

Ai Weiwei

Paris: 57, rue du Temple, 3 September – 8 October 2016



Opening: 3 September, 4–8:30 pm

Galerie Max Hetzler is delighted to announce **Ai Weiwei's** first solo exhibition in a Paris gallery.

A key figure in the Chinese independent art scene, Ai Weiwei conceives sculptures and installations in addition to being known as a photographer, architect and curator. The son of renowned poet Ai Qing who was exiled for 20 years in a labour camp, Ai Weiwei is a keen observer of today's society. His outputs have become inextricably tied to his daring actions promoting justice and Human Rights.

As a fine connoisseur of Chinese art and antiques which he has been collecting for decades, Ai Weiwei grounds part of his work on the recognition of Chinese culture that had been banned during the Cultural Revolution. He favours the use of traditional materials such as porcelain, jade, marble or precious wood, also resorting to ancient objects to divert them from their common use. The artworks displayed in this exhibition including *Tree Trunk*, which is cast in iron, attests to the plenitude of techniques used by this protean artist.

Treasure Box is a masterpiece of craftsmanship conceived in precious rosewood or huali (used since the Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644). The work has been entirely built without resorting to a single nail or screw. Hidden mortises and tenons fix the pieces together. This giant puzzle box conceals a cylindrical structure in its centre. The different sides of the cube are made of hexagons, revealing in places the inside of the structure. This latter is formed of an intricate combination of shelves. Once opened, the work unveils multiple compartments of outstanding finishes. *Treasure Box* is part of a series of cubes with similar dimensions - one square meter - made of ebony, crystal and compressed tea. *Treasure Box* stands out for its concept of concealing and revealing, which could be referencing to today's political context.

Surveillance camera is entirely made in marble, a symbol of wealth and power, which is also reminiscent of funerary monuments. The skilfully carved rock comes from a quarry used in building the Forbidden City and later Mao Zedong's mausoleum. The camera has been modelled on the fifteen or so surveillance cameras positioned outside Ai's studio following his detention in 2011.

Bicycle Basket with Flowers in Porcelain is a nod to the daily performance 'Fresh Flowers' in which Ai daily placed a fresh bouquet of flowers in his bicycle basket parked in front of his studio during 600 days. Ai Weiwei was thus mocking the seizure of his passport which lasted for over four years. This delicate work, incredibly precise, has been made in Jingdezhen, which is known as the 'Porcelain Capital' due to its long history of pottery production.

Ruyi ('may your wish be granted'), also made from Jingdezhen's kilns, has symbolised power for more than 2000 years and has been used as a good fortune gift by scholars since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). The object initially had the form of a note tablet. It then transformed into a sceptre and later into a 'mushroom of immortality'. The tablet gave the holder the right to talk to the Emperor and later served as a written medium for sacred texts after the introduction of Buddhism under the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD). Ai Weiwei reinterprets the object, shaping it as a delicate dragon in porcelain. This attests to the artist's 'appropriation' of old Chinese objects or myths.

Ai Weiwei started his *Tree* series in 2009, assembling branches, trunks and roots from dead trees found in mountains from the South of China and sold in the streets of Jingdezhen to form majestic and tortuous trees which he regards as abstract paintings. Chinese culture attaches great importance to trees: they are seen as connecting heaven and the underworld. Works from the *Tree* series have been exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in London and more recently at the Fondation Louis Vuitton, as well as one recently installed in the new wing of Tate Modern.

Contrary to the trees, the imposing 4 metres high *Tree Trunk* in cast iron is made up of a single piece. The work has been casted out of a real tree trunk and has subsequently been left outside in order to oxidize, the passing of time slowly turning the material into this very particular red.

Ai Weiwei is to release a movie entitled 'The Human Flow' (working title) in 2017 from the hundreds of hours he shot in refugee camps.

Ai Weiwei (*1957, Beijing, China) lives and works in Berlin. He studied at Beijing Film Academy and attended the Parsons School of Design after moving to New York in 1981. Major solo exhibitions were held at Helsinki Art Museum (2015), Royal Academy (2015), Alcatraz Prison, San Francisco (2014), 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). He also took part to *Andy Warhol | Ai Weiwei*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2015). Architectural collaborations include the 2008 Beijing Olympic Stadium with Herzog & de Meuron. He was awarded numerous honours, among which the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent from the Human Rights Foundation (2012) and was made Honorary Academician at the Royal Academy of Arts, London (2011).

Upcoming exhibitions and fairs:

PARIS

Beatriz Milhazes

17 October – 19 November 2016

Charles Gaines

26 November – 14 January 2017

BERLIN

Liz Larner

16 September – 22 October 2016

Goethestrasse 2/3, Berlin-Charlottenburg

Wilhelm Schürmann, Fotograf und Sammler

16 September – 22 October 2016

Bleibtreustrasse 45, Berlin-Charlottenburg

For further information, please contact:

presse@maxhetzler.com or +33 1 57 40 60 80

www.maxhetzler.com

www.facebook.com/galeriemaxhetzler

www.instagram.com/galeriemaxhetzler

www.twitter.com/hetzlergallery