a blue-and-white jar of the fifteenth century that was sold by Christie's in 2016.⁶ The recreation was produced in both blue-and-white and red-and-white with the designs very accurately depicted apart from one small feature: an extra claw for the dragon. On the original model, the dragon has five claws, a traditional indication of imperial factory production, which is generally assumed to be a symbol of the emperor. Here the dragon has six claws, which would never have appeared on an ancient piece. Another deviation from the original is the production of a red-and-white version of the jar. Red-and-white porcelains, utilizing underglaze copper red decoration, were made in the early fifteenth century but not with this decoration on that form. Thus, the red jars are historically accurate to some extent but not completely, just like the decorative motif. This reveals the virtual hand of the artist who, while not the actual maker, has devised the concept of what these jars represent: challenging the history and connoisseurship of Chinese ceramics, as well as traditional symbolism and its fetishization.

The technical complexity of the *Ghost Gu* and *Dragon Vase* could only have been accommodated at a factory town like Jingdezhen, which has over 1,000 years of experience in making and decorating porcelains. It also has a large specialized work force, which can make almost anything from porcelain on a large or a small scale. This technical knowledge would also have been necessary for a number of other ceramic works by Ai Weiwei, including the 'copies' of blue-and-white wares of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), the *trompe l'oeil* sunflower seeds, crabs and watermelons, as well as his largescale

⁵ These were recently published in ZIJPP, Sue-an van der, and WILSON, Mark, eds., *Ai Weiwei*, Rotterdam: Groninger Museum; London: Art Data, 2008, pp. 86–87, 89.

⁶ A magnificent very rare large blue-and-white 'Dragon' jar, *guan*. Xuande four-character mark in underglaze blue and from the period 1426–1435. Sold for \$HK158,040,000 / \$20,447,642 on 30 May 2016 by Christie's Hong Kong.

installation works such as *Pillar*. In the case of the ‘copies’ of Qing blue-and-white wares, these demonstrate and call attention to the widespread problem of faking and authenticity, especially when the original location of production is still in existence, hundreds of years after the Qing pieces were made, and when the potters at Jingdezhen are quite capable of recreating almost any ancient porcelain ever produced there. What is particularly interesting from the perspective of Chinese ceramics history is the fact that the copies Ai Weiwei commissioned are of Qing porcelains in the Ming style, which themselves were originally made to imitate a porcelain type from a previous period. In Chinese ceramics, the imitation of past styles was commonplace from the fourteenth century onward and is very much in keeping with a then-current taste for what is known as archaism in the arts. Ai Weiwei’s production of sunflower seeds, crabs and watermelons in porcelain can also be considered from a historical perspective. While there are clearly personal references for the artist in these forms, in ceramic terms, they also recall the eighteenth-century fashion for ceramic skeuomorphs, or mimetic creations in ceramic of other materials, such as plants, foods, wood, lacquer, etc.⁷ One can see Ai Weiwei’s porcelain oil spills, water drops and even the gold vessels as a further extension of this.

CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

In addition to using the ceramic medium and China’s advanced ceramic technology in his work, Ai Weiwei also famously manipulates and destroys actual ancient ceramics in ways, which confirm their status as culturally significant objects, precious artworks (as they are perceived today) and symbols of the past (*Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* [1995]; *Colored Vases* [2015]). What is interesting is that, perhaps for reasons of cost, he often uses ancient ceramics that are not canonical in the connoisseurship of fine Chinese ceramics, for example painted Neolithic jars of the Yangshao-culture

type (c. 4800-3000 BCE) or unglazed Han-dynasty jars (206 BCE-220 CE). In the current market for Chinese ceramics, in collecting terms, these are somewhat value-less; a Ming connoisseur, the benchmark collector in China, would have never collected them so their significance is more symbolic than actual. As we have seen, an important aspect of the cultural context for ceramics in China is the recognition of their multiple histories. The most comprehensive history is that informed by archaeology, a science that developed in China during the early twentieth century. In this history, every type known is represented, from Neolithic earthenware jars from various cultures to Ming-dynasty blue-and-white and early twentieth century Republican-period wares. The other, more culturally determined history of ceramics in China is that which was created by and is still currently referenced by connoisseurs. It is what Chinese scholars would equate to an antiquarian history, and thus it is not comprehensive but rather informed by taste and cultural biases. The connoisseurship history of Chinese ceramics excludes earthenware almost entirely, concentrating instead on Song stoneware (which were later divided into ‘five classic’ types, in the Ming),⁸ and certain Ming and Qing porcelains. It is not, therefore, this history which Ai Weiwei wishes to subvert with his destruction of early vessels. On the other hand, the ancient vessels (assuming they are not copies, for these are legion) are archaeologically significant. Culturally in China and elsewhere, there is a bias against the destruction of such objects, but this is where the ceramics further demonstrate their meaning because another theme in Ai Weiwei’s work in general is the thoughtless destruction or ruination of ancient buildings in China.

DEFINING THE MAKER

The conceptual nature of Ai Weiwei’s work in and with ceramics sets him apart from contemporary ceramic artists in China whose work involves hands-on design and production. To create his ceramic

⁷ PIERSON, *Chinese Ceramics*, p. 96.

