

Ai Weiwei

23 May – 19 July 2014
27 Bell Street, London

For his third solo exhibition with Lisson Gallery, Ai Weiwei has created a monumental new installation of bicycles as part of an ongoing series, 'Forever', as well as a number of hand-carved, domestic-scale copies – in various materials including wood, stainless steel and crystal – of some highly personal objects. These include: a marble recreation of his father's armchair; two sets of humble cosmetics bottles fashioned from jade; various handmade facsimiles of coat-hangers and pairs of handcuffs; as well as the window handles taken from Beijing taxis, which appear to be readymades, only remade in clear glass.

Although some of the sculptures in this show relate to his secret detention of 2011 – during which he spent 81 days accompanied only by his interrogators and the scant furnishings of his cell – the overall impression is of Ai's life as it was before and currently is in Beijing, confined as he is to his native China. The formative influence and example of Marcel Duchamp, as an artistic hero of Ai's discovered during his period living in New York from 1983–93, also looms large.

A ghostly, carved-marble gas mask, like a death's-head emerging from a tomb, relates to the perpetual pollution experienced in the Chinese capital city, while the massing of bicycles also addresses a stereotypical national symbol in an uncompromising and unconventional way. Ai's groupings of stainless-steel bikes – here configured in different modular shapes and layers of geometrically stacked structures – refer to the famous 'Forever' brand of bicycles that have been mass-manufactured in Shanghai since 1940. Once ubiquitous, this classic marque and indeed the perceived profusion of pushbikes on Beijing streets are now steadily dying out, to be replaced by smog-emitting cars on clogged highways and six-lane ring roads. The transparent *Taxi Window Crank* pieces are further examples of a surreal political system that insists on removing such mundane items from public life for fear that protesters would transmit their leaflets through car windows during sensitive times.

Ai is also showing four major works in the newly refurbished Chapel at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (24 May–2 November). He is also the subject of two other international solo exhibitions, in Berlin at the Martin-Gropius-Bau ('Evidence', until 7 July) and in New York, where his touring show: 'Ai Weiwei: According to What' ends on 10 August.

About the artist

Conceptual artist Ai Weiwei positions himself in and out of his Beijing studio as a cultural arbiter. Compelled by a sense of social conscience, his artistic practice extends across many roles, from filmmaker and photographer, to writer, publisher, curator and architect. As an heir to Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, yet digging deep into Chinese heritage, he moves freely between a variety of formal languages, and reflecting on contemporary geopolitics, he takes no prisoners. In recycling historical materials, loaded with meaning, such as Han Dynasty vases or wood from destroyed temples, Ai distils ancient and modern aesthetics in works of salvage or iconoclasm. Public commissions, like bringing 1,001 Chinese citizens to the small German town of Kassel for documenta 12 (*Fairytale*, 2007), or the pouring of hundreds of millions of handmade porcelain seeds into the Tate's Turbine Hall

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(*Sunflower Seeds*, 2010), are audacious gestures that command global attention, but are always underlain with humour and compassion. He is one of the leading cultural figures of his generation and consistently displays great courage in placing himself at risk to affect social change through his art. He serves as an example for legitimate social criticism and free expression both in China and internationally.

Ai Weiwei was born in Beijing in 1957, where he resides and works today. 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, Berlin (2014); Brooklyn Museum, New York (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 and 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.

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About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Since being founded in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, it has championed the careers of artists who have transformed the way art was made and presented. It continues to support the future of its artists, the legacy of historical figures, the evolving practice of established artists and the wide-ranging potential of emerging and new talents. As well as showing and supporting an important array of international artists, such as Marina Abramović, Gerard Byrne, Tatsuo Miyajima and Santiago Sierra, Lisson Gallery also represents many younger artists of this stature, including Allora & Calzadilla, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander and Haroon Mirza.

Exhibition Facts

Opening Hours Monday-Friday 10am-6pm, Saturday 11am-5pm

Location 27 Bell Street, London, NW1 5BY

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Forthcoming shows

Milan: Pedro Reyes 28 May – 18 July

Venice: *Genius Loci – Spirit of Place* An exhibition on public art and its environment, through the work of 18 artists: Palazzo Franchetti, 7 June – 23 Nov (during the Venice Architecture Biennale).

London: Marina Abramovic / Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg 18 Sept – 1 Nov