

# Ai Weiwei

Exhibition in Lucerne: 13. 11. 2014–17. 1. 2015  
Opening: Thursday, November 13, 2014; 6–8pm

Galerie Urs Meile is pleased to announce the opening of Ai Weiwei's fifth exhibition at our gallery in Lucerne. The first work immediately confronts the visitor with that aspect of the Ai Weiwei phenomenon, which even people who are not interested in art are familiar with, thanks to countless media reports: the political activist who is not allowed to leave China. *Surveillance Camera* (2010, 8/14, marble, 39.2 × 39.8 × 19 cm, edition of 14) is a marble replica of one of the cameras outside of Ai Weiwei's studio in Beijing. But actually everybody is able to follow Ai Weiwei wherever he went, or see whom he met and what he ate without the help of surveillance cameras, since Ai Weiwei takes many photographs and publishes them online on Instagram. Of course, the artist selects what he will share, but he definitely has an easy way of handling his privacy. Ai Weiwei once said, «I realize that being an artist after Duchamp is more about lifestyle and attitude than producing some sort of product . . . a way of looking at things.» Many of his photographs represent this idea, and show his view of the world. His early *New York Photographs* (1983–1993) were already focusing on Ai Weiwei, his friends, and the art scene in New York's East Village. And even in highly dramatic situations, Ai Weiwei doesn't forget to capture the moment. The famous photograph *Illumination* (2009, digital lambda print, 126 × 168 cm (mounted), edition of 40) was taken during his arrest on August 12, 2009, at the Anyi Hotel in Chendgu, China. Ai Weiwei was assaulted and kept from testifying at the trial of his friend, the activist Tan Zuoren, who was accused of inciting subversion of state power, because he had investigated the Sichuan school corruption scandal and tried to set up a database of earthquake victims. Due to their inadequate construction, many schools in Sichuan collapsed and five thousand students lost their lives.

Ai Weiwei knows that he challenges the independence of art by making it political, by using it as a tool to convey information. As a matter of course, though, the question of form is of equal interest to him. His aesthetic sense can be seen in the series *Sugar Pills* (2013, huali wood, 162 × 154 × 100 cm, 97 × 86 × 60 cm, 63 × 108 × 102 cm, 134 × 86 × 74 cm). Their outlines are random, and their original shapes come from wooden blocks cut from scrap wood by carpenters in Ai Weiwei's studio, who used them to practice their craft. They employ a classic Ming furniture-making technique, without the use of screws or nails. Although related to Ai Weiwei's earlier series, titled *Divina Proportione* (2010), they are unlike the earlier work, as they are not based on geometry and mathematical precision. The form of the *Sugar Pill* is not logical, but it has a strong sense of design and structure, as well as volume and an element of architecture.

This becomes even more visible when they are seen next to *National Stadium* (2005–2007, digital lambda print, set of 10; 91 × 111 cm each (framed), edition of 20 + 2AP). This is a series of ten photographs featuring the different phases of construction of the Beijing Olympic Stadium. The so-called Bird's Nest was designed by the Swiss architects Herzog & De Meuron for the 2008 Olympic Summer Games, and Ai Weiwei served as artistic advisor and cultural translator for the design. The architects added extra, random-looking pieces of steel so that the supports would blend into the rest of the stadium. This harmony between randomness and design can also be seen in the *Sugar Pills*. Ai Weiwei documented the construction from the foundation trench to the finished building, sometimes over a period of twenty-four hours, and took great care to construct his images meticulously.

Ai Weiwei was born in 1957 in Beijing, China, where he also lives and works today. A selection of his most recent exhibitions includes: *Ai Weiwei @ large*, Alcatraz, San Francisco, USA; *Ai Weiwei - Evidence*, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, Germany; and *Ai Weiwei: According to What?*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, USA, all in 2014. In 2013 he exhibited in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennial, and in 2007 he realized his project *Fairytale* for Documenta XII, in which he invited 1001 Chinese people to spend a week in Kassel, Germany.