⁸ These were defined as Ding, Ru, Jun, Guan and Ge wares.

works Ai relies on the abilities of highly skilled makers who are, for the most part, anonymous potters. In films on the production of his works at Jingdezhen (*Sunflower Seeds* [2010]), he gives these makers a voice, but they are not artists in the same way that studio potters are. They make his art possible instead. This dual identity for ceramic makers in China parallels the universal dichotomy between industrial and studio ceramics. Factories make hundreds of thousands of industrial pots in a system that can be traced back to the tenth century in China. Studio ceramics, on the other hand, have only recently developed independently in China, since the 1980s, so most of the ceramics from China's history are in fact factory wares. Perhaps because the tradition is still relatively new, much of the work of studio potters has been deemed to be somewhat retrograde by some critics,⁹ who want to see these makers move beyond tradition and Western-influenced styles to create an independent, contemporary aesthetic. Nonetheless, there are many potters who have done so both in vessel-based and sculptural work.

Ai Weiwei, however, does not create ceramics himself today and would not therefore be considered a ceramist or 'potter,' but he did train to be a potter at one of the traditional production sites of *cizhouyao* wares, a stoneware with characteristic painted slip decoration that was made mainly in the Song and Yuan periods (tenth to fourteenth centuries). This exhibition includes one of the works he made there (*Plate with Bird Motif*) and thus attempts to position him as a maker as well as a designer. As an artist, his engagement with traditional Chinese ceramics parallels that of studio potters who consistently reference traditional types, styles and techniques; but we can also see that this knowledge of the material and its production methods informs his more conceptual approach to ceramic production. He knows what can be done with porcelain in the right hands, and he also knows what porcelain represents as both a material and a type of object.

Interestingly, appropriating techniques and styles from what used to be called 'oriental' ceramics has for a century been an indica-

tion of a sophisticated aesthetic for many potters outside of China, the most famous of whom is probably Bernard Leach (1887–1979). But within China, the difficulty for independent potters, rather than conceptual artists who use ceramics as a medium, has been to break away from the weight of that revered tradition to use the medium in new ways. In present-day China, the tradition of ceramic history is therefore both an inspiration and a curse, demonstrating once again how important it is for Chinese cultural identity and therefore the work of Ai Weiwei. Ceramic is both a medium and a subject which, in this way, is unique to China in world history and unlike more precious materials such as jade, ceramic is also the material representation of China globally. For Ai Weiwei, ceramic is both a medium and a material culture with profound historical, cultural and technical associations with China and its histories.

'Challenging History: Ai Weiwei and the History of Chinese Ceramics' © Stacey Pierson; published for the first time in *Ai Weiwei on Porcelain* (Istanbul: SU Sakıp Sabancı Museum, 2017).



AI WEIWEI

A TIMELINE

- 1957** — Born in Beijing, China
- 1978** — Enrolled at the Beijing Film Academy
- 1981–93** — Lived in the USA, and briefly studied at the Parsons School of Design and Art Students League of New York
- 1997** — Co-founded the China Art Archives and Warehouse (CAAW)
- 1999** — Took part in the 48th Venice Biennale
— Built the studio in Caochangdi, Beijing
- 2003** — Broke the ground for Beijing's National Stadium, jointly designed with Herzog & de Meuron for the 2008 Summer Olympics
- 2002–05** — 1st/2nd Guangzhou Triennial
- 2006** — 15th Biennale of Sydney
- 2007** — *Fairytales*, documenta12, Kassel
- 2008** — Launched Citizens' Investigation after the Sichuan Earthquake in 2008 and compiled a list of 5197 student victims
— Chinese Contemporary Art Awards (CCAA)
— *Mock up*, Beijing, with Herzog & de Meuron, at the 11th Venice Architecture Biennale
- 2009** — *Ai Weiwei: According to What?*, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo
— *Ai Weiwei. So Sorry*, Haus der Kunst, Munich
- 2010** — The Prism of Reason, Kassel Citizen Award
— *Ai Weiwei: Sunflower Seeds*, Unilever Series, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London
- 2011** — Secretly detained for 81 days in Beijing without formal charges
— Accepted visiting professorship at the Berlin University of the Arts
— Co-Artistic Directors of the 4th Gwangju Design Biennale
— Honorary Academician at the Royal Academy of Arts, London
— Membership at the Academy of Arts, Berlin
- 2012** — Foreign Member of Royal Swedish Academy of Arts
— Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent
- 2013** — *Bang*, at the 55th Venice Biennale
- 2014** — *@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz*, Alcatraz Island, San Francisco
- 2015** — Relocated to Europe after the authorities in Beijing returned his passport
— Ambassador of Conscience Award, Amnesty International, Berlin
— *Evidence*, Martin-Gropius Bau, Berlin
— *Ai Weiwei*, Royal Academy of Arts, London
- 2017** — Documentary: *Human Flow* (premiered at the Venice International Film Festival and shortlisted for Best Documentary at the Oscars)
— *Ai Weiwei: Good Fences Make Good Neighbors*, Public Art Fund, New York
— *Trace*, Hirschhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.
- 2020** — Documentaries: *Coronation and Cockroach*
— *History of Bombs*, Imperial War Museum, London
- 2021** — *Published 1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows* in English (translated into dozens of languages)
— Documentary: *Rohingya*
— *Ai Weiwei. In Search of Humanity*, Albertina Modern, Vienna
- 2022** — *Ai Weiwei: The Liberty of Doubt*, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge
— The new production of *Turandot* premiered at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma (direction, sets, costumes, videos by Ai Weiwei)
- 2023** — *Ai Weiwei: Making Sense*, Design Museum, London
— *Ai Weiwei. In Search of Humanity*, Kunsthal Rotterdam, Rotterdam
- 2024** — Published *Zodiac: A Graphic Memoir*





AI WEI WEI PARADIGM CATALOG
MAY 15th TO JULY 31st, 2024

Hanging Man in Porcelain is a tribute to the influential figure of Marcel Duchamp.

