



PRESS RELEASE

**CAMERA – Centro Italiano per la Fotografia**

presents

## **Around Ai Weiwei: Photographs 1983-2016**

**curated by Davide Quadrio**

from Friday 28 October 2016 to Sunday 12 February 2017

Press preview: Thursday 27 October, breakfast 9.30am  
or during the day by appointment

*Turin, October 2016.* From Friday 28 October 2016 to Sunday 12 February 2017, CAMERA – Centro Italiano per la Fotografia presents *Around Ai Weiwei: Photographs 1983-2016*, curated by Davide Quadrio.

The exhibition is part of the investigation process into photography undertaken by Camera, which over the year since its opening has focused its activities on the study of this language as a medium of artistic expression, of political reflection and social inclusion. Camera has systematically drawn comparisons between photography and other media as well as other artistic disciplines, highlighting its great importance in the contemporary debate and its ability to interface both with the cultural universe as a whole and with a range of audiences. Numerous events, both national and international, including seminars, interventions in the field of the leading institutions in the sector and the circulation of exhibitions organised by Camera in major foreign venues (the FOMU in Antwerp, the Fotomuseum in Winterthur, the SCoP in Shanghai, etc.), testify to the quality of the work carried out and its value within the broader panorama of photography, art and research. *Around Ai Weiwei* constitutes a further step in this programme, investigating the relationship with photography and video of one of the unquestioned leading names in contemporary art but also a figure central to the analysis of the relationship between East and West as well as our recent and not so recent history.

Along an exhibition itinerary that includes photographic and video materials, with a number of documents never seen before, *Around Ai Weiwei* highlights the various stages of the artistic career of Ai Weiwei – a provocative and outspoken figure – investigating not only his artistic poetics from his debut right up to the present day, but also his role in the cultural, social and political debate, both in China and throughout the world. The exhibition explores the genesis of Ai Weiwei as a public figure and as an icon of the Asiatic world, as well as stimulating a reflection on the way in which the contemporary environment has transformed him and thus pondering ‘who’ Ai Weiwei has become.



*“In a world of exhibitions showcasing Ai Weiwei’s monumental works, we conceived of this project – says the curator Davide Quadrio – to expressly redirect the attention of the public to documentary evidence that circumnavigates the artist’s life, as a testimonial to his fascinating journey as a man, creator and activist. For most, Ai Weiwei is a global product of Chinese origin.”*

The exhibition starts off with an image chosen by the artist himself: a self-portrait shot by the artist in 2003 entitled *The Forbidden City during the SARS Epidemic*. In this image, reminiscent of a selfie *ante litteram*, Ai Weiwei is depicted alone in the Forbidden City, emptied by the epidemic that isolated China from the rest of the world for six months, turning a great number of cities and into ghost towns. An intensely meaningful image, in this human-less place, the public figure of Ai Weiwei sits at the heart of where the cosmogony of power is at its strongest: the Forbidden City of Beijing, the imperial centre of the universe. The image creates a zone of silence, a ground zero for the exhibition to reveal specifics of Ai Weiwei’s activities to viewers.

On entering Camera we encounter a single monumental artwork: *‘Soft Ground’*, a 45-metre long carpet with a 1:1 photo reproduction of the traces left behind by tanks on a dirt track to the southwest of Beijing. It is a reminder of the Tiananmen crisis, a pivotal moment in the history of contemporary China and of the whole world, which has since influenced Chinese artistic production.

From here, the exhibition itinerary unfolds chronologically through a series of thematic chapters. Alongside the marks of tank tracks in Tiananmen Square, Ai Weiwei’s life is shown in his New York period, with a series of photographs entitled *New York Photographs 1983-1993*: 80 shots, like stills from a black and white film, recount a sequence of private moments and encounters had by Ai Weiwei when he lived in the United States.

The two video works *Chang’an Boulevard* and *Beijing: The Second Ring* describe the scenario of the Chinese capital in the early 2000s. Through footage of urban landscapes and fragments of life, he documents the radical transformations sweeping across Beijing, dissecting and investigating a city in a constant state of metamorphosis.

Of great importance is also the rare video interview carried out by Daria Menozzi, *Before Ai Weiwei*, 1994, edited in 2009) which shows the artist involved in an intimate dialogue, thus offering us a glimpse of the first years of his return to China after having lived in NYC. This almost unseen documentary confirms Ai Weiwei’s decisive contribution to the intellectual, cultural and artistic debate in 1990s China.

*Beijing Photographs 1993-2003* is a previously unseen series of photographs that Camera will display for the first time. The series depicts the life, actions and the entourage of Ai Weiwei just prior to the rapid process of transformation that was to make Beijing the global city it is today. Ai captures the demarcation of the contemporary art scene in China—a frontier that has shaped, and arguably propelled, the artist’s career and global image. The autobiographical storyline of the exhibition is punctuated with a selection of sculptural artworks that become symbols mirroring the development of Ai Weiwei’s life over four decades. The artist’s readymades and porcelain works are an expansion on the multilayered abilities and subtleties of Ai. Each sculpture manifests as a point of reflection, allowing for a suspension of time as visitors pass through Camera’s rooms.



The last section of the exhibition premieres one of Ai's latest projects: *Refugee Wallpaper*, a collage of 17,000 images shot by Ai Weiwei during his ongoing contact with the refugee emergency which is spreading across Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere. This endless series seems designed to make viewers question the implications of the artist's activism. Within the delicate boundaries of global events and international politics, the drama of migration has turned into a spectacle like everything else.

