

**KEMPER ART MUSEUM TO PRESENT *AI WEIWEI: BARE LIFE*, THE INAUGURAL EXHIBITION
IN ITS RENOVATED AND EXPANDED BUILDING, REOPENING ON SEPTEMBER 28, 2019**

***Ai Weiwei: Bare Life* Presents Over 35 Artworks, Including New Large-Scale and Site-Specific Installations
and Works Being Shown for the First Time in the United States**



Ai Weiwei: Bare Life, installation view, Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2019. Photo: Joshua White / JWPictures.com

St. Louis, Missouri, September 12, 2019—This fall, the newly expanded and renovated Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at Washington University in St. Louis will reopen with a major exhibition of work by Ai Weiwei. The renowned Chinese dissident artist and activist is internationally known for rigorous, compassionate and complex artworks that address themes of political, ethical and social urgency. Designed by the artist and curated by Sabine Eckmann, William T. Kemper Director and Chief Curator of the Kemper Art Museum, *Ai Weiwei: Bare Life* will be on view from September 28, 2019, through January 5, 2020.

Ai Weiwei: Bare Life will feature roughly three dozen artworks created over the last two decades in a wide variety of mediums, among them sculptures, installations, photographs and films. A selection of new large-scale and site-specific projects—including the monumental wallpaper mural *Bombs*—will be placed in dialogue with some of Ai’s most iconic works and several major artworks never before exhibited in the United States. Together, these objects will provide new insight into Ai’s abiding concern for human rights and the global condition of humanity while showcasing his profound engagement with Chinese culture past and present—especially the radical shifts that have characterized China in the new millennium.

Created for the museum’s Saligman Family Atrium, *Bombs* measures approximately 65 feet long and 36 feet high. The piece features full-scale renderings of 43 weapons of mass destruction, including aerial bombs and missiles developed by the United States, Russia, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Israel. The weapons are arranged left to right chronologically—from a grenade used in the Italo-Turkish War in 1911 to a guided nuclear bomb created in 2019—and bottom to top by destructive power. The most devastating weapons loom overhead on the atrium’s vaulted ceiling, their ominous visual weight underscoring the sense of increasingly lethal power.

The exhibition, which is organized into two thematic sections, takes its title from the writings of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who has long examined the notion of bare, unprotected life and its manifestations throughout human history. In recent years, Agamben’s ideas have gained new force as approximately 70 million people have been displaced from their homelands and deprived of basic human rights.

The first section, *Bare Life*, encompasses artworks visualizing the effects of the global refugee crisis as well as Ai’s investigation into Chinese human rights violations in connection with the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. The second section, *Rupture*, alludes to the German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt’s influential writings about modernity’s break from tradition. It comprises artworks that represent Ai’s creative engagement with China’s cultural legacy, from the radical erasures of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) to the rapid globalization and economic reforms that have marked the beginning of the 21st century.

“Over the last decade the Kemper Art Museum has explored the interconnections between art, especially conceptual art, and politics,” explains Eckmann. “Continuing in this trajectory, *Ai Weiwei: Bare Life* is focused on Ai’s creation of images that reconfigure the past in the present, employ a radical form of realism for political critique and elevate into the realm of visibility those whose humanity has been ignored. We are extremely honored to be able to present the work of one of the most important artists and humanitarian voices of our time.”

Ai adds, “The exhibition at the Kemper Art Museum will be my first major institutional exhibition in the Midwest. It will also be my first major exhibition created under an academic framework. The exhibition is separated into two sections—*Bare Life* and *Rupture*—and the process of selecting the works and curating the show with Sabine Eckmann has been intense, but also precise and meaningful.”



The monumental site-specific installation *Bombs* was conceived for *Ai Weiwei: Bare Life* at the Kemper Art Museum. Pictured here with *Your Imploded View* (2001) by Olafur Eliasson. Photo: Joshua White / JWPictures.com

Bare Life Section

Entering the museum's Barney A. Ebsworth Gallery, visitors will encounter the mesmerizing ***Forever Bicycles*** (2019), a new, large-scale, site-specific installation that dominates the center of the room. Composed of 720 Forever bicycles—an iconic Chinese brand—the artwork is a readymade of sorts, diagonally bisecting the gallery while also creating a monumental arch through which visitors can pass.

To one side of *Forever Bicycles*, viewers will find a series of projects relating to victims of the devastating earthquake that struck Sichuan Province in 2008 and to Ai's persecution by Chinese authorities for his outspoken political activism sparked by the event. Through sculptures, videos and installations, Ai explores the Chinese government's insufficient response to the quake, which resulted in the collapse of substandard school buildings and the deaths of an estimated 90,000 people, including more than 5,000 children. Among these works is the semiabstract sculpture ***Forge Bed*** (2008–12), here making its U.S. debut. The work is formed from iron rebar segments that were shaped to replicate twisted rebar Ai found in Sichuan following the earthquake.