Ai Weiwei spent 12 formative years in New York, from 1981 to 1993. During this period he was exposed to contemporary art currents of which Pop Art and Conceptualism left a lasting impression.

It is in particular the figure of Marcel Duchamp that influenced a body of work dealing with concepts of ready-made and subversion of form and function. One of such works was a profile of Duchamp executed with a coat hanger: *Hanging Man* (1985).

Fast forward a few years, Ai would revisit this work in porcelain, merging a dialogue between East and West and 20th and 21st centuries archetypes of art:

'I felt that Duchamp was a very fascinating character, very ingenious, almost like an Oriental thinker or a chess player. That is why I paid him this homage, using a hanger to form his profile.'

01

HANGING MAN IN PORCELAIN, 2009

Porcelain, silver pigment, wooden frame

Dim.: 50.0 × 43.5 × 3.5 cm

Edition of 100

EXHIBITED AT:

- 2020 YEAR OF THE RAT — Tang Contemporary, Bangkok (Thailand)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — MON, Curitiba (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Belo Horizonte (Brazil)
- 2018 RAIZ — OCA Museum, São Paulo (Brazil)
- 2018 INOCULATION — Corpartes, Santiago (Chile)
- 2017 INOCULATION — Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires (Argentina)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2014 AI WEIWEI AT BLENHEIM PALACE — Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire (UK)
- 2014 AI WEIWEI — Chambers Fine Art and Francis Naumann Fine Art, New York (USA)



Devised as an installation comprising 2,000 porcelain crustaceans, *He Xie*, or river crab, commemorates the feast that Ai Weiwei hosted, focusing attention on the ordered demolition of his Shanghai studio by authorities in 2010.

River crabs are a delicacy in China, but have also come to represent a subversive element in contemporary culture.

He Xie, a homophone for the government's buzzword, harmony, became slang for censorship under the guise of stability.

The term was particularly applied to 'harmonisation' of internet forums where Ai Weiwei was a prolific contributor from 2006 to 2009.

The representation of crabs is a subject matter recurrent through different dynasties. In this exhibition the work introduces the imitation of life-like subject matters.

02

HE XIE, 2011

Porcelain

Dim.: 78.0 × 57.0 × 14.0 cm

Edition of 35 + 5AP

EXHIBITED AT:

- 2022 AI WEIWEI AT KAVIARFACTORY — KaviarFactory, Henningsvaer (Norway)
- 2021 AI WEIWEI: DEFEND THE FUTURE — The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (Korea)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — MON, Curitiba (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Belo Horizonte (Brazil)
- 2018 RAIZ — OCA Museum, São Paulo (Brazil)
- 2018 INOCULATION — Corpartes, Santiago (Chile)
- 2017 INOCULATION — Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires (Argentina)
- 2017 D'AILLEURS C'EST TOUJOURS LES AUTRES — Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne (Switzerland)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2017 YOKOHAMA TRIENNALE, Yokohama (Japan)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI AT MELJER GARDENS: NATURAL STATE — Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids (USA)
- 2016 AI WEIWEI. LIBERO — Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (Italy)
- 2015 AI WEIWEI AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY — Royal Academy, London (UK)
- 2014 ON THE TABLE. AI WEIWEI — La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona (Spain)
- 2014 AI WEIWEI AT BLENHEIM PALACE — Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire (UK)
- 2014 EVIDENCE — Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin (Germany)
- 2014 AI WEIWEI: ACCORDING TO WHAT? — Brooklyn Museum, New York (USA)
- 2012 ACCORDING TO WHAT? — The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C. (USA)





On 12 May 2008, a massive earthquake measuring 8.0-magnitude hit Sichuan province in southwest China, causing approximately 80,000 deaths. Among them were thousands of students who died under collapsed school buildings. In December, Ai Weiwei promoted a grass-roots inquiry of the earthquake via his blog due to government inaction and unwillingness for transparency. Out of this collective effort, over 5000 names of children were identified having perished in the collapsed school buildings.

This event marked both the beginning of the clash between Ai and the Chinese government and became a prominent theme in his art.

The rebar collected from the sites of destroyed schools have become a recurring motif in Ai's oeuvre, notably the vast installation Straight (2008–2012), comprising 90 tonnes of mangled steel rebar made straight.

By using the medium of porcelain to duplicate the mangled lengths of steel in Porcelain Rebar, Ai Weiwei commemorates the student casualties.

