



**EMBARGOED UNTIL FEB.11<sup>TH</sup> AT 5 P.M.**

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## **MEIJER GARDENS ACQUIRES MAJOR WORK BY PROMINENT AND PROVOCATIVE SCULPTOR AI WEIWEI**

*This sculpture will be dedicated on Meijer Gardens 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary on April 20th.*

**GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., – February 11, 2015** – Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park is honored to announce the acquisition and permanent siting of a major work by one of the most renowned cultural and political figures in the world, Ai Weiwei. The large-scale piece, *Iron Tree*, is the artist's largest and most complex outdoor sculpture to date.

Standing at more than 22 feet tall, and measuring more than 22 feet wide, this sculpture is composed of 99 unique iron pieces cast from individual tree elements from southern China. Held together with oversize stainless steel bolts, *Iron Tree* appears as a living tree in form, but upon closer examination, the diversity of shapes, exaggeration of reality and awkwardness of the bolts create a much different image.

"The opportunity to acquire such a profoundly important work by one of the most significant artists of our time is a truly momentous occasion," said Joseph Becherer, vice president and chief curator at Meijer Gardens.

Meijer Gardens has been working in collaboration with the artist, his Beijing studio and foundry, and London gallery to bring this colossal work to Grand Rapids. *Iron Tree* will be dedicated in the Sculpture Park on April 20 at 6:30 p.m. also marking the organization's 20th anniversary. Following the dedication, a lecture about the controversial artist and his career will be given by Joseph Becherer, chief curator and vice president.

As a sculptor, author and installation artist, Weiwei is one of the most versatile and respected artists in Contemporary art. Although stripped of his passport and confined to limited travel within China, his work has been exhibited across the globe to widespread claim. His work ranges from single objects to large installations to historic collaborations like the Beijing National Stadium or "Bird's Nest" for the 2008 Olympics. As an activist, he has been a champion of free speech and human rights around the world and highly critical of the Chinese government leading to his imprisonment and house arrest.

"Although the artist is unable to travel, we have worked very closely with him to place the work and develop the site," described Becherer.

*Iron Tree* was made possible through the generosity of Fred and Lena Meijer.

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**Images available upon request.**

### **About Ai Weiwei**

Ai Weiwei (b. 1957, Beijing) spent his childhood in forced exile. He moved to New York in 1981 returning to his ailing father in Beijing in 1993 where he continues to work and live, under restrictions. He is widely respected as one of the most versatile and influential artists of our time. A prolific artist, architect, author and activist, Weiwei is a vocal critic of China's record on democracy and human rights and in 2011 was arrested and held for 81 days without charge, prompting worldwide official and public protest. His 2013 heavy metal video *Dumbass* (from the album *The Divine Comedy*) describes explicitly his treatment during detention. Recent and current solo exhibitions include those in Berlin, London, Miami, Brooklyn and San Francisco.

### **About Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park**

One of the world's most significant botanic and sculpture experiences, Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park serves nearly 600,000 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 159-acre grounds feature 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 Rodin, Oldenburg, Moore, Serra, Bourgeois 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 8-acre Richard & Helen DeVos Japanese Garden at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park will open. Created by renowned designer Hoichi Kurisu, the garden will also feature sculpture by Anish Kapoor, Zhang Huan and Guiseppe Penone, among others.

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