

## IRON TREE BY AI WEIWEI

Powerful, provocative, penetrating. Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei (born 1957) is among the most renowned cultural and political figures in the world today.



Courtesy the artist's studio and AW Asia. Photographed by Ted Alcorn.

This April, one of his greatest artistic achievements, *Iron Tree*, will be made available on permanent display at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, commemorating the organization's 20th anniversary through the generosity of Fred and Lena Meijer.

As a sculptor, author, and installation artist, Ai Weiwei is one of the most versatile and respected artists in Contemporary art. Although

stripped of his passport and confined to limited travel only within China, his work has been exhibited across the globe to widespread acclaim. As an artist, his work ranges from single objects to large installations to historic collaborations resulting in architectural projects 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, specifically, highly critical of the Chinese government leading to his imprisonment and house arrest.

Standing at more than 22 feet tall and measuring more than 22 feet across, *Iron Tree*, 2013, is the artist's largest and most complex outdoor sculpture to date. Meijer Gardens has been working in collaboration with the artist, his Beijing studio and foundry, and London gallery to bring this colossal work to Meijer Gardens. *Iron Tree* will be dedicated in the Sculpture Park on April 20, 2015, at 6:30 pm, marking the organization's 20th anniversary. A lecture on the artist and his dynamic career entitled "Absurdity is Powerful" by Joseph Becherer, Chief Curator and Vice President for Collections and Exhibitions will be offered at 7 pm immediately following the dedication.

Held together with oversize stainless steel bolts, *Iron Tree* is composed of 99 unique iron pieces cast from individual tree

elements (branches, trunks, roots) from different species collected in the mountainous areas of southern China. From a distance, the sculpture registers as a living tree in form, but as one approaches the work, the details in the diversity of shapes, exaggeration of reality and awkwardness in using bolts in the permanent assembly are clearly understood. As with many of Weiwei's projects, copying and assemblage play a significant role in communicating ideas.

### SCULPTURE DEDICATION AND LECTURE

Monday, April 20, 2015

6:30 pm Dedication of *Iron Tree* sculpture by Ai Weiwei

7:00 pm Lecture, *Absurdity is Powerful* by Joseph Becherer, Chief Curator and Vice President for Collections and Exhibitions\*

\* Enjoy a piece of Meijer Gardens' birthday cake immediately following the lecture

Here, the very notion of bringing together unrelated parts from different areas to become a new unit becomes a metaphor for the complexities and complications of 21st century globalism.

Since 2009, Weiwei has created a series of large wooden sculptures utilizing elements from cut trees sold in the markets of

Jingdezhen, China. These elements are sold by local vendors and appreciated for their interesting shapes in the tradition of Chinese scholar's rocks. Methods of cutting and interlocking the wood elements are based on historic Chinese practices for temple construction. Innovatively, the artist brought together 99 disparate elements, had them cast individually in iron and uniquely conjoined them through a complex bolting system, but connections to traditional Chinese culture remains intact. *Iron Tree* is the transformed climax of that series.

FEE: Free for members, general admission for non-members. RSVP: 616-975-3144 or [skilroy@meijergardens.org](mailto:skilroy@meijergardens.org)



Ai Weiwei. *Iron Tree*, 2013. Iron and stainless steel, 264 x 264 x 264 inches. Photo by Dean Van Dis.