



FREDERIK MEIJER Gardens & Sculpture Park

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LANDMARK EXHIBITION BRINGS AI WEIWEI'S VISION TO MEIJER GARDENS

This will be Ai Weiwei's first exhibition at a botanical garden or sculpture park.

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – January 17, 2016 – Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, one of the nation's premier botanic and sculpture experiences, is honored to present a landmark exhibition featuring internationally renowned artist and activist Ai Weiwei. Opening on January 27, 2017, *Ai Weiwei at Meijer Gardens: Natural State* is the first of its kind for the artist at a botanical garden or sculpture park anywhere in the world. More than 30 works will be sited in galleries, conservatories, public spaces and the auditorium.

"I am looking forward to the exhibition at Meijer Gardens and to share my work and ideas in this unique place," states Ai Weiwei. "I appreciate that they are so committed to my work; they even acquired *Iron Tree* in 2015. This opportunity to bring an exhibition to Michigan is something I greatly anticipate."

The title of the exhibition underscores the relationship between the artist and the venue. The word "natural" sheds light on Ai Weiwei's use of imagery from the natural world to introduce his ideas and concerns. It also refers to his use of natural materials from ceramics and silk, to bamboo and wood. The word "state" suggests multiple levels of meaning, from the state of a found object that the artist may transform, to the state of humanity, whose inequalities and injustices the artist feels compelled to call out for the betterment of the lives of women, men and children everywhere. The notion of "state" also refers to political systems that Ai Weiwei has challenged for the benefit of humankind in his native China and around the world.

The exhibition at Meijer Gardens provides Ai Weiwei the opportunity to use the diverse environments of the four gallery spaces, four indoor conservatories, auditorium and numerous public areas. Iconic works from across the artist's repertoire, as well as work specific to Meijer Gardens, will be featured. Starting in the galleries, visitors will find iconic works such as *He Xie*, *Blossom*, *Watermelon* and *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*. Also on display will be three wallpapers designed by Ai Weiwei, including the rarely seen *The Animal that Looks Like a Llama but is Really an Alpaca*. Shown in the Scenic Corridor are five monumental sculptural bodies derived from ancient

Chinese mythological text: *Taifeng*, *Dijiang*, *Shuyu*, *Mingshe* and *Shusi*. Additional iconic porcelain works will be on display in the Tropical Conservatory, Arid Garden, the Seasonal Display Greenhouse and the Victorian Garden Parlor including *Rock*, *Porcelain Rebar* and *Bubble*. Combined, it is an exhibition of unprecedented scope, presenting both iconic and recently created work.

“Having worked with Ai Weiwei for many years and in venues across the world, it has been a pleasure to see him focused on the very distinguished and unique circumstances of Meijer Gardens,” said Greg Hilty, Curatorial Director of Lisson Gallery, which collaborated with Meijer Gardens on the exhibition. “The work carefully selected by the artist and thoughtfully installed at this venue offers a truly memorable experience not to be missed. Meijer Gardens has a special magic, and Lisson Gallery has been proud to collaborate with them on projects with Ai Weiwei and Anish Kapoor, two of the world's great artists.”

Ai Weiwei has emerged as one of the defining cultural voices for the 21st century. Known to work in a wide variety of contexts and scale, his ability to transform materials to share his ideas, concerns and vision has given rise to a critically acclaimed and widely appreciated body of work. Among recent work is his colossal *Iron Tree*, acquired and installed in 2015 in honor of Meijer Gardens' 20th anniversary.

“Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park is pleased beyond words to host this major exhibition, Ai Weiwei's first ever in a botanical garden or sculpture park,” said David S. Hooker, President and CEO. “It will be an opportunity for hundreds of thousands of people to enjoy his vision and boundless creativity. Ai Weiwei has a compelling life story that is told through his art. We are deeply grateful to our presenting sponsors, The Daniel & Pamella DeVos Foundation and the Meijer Foundation, for making this exhibition possible.”

“It has been an extraordinary experience to work with Ai Weiwei on this highly unique exhibition, as he has been extremely involved in every level of decision making and detail,” states Joseph Antenucci Becherer, Chief Curator and Vice President of Exhibitions and Collections at Meijer Gardens. “With more than 30 works installed across galleries, conservatories and public spaces, this fascinating and thought-provoking collection of works is quite unlike any exhibition Meijer Gardens has ever mounted.”

A full list of exhibition activities can be found at www.meijergardens.org/aww

Ai Weiwei at Meijer Gardens: Natural State is made possible by:

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This exhibition has been organized by the artist and Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park with the support of Lisson Gallery.

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Images, video and full sculpture descriptions are available [HERE](#).

About Ai Weiwei

Ai Weiwei (b. 1957, Beijing) spent his childhood in forced exile. He moved to the United States in 1981, settling in New York in 1983 before returning to his ailing father in Beijing in 1993. He is widely respected as one of the most versatile and influential artists of our time. A prolific artist, architect, author and activist, Ai Weiwei is a vocal critic of China's record on democracy and human rights. In 2011, he was arrested and held for 81 days without charge, prompting worldwide official and public protest. Recent and current solo exhibitions include *Er Zi, Air de Jeu* at the Bon Marché, Paris, France; *Evidence* at the Martin Gropius, Berlin, Germany; *Ai Weiwei* at The Royal Academy of Arts in London, UK; *Ai Weiwei 2016: Roots and Branches* at the Mary Boone Gallery (Fifth Avenue), Mary Boone Gallery (Chelsea) & Lisson Gallery New York; *Laudromat* at Deitch Projects (Soho) in New York, New York, USA; *Libero* at the Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, Italy; *Andy Warhol/Ai Weiwei* at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; *Ai Weiwei* at the Helsinki Art Museum, Helsinki, Finland and *@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz* on the island of Alcatraz in San Francisco, California, USA.

About Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park

One of the world's most significant botanic and sculpture experiences, Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park serves over 700,000 visitors annually. Meijer Gardens was recently ranked in the top 100 most-visited art museums worldwide by Art Newspaper, the leading publication in global art news. The 158-acre main campus features Michigan's largest tropical conservatory; one of the largest children's gardens in the country; arid and Victorian gardens with bronze sculptures by Degas and Rodin; a carnivorous plant house; outdoor gardens; and a 1900-seat outdoor amphitheater, featuring an eclectic mix of world-renowned musicians every summer. The internationally acclaimed Sculpture Park features a permanent collection including works by Oldenburg, Moore, Hepworth, Serra, Bourgeois, Ai Weiwei and Plensa, among others. Indoor galleries host changing sculpture exhibitions with recent exhibitions by Picasso, Degas, di Suvero, Borofsky, Calder and Dine. In June 2015, the eight-acre Richard & Helen DeVos Japanese Garden at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park opened. Created by renowned designer Hoichi Kurisu, the garden features sculpture by Anish Kapoor, Jenny Holzer and Guiseppe Penone, among others.