



PRESS RELEASE

CAMERA – Centro Italiano per la Fotografia

presents

Around Ai Weiwei: Photographs 1983-2016
curated by **Davide Quadrio**

from Friday 28 October 2016 to Sunday 12 February 2017

Turin, October 2016. From Friday 28 October 2016 to Sunday 12 February 2017, CAMERA – Centro Italiano per la Fotografia presents *Around Ai Weiwei: Photographs 1983-2016*, curated by Davide Quadrio.

The exhibition is part of the investigation process into photography undertaken by Camera, which over the year since its opening has focused its activities on the study of this language as a medium of artistic expression, of political reflection and social inclusion. Camera has systematically drawn comparisons between photography and other media as well as other artistic disciplines, highlighting its great importance in the contemporary debate and its ability to interface both with the cultural universe as a whole and with a range of audiences. Numerous events, both national and international, including seminars, interventions in the field of the leading institutions in the sector and the circulation of exhibitions organised by Camera in major foreign venues (the FOMU in Antwerp, the Fotomuseum in Winterthur, the SCoP in Shanghai, etc.), testify to the quality of the work carried out and its value within the broader panorama of photography, art and research. *Around Ai Weiwei* constitutes a further step in this programme, investigating the relationship with photography and video of one of the unquestioned leading names in contemporary art but also a figure central to the analysis of the relationship between East and West as well as our recent and not so recent history.

Along an exhibition itinerary that includes photographic and video materials, with a number of documents never seen before, *Around Ai Weiwei* highlights the various stages of the artistic career of Ai Weiwei – a provocative and outspoken figure – investigating not only his artistic poetics from his debut right up to the present day, but also his role in the cultural, social and political debate, both in China and throughout the world. The exhibition explores the genesis of Ai Weiwei as a public figure and as an icon of the Asiatic world, as well as stimulating a reflection on the way in which the contemporary environment has transformed him and thus pondering ‘who’ Ai Weiwei has become.

“In a world of exhibitions showcasing Ai Weiwei’s monumental works, we conceived of this project – says the curator Davide Quadrio – to expressly redirect the attention of the public to documentary evidence that circumnavigates the artist’s life, as a testimonial to his fascinating journey as a man, creator and activist. For most, Ai Weiwei is a global product of Chinese origin.”

When entering Camera we encounter a single monumental artwork. *Soft Ground* is a reminder of the Tiananmen crisis, which was a pivotal moment in the history of contemporary China. For over a decade, these events directly affected artists all over the country, and still today, it represents a trauma that has not been completely overcome. *Soft Ground* is a 45 meter-long carpet with a 1:1 photo reproduction of the traces left behind by tanks on a dirt track to the southwest of Beijing. The tracks are reminiscent of the traces left behind by the tanks sent into Tiananmen Square during the protest of 1989. As we walk softly along its tracks within the exhibition space, the scale and size of the historical incident is translated.

On the wall, to the right of the carpet, runs Ai Weiwei’s life in New York in a series of photographs entitled *New York Photographs 1983-1993*; the images are like stills from a black and white film, sequencing a selection of private moments and encounters from over 10,000 pictures that Ai took when he lived in New York, from 1983 to 1993.

After this introductory promenade, and as a consequence of what it implies, the exhibition chronologically develops through thematic chapters. Clustered between the overarching narrative, the two projects *Chang’an Boulevard* and



Beijing: The Second Ring set the scene in the capital of China in the early 2000s. The video works dissect and observe the city as it evolves and morphs.

Also included is a rarely seen interview by Daria Menozzi *Before Ai Wei Wei* (1995) in which the artist engages in an intimate conversation, giving glimpses of his first years back in China following his return from New York. This rarely seen documentary is of utmost importance in affirming Ai's sensible contribution to the intellectual, cultural and artistic discourse in China in the 1990s. *Before Ai Wei Wei* is a rare compendium of what he was thinking and doing at that point in history.

Upon this photographic stage, highlighting the urbanism and architecture of the times, the exhibition displays *Beijing Photographs 1993-2003*. This never before seen series of photographs is debuting at Camera. The series portrays the life and actions of Ai Weiwei and his entourage just before the quick process of transformation that ultimately turned Beijing into the global city it is today. The key image chosen by the artist summarize and illustrate the show is a photograph from 2003, *The Forbidden City during the SARS Epidemic* (room 5). In this self-portrait, evocative of the yet-to-be-invented selfie, Ai Weiwei stands alone in the Forbidden City, emptied by the epidemic that isolated China from the rest of the world for six months and turned cities into ghost towns. In this silent, human-less place, the public figure Ai – the confrontational and outspoken artist – sits at the heart of where the cosmogony of power is at its strongest: the Forbidden City of Beijing, the imperial centre of the universe. The image creates a zone of silence, a ground zero for the exhibition to reveal specifics of Ai Weiwei's activities to viewers. In *Beijing Photographs 1993-2003*, Ai captures the demarcation of the contemporary art scene in China: a frontier that has shaped, and arguably propelled, the artist's career and global image.

The autobiographical storyline of the exhibition is punctuated with a selection of sculptural artworks that become symbols mirroring the development of Ai Weiwei's life over four decades. The artist's readymades and porcelain works are an expansion on the multilayered abilities and subtleties of Ai. Each sculpture manifests as a point of reflection, allowing for a suspension of time as visitors pass through Camera's rooms.