To the other side, viewers will find artworks reflecting Ai's deep concern for the welfare and dignity of displaced people around the world. ***Tear Gas Canisters*** (2016), also making its U.S. debut, consists of altered tear gas cans that were used by police against refugees. The ***Odyssey*** (2016) frieze, which covers two of the gallery's walls, is an immense wallpaper installation narrating the journey of those forced to flee their homelands, including representations of war, ruins in the wake of war, traveling on land, crossing the sea, refugee camps, and protests in host countries. Contemporary images are interspersed with figures and elements from ancient Greek and Egyptian art, Renaissance sculpture, and 19th-century Japanese woodblock prints. Through these hybrid artistic languages Ai insists on the universal urgency of human coexistence in a shared world while bringing empathy and visibility to precarious lives.

Other projects in the section use the medium of film to focus on the effects of war and displacement across the world, including the videos ***Idomeni*** (2016), ***Laziz*** (2017) and ***Calais*** (2018). In addition, the museum will host public screenings of Ai's longer documentary films about the refugee crisis, including ***Human Flow*** (2017) and the brand-new ***The Rest*** (2019).

Rupture Section

Entering the museum's Garen Gallery, visitors will encounter a range of artworks in which Ai engages with historical Chinese artifacts and explores China's complex relationship to its past and its rapid transformation into a globalized country.

Through (2007–8), a monumental installation not previously exhibited in the United States, is constructed from immense wooden pillars sourced from demolished temples. Crisscrossing the gallery at sharp diagonals, these beams intersect at various junctures and penetrate the tops of Qing-dynasty (1644–1912) tables, forming a complex network of interdependent structures that condense China's ruptured history.

The availability of such architectural remnants speaks to the scale of contemporary development, which has destroyed many historically significant buildings. *Through* evolved from a series of furniture works Ai began in 1997, employing skilled artisans to reassemble antique furniture and fragments into new configurations using traditional joinery techniques. Other iconic works on view from this series are ***Table with Three Legs*** (2006) and ***Grapes*** (2011).

Nearby, the triptych ***Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*** (2015), constructed from LEGO bricks, depicts Ai in the deliberately destructive act of dropping a Han-dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) urn. The artwork is based on a set of three photographs taken in 1995 and, like much of Ai's work, investigates the complex and artistically generative relationship between destruction and creation. Ai's performative iconoclasm can be understood both as an ironic reenactment of the Cultural Revolution and as a metaphor for China's break with its traditions and values.

Positioned near the triptych, and also making its U.S. debut, is *Feet* (2010), a display of found relics dating back to the sixth century. The work comprises ten pairs of stone feet originally belonging to Buddhist sculptures likely destroyed during a suppression of Buddhism in the ninth century. Here, Ai leaves the feet unaltered, displaying them as readymades or found objects to underscore the act of iconoclasm already perpetrated upon them.

Other works on view document more recent changes to China's built environment. *Souvenir from Shanghai* (2012), a large-scale sculpture, is composed of rubble from Ai's Shanghai studio, which was demolished in 2011 by the city government. *Provisional Landscapes* (2002–8), a wallpaper created from a series of more than 100 photographs, depicts urban spaces in transition as older, traditional buildings are destroyed to make way for new construction. The conceptual videos *Beijing 2003* (2003), *Chang'an Boulevard* (2004), *Beijing: The Second Ring* (2005) and *Beijing: The Third Ring* (2005) reveal the city's shifting urban landscape while preserving a particular moment in time.

Public Programs

To accompany the exhibition, the museum will present a wide range of public programs in collaboration with Washington University faculty, visiting scholars, artists, writers and critics, and local partners.

“As a teaching museum within a major research university, the Kemper Art Museum is dedicated to exploring how art both responds to and shapes understandings of what it means to be human, in the past and present,” says Eckmann. “*Ai Weiwei: Bare Life* speaks directly to this goal, providing students and the larger community with opportunities to participate in the global conversation around some of the most pressing issues of our time.”

Ai will join Eckmann for a public Q&A and will be present at the exhibition opening. Visitors will be invited to read aloud statements from Ai's book *Humanity*, which will be shared on social media as part of a wider effort to call attention to the importance of international human rights. Washington University students will have special opportunities to assist with the installation of the exhibition, lead tours, and participate in gallery talks.

Event highlights include:

- **Bunny and Charles Burson Distinguished Visiting Lecture:
Q&A with Ai Weiwei and Sabine Eckmann**
Thursday, September 26, 5:30 pm
- ***Ai Weiwei: Bare Life* Public Opening**
Saturday, September 28, 11:00 am–5:00 pm
- **Screening of *Human Flow* (2017)**
Friday, October 4, 6:00 pm
- **Lecture: Ai Weiwei and Readymades**
John J. Curley, Associate Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art, Department of Art, Wake Forest University
Wednesday, October 23, 6:30 pm
- **Screening of *The Rest* (2019)**
Saturday, November 16, 6:00 pm

Publication

The accompanying catalog presents the artist's work in dialogue with theoretical texts by the philosophers Giorgio Agamben (b. 1942) and Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) alongside three interpretive essays that illuminate the artist's work on the universal human condition, his engagement with historical Chinese artifacts, and his critical consideration of the effects of globalization. The book includes a new essay on human rights by Ai Weiwei and an interview in which he discusses his artwork and activism. With over 150 images, including installation photographs of the exhibition, the publication is designed by Lorraine Wild, Green Dragon Office, Los Angeles, and distributed by the University of Chicago Press.