03

PORCELAIN REBAR, 2014

Porcelain

Dimensions variable

Unique set

EXHIBITED AT:

- 2017** D'AILLEURS C'EST TOUJOURS LES AUTRES — Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne (Switzerland)
- 2017** AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2017** AI WEIWEI AT MELJER GARDENS: NATURAL STATE — Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids (USA)





Taking inspiration from Homer's *Odyssey*, Ai Weiwei reflects on the cyclical nature of history in the series of porcelain plates. He draws a correlation between the ancient journey undertaken by Odysseus and the recent global refugee crisis.

Six themes become central to understanding the whole—*War* (1), *Ruins* (2), *The Journey* (3), *Crossing the Sea* (4), *Refugee Camps* (5), *Demonstrations* (6). These themes reflect the various traumas defining the refugee condition today. They use the language of blue-and-white porcelain and the traditional painting style of late Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) till early Ming dynasty (1368–1644), while referring to early Greek and Egyptian carvings and pottery.

The works' contemporary nature is revealed upon closer inspection, with the drawings of imagery sourced from the internet and the artist's own experiences while filming his first documentary feature, *Human Flow*.

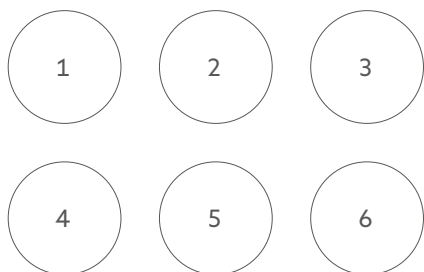
04

BLUE-AND-WHITE PORCELAIN PLATES, 2017

Porcelain

Set of 6 pieces, each approx. Ø31.0 × 5.0 cm

Editon of 10 + 2AP



EXHIBITED AT:

- 2022 CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE — Galleria Continua, Rome (Italy)
- 2022 THE LIBERTY OF DOUBT — Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (UK)
- 2021 MARBRE, PORCELAIN, LEGO — Galerie Max Hetzler, Paris (France)
- 2018 CAO / HUMANITY — UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles (USA)
- 2018 FAN-TAN — MUCEM, Marseille (France)
- 2017 D'AILLEURS C'EST TOUJOURS LES AUTRES — Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne (Switzerland)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)





This stool made of celadon porcelain, depicts in relief multiple sunflower seeds—a symbol reminiscent of China’s Cultural Revolution and a metaphor for its population in relation to Chairman Mao, often depicted with a sunflower.

Ai Weiwei first developed the motif in a sprawling installation made of 100 million of handmade and hand painted porcelain seeds presented at Tate in 2010. These and the latter series of stools were commissioned in Jingdezhen, the porcelain epicenter in China.

Appropriating what is a ubiquitous piece of classical garden and imperial furniture, often associated with social elites, the stool becomes an anthropomorphized object.

05

PORCELAIN STOOL WITH SUNFLOWER SEEDS MOTIF, 2014

Porcelain

Dim.: 45.0 × 45.0 × 45.0 cm

Unique in a series of 44 works

EXHIBITED AT:

- 2017 TYRE — Bohman Forsblom Gallery, Stockholm (Sweden)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2014 AI WEIWEI AT BLENHEIM PALACE — Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire (UK)
- 2014 AI WEIWEI: ACCORDING TO WHAT? — Brooklyn Museum, New York (USA)



The ruyi scepter, literally ‘as one wishes,’ is a ceremonial emblem of longevity and good fortune.

Ai reinterprets the traditional form by composing his ruyi of porcelain human organs, bringing to mind man’s mortality, rather than good health.

In doing so, he takes on traditions such as Ming Dynasty’s (1368–1644) porcelain creations celebrating everyday objects or natural forms bringing them into a contemporary conversation.

What could be perceived as viscera, rendered in porcelain becomes an elevated and softly abstract anatomical sculpture.

06

RUYI, 2012

Porcelain

Dim.: 41.0 × 16.0 × 10.0 cm

Unique in a series of 16 works

EXHIBITED AT:

- 2021 AI WEIWEI: DEFEND THE FUTURE — The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (Korea)
- 2021 RAPTURE — Cordoaria Nacional, Lisbon (Portugal)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — MON, Curitiba (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Belo Horizonte (Brazil)
- 2018 RAIZ — OCA Museum, São Paulo (Brazil)
- 2017 TYRE — Bohman Forsblom Gallery, Stockholm (Sweden)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2017 D’AILLEURS C’EST TOUJOURS LES AUTRES — Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne (Switzerland)
- 2017 MAYBE, MAYBE NOT — The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Israel)
- 2016 AI WEIWEI. LIBERO — Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (Italy)
- 2016 AROUND AI WEIWEI: PHOTOGRAPHS 1983–2016 — Camera Italian Centre for Photography, Turin (Italy)
- 2014 AI WEIWEI AT BLENHEIM PALACE — Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire (UK)
- 2011 AI WEIWEI ABSENT — Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei (Taiwan, Republic of China)
- 2009 AI WEIWEI. SO SORRY — Haus der Kunst, München (Germany)





The motif in this jar is a direct reference to a vase from the Yuan period (1269–1368) that sold at auction for a record breaking amount.

Thinking on themes of reproduction, mechanical and manual, and authenticity, Ai Weiwei created a series of vases, all depicting a portion of the story of Ghost Gu.

