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Tuesday, December 3, 2013

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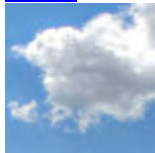
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Art News & Gossip

In the Air – Art+Auction's Gossip Column

December 3, 2013, 8:34 am

Ai Weiwei Taking Over Alcatraz in 2014

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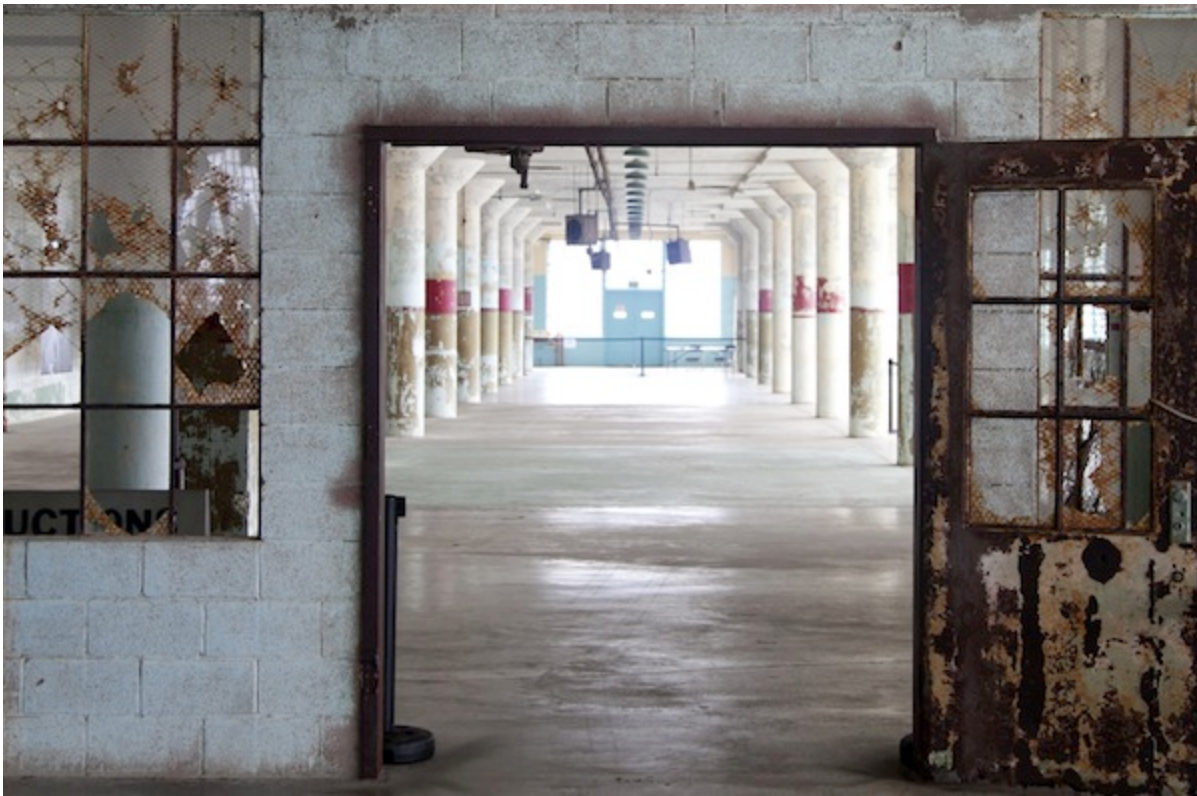
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Second and third floors of A Block in the cellhouse at Alcatraz, site of the exhibition "Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz" (September 27, 2014-April 26, 2015).

Like the disgruntled Vietnam veteran played by **Ed Harris** in **Michael Bay**'s 1996 classic "[The Rock](#)," **Ai Weiwei** is about to take over [Alcatraz](#). The [FOR-SITE Foundation](#), working in partnership with the [National Park Service](#) and the [Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy](#), has commissioned a set of new works from the Chinese artist and activist that will respond to the very specific site that is the former maximum security island prison in the San Francisco Bay. The exhibition, titled simply "[Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz](#)," will run from September 27, 2014 to April 26, 2015. The exhibition will span several former prison buildings and outdoor on the island for a total of four sites, and admission will be included in the fee for visiting Alcatraz. Included will be new sculptural works, sound art, and multimedia pieces exploring themes central to the artist's practice as well as his work as an activist. The former federal detention center is an apt venue for Ai's work as the artist was famously detained — allegedly for tax evasion — by the Chinese authorities for 81 days. That experience was explored in a series of sculptures the artist [created for a collateral exhibition at the 2013 Venice Biennale](#).



First floor of the New Industries Building at Alcatraz, site of the exhibition "Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz" (September 27, 2014-April 26, 2015).

Ai is developing the overall concept for the massive exhibition and overseeing creation of the works in his studio in Beijing, where he remains under constant surveillance and banned from travel by Chinese authorities. FOR-SITE co-founder and director **Cheryl Haines** will coordinate and curate the exhibition on Alcatraz.

“The misconception of totalitarianism is that freedom can be imprisoned,” Ai said of the exhibition in a statement. “This is not the case. When you constrain freedom, freedom will take flight and land on a windowsill.”

This will mark the first major contemporary art intervention on Alcatraz island, which is managed jointly by the National Park Service and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.



View of San Francisco from Alcatraz Island, site of the exhibition "Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz" (September 27, 2014-April 26, 2015).

“It is thrilling to offer Alcatraz as muse and canvas to such a masterful and courageous artist as Ai Weiwei,” **Frank Dean**, superintendent of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, said in a statement. “We look forward to seeing the ways in which Alcatraz inspires this new body of work, and to inspiring a deeper level of interpretation and engagement with the island for the thousands of people who will visit during this special exhibition.”

True to [Ai’s prolific use of social media](#) as an extension of his work both as an artist and an activist, the exhibition will also include a major social media initiative to elicit audience engagement.

— Benjamin Sutton ([@bhsutton](#))

(All photos by Jan Stürmann, courtesy FOR-SITE Foundation.)

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