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## **THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN ACQUIRES AI WEIWEI'S IRON TREE TRUNK FOR SCULPTURE PARK AT LAGUNA GLORIA**

*On view at the museum since 2017, the poignant, monumental sculpture—by an artist who is among the most influential artists in the world—is now part of the museum's permanent collection, for visitors to appreciate on every visit to the museum's Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park.*

*Acquisition of Iron Tree Trunk, 2015, is made possible through the generous contributions of more than seventy individuals and foundations in Austin and nationally.*

*The Contemporary also announces an extension to the loan of the artist's Forever Bicycles, 2014, which will now remain on view through June 2019 at the Waller Delta downtown.*

**OCTOBER 1, 2018, AUSTIN, TEXAS** – Louis Grachos, the Ernest and Sarah Butler Executive Director and CEO of The Contemporary Austin, is honored to announce that the museum has secured funds to acquire the sculpture *Iron Tree Trunk* by artist and political activist **Ai Weiwei** (Chinese, born 1957 in Beijing). Installed in 2017, among the trees within The Contemporary's fourteen-acre, lakeside Laguna Gloria site, *Iron Tree Trunk* has quickly become an iconic art experience in Austin, beloved by visitors who come to the contemporary sculpture park each year.

The acquisition of Ai Weiwei's *Iron Tree Trunk* is made possible through a generous challenge grant from the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation. Reflecting the public's appreciation for this important piece, funds to meet the challenge grant and purchase *Iron Tree Trunk* for Austin were raised through gifts from more than seventy additional individual, foundation, and corporate donors from throughout Central Texas and across the country, including an Urban Forest Grant from the City of Austin. A full list of donors is available online at [thecontemporaryaustin.org/AiWeiwei](http://thecontemporaryaustin.org/AiWeiwei).



“Ai Weiwei is among the most important artists working in the world today,” Grachos said. “I am touched and so impressed by the outpouring of support for this purchase. Austinite’s clearly understand just how significant a work like this is for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of the tens of thousands of adults and children who visit Laguna Gloria from the region, for the cultural tourists who come to Austin from around the world, and for future generations who will develop lifelong relationships and lasting memories with this moving and poetic sculpture.”

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Melba Whatley, Chairperson of the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation said, “What could be more wonderful than participating in the acquisition of Ai Weiwei’s singular work *Iron Tree Trunk*. We believe great art elevates us all. Through Ai Weiwei’s monumental sculpture we brush up against China, immigration, civil rights, nature and the awe-inspiring dimensions of genius. All Austinites can be proud that this community has matched the Marcus Foundation’s financial support for this most important addition to the city’s cultural landscape.”

Grachos continued, “I extend my deepest gratitude—on behalf of the museum and all of its visitors—to the Edward and Betty Marcus Foundation and to each individual and organization that contributed to this historic purchase for the city of Austin.”

## **AI WEIWEI’S IRON TREE TRUNK, 2015**

On view at The Contemporary Austin’s Laguna Gloria location, in the Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park, *Iron Tree Trunk* is a monumental sculpture that offers a poetic composition rich with references to the artist’s Chinese heritage as well as to the landscape of the surrounding sculpture park at Laguna Gloria. 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 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.

## **ABOUT AI WEIWEI**

Conceptual artist Ai Weiwei is 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 museum, and items of clothing left behind in refugee camps, meticulously washed, pressed, and arranged in a gallery.

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Ai 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, 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. 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.

## **ALSO ON VIEW, AI WEIWEI'S FOREVER BICYCLES EXTENDED THROUGH JUNE 2019**

In addition to *Iron Tree Trunk*, Ai Weiwei's spectacular *Forever Bicycles*, 2014 was installed at the Waller Delta (74 Trinity Street, Austin, Texas) in 2017 as part of The Contemporary Austin's partnership with Waller Creek Conservancy and its Museum Without Walls program. Incorporating more than 1,200 bicycles in a striking composition, *Forever Bicycles* is a long-term loan to the museum originally scheduled to be returned to the artist in November 2018.



The museum is pleased to announce that Ai Weiwei has recently agreed to extend the loan through June 2019, so the work will remain along Austin's popular hike-and-bike trail for an additional six months.

## **THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTIN**

As Austin's only museum solely focused on contemporary artists and their work, The Contemporary Austin offers exhibitions, educational opportunities, and events that start conversations and fuel the city's creative spirit. Known for artist-centric projects and collaborations, The Contemporary invites exploration in both its urban and natural settings—downtown at the Jones Center on Congress Avenue, lakeside at the Laguna Gloria Campus (including the Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park, the Art School, and the historic Driscoll Villa), and around Austin through the Museum Without Walls program.

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### **IMAGE CAPTIONS**

Ai Weiwei, *Iron Tree Trunk*, 2015. Cast iron. 185 x 63 x 82 5/8 inches. Edition 1 of 3. Installation view, The Contemporary Austin – Laguna Gloria, Austin, Texas, 2017. Artwork © Ai Weiwei Studio. Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio and Lisson Gallery. Image courtesy The Contemporary Austin. Photograph by Brian Fitzsimmons.

# The Contemporary Austin

Ai Weiwei, *Forever Bicycles*, 2014. 1,254 bicycles. Dimensions variable. Installation view, Waller Creek Delta, The Contemporary Austin – Museum Without Walls Program, Austin, Texas, 2017. Artwork © Ai Weiwei Studio. Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio and Lisson Gallery. Image courtesy The Contemporary Austin / Waller Creek Conservancy. Photograph by Brian Fitzsimmons.