About Ai Weiwei

Ai Weiwei was born in Beijing in 1957. The following year, his family was sent to a labor camp in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang, then spent 16 years exiled in the western province of Xinjiang. The family resettled in Beijing in 1976, after the death of Mao Zedong and the end of the Cultural Revolution. Ai studied animation at the Beijing Film Academy but spent most of the 1980s and early '90s residing in New York. There he began making conceptual artworks as well as photographs of political unrest, police violence and homeless people—concerns that remain central to his practice.

Returning to China in 1993, Ai helped to establish the Beijing East Village artist colony, the China Art Archives & Warehouse independent art space and the architecture studio FAKE Design. He collaborated with Herzog & de Meuron on the “Bird's Nest” stadium for the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics. Through his investigations into the circumstances prior to and following the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, he emerged as a prominent government critic and was arrested in 2011. He remained under constant surveillance until 2015, when his passport was returned to him and he could leave the country. He currently lives and works in Berlin.

Ai's work has been exhibited at major venues around the world, including recently at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (2017), the National Gallery Prague (2017), the Sakıp Sabancı Museum in Istanbul (2017), the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (2011), and the Tate Modern in London (2010). In 2017 he was commissioned to create a citywide installation, *Good Fences Make Good Neighbors*, for New York City's Public Art Fund. His many honors include Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience Award (2015), the inaugural Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent (2012), and the Chinese Contemporary Art Award for Lifetime Achievement (2008).

Exhibition Support

Support for exhibitions at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum is provided by the William T. Kemper Foundation, Nancy and Ken Kranzberg, Elissa and Paul Cahn, the Hortense Lewin Art Fund, and members of the Kemper Art Museum.

About the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum

The Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, part of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis, is among the nation's leading university art museums. As a teaching museum within a major research university, it serves as a center of cultural and intellectual life on campus and in St. Louis. Its mission is to build and preserve its art collection for current and future generations; collect significant modern and contemporary art; provide excellence in art historical research, exhibition, and object-based learning; and engage the campus population, its visitors and alumni, the St. Louis region, and the global art community.

Throughout its history, the Kemper Art Museum has built its permanent collection, now comprising some 8,700 objects, primarily by acquiring significant works by artists of the time. It includes strong holdings of 19th-, 20th- and 21st-century European and American paintings, sculptures, prints, installations and photographs. In recent years, it has originated groundbreaking special exhibitions such as *Georges Braque and the Cubist Still Life, 1928-1945* (2013), *In the Aftermath of Trauma: Contemporary Video Installations* (2014) and *To See Without Being Seen: Contemporary Art and Drone Warfare* (2016).

Formerly known as the Washington University Gallery of Art, the museum changed its name to the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum in 2004, when it was formally incorporated into the university's Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts. The current building — designed by Pritzker Prize winner Fumihiko Maki — opened on October 25, 2006. The building's current expansion and renovation — led by internationally acclaimed architecture firm KieranTimberlake — is one of two major new capital projects the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis will unveil this fall that transform the campus, reshape the visitor experience and firmly establish the prominence of its art museum on campus. The newly constructed Anabeth and John Weil Hall houses state-of-the-art graduate studios, classrooms and digital fabrication spaces.

The Kemper Art Museum expansion will strengthen visibility, better showcase the renowned permanent collection and accommodate larger and more varied special exhibitions. A striking new 34-foot-tall polished stainless-steel facade will draw visitors to the museum, where they will experience a soaring new glass-lined lobby. The new 2,700-square-foot James M. Kemper Gallery, with its double-height walls, will showcase a range of post-war and contemporary art. On the second floor, the reconfigured Gertrude Bernoudy Gallery will provide an intimate viewing experience for major 19th- and early 20th-century European and American works. Other renovations—led by Escher GuneWardena Architecture in partnership with Trivers—include a first-floor coffee bar and a suite of new galleries on the museum's lower level, opening in February 2020, where visitors will be able to enjoy works on paper; video art; an expanded Teaching Gallery; and the new Stair Gallery, highlighting seldom-seen historical objects from the collection. Overall, public display space will increase by nearly 50 percent.

About the East End Transformation

The \$280 million transformation of Washington University's East End encompasses eight major components.

These include Weil Hall and the Kemper Art Museum, as well as the Gary M. Sumers Welcome Center and the Craig and Nancy Schnuck Pavilion, all designed by KieranTimberlake in partnership with Tao + Lee; an underground parking garage, designed by KieranTimberlake and BNIM; and Ann and Andrew Tisch Park, an expansive green space designed by Michael Vergason Landscape Architects. Two new buildings for the university's McKelvey School of Engineering will round out the East End: Henry A. and Elvira H. Jubel Hall, designed by Moore Ruble Yudell and Mackey Mitchell; and James M. McKelvey, Sr. Hall which will be completed in 2