'At that time, I had a certain understanding of antiquities and ancient Chinese objects including pottery firing. My question was, how could I use a modern language to explain this traditional art and craft? The jar was sold with an extremely high price. In fact, I think the understanding of Chinese art, whether in China or in the West, is very superficial, so I made a set of jars with one side full of drawings and the other side plain white.

They were made according to a certain logic so that the paintings on each one of them would be different. It is a conceptual art.' (*Ai Weiwei*)

07

GHOST GU DESCENDING THE MOUNTAIN, 2007

Porcelain

Dim.: 46.0 × 46.0 × 42.0(h) cm

Unique in a series of 66 works

EXHIBITED AT:

2017 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)

2006 SERGE SPITZER & AI WEIWEI: TERRITORIAL — Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main (Germany)



The Wave sculptures were created after the devastating 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami.

The porcelain sculpture exemplifies the artist's use of traditional languages to reflect upon contemporary events.

Bringing to mind Southern Song (1127–1279) court painter Ma Yuan's (ca. 1160–1225) depiction of waves and Katsushika Hokusai's (1760–1849) wood-block print, *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (ca. 1830–1832)—The Wave illustrates the artist's use of earlier pictorial motifs as 'cultural ready-made'.

Spanning over a decade, this series of work is realised in the fine porcelain kilns in Jingdezhen.

08

THE WAVE, 2015

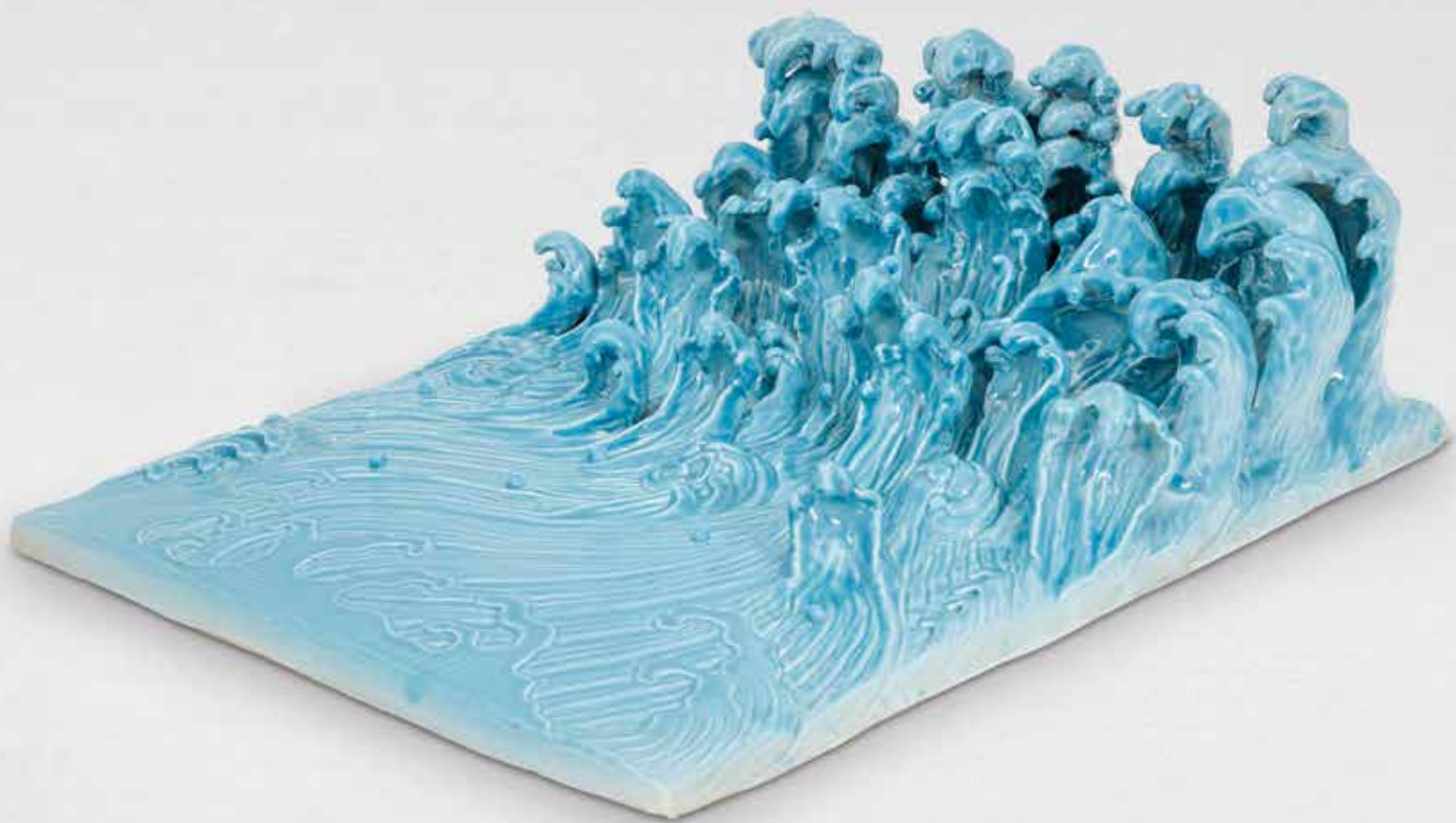
Porcelain

Dim.: 48.0 × 37.0 × 18.0(h) cm

Unique in a series of 34 works

EXHIBITED AT:

