

AI WEIWEI

WHY IS HE CONSIDERED ONE OF CHINA'S GREATEST ENEMIES?

HIS WORK CALLS ATTENTION TO GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, FOCUSING A LENS ON CHINA'S PRESENT GOVERNMENT. POLICE HAVE THREATENED HIM PHYSICALLY, IMPRISONED HIM, KEPT HIM UNDER HOUSE ARREST, AND PLACED HIM UNDER GOVERNMENT SURVEILLANCE. DESPITE THIS, HE CONTINUES HIS ICONOCLASTIC BODY OF WORK. TRANSITIONING FROM NEW YORK IN THE 1990S TO CHINA, HIS CONTROVERSIAL STATEMENTS AND CRITICISM BECAME ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT.

"A threat to harmonious society"

HAVING BEEN TRAINED IN THE WEST, HIS ART DRAWS FROM MINIMALIST AND CONCEPTUAL PRINCIPLES.

Sources

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NOTABLE PIECES

Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn: 1995

THIS WAS A CONCEPTUAL PERFORMANCE PIECE IN WHICH AI WEI WEI PHOTOGRAPHED HIMSELF SMASHING A 2000 YEAR OLD CEREMONIAL URN. HAVING MONETARY AS WELL AS CULTURAL VALUE, HE FACE SIGNIFICANT BACKLASH. HOWEVER, HE CITED CHAIRMAN MAO IN HIS DEFENSE, REFERRING TO CULTURAL ERASURE IN COMMUNIST CHINA. THIS HIGHLIGHTED THE HYPOCRISY OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME.

Ton of Tea: 2008

IN THIS SCULPTURE, AI WEI WEI COMPRESSED A TON OF TRADITIONAL PU-ER TEA INTO ONE CUBIC CENTIMETER. THE VISUAL AESTHETIC IS MINIMALIST, BUT THE BLOCK FORM IS A REFERENCE TO THE ACTUAL USE IN PRESENT-DAY CHINA. THE SCULPTURE BEARS A STRONG TEA SMELL DUE TO THE HEAVY CONCENTRATION OF TEA. HE CALLS ATTENTION TO THE DIVISION BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT AND THE EAST AND WEST IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ROLE OF TEA.

Sunflower Seeds: 2010

49 TONS OF PORCELAIN SUNFLOWERS SEEDS WERE MADE BY 1600 CHINESE ARTISANS. EACH WAS INDIVIDUALLY HANDPAINTED TO BE INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM AN ACTUAL SUNFLOWER SEED. IN THIS, AI WEI WEI COMMENTS ON THEMES OF AUTHENTICITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL'S ROLE IN SOCIETY. HE ALSO REFERS TO PROPAGANDA POSTERS WHICH DEPICTED MAO ZEDONG AS THE SUN AND THE PEOPLE AS SUNFLOWERS TURNING TOWARDS HIM.

