



Work of Chinese Artist and Activist Ai Weiwei in Princeton

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By Susan Wallner
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"Your own acts tell the world who you are and what kind of society you think it should be."

~ from "*Weiwei-isms*," edited by Larry Warsh

Ai Weiwei (pronounced EYE WAY-WAY) is China's most famous artist. He's a jester and a provocateur. He's a serious artist and a prolific tweeter. He's unable to leave China (his passport was seized), and Chinese censors suppress every appearance of his name on the Internet (he's almost unknown in his own country). But over 190,000 people follow [@aiww](#) on Twitter, and his art can be seen in high profile exhibitions around the world.

Through his art and his activist writings, Ai Weiwei focuses on China today, and the average citizen's inability to hear or tell the truth. The government has not been pleased, and Ai was detained in 2011 for 81 days. Calls for his freedom were heard from around the world, including from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Although released, he has not been permitted to leave China since. But in almost inverse proportion to the Chinese government's attempts to suppress his freedom of speech, Ai Weiwei's international audience has grown.

Ai Weiwei's views on life, art, politics, the digital world, and more are presented in *Weiwei-isms*, published this month by Princeton University Press. The small book (4 ½" x 5 ½") is grouped into sections such as "On Freedom of Expression," "On Art and Activism," and "On History, the Historical Moment, and the Future." Found under this last heading: "If a nation cannot face its past, it has no future."

Ai Weiwei is very concerned about the past, the present, and the future of China. According to his friend and the editor of *Weiwei-isms* Larry Warsh, "He loves China, he doesn't want to leave China. He understands that China needs to change." Warsh points out that it is Ai's commitment to China that makes his outspoken critique of the country so meaningful.



Ai Weiwei "No Evil." Photographs of Ai Weiwei by Sharron Lovell, 2009.

At the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum, the first American survey of Ai Weiwei's work runs through February 24. At Princeton University, his "Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads" is on display in Scudder Plaza, in front of The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Each of the animal heads — one for each sign in the Chinese zodiac — is 10 feet high and weighs 800 pounds. "It's a little unusual to think of art and public policy as coming together," says Dean of the Woodrow Wilson School, Cecilia Rouse, "and I'm really proud of the fact that we recognize that public policy and the expression that goes with public policy comes in many different shapes and forms."

"Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads" is a joint presentation of the Woodrow Wilson School, the Princeton University Art Museum, and the Princeton University Press. For additional reading and to see a time-lapse of the installation of the Zodiac Heads on Scudder Plaza, visit princeton.edu/aiww. *Weiwei-isms* is published by the Princeton University Press.

Susan Wallner is an award-winning producer with PCK Media. She is a long-time contributor to [State of the Arts](#), now airing on NJTV Sundays at 8 pm and Thursdays at 11:30 pm.