- 2022** THE PLEASURES OF HOME — Greifswalderstraße 207, Berlin (Germany)
- 2022** CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE — Galleria Continua, Rome (Italy)
- 2017** LAW OF THE JOURNEY — National Gallery Prague, Prague (Czech Republic)
- 2016** KNEADED KNOWLEDGE – THE LANGUAGE OF CERAMICS — Kunsthaus Graz, Graz (Austria)
- 2016** AI WEIWEI. LIBERO — Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (Italy)



Set of Spouts is a porcelain cast of teapot spouts from the Song dynasty (960–1279)—just a small sample of those 40,000 that Ai has assembled until now and displayed elsewhere as a carpet covering the gallery floor.

The spouts, recalling human bones, raise questions relating to the authenticity and cultural value of archaeological objects. Ranging over a thousand of years, the teapot spouts were subject to precise craftsmanship and those that were rendered imperfect were broken and cast off, eventually being buried over the centuries.

In the mid-1990s Ai Weiwei began to amass a vast quantity of ancient Chinese objects and fragments of objects that were discarded as a result of accelerated industrialization and urbanisation, incorporating them in his work. These included Neolithic implements such as stone axes and tools, and fragments of Buddhist ritual figures from the fourth to the sixth century CE. By displaying them as contemporary works of art, the artist gives these objects a new lease of life.

09

SET OF SPOUTS, 2015

Porcelain

Set of 6 w/ dim.: 80.0 × 40.0 × 10.0 cm; 60.0 × 40.0 × 10.0 cm;
40.0 × 40.0 × 10.0 cm; 40.0 × 20.0 × 10.0 cm; 20.0 × 20.0 × 10.0 cm;
20.0 × 10.0 × 10.0 cm

Unique set

EXHIBITED AT:

- 2019** RESETTING MEMORIES — MUAC, CDMX (Mexico)
- 2017** AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2017** MAYBE, MAYBE NOT — The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Israel)
- 2015** AI WEIWEI: TANG CONTEMPORARY AND GALLERIA CONTINUA — Beijing (China)





The slogan 'Free Speech' decorates each of the individual porcelain ornaments that collectively form a map of China with its distinctive regions. Ai has produced numerous Map works in disparate materials, such as wood, milk powder cans and cotton, over the past twenty years.

The components of Free Speech Puzzle follow the style of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). They are based on traditional pendants made of various materials such as wood, porcelain or jade, depending on the wealth of the individual, that bore a family's name and served as a marker of status and as a good-luck charm for the wearer.

10

FREE SPEECH PUZZLE, 2018

Porcelain

Dim.: 51.0 × 41.0 × 0.8 cm

Unique in a series of 12 works

EXHIBITED AT:

- 2021 AI WEIWEI: DEFEND THE FUTURE — The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (Korea)
- 2021 RAPTURE — Cordoaria Nacional, Lisbon (Portugal)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — MON, Curitiba (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Belo Horizonte (Brazil)
- 2018 RAIZ — OCA Museum, São Paulo (Brazil)
- 2018 INOCULATION — Corpartes, Santiago (Chile)
- 2017 INOCULATION — Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires (Argentina)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI — Massimo de Carlo, Milan (Italy)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2017 MAYBE, MAYBE NOT — The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Israel)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI AT MEIJER GARDENS: NATURAL STATE — Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids (USA)
- 2016 AI WEIWEI 2016: ROOTS AND BRANCHES — Mary Boone Gallery, New York (USA)
- 2016 AI WEIWEI. LIBERO — Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (Italy)
- 2016 AROUND AI WEIWEI: PHOTOGRAPHS 1983–2016 — Camera Italian Centre for Photography, Turin (Italy)
- 2015 AI WEIWEI AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY — Royal Academy, London (UK)



Remains is composed of porcelain replicas of sets of human bones excavated at the site of a labor camp that operated under Mao Zedong in the late 1950s.

Presented as archaeological and epistemological facts, this facsimile of human bones bares a parallel with the artist's own personal biography more than it lends itself as vanitas.

In 1958, Ai Weiwei's father, Ai Qing, and thousands of other intellectuals were purged during the Anti-Rightist Movement, in itself a consequence of the Hundred Flowers Campaign. During this brief moment, the regime invited criticism from civil society to later punish it with detention, reeducation and forced labour.

Remains is therefore a reminder of an opposition condition. One that decades later the artist would experience himself during 81 days of incarceration in 2011.

