

MASSIMODECARLO

AI WEIWEI

Massimo De Carlo is proud to present a solo exhibition by Ai Weiwei in its Milan gallery in Palazzo Belgioioso.

This is the second show of Ai Weiwei with Massimo De Carlo: the iconic Chinese artist, renowned for his radical work that challenges the political and the contemporary, will present on this occasion a series of sculptures and installations in the historically relevant context of the gallery's space.

Upon entering the first room, the visitor is confronted with a large-scale sculpture, *Garbage Container*. The sleek yet daunting object, crafted in *huali* wood, resembles a wardrobe but in fact offers a tragic commentary on the life of impoverished children in China. Modeled after a garbage container, the work is a tribute to the five homeless children from Guizhou Province who died of carbon monoxide poisoning in 2012, after lighting a fire in a bin to stay warm.

Behind it, stretched on the antique walls of the gallery, is the intricate white and gold wallpaper *The Animal That Looks Like a Llama But is Really an Alpaca*. The work addresses censorship and free speech by featuring repeated images of surveillance cameras, the Twitter bird logo and an alpaca icon—which since 2009 has become a symbol for the fight for free speech in China.

In the second room, the artist challenges Chinese history and heritage through his pivotal and iconoclastic works *Colored Vases* and the iconic triptych *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*. In *Colored Vases*, the artist conceals the history of each ancient vase by dipping them in colourful buckets of industrial paint: the question of the authenticity of the vases mocks and dramatizes the intentional childlike sabotage of history, conveying the political message of the gesture. The same gesture becomes fierce and affirmative in the series of renowned black and white images *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, produced here in LEGO bricks, where the artist is immortalized destroying an antique Han pot whilst staring stoically at the viewer.

In *Free Speech Puzzle*, Ai Weiwei uses an ancient craft technique, specifically the Qing dynasty imperial style of hand painting porcelain to create a geomorphic map decorated with the slogan 'Free Speech'.

In the smaller and more intimate room of the gallery is the most delicate yet strenuous and persistent trace of Ai Weiwei's protest against the authorities: *Bicycle Basket With Flowers in Porcelain* immortalizes the 600 days that the artist arranged daily blooms in the bicycle basket outside his studio, protesting against the withholding of his passport by the authorities. This touching gesture is documented in the video *放鲜花直至恢复自由旅行的权力*, in the last room of the exhibition.

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Ai Weiwei (b. 1957) is an artist who resides and works in both Berlin and Beijing. China's Communist Party denounced his father, the poet Ai Qing, in 1958 and he and his family were sent into exile, first near the North Korean border and then eventually in Xinjiang province. They returned to Beijing in 1976 after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Ai studied animation at the Beijing Film Academy, and then studied art in New York in the early eighties. Upon returning to China a decade later, Ai advocated for experimental artists by publishing underground books and curating avant-garde exhibitions. Ai has worked in a variety of roles, as an artist, architect, curator, filmmaker, and activist. He is an outspoken advocate of human rights and freedom of speech. Ai is the recipient of the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent in 2012 and the Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award in 2015.

Hard Facts:

Massimo De Carlo, Milan

Piazza Belgioioso, 2 - 20121 Milan, Italy

From 12th of September until 18th of November, 2017

Opening reception on Monday 11th of September, from 19:00 to 21:00

Open Tuesday to Saturday, 11:00 – 19:00

For further information and materials:

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