

AI WEIWEI ODISSEY

ODYSSEY

A PROJECT BY AI WEIWEI FOR PALERMO

April 23 – June 20 2017 – ZAC / Zisa Arti Contemporanee, Palermo

Presented in Palermo **Odyssey, the installation made by Ai Weiwei for the ZAC exhibition space - Zisa arti contemporanea, which opens to the public on Sunday 23rd April.** Odyssey, which covers the entire surface of the approximately 1400 square-metre exhibition space, was born from a research project on refugees and refugee camps around the world, launched in 2015 by the great Chinese artist who lives and works between Berlin and Peking. The project is being promoted by **Amnesty International Italy**, on the event of its XXXII general assembly; and by the **Department for culture - municipality of Palermo**. It has been organised by **Ruber.Contemporanea**, in collaboration with the Accademia di Belle Arti di Palermo (Palermo Fine Art Academy) | DICODA Dipartimento di Comunicazione e didattica dell'Arte (Department of Communication and Art Education).

Odyssey was made as part of “**Diritti in Cantiere**” (“Rights in Cantiere” - referring to the name of the venue), a rich series of cultural and educational initiatives that, starting from the 21st of April at the Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa, lead up to the XXXII Amnesty International Italy general assembly. This is the biggest moment of discussion for the human rights organisation, which this year has chosen Sicily, Mediterranean port and site of meetings and exchanges between different populations, languages and cultures for thousands of years, as the setting for its messages on the promotion of human rights.

The installation Ai Weiwei presents in the ZAC exhibition space is realised across a piece of floorpaper of around 1400m² in surface area. It was born from a research project into refugees and refugee camps around the world, which he started in 2015.

The Odyssey installation is the result of careful investigation of the historical, political and social context in which the “refugee crisis” - which represents the focus of his research - has developed. It is a path that started from direct, personal experience and has been developed through the study of the topic in its current events and throughout history.

Ai Weiwei. Odyssey
PalermoZac. Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa
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The iconographic motif for the wallpaper is made from a combination of images taken from social media and materials collected by the artist during the course of his visits to refugee camps, and it has been organised based on the graphic and stylistic elements from ancient Greece and Egypt that inspired him. Black-and-white figures appear juxtaposed, in the style of ancient Greek pottery, but morphed to represent the 21st century political realities of militarisation, migration and escape. The close dialogue between the didactic aspect of the ceramic iconography and the huge quantity and speed of images which modern man is used to, creates a direct relationship between a collective, historical memory and modern communication, growing one of the central themes in the research and works of Ai Weiwei.

Here follows a detailed explanation of the project, where the artist shows his research methods, his approach to the subject and the contents of the work:

“In the last year, I have been producing a documentary on the refugee crisis. I have traveled to over ten different countries across several continents, having visited dozens of refugee camps. I have interviewed refugees and others involved, such as local politicians and NGOs. The refugee crisis has a much broader context. There are different histories, regional and religious conflicts, economic pressures, and environmental crises that have contributed to what we understand to be the refugee crisis. My team and I studied this, beginning with the earliest human movements, stretching back to the Old Testament. With the wallpaper, specifically, we tried to come up with a visual language directly inspired by drawings found in early Greek and Egyptian carvings, pottery, and wall paintings. Within that context, we integrated the new conflicts, with images found on social media and the Internet, as well as images from my own involvement. Beyond the images, we also examined literature and the political conditions of the various periods. It took more than half a year to finish the drawing and it relates to six themes: war, the ruins resulting from war, the journey undertaken by the refugees, the crossing of the sea, the refugee camps, and the demonstrations and protests.”

“Today, in the time of the death penalty and slavery, - said **Mayor Leoluca Orlando** - I ask Amnesty International to include Palermo, Italian Capital of Culture 2018, in its initiatives, because culture is not only about art, but also rights. In Palermo there are no migrants, because whoever lives in our city is Palermitan and helps us to understand our rights. This is what Ai Weiwei has understood.”

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Antonio Marchesi, president of Amnesty International Italy, states, “Amnesty International not only provides figures or statistical data which, although alarming, risk communicating little or badly the suffering of so many men, women and children. Amnesty also wants to tell the individual stories of so many people, fleeing from persecution, war or poverty who are being treated with more and more hostility, sent back away, held as far as possible from those who actually have the legal and moral duty to provide them help. At this historic moment, in which we are witnessing one of the most significant movements of migrants and refugees since the Second World War, Amnesty International joins forces with Ai Weiwei, the world-famous artist, who has made his own installation available. The common goal is to succeed in convincing the world to reverse course, to understand very simply that migrants, like us, are human beings.