11

REMAINS, 2014

Porcelain

Set of 13 w/ dim.: 16.0 × 14.0 × 10.0 cm; 18.0 × 13.0 × 9.0 cm;
20.0 × 15.0 × 10.0 cm; 30.0 × 4.0 × 3.0 cm; 12.0 × 11.0 × 6.0 cm;
12.0 × 5.0 × 3.0 cm; 14.0 × 5.0 × 2.0 cm; 11.0 × 9.0 × 4.0 cm;
7.0 × 5.0 × 4.0 cm; 8.0 × 3.0 × 15.0 cm; 5.0 × 2.0 × 2.0 cm;
6.0 × 4.0 × 3.0 cm; 7.0 × 4.0 × 1.0 cm

Unique in a series of 8 sets

EXHIBITED AT:

- 2023 MAKING SENSE — The Design Museum, London (UK)
- 2022 LA COMMEDIA UMANA: MEMENTO MORI — Church of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice (Italy)
- 2021 RAPTURE — Cordoaria Nacional, Lisbon (Portugal)
- 2021 AI WEIWEI: DEFEND THE FUTURE — The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (Korea)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — MON, Curitiba (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Belo Horizonte (Brazil)
- 2018 RAIZ — OCA Museum, São Paulo (Brazil)
- 2018 INOCULATION — Corpartes, Santiago (Chile)
- 2017 INOCULATION — Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires (Argentina)
- 2018 FAN-TAN — MUCEM, Marseille (France)
- 2017 ROLAND FLEXNER - AI WEIWEI — Massimo de Carlo, Hong Kong (China)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2017 MAYBE, MAYBE NOT — The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Israel)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI AT MEIJER GARDENS: NATURAL STATE — Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids (USA)
- 2016 AI WEIWEI. LIBERO — Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (Italy)
- 2016 AI WEIWEI AT CYCLADIC — Museum of Cycladic Arts, Athens (Greece)
- 2016 EXAGGERATION — Galerie Forsblom, Helsinki (Finland)
- 2015 AI WEIWEI AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY — Royal Academy, London (UK)





This vessel was inspired by the original antique Dragon Vase, which was sold at the highest price at an auction house, and produced with exactly the same technique.

In Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) and Ming dynasty (1368–1644), blue and white were often used, but red glaze is more rare and more precious. The color requires a more precise firing temperature. When it is successfully made, it is more unique.

The accurate reproduction of the original vessel is only deterred by the inclusion of a six claw. Whereas the presence of dragon representations indicated the manufacturer for the imperial house, Ai subverts the design questioning not just the perceived value of antique replicas but also merging the contemporary art attributed value within it.

12

DRAGON VASE, 2017

Porcelain

Dim.: Ø51.0 × 50.0 cm

Unique in a series of 20 works

EXHIBITED AT:

- 2022** THE LIBERTY OF DOUBT — Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (UK)
- 2021** MARBRE, PORCELAINE, LEGO — Galerie Max Hetzler, Paris (France)
- 2018** CAO / HUMANITY — UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles (USA)
- 2018** REPUTATION — Tang Contemporary, Hong Kong (China)
- 2017** AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)



The artwork is informed by the tradition of mimicking organic forms in Chinese porcelain making.

Replicating natural objects has historically been a method to refine artistic techniques, which also relates to the still-life tradition in Western art history.

Ai adds the dimension of cultural ready-made in his installation *Pazar*, which is influenced by the markets he encountered along his travels, particularly in Turkey where the title of the work is equally synonym of market and Sunday.

This work inadvertently communicates with Portugal's own similar porcelain traditions incepted by Bordalo Pinheiro's ubiquitous centerpieces. Both artists looked at the tradition of the craft of porcelain to expand on the possibilities of the medium through scale, repetition and complexity.

13

PAZAR, 2017

Porcelain

Dimensions variable

Unique set

EXHIBITED AT:

2017 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)





Following his arrest and secret detention lasting 81 days in 2011, the artist's passport was confiscated and a battery of surveillance cameras were installed around his studio house in Beijing. In response, on 30 November 2013, Ai announced that he would begin the daily practice of placing a bouquet of fresh flowers in the bicycle basket outside of his studio until his passport was returned. He photographed the flowers and shared the images on his website and social media accounts. Ai's supporters also shared images under the tag *#FlowersForFreedom*. The project concluded on 22 July 2015, following the return of the artist's passport.

During this period, a series of works depicting flowers developed, of which *Blossom*, created in Jingdezhen, is a remarkable example in monochrome.

This porcelain flower bed equally retains a reference to the Hundred Flowers Campaign, extending the symbolism for freedom of expression.

14

BLOSSOM, 2015

Porcelain

Dim.: 80.0 × 80.0 × 8.0 cm

Unique in a series of 64 works

EXHIBITED AT:

- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — MON, Curitiba (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Belo Horizonte (Brazil)
- 2018 RAIZ — OCA Museum, São Paulo (Brazil)
- 2018 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Mardin (Turkey)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2017 D'AILLEURS C'EST TOUJOURS LES AUTRES — Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne (Switzerland)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI AT MEIJER GARDENS: NATURAL STATE — Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids (USA)
- 2016 AI WEIWEI. LIBERO — Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (Italy)
- 2016 AI WEIWEI 2016: ROOTS AND BRANCHES — Mary Boone Gallery, New York (USA)
- 2016 ANDY WARHOL. AI WEIWEI — Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (USA)
- 2016 OVERRATED — Haines Gallery, San Francisco (USA)
- 2015 ANDY WARHOL. AI WEIWEI — National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (Australia)



The original photograph in this portrait was taken by Gao Yuan. It shows the artist with a partially shaved head baring a surgery scar.

Though playfully rendered in LEGO bricks and reminiscent of Andy Warhols's screen printing aesthetic, the portrait coalesces a critical moment.