*"Here the voice of the artist fills the void of the thousands that go unheard,"* Davide Quadrio explains, *"but at the same time we bear witness to an obsessive act of voyeurism that triggers feelings of unease. Does this grandiose multiplication of records make us see and understand more, or less? Years after his self-portraits series, what remains and what has changed in the artist's take on self-representation?"*

The exhibition will be accompanied by a cycle of dates with screenings of documentaries in which various profiles and interviews present the process of construction and transformation of the public figure and contemporary icon of Ai Weiwei.

The exhibition is supported by Compagnia di San Paolo and Lavazza, and promoted and organised with the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, alongside the major retrospective *Ai WeiWei. Libero* on view from 23 September 2016 to 22 January 2017 at Palazzo Strozzi, offering a specific study of his photography and video work.

From 11 October at the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, the monumental installation by Ai Weiwei *Fragments (2005)* will be on show, a powerful metaphor for contemporary reality and the fragility which lies behind manifestations of power.

***Around Ai Weiwei: Photographs 1983-2016***

**On View: From 28 October 2016 to 12 February 2017**

**Venue: CAMERA – Centro Italiano per la Fotografia, Turin**

**Curator: Davide Quadrio**

**Adjunct Curator: You Mi**

**Research and Coordination in China: Ryan Nuckolls**

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## **Ai Weiwei biography**

Ai Weiwei was born in Beijing in 1957. His childhood was scarred by the exile of his father, the Chinese poet Ai Qing, branded a 'rightist'. In 1976, after Mao Zedong's death, Ai Weiwei enrolled at the Beijing Film Academy and became one of the founding members of the avant-garde 'Stars' group. He lived in New York from 1983 to 1993, briefly attending the Parsons School of Design and starting out on his artistic career.

In 1993, he returned to China to be with his ailing father. He contributed to the creation of a community of avant-garde artists in Beijing's East Village and co-founded the China Art Archives & Warehouse (CAAW), one of the country's first independent art spaces.

From the early 1990s, he began to develop an interest in architecture, designing his own studio-house in Caochangdi, founding the architecture studio FAKE Design and, in 2008, co-designing Beijing's 'Bird's Nest' national stadium together with the Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron. An outspoken human rights activist, Ai was arrested by Chinese authorities in April 2011 and held incommunicado for three months.

He received an honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Politics and Social Science, University of Ghent, Belgium in 2010, as well as many awards, including the Skowhegan Medal (2011) and the Chinese Contemporary Art Award (2008). In 2012, Weiwei was awarded the Human Rights Foundation's Vaclav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent, and Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience Award in 2015. His work has appeared in major exhibitions such as that at the Royal Academy of Arts, London (2016); at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2015); the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC (2013); the Asia Society Museum, New York (2011); the Tate Modern, London (2010); the São Paulo Art Biennial (2010); the Haus der Kunst, Munich (2009); the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2009), and Documenta XII (2007). The exhibition *Around Ai Weiwei* is organised and promoted in collaboration with the Palazzo Strozzi Foundation as part of the major Florentine show *Ai Weiwei. Libero*.

## **Davide Quadrio biography**

Davide Quadrio is a China-based producer and curator. For a decade, he founded and directed the first not-for-profit independent creative lab in Shanghai, Bizart Art Center, designed as a platform to foster the local contemporary art scene. In 2007, Quadrio created Arthub Asia, a production and curatorial proxy active in Asia and throughout the world. He is currently hosted by the Shanghai Visual Art Institute and is working as a curator for the Aurora Museum, Shanghai. Assisted by its ongoing collaboration with Arthub, the Museum plans to open a new contemporary art wing in 2016. He is a member of the Curatorial Board of the PAC, Pavilion of Contemporary Art in Milan, as well as being responsible for the international curatorial programme of Scene 44, Marseille: a production platform covering visual arts, movement and space. With Bizart and its team, and currently with Arthub Asia, Quadrio has organised hundreds of exhibitions, educational activities and exchanges both in China and further afield, developing relationships with local and foreign artists as well as independent organisations and institutions worldwide.



## Informazioni pratiche

**Around Ai Weiwei**

**Photographs 1983-2016**

**Curated by Davide Quadrio**

From 28 October 2016 to 12 February 2017

**CAMERA – Centro Italiano per la Fotografia**

Via delle Rosine 18, 10123 - Turin, Italy

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### Opening hours:

Monday 11.00 am – 7.00 pm

Tuesday closed

Wednesday 11.00 am – 7.00 pm

Thursday 11.00 am – 9.00 pm

Friday 11.00 am – 7.00 pm

Saturday 11.00 am – 7.00 pm

Sunday 11.00 am – 7.00 pm

Last admission 30 minutes before closing time

### Tickets:

Admission fee €10

Reduced €6 for visitors up to 26, over 65 years old and owners of Abbonamento Musei Torino Piemonte Ticket holders: Gallerie d'Italia (Milano, Napoli, Vicenza), Museo Nazionale del Cinema, MAO, Palazzo Madama, Borgo Medievale, GAM – Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Touring Club Italiano, Forte di Bard, MEF – Museo etto Fico, Amici della Fondazione per l'Architettura, Ordine degli Architetti member, AIACE member, Enjoy member, Slow Food member, Centro Congressi Unione Industriale Torino member.

Free admission for children up to 12 years old and Torino+Piemonte Card owners.

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