“The scheduling continues of events at the ZAC with site-specific participation of great names in contemporary art - affirms the **Councillor for Culture at the municipality of Palermo, Andrea Cusumano**. Ai Weiwei, among the most influential artists of our day, has created a project designed for Palermo and our policy of hospitality, dialogue and cultural exchange in the centre of the Mediterranean. Another confirmation of the recovered cultural centrality of our city and its ability to discuss the most important contemporary issues effectively. Another important booking for the ZAC space, which is increasingly assuming the role of the ‘Turbine Hall of the South’ ”

PRESS KIT AND PHOTOS:

<http://www.civita.it/Sala-stampa/ODYSSEY-Un-progetto-di-AI-WEIWEI-per-Palermo>

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INFO:

Artist: Ai Weiwei

Title: Odyssey

Promoted by: Amnesty International Italia e Comune di Palermo - Assessorato alla Cultura

Organised by: ruber.contemporanea

Location: Zac - Zisa Arti Contemporanee Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa | April 23 - June 20 2017

Project manager: Antonio Leone

Scientific advice and educational activities: Giulia Ingarao

Graphic design: Donato Faruolo

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Communication: Virginia Glorioso

Community manager social network: Daniela Tomasino

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Ai Weiwei

Ai Weiwei (b. 1957) is an artist who resides and works in both Berlin and Beijing. His father, the poet Ai Qing, was denounced by China's Communist Party in 1958 and his family was sent to labor camps, first near the North Korean border and then eventually in Xinjiang province. They returned to Beijing in 1976 after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Ai studied animation at the Beijing Film Academy, then studied art in New York in the early eighties. Upon returning to China a decade later, Ai advocated for experimental artists by publishing underground books and curating avant-garde exhibitions. He has worked in many media, including sculpture, installation, photography, architecture and film. He is an outspoken advocate of human rights and freedom of speech. He is the recipient of the Václav Havel Prize in Creative Dissent in 2012 and the Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award in 2015.

CV

Selected Solo Exhibitions: *Law of the Journey*, National Gallery in Prague, Prague (2017), *translocation — transformation*, 21er Haus Museum of Contemporary Art, Vienna; *Ai Weiwei. Libero*, Palazzo Strozzi, Firenze; *Around Ai Weiwei: Photography 1983-2016*, Camera Centro Italiano per la Fotografia, Torino; *Ai Weiwei 2016: Roots and Branches*, Lisson Gallery, New York; *Ai Weiwei 2016: Roots and Branches*, Mary Boone Gallery, New York; *Laundromat*, Jeffrey Deitch, New York (2016), *Ruptures*, Fauschou

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Foundation, Copenhagen; *Ai Weiwei*, Galleria Continua, Pechino; *Ai Weiwei*, Royal Academy of Art, Londra; *Ai Weiwei @ Helsinki*, Helsinki Art Museum, Helsinki; *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads*, Contemporary Art Centre Malagá, Malagá (2015) *Evidence*, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlino; *@Large: Ai Weiwei*, Alcatraz, San Francisco; *On the Table. Ai Weiwei*, La Virreina Image Centre, Barcelona (2014), *55a Mostra Internazionale d'Arte La Biennale di Venezia*, Padiglione della Germania, Venezia; *Ai Weiwei: Screening Room*, Hotel Bauer, Venezia (2013); *Ai Weiwei: According to What?*, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C.; *Interlacing*, Jeu de Paume, Parigi (2012); *Circle of Animals*, Somerset House, Londra; *Ai Weiwei: Absent*, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei (2011); *Ai Weiwei: Sunflower Seeds*, Tate Modern, Londra (2010); *So Sorry*, Haus der Kunst, Monaco, *Ai Weiwei: New York Photographs 1983-1993*, Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, Beijing (2009); *Ai Weiwei*, Kunsthalle Bern, Berna (2004).

Selected Group Exhibitions: *Roland Flexner - Ai Weiwei*, Massimo De Carlo, Hong Kong (2017), *Terra provocata*, Fondazione del Monte, Bologna; *East Asian Video Frames*, Pori Art Museum, Pori; *Performing for the Camera*, Tate Modern, Londra UK; *Chinese Whispers*, Kunstmuseum Bern & Zentrum Paul Klee, Berna (2016), *56a Mostra Internazionale d'Arte La Biennale di Venezia*; *Go East*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; *A Brief History of the Future*, Louvre; *Andy Warhol | Ai Weiwei*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (2015), *14a Mostra Internazionale d'Architettura La Biennale di Venezia*, Palazzo Franchetti, Venezia; *Beyond and Between*, Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul (2014); *Busan Biennale*, Busan (2012); *29a Biennale di San Paolo*, San Paolo; *documenta 12*, Kassel (2007); *I Triennale di Guangzhou*, Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou (2002); *Fuck Off*, EastLink Gallery, Shanghai (2000); *II Stars Exhibition*, National Art Museum of China, Beijing (1980); *I Stars Exhibition* all'esterno del National Art Museum of China, Beijing (1979).

Collections: Centre Pompidou, Paris; De Pont Museum, Tilburg; Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek; Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museen Dahlem, Berlin; Museum DKM, Duisburg; Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Rubell Family Collection, Miami; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Tate Collection, London; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; Walther Collection, Neu-Ulm.

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