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AI WEIWEI

Change of Perspective

25/03/2022 - 07/05/2022

Open from Tuesday - Saturday | 11.00 am-7.00 pm

In compliance with the latest health measures, we recommend booking your visit by writing to: roma@galleriacontinua.com.

Vaccine pass is requested on entrance to the gallery.

Download here the press folder for 'Change of Perspective'

<https://we.tl/t-bIVvISSt15>

Download here the press folder for 'La Commedia Umana', Museo Nazionale Romano-Terme di Diocleziano

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Galleria Continua is pleased to present for the first time in its exhibition spaces in Rome, the solo exhibition of one of the most important and influential contemporary artists, **Ai Weiwei**.

Sculptor, painter, performer, photographer, architect and urban planner, conceptual artist, collector, director (he is the **director of Turandot** at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma this spring), writer and publisher, blogger, human rights activist and dissident, Ai Weiwei is many souls in one. What distinguishes his story as a man and an artist is his acute thinking that doesn't enter into rhetoric, instead it is **visionary** and always **disorients** the status quo.

Ai Weiwei creates a strong channel for communication and political statement that is present in a vast and diversified array of works. His reflection on the meaning of the **traditions** of his origins occurs frequently in his work. The exhibition at Galleria Continua in Rome, titled *Change of Perspective*, aims to examine Ai Weiwei's strong bond with tradition and the **millenary Chinese culture** which the artist respects but brings into the **modern age**. What characterizes the exhibition is his ability to make a **desecration** and a **break with the past** while also claiming belonging, and safeguarding the elements of authenticity of

a priceless and rich culture. Ai Weiwei interprets motifs, images, metaphors, manufacturing processes and traditional materials in a playful and iconoclastic way to arrive at a - sometimes hidden, other times blatant - critique of the **political system**. "I think my works are deeply rooted in the understanding of Chinese tradition, I am a contemporary man, I think that reinterpreting **craftsmanship** and **culture** in this vernacular is very important, destroying and desecrating is a way to understand what happened in the past.", the artist declares.

Porcelain is traditionally regarded as the highest expressive medium in Chinese art. From the direct experience of Ai Weiwei with the workers of the Jingdezhen district - the spearhead of China in the processing of this material before the **industrial revolution** - a series of works have been created that make up the exhibition itinerary. Among these: *Wave Plate*, a refined porcelain plate with a gray-green celadon finish that recalls the luminous aesthetic qualities of jade. The motif of the wave that develops until it culminates in a vortex is Ai Weiwei's homage to the art of the **Yuan dynasty** (1271-1368) in which water was a recurring theme; *Set of Spouts*, a porcelain sculpture covered with an extraordinarily smooth, soft and thick covering of a translucent and luminous off-white color, made from broken teapot spouts. On a teapot, the

spout represents the path that the steam crosses to transfer its heat to the outside, spreading comfort and consolation; nevertheless, the word "spout" (etymologically from the word "spit") evokes the story of Ai Weiwei as a political dissident, "one who spits out controversial opinions".

Ai Weiwei dedicates part of the exhibition to some famous political dissenters of the past. It is a series of portraits made with the mosaic technique using almost ten thousand multicolored Lego bricks. The faces that come to life from this work are those of **Dante Alighieri, Filippo Strozzi, Girolamo Savonarola and Galileo Galilei**. Dante, the exile par excellence in Italian literary history; Filippo Strozzi, banished by the Medici family and returned to Florence after twenty years spent away from his homeland; Girolamo Savonarola, a controversial figure, considered a "**martyr of freedom**" in the nineteenth century, a troubling preacher friar, executed for his opposition to the Medici regime and for the sermons against the Church of Pope Borgia; Galileo, the revolutionary Tuscan scientist, emblem of the battle for **freedom of thought**, imprisoned and tried for defending his ideas. In the unrealistic colors of Lego bricks, a means of communication that the artist defines as "**democratic**" because everyone knows it and can use it, the faces of these characters acquire the playful character of Pop Art.

The exhibition itinerary ends in the hall of the prestigious The St Regis hotel where the artist takes his leave with a final poignant tribute to the power of **nature** and an invitation to reflect on the **role of humankind** in the earth's fragile and changing natural balance. *Palace* is the result of Ai Weiwei's collaboration with the **artisans and local communities** of Trancoso with whom he identified the roots and trunks of an endangered tree, the Pequi Vinagreiro, typical of the river forest of Bahia. These rare roots, some of which are more than a thousand-years-old, have been modeled and assembled to create sculptures of

bold and surprising shapes. Among the marbles and crystals of the luxurious Roman hotel, *Palace* disorients and enchants you, a wild "creature" that - somehow also tamed - turns into a magical vision before you.

From 25 March to 3 April 2022, Museo Nazionale Romano, hosts Ai Weiwei's work *La Commedia Umana* at Le Terme di Diocleziano, a huge colossal **chandelier** made up of over two thousand pieces of **hand-blown glass** and cast by the **master glassmakers** of Berengo Murano studio. The exhibition - produced and organized by **Museo Nazionale Romano and Berengo Studio** with the Berengo Foundation - is in collaboration with Galleria Continua.

Ai Weiwei has been called the most influential artist of our time. After denouncing government corruption and lack of respect for human rights and freedom of speech in China, he was arrested, beaten, placed in isolation and forbidden to travel. His activity as a dissident has gone hand in hand with his artistic career and he has continued to produce work testifying to his political beliefs while at the same time making plenty of room for creativity and experimentation. His output over the past thirty years allows us to explore his ambivalent rapport both with Western culture and with the culture of his own country - torn between a deep-rooted sense of belonging and an equally strong urge to rebel.

Ai Weiwei was born in 1957 in Beijing. His father, the poet Ai Qing, was labeled a "rightist" in 1958 and Ai and his family were exiled, first to Heilongjiang, in northeastern China, and then soon after to the deserts of Xinjiang, in northwestern China. Following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, Ai Qing was rehabilitated and the family moved back to Beijing. Ai would enroll at the Beijing Film Academy and was a member of the Stars group of artists. Ai moved to the United States in 1981, living in New York between 1983 and 1993. He briefly studied at the Parsons School of Design. In New York, Ai would discover the works of Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol. Returning to China in 1993 to care for his ailing father, Ai contributed to the establishment of Beijing's East Village, a community of avant-garde artists. In 1997, he co-founded the China Art Archives & Warehouse (CAAW), one of the first independent art spaces in China. He began to take an interest in architecture in 1999, designing his own studio house in Caochangdi, on the northeast edge of Beijing. In 2000, Ai started his own architecture practice, FAKE Design. In 2007, as a participant of documenta 12, Ai brought 1001 Chinese citizens to Kassel as part of his Fairytale project. In 2008, Ai and the Swiss architecture team of Herzog and de Meuron designed the Beijing National Stadium. In 2010, Ai covered the floor of the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern with 100 million porcelain sunflower seeds. In 2012, Ai Weiwei was awarded the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent, by the Human Rights Foundation. In 2015, Ai was awarded the Ambassador of Conscience Award, by Amnesty International, for his actions in support of the defense of human rights. In 2017 his epic film journey *Human Flow* took part in the 74th Venice International Film Festival. The film gives a powerful visual imagination to contemporary mass human migration. Captured over the course of an eventful year in 23 countries, *Human Flow* follows a chain of urgent human stories that stretches across the globe in countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, France, Greece, Germany, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, and Turkey.

For more information on the exhibition and photographs: [Silvia Pichini ufficio stampa press@galleriacontinua.com](mailto:Silvia.Pichini@ufficio.stampa.press@galleriacontinua.com)

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