In 2009, Ai ran into police the night before testifying at a court hearing on behalf of a Sichuan earthquake activity, Tao Zuoren, following his research on faulty construction in the collapsed schools. In order to stop him from testifying, Ai was arrested and beaten severely in the head while in his hotel room in Chengdu and was subject to emergency brain surgery shortly after.

The portrait is thus charged with the gravity of an artist becoming a persecuted dissident.

15

AI IN DRIPPING, 2022

Toy bricks (LEGO)

Dim.: 115,5 × 115,5 cm

Unique work



In 1995, Ai Weiwei intentionally dropped a Han dynasty (206 bce–220 ce) urn, capturing the action in three frames. The images depicted a stoic young man committing an act of destruction, or creation, upon an ancient vessel.

Twenty years later, the images have been recreated in LEGO bricks. The pixelated nature of this material is of particular interest to Ai Weiwei and was explored further in works such as *Trace* and *Letgo Room*, large-scale installations depicting portraits of political dissidents whose internet source images were of such low resolution that LEGO became a terrific conduit for reproduction.

16

DROPPING A HAN DYNASTY URN, 2015

Toy bricks (LEGO)

Triptych, 192.0 × 153.5 × 3.0 cm

Prototype

EXHIBITED AT:

- 2023 AI WEIWEI — Tang Contemporary, Seoul (Korea)
- 2023 AI WEIWEI: ZODIAC — Vito Schnabel Gallery, St. Moritz (Switzerland)
- 2022 LA COMMEDIA UMANA: MEMENTO MORI — Church of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice (Italy)
- 2022 THE LIBERTY OF DOUBT — Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (UK)
- 2021 AI WEIWEI: DEFEND THE FUTURE — The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (Korea)
- 2019 BARE LIFE — Kemper Art Museum, St. Louis (USA)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — MON, Curitiba (Brazil)
- 2019 RAIZ — CCBB, Belo Horizonte (Brazil)
- 2018 RAIZ — OCA Museum, São Paulo (Brazil)
- 2018 FAN-TAN — MUCEM, Marseille (France)
- 2018 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Mardin (Turkey)
- 2018 INOCULATION — Corpartes, Santiago (Chile)
- 2017 INOCULATION — Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires (Argentina)
- 2017 TYRE — Bohman Forsblom Gallery, Stockholm (Sweden)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI ON PORCELAIN — Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2017 D'AILLEURS C'EST TOUJOURS LES AUTRES — Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne (Switzerland)
- 2017 FRAGILE STATE — Pinchuk Art Center, Kiev (Ukraine)
- 2017 MAYBE, MAYBE NOT — The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Israel)
- 2017 AI WEIWEI AT MEIJER GARDENS: NATURAL STATE — Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids (USA)
- 2016 AI WEIWEI. LIBERO — Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (Italy)
- 2016 ANDY WARHOL. AI WEIWEI — Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (USA)
- 2015 ANDY WARHOL. AI WEIWEI — National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (Australia)







Johannes Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1665) is one of the most recognizable western old masters' paintings. In a hypothetical sense, the girl here represented stands as a contemporain of the Dutch Golden Age where the obsession for Chinese inspired porcelain truly took off across Europe.

By depicting the subject in LEGO, the artist emphasizes its tronie features and colour attributes in a similar way to what was available for Vermeer as a product of its time.

The use of a ready-made material such as bricks and the sense of template reproducibility in this small portrait stimulate the debate between exclusive and accessible art.

17

GIRL WITH PEARL, 2022

Toy bricks (LEGO)

Dim.: 38.0 × 38.0 cm

Edition 9 of 10



COLOPHON



SÃO ROQUE, ANTIQUES AND ART GALLERY

RUA DE S. BENTO 199B AND 269
1250-219 LISBON
PORTUGAL

P +351 213 960 734

M +351 962 363 260

E GERAL@SAOROQUEARTE.PT

WWW.ANTIGUIDADESSAOROQUE.COM

COMPILATION AND ORGANIZATION

AI WEIWEI STUDIO
MATÉRIA RARA
SÃO ROQUE

TEXTS

RUTE VENTURA
STACEY PIERSON

EDITION

SÃO ROQUE

PHOTOGRAPHY

PHOTO CREDITS BY AI WEIWEI STUDIO, EXCEPT
PAGE 16 (©PETER MACDIARMID), PAGES 26-27,
33, 34-35, 36-37, 47 AND 51-53 BY JOÃO KRULL
(©SÃO ROQUE), GATEFOLD COVERS (©GAO YUAN)

GRAPHIC INTERVENTION OCCURS ON THE
PHOTOGRAPHS ON PAGES 06, 16, 18-19, 57 AND
GATEFOLD COVERS

EDITING AND IMAGE TREATMENT

JOSÉ FRANCISCO MARTINS

GRAPHIC DESIGN AND PAGINATION

JOSÉ MENDES

TYPE

AZO SANS, RUI ABREU—R-TYPOGRAPHY.COM
CHAPARRAL PRO, CAROL TWOMBY—ADOBE.COM

PRINTING AND FINISHING

MR ARTES GRÁFICAS

LEGAL DEPOSIT

531185/24

ISBN

978-989-35563-1-3

PRINT RUN

500 COPIES

MAY 2024



////////// 25,00€



