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PORTFOLIO

AI WEIWEI'S @LARGE EXHIBIT EXPLORES THE CONCEPTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREE EXPRESSION



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AI WEIWEI, BLOSSOM, 2014 (INSTALLATION DETAIL, ALCATRAZ HOSPITAL)

Blossom - Hospital

Blossom ironically references China's famous Hundred Flowers Campaign of 1956. During this brief period the government showed tolerance towards freedom of expression, but this was immediately followed by a severe crackdown. Weiwei creates intricately detailed brittle ceramic flowers to transform the sinks, toilets and tubs in the space into "fantastical, fragile porcelain bouquets".



AI WEIWEI, BLOSSOM, 2014 (DETAIL)

About the exhibition

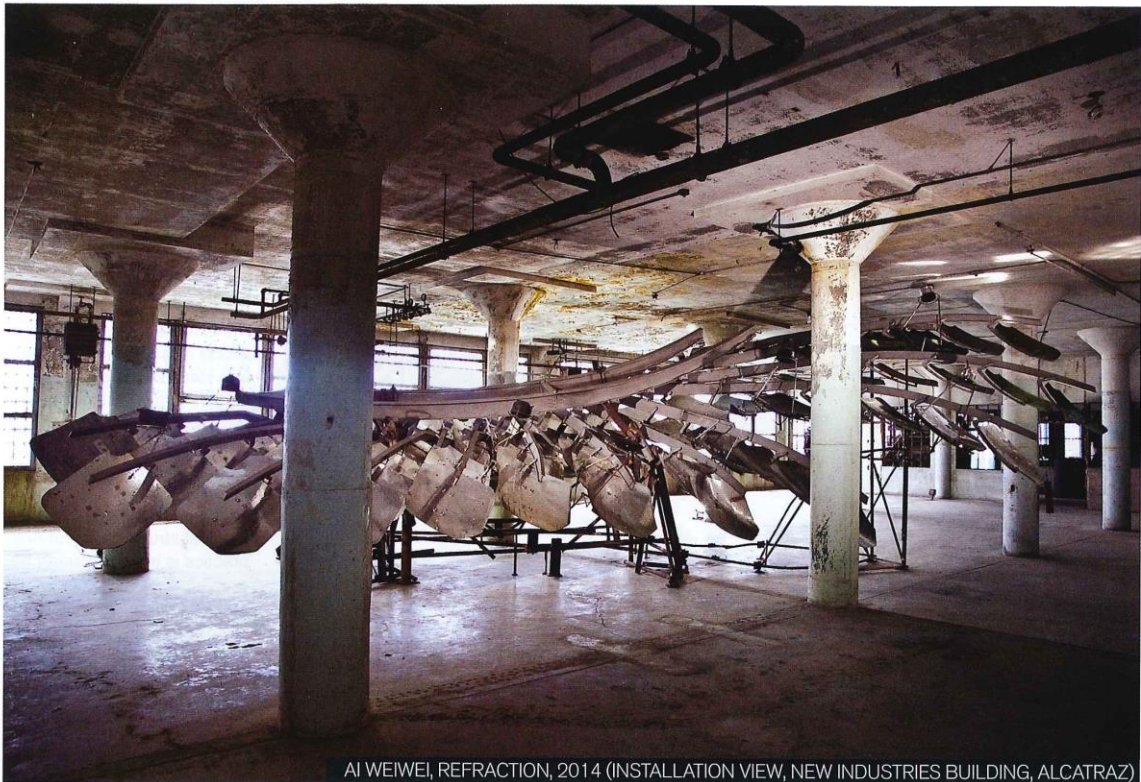
Alcatraz was a fortress, prison and a national park, but today it is home to artist Ai Weiwei's latest exhibit, @ Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz. Running till April 2015, the exhibit explores human rights and freedom of expression. Organised by the FOR-SITE Foundation in partnership with the National Park Service and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, the exhibit is located in the New Industries Building where certain 'fortunate' inmates were allowed to work.

Cheryl Haines curator of @Large says,

/// One of the qualities that first struck me about Ai's practice is how profoundly he explores the confluence of art and the built environment...///

About the artist

Ai Weiwei is a Beijing-based artist-activist whose works focus on China's social and political atmosphere. In the spring of 2011, Weiwei was incarcerated for 81 days by the Chinese government on charges of tax evasion. Although he was released, he was prohibited from leaving Beijing for a year and is still forbidden to leave China. As he could not visit Alcatraz, this made the exhibit an amazing feat as all the works were created at his Beijing studio.