The last section of the exhibition premieres one of Ai's latest projects: *Refugee Wallpaper*, a collage of 17,000 images shot by Ai Weiwei during his ongoing contact with the refugee emergency which is spreading across Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere. This endless series seems designed to make viewers question the implications of the artist's activism. Within the delicate boundaries of global events and international politics, the drama of migration has turned into a spectacle like everything else.

"Here the voice of the artist fills the void of the thousands that go unheard," Davide Quadrio explains, *"but at the same time we bear witness to an obsessive act of voyeurism that triggers feelings of unease. Does this grandiose multiplication of records make us see and understand more, or less? Years after his self-portraits series, what remains and what has changed in the artist's take on self-representation?"*

The exhibition will be accompanied by a cycle of dates with screenings of documentaries in which various profiles and interviews present the process of construction and transformation of the public figure and contemporary icon of Ai Weiwei.

The exhibition is supported by Compagnia di San Paolo and Lavazza, and promoted and organised with the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, alongside the major retrospective *Ai WeiWei. Libero* on view from 23 September 2016 to 22 January 2017 at Palazzo Strozzi, offering a specific study of his photography and video work.

From 11 October at the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, the monumental installation by Ai Weiwei *Fragments* (2005) will be on show, a powerful metaphor for contemporary reality and the fragility which lies behind manifestations of power.



Around Ai Weiwei: Photographs 1983-2016
On View: From 28 October 2016 to 12 February 2017
Venue: CAMERA – Centro Italiano per la Fotografia, Turin
Curator: Davide Quadrio
Adjunct Curator: You Mi
Research and Coordination in China: Ryan Nuckolls

Download link

<https://we.tl/2lAtQUZms3>

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Ai Weiwei biography

Ai Weiwei was born in Beijing in 1957. His childhood was scarred by the exile of his father, the Chinese poet Ai Qing, branded a 'rightist'. In 1976, after Mao Zedong's death, Ai Weiwei enrolled at the Beijing Film Academy and became one of the founding members of the avant-garde 'Stars' group. He lived in New York from 1983 to 1993, briefly attending the Parsons School of Design and starting out on his artistic career.

In 1993, he returned to China to be with his ailing father. He contributed to the creation of a community of avant-garde artists in Beijing's East Village and co-founded the China Art Archives & Warehouse (CAAW), one of the country's first independent art spaces. From the early 1990s, he began to develop an interest in architecture, designing his own studio-house in Caochangdi, founding the architecture studio FAKE Design and, in 2008, co-designing Beijing's 'Bird's Nest' national stadium together with the Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron. An outspoken human rights activist, Ai was arrested by Chinese authorities in April 2011 and held incommunicado for three months.

He received an honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Politics and Social Science, University of Ghent, Belgium in 2010, as well as many awards, including the Skowhegan Medal (2011) and the Chinese Contemporary Art Award (2008). In 2012, Weiwei was awarded the Human Rights Foundation's Vaclav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent, and Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience Award in 2015. His work has appeared in major exhibitions such as that at the Royal Academy of Arts, London (2016); at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2015); the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC (2013); the Asia Society Museum, New York (2011); the Tate Modern, London (2010); the São Paulo Art Biennial (2010); the Haus der Kunst, Munich (2009); the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2009), and Documenta XII (2007). The exhibition *Around Ai Weiwei* is organised and promoted in collaboration with the Palazzo Strozzi Foundation as part of the major Florentine show *Ai Weiwei. Libero*.

Davide Quadrio biography

Davide Quadrio is a China-based producer and curator. For a decade, he founded and directed the first not-for-profit independent creative lab in Shanghai, Bizart Art Center, designed as a platform to foster the local contemporary art scene. In 2007, Quadrio created Arthub Asia, a production and curatorial proxy active in Asia and throughout the world. He is currently hosted by the Shanghai Visual Art Institute and is working as a curator for the Aurora Museum, Shanghai. Assisted by its ongoing collaboration with Arthub, the Museum plans to open a new contemporary art wing in 2016. He is a member of the Curatorial Board of the PAC, Pavilion of Contemporary Art in Milan, as well as being responsible for the international curatorial programme of Scene 44, Marseille: a production platform covering visual arts, movement and space. With Bizart and its team, and currently with Arthub Asia, Quadrio has organised hundreds of exhibitions, educational activities and exchanges both in China and further afield, developing relationships with local and foreign artists as well as independent organisations and institutions worldwide.



PRATICAL INFORMATION

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Via delle Rosine 18, 10123 - Turin, Italy

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Opening hours:

Monday 11.00 am – 7.00 pm

Tuesday closed

Wednesday 11.00 am – 7.00 pm

Thursday 11.00 am – 9.00 pm

Friday 11.00 am – 7.00 pm

Saturday 11.00 am – 7.00 pm

Sunday 11.00 am – 7.00 pm

Last admission 30 minutes before closing time

Tickets:

Admission fee €10

Reduced €6 for visitors up to 26, over 65 years old and owners of Abbonamento Musei Torino Piemonte Ticket holders: Gallerie d'Italia (Milano, Napoli, Vicenza), Museo Nazionale del Cinema, MAO, Palazzo Madama, Borgo Medievale, GAM – Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Touring Club Italiano, Forte di Bard, MEF – Museo etto Fico, Amici della Fondazione per l'Architettura, Ordine degli Architetti member, AIACE member, Enjoy member, Slow Food member, Centro Congressi Unione Industriale Torino member.

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