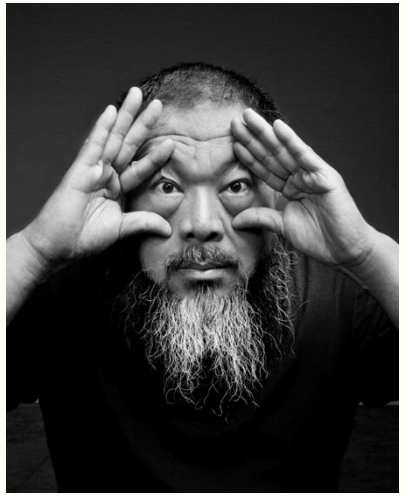
Artist Resources – Ai Weiwei (Chinese, b. 1957)



Ai, 2012
Photo: Ai Weiwei Studio

Ai on Instagram Ai on Art21 Ai Weiwei at Lisson Gallery Ai at Galerie Max Hetzler

Ai started his career with the Stars artists in 1979 Beijing. Read more from Sylvia Vetta, "Ai Weiwei and the Stars Art Movement," and see some photographs documenting the birth of this movement.

In 2009, the Mori Art Museum organized *Ai Weiwei: According to What?* As the first major international survey of the artist's work. The exhibition was intended to "spotlight issues of freedom of expression, as well as individual and human rights both in China and globally." It traveled extensively for years, including to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Pérez Art Museum, Brooklyn Museum, and Art Gallery of Ontario. Read reviews of the Miami edition in ARTPULSE, D.C. edition in The Brooklyn Rail, and Brooklyn edition in Aesthetica Magazine and the New York Times.

Ai Weiwei: Sunflower Seeds was a major commission for the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern in 2010. The monumental installation featured millions of unique porcelain sunflower seeds made by a team of specialists in Jingdezhen, China, the historical center of porcelain production. Read an article about the project on Smarthistory and watch an artist interview on YouTube. Reviews were also published in The Guardian, Hyperallergic, and the New Yorker.

Ai launched his first major public sculpture project, *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* in 2011, reimagining the traditional Chinese zodiac figures that were once situated at the fountain-clock of the Yuanming Yuan imperial retreat in Beijing. The sculptures were on display in bronze at Grand Army Plaza in New York, Somerset House, the Crocker Art Museum, Carnegie Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Prague, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Cleveland Museum of Art, Seattle Art Museum, and LACMA. A gold edition was also on view at Palm Springs Art Museum, Portland Art Museum, Phoenix Art Museum, Crow Museum of Asian Art, and MCA San Diego.

Ai Weiwe: New York Photographs 1983–1993 was at the Asia Society in 2011, featuring 227 photographs taken by the artist documenting his life in 1980s New York.

In 2014, *@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz* was at the notorious military fortress, federal penitentiary, and protest site. Watch a video walkthrough of the exhibition on YouTube and a video by KQED about the making of the exhibition.

Foam in Amsterdam installed *#SafePassage* in 2016, focusing on the stories of migrants fleeing to Europe. An installation of the same name was on the façade of the Konzerthouse Berlin and, later, the Minneapolis Institute of Art. The next year, in 2017, Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park organized *Natural State*. Listen to an interview with the artist about the exhibition on WGVU Public Media.

Ai Weiwei: History of Bombs was at the Imperial War Museum in London in 2020. Read a review of the installation in The Guardian.

In 2025, the Seattle Art Museum installed *Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of Ai Weiwei*, the first retrospective of the artist's work in over a decade and his largest-ever US exhibition. Read a review in The Brooklyn Rail and watch an interview with the artist produced by SAM.

Ai published *On Censorship* in 2026 reconsidering "power, ideology, and the boundaries of free speech." Listen to the artist talk about his essay on NPR's' Book of the Day Podcast.



Ai standing on *Sunflower Seeds*, 2010
Photo: Peter Macdiarmid



Ai Weiwei (Chinese, b. 1957)
Vases in Five Colors (Green), 2024
Murano glass

On loan from Collection of Dominic Ng; L2026:65.2

Ai Weiwei is one of the most influential artists and activists of his generation. Born in the midst of the Cultural Revolution to a poet father labeled as a "rightist," Ai grew up in labor camps and exile. He is among the first generation of artists to study outside of China after reform in 1980, and was arrested for political and activist work several times before permanently relocating to Europe. **Vases in Five Colors (Green)** is part of a series examining the relationship between old and new. This glass, Coca-Cola-branded ceremonial urn questions our cultural and material values in a globalized world. It is an extension of *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995), when the artist smashed a 2000-year-old ceremonial object, saying: "It's powerful only because someone thinks it's powerful and invests value in the object."



Ai Weiwei
Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn, 1995
M+ Sigg Collection

On view October 14, 2026 – February 8, 2027