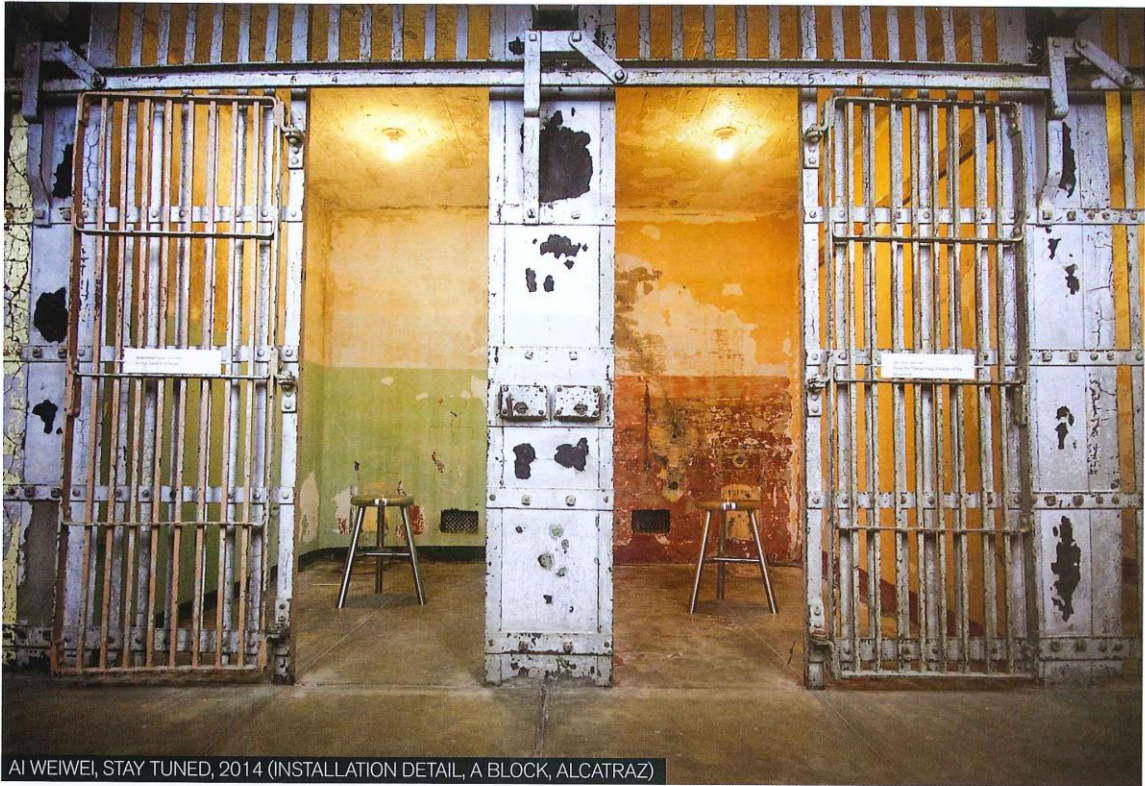
AI WEIWEI, REFRACTION, 2014 (INSTALLATION VIEW, NEW INDUSTRIES BUILDING, ALCATRAZ)

Refraction - New Industries Building

Inspired by a bird's wing and weighing more than five tons, this installation is made from reflective panels initially used in Tibetan solar cookers. The artwork represents the conflict that exists between freedom and confinement through the subtext of flight. By positioning the installation on the lower level, which can be viewed from the gun gallery above, the artist allows the visitor the vantage point of the prison guard. Thus, including the viewer in a complex structure of power and control.



AI WEIWEI, REFRACTION, 2014 (INSTALLATION DETAIL, NEW INDUSTRIES BUILDING, ALCATRAZ)



AI WEIWEI, STAY TUNED, 2014 (INSTALLATION DETAIL, A BLOCK, ALCATRAZ)

Stay Tuned - A Block

One of the most thought-provoking pieces of the exhibit is the 12-sound installation located in individual cells of A Block. One is invited to sit on a shiny new stainless steel stool that is juxtaposed against a battered sink in the cell, where they can listen to works by people who have been imprisoned for creatively expressing their beliefs.

Each cell has its own recording, right from a speech from Martin Luther King Jr to works by the Russian punk band Pussy Riot. The piece allows one to reflect on the power of the human voice in a circumstance of forced isolation and silence.



