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MAJOR WORKS BY CHINESE ARTIST AND POLITICAL ACTIVIST AI WEIWEI COMING TO AUSTIN



As part of The Contemporary Austin’s collaboration with Waller Creek Conservancy and its Museum Without Walls program, the monumental sculptures Forever Bicycles, 2014, and Iron Tree Trunk, 2015, will be on view at the Waller Delta and The Contemporary Austin – Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria, respectively, beginning June 3, 2017.

Project is made possible by the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation and represents the second collaboration between The Contemporary Austin and Waller Creek Conservancy.

MAY 2, 2017, AUSTIN, TEXAS – The Contemporary Austin and Waller Creek Conservancy announce an upcoming two-part outdoor exhibition of large-scale installations by Chinese artist and political activist Ai Weiwei, to go on view to the public beginning June 3, 2017, as part of The Contemporary Austin’s partnership with Waller Creek Conservancy and its Museum Without Walls program. The works include

the striking installation *Forever Bicycles*, 2014, installed by The Contemporary Austin at the Waller Delta (74 Trinity Street, Austin, Texas), and *Iron Tree Trunk*, 2015, on view at The Contemporary Austin's Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria (3809 West 35th Street, Austin, Texas). The public opening for both works by Ai Weiwei will be celebrated with free family-friendly art activities and refreshments on Saturday, June 3 from 10 am to Noon at the sculpture *Forever Bicycles* at the Waller Delta. Both works will remain on view as long-term loans.

Conceptual artist Ai Weiwei is considered one of the most important and influential artists working today and one of the leading cultural figures of his generation. Drawing on current global politics, Chinese culture, human rights, and more to push the definition of art into new realms, Ai consistently places himself at risk to effect social change and has amplified his own artistic voice by expanding his output to include films, photography, writing, publishing, curation, and architecture. Permeated by social conscience, humor, and compassion, his work has included a range of unorthodox methods, materials, and subject matter, including Instagram feeds, dioramas of his own experiences in a Chinese prison, millions of porcelain sunflower seeds filling a gallery at Tate Modern in London, and items of clothing left behind in refugee camps, meticulously washed, pressed, and arranged in a gallery at Jeffrey Deitch in New York.

Forever Bicycles and *Iron Tree Trunk* introduce Austin audiences to some of Ai Weiwei's most enduring themes, including the intersection of art and social conscience; the primacy of ideas, repetition, and seriality; the reimagining and abstraction of commonplace objects; and the amalgamation of disparate elements. Exuding a combination of imposing beauty and subtle humor, both *Forever Bicycles* and *Iron Tree Trunk* appear site-specific to their unique settings while simultaneously referencing their past iterations and the culture of the artist's native China.

"Austin has a beloved activist spirit, one that is known for being wide awake and vocal to the world's events. It seems appropriate, then, to bring an artist with such great social underpinnings and world renown to the city. For many, Ai Weiwei will be a recognizable entity, but perhaps this will be the first time they've seen the work in person. The work sends a message with an important purpose and universal resonance," noted Heather Pesanti, Senior Curator of The Contemporary Austin.

Incorporating more than 1,200 bicycles in a striking composition, *Forever Bicycles* recalls the Dada-esque "readymade" sculptures of twentieth-century Western artists such as Marcel Duchamp, which remove an everyday object from its expected environs and reconstitute it into something new by displacing its original function. Ai's sculpture takes as its subject the Forever brand bicycle, once ubiquitous on the streets of Beijing. A means of not only transportation but also social mobility and a coveted luxury item when the artist was growing up in China, in contemporary times the Forever bicycle has given way to aspirations of car ownership. Given this context, the installation here imparts poignant commentary through 1,200 of these nostalgic objects assembled into a gorgeous, dizzying sculpture, whose wheels are now frozen in perpetual cycle.

Forever Bicycles is a reconfiguration of a series of sculptures and installations that Ai has been exploring since 2003, and iterations of the work have been exhibited in New York, Washington, D.C., Boston, Florence, Venice, Toronto, Taipei, and London, including, at times, several dozen, several hundred, or several thousand bicycles in various configurations. In each instance of the theme, the bicycles themselves have been taken apart, their original function undermined, and reassembled as an artistic

medium that is rich with cultural history. Infused with both universal meaning and specific significance to the artist, the installations may be interpreted by viewers in any number of ways.

Positioned at the Waller Delta, a prominent downtown location joining Austin's Waller Creek and the popular urban hike and bike trail system, *Forever Bicycles* will resonate among the thousands of bike commuters, pedestrians, tourists, and recreational trekkers who use and enjoy the lakeside trail.

With multiple bicycles stacked upon each other to form an archway that visitors can move through, the sculpture is striking in its size and scope and visually reverberates through the stacked repetition of the bicycle frames and wheels.

"We are thrilled to work with The Contemporary Austin to bring Ai Weiwei's monumental voice to our city," said Peter Mullan, Waller Creek Conservancy CEO. "His work invites us to see our physical and cultural landscape in new ways that are relevant for Waller Creek and Austin. Public art works bring people together. We invite the entire Austin community to come and experience the intense visual impact of *Forever Bicycles*."

On view at The Contemporary Austin's Laguna Gloria location, in the Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park, *Iron Tree Trunk*—visually quieter than *Forever Bicycles* despite its monumental size—offers a poetic composition rich with references to the artist's Chinese heritage as well as to the landscape of the surrounding sculpture park. Since 2009, Ai has explored the theme of trees and, especially, felled tree trunks, branches, and roots, creating large-scale, minimalist works in cast iron or, at times, using the original wood. The artist was inspired by a Chinese tradition local to the city of Jingdezhen and encountered by the artist during a visit in 2009—in which dried tree sections, appreciated for their complexity and aesthetic and contemplative qualities, are sold at market to be displayed in homes. Ai began his series of iron trees by collecting parts of dead trees that had been gathered from mountainous areas in southern China. The artist then pieces segments of different trees together, joining them with oversized bolts and screws and casting the final compositions in iron—leaving clues to their making to reveal that these amalgamations are actually man-made replicas and hybrid specimens. Other sculptures in this series might be created from individually cast elements that are then bolted together, or may incorporate traditional woodworking joinery techniques.



In this lineage, *Iron Tree Trunk* is a fifteen-foot-high sculpture that resembles the hollowed-out remains of a dead and decomposing tree trunk. Positioned near the lagoon at the fourteen-acre sculpture park, *Iron Tree Trunk* may be mistaken as a natural part of the landscape from afar, but on closer inspection, the man-made qualities come into focus. A towering yet subtle monolith, the work suggests an affinity with the aesthetics of nature, landscape, and material while alluding to the environmental costs of industrialization and urbanization both here and in the artist's native China.

"I couldn't be more pleased to continue our partnership with Waller Creek Conservancy as part of our Museum Without Walls program, which takes important works of art out of the confines of a traditional gallery space and injects them into the life of our community," said Louis Grachos, Ernest and Sarah Butler Executive Director and CEO of The Contemporary Austin. "With beautiful and outspoken conceptual work fused to his own larger-than-life persona, Ai Weiwei has become one of the most important artists working today—and his relevance is only deepening given the current political climate in the United States and throughout the world. It is an honor to bring Ai Weiwei's work to Austin and present it at both Waller Creek and Laguna Gloria, where it may be contemplated and appreciated by thousands of visitors over the coming year."

The partnership between The Contemporary Austin and the Waller Creek Conservancy is made possible through a generous grant of \$1.1 million from the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation, announced in 2016 in support of art programming organized by The Contemporary Austin, to be presented in collaboration with the Waller Creek Conservancy and installed along the developing Waller Creek area in Austin.

Forever Bicycles is located on City of Austin parkland. The Contemporary Austin and Waller Creek Conservancy would like to thank the City for its ongoing support of this partnership.

AI WEIWEI - BIOGRAPHY

Ai Weiwei (b. 1957) is an artist who resides and works in both Berlin and Beijing. His father, the poet Ai Qing, was denounced by China's Communist Party in 1958 and his family was sent to labor camps, 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, 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. He has worked in many media, including sculpture, installation, photography, architecture and film. He is an outspoken advocate of human rights and freedom of speech. He is the recipient of the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent in 2012 and the Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award in 2015.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Law of the Journey*, National Gallery in Prague, 2017, *transformation-translocation*, 21er Haus Museum of Contemporary Art, Vienna, 2016, *#SafePassage*, Foam, Amsterdam, 2016, *Ai Weiwei. Libero*, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 2016, *Ai Weiwei*, Royal Academy of Art, London, 2015, *Evidence*, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, 2014, and *Ai Weiwei: According to What?*, Hirshhorn Museum of Art, Washington D.C., 2012.

Ai Weiwei is represented by Lisson Gallery, London, Milan, and New York.

THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN

The Contemporary Austin reflects the spectrum of contemporary art through exhibitions, commissions, education, and the collection. The museum has two distinct yet complementary locations, the Jones Center in downtown Austin at 700 Congress Avenue, and Laguna Gloria, a fourteen-acre site on Lake Austin at 3809 W. 35th Street, which is home to the Driscoll Villa, the Art School, the Gatehouse Gallery, and the Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria.

Since its inception in 2013, the museum has also been building its Museum Without Walls program—an initiative that brings art to visitors in new ways and in diverse venues. Current Museum Without Walls projects include a partnership with neighborhood groups and the City of Austin’s Parks and Recreation Department to create a small-scale “art park” in Austin’s Perry Park, individual works on long-term loan to museums including the Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum and the Pease Park Conservancy, and the ongoing partnership with the Waller Creek Conservancy to bring significant public art projects by national and international artists to the developing string of parks along Waller Creek in downtown Austin. Whenever possible, Museum Without Walls projects connect with activity at The Contemporary Austin’s Laguna Gloria and Jones Center sites, including the museum’s first partnership with Waller Creek in 2016, which brought artist Orly Genger’s installation *Hurlyburly*, 2016, to Austin. More information about The Contemporary Austin can be found at thecontemporaryaustin.org.

WALLER CREEK CONSERVANCY

Waller Creek Conservancy is a non-profit whose mission is to create and maintain a chain of extraordinary urban parks around a restored Waller Creek, in partnership with the City of Austin, for the benefit of all. The Conservancy renews the natural environment, promotes play, health and wellness, economic vitality, and mobility, and engages the community through outreach, education, cultural events, and the arts.

The new Waller Creek Park, currently undergoing revitalization by Waller Creek Conservancy, has welcomed many artists and art programs—as part of the Conservancy’s mission to create extraordinary park spaces for the benefit of all—including Orly Genger’s installation *Hurlyburly*, 2016, in partnership with The Contemporary Austin, and the popular annual Creek Show light-based art series held November 10-18 between 5th and 8th Streets along the creek. For more information, visit wallercreek.org.

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IMAGE CAPTIONS:

Ai Weiwei, *Forever*, 2014. Installation view: Sculpture in the City, in partnership with the Royal Academy of Arts Exhibition, London, 2015. Artwork © Ai Weiwei Studio. Courtesy the artist, Lisson Gallery, and Sculpture in the City/City of London. Photograph by Nick Turpin.

Ai Weiwei, *Iron Tree Trunk*, 2015. Artwork © Ai Weiwei Studio. Courtesy Lisson Gallery. Photograph by Jack Hems.