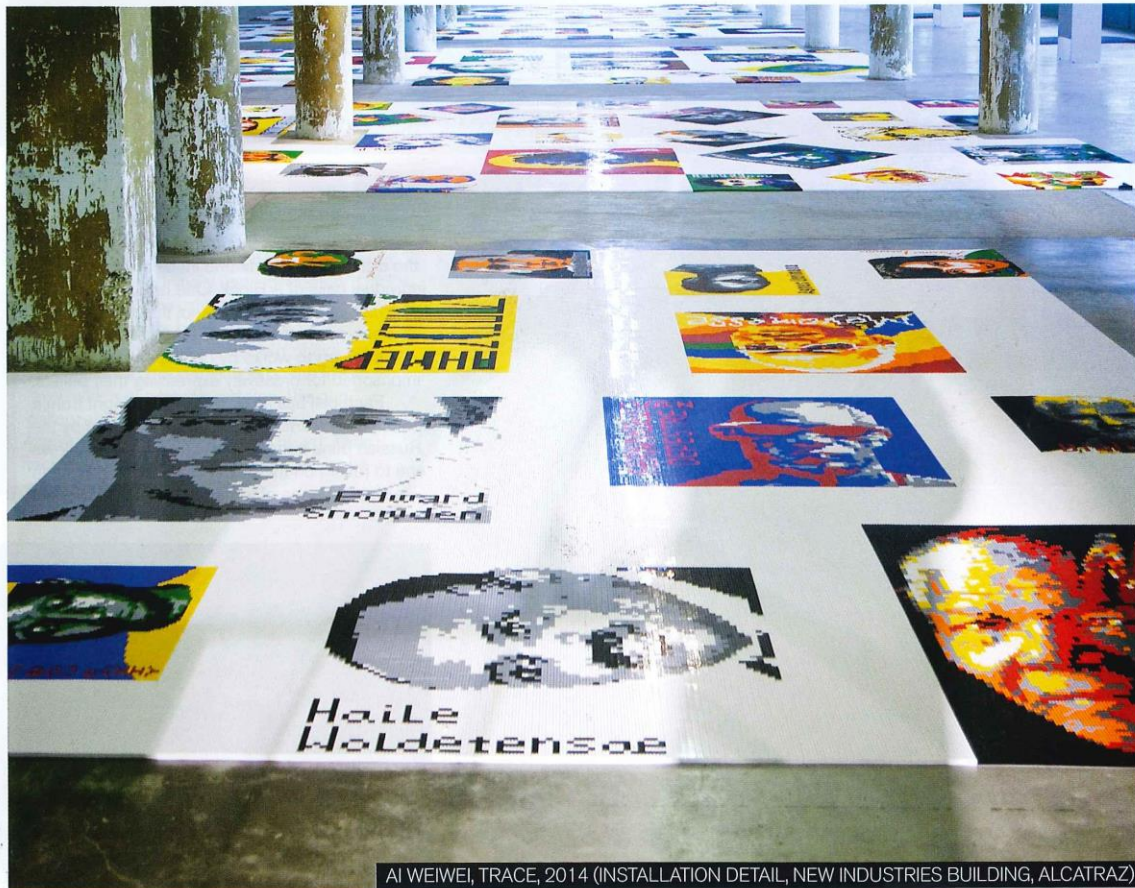
AI WEIWEI, STAY TUNED, 2014 (INSTALLATION DETAIL, A BLOCK, ALCATRAZ)



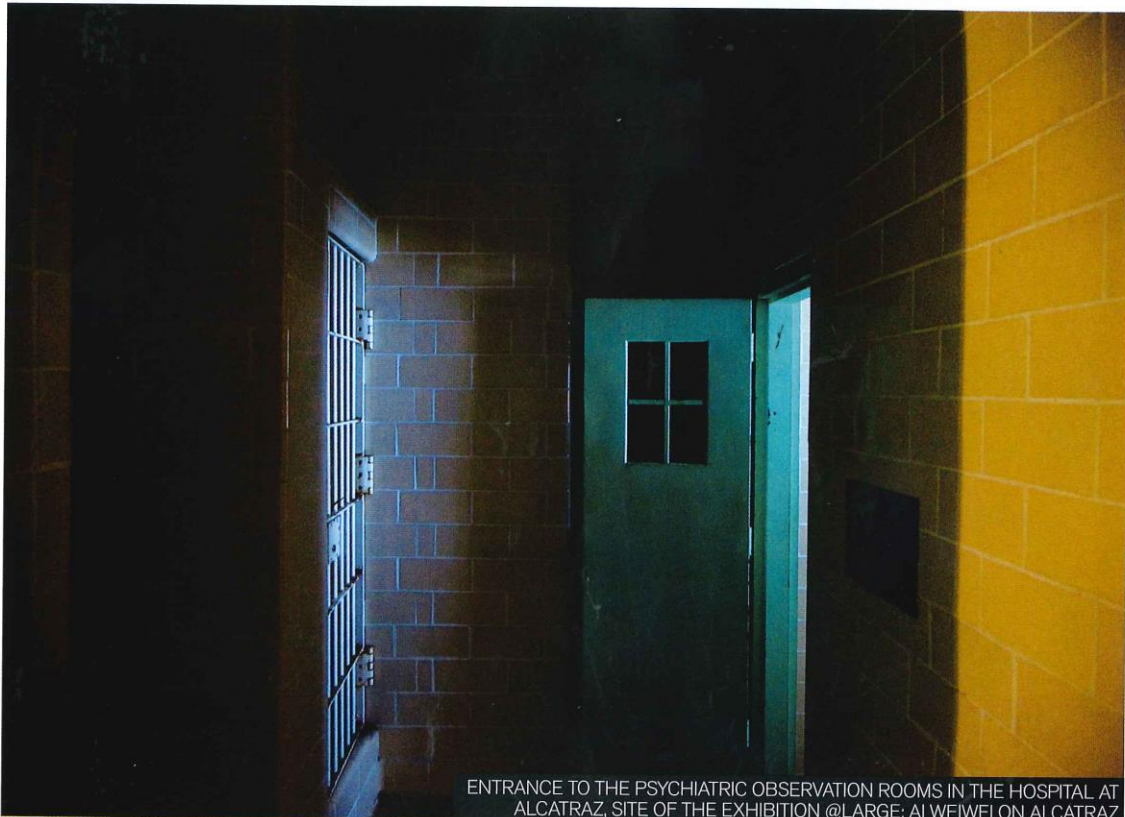
AI WEIWEI, TRACE, 2014 (DETAIL)

Trace - New Industries Building

Described as the exhibit's signature piece, Trace confronts viewers with a field of 176 odd faces made from colourful Lego bricks stretched across the floor. They portray the faces of Nelson Mandela, Edward Snowden and some lesser known ones that have been detained or restricted from moving freely because of their beliefs, actions, or affiliations, thus giving a human face to political detainment.



AI WEIWEI, TRACE, 2014 (INSTALLATION DETAIL, NEW INDUSTRIES BUILDING, ALCATRAZ)



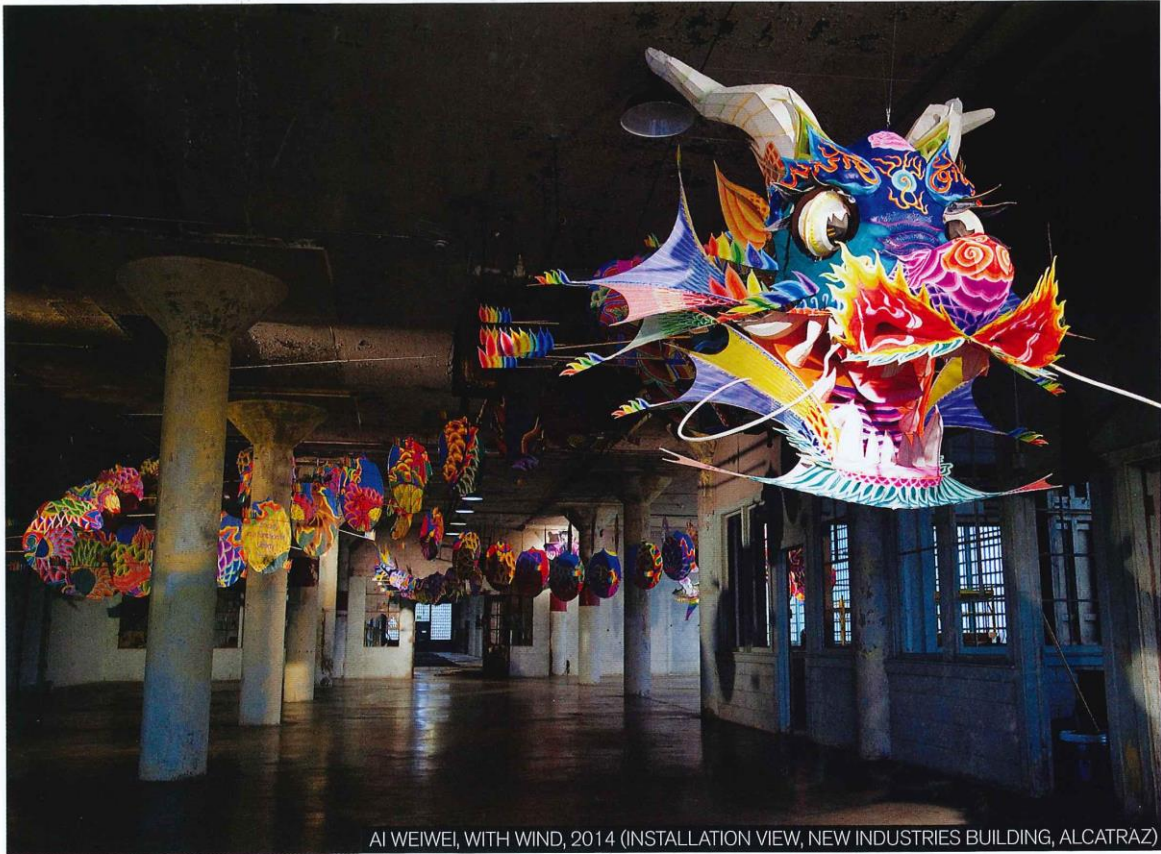
ENTRANCE TO THE PSYCHIATRIC OBSERVATION ROOMS IN THE HOSPITAL AT ALCATRAZ, SITE OF THE EXHIBITION @LARGE: AI WEIWEI ON ALCATRAZ

Illumination - Hospital (Psychiatric Observation Cells)

Illumination highlights the role chanting has as a source of comfort, strength and identity under severe circumstances. In this installation, the observation cells resonate with the recording of a traditional song of the Hopi tribe and the chanting from a Buddhist monastery. Weiwei particularly chooses the tribe as they were the first men to be prisoners of conscience held at Alcatraz.

With Wind - New Industries Building

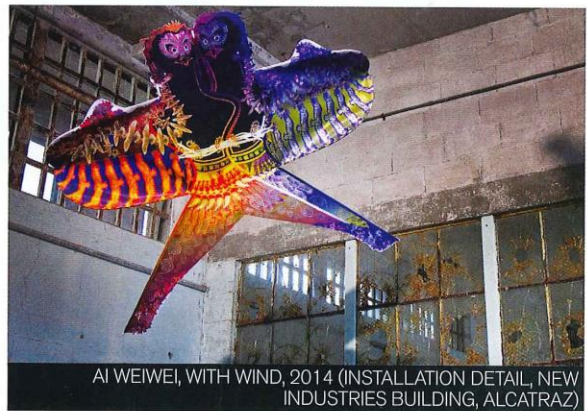
This large-scale installation was not actually created by Weiwei, but by Chinese artisans in collaboration with his studio. It features a contemporary version of the traditional Chinese dragon kite and the body of the kite is imprinted with quotes known as Weiwei-isms, such as, "Every one of us is a potential convict." There are other kites around the room too with birds and flowers, which reference the island, an important bird habitat. It also represents 30 nations that have serious records of restricting their citizens' human rights and civil liberties.



AI WEIWEI, WITH WIND, 2014 (INSTALLATION VIEW, NEW INDUSTRIES BUILDING, ALCATRAZ)



AI WEIWEI, WITH WIND, 2014 (PRELIMINARY DESIGN DETAIL)



AI WEIWEI, WITH WIND, 2014 (INSTALLATION DETAIL, NEW INDUSTRIES BUILDING, ALCATRAZ)



AI WEIWEI, YOURS TRULY, 2014 (INSTALLATION VIEW, ALCATRAZ DINING HALL)

Yours Truly - Dining Hall

Yours Truly gives visitors the opportunity to interact with the prisoners represented in Trace through postcards that they can address to them. The cards depict birds and plants of the nations where the prisoners are held. The exhibit serves as a reminder that their causes have not been forgotten and allows visitors to contribute to the global conversation on the subject.

- Compiled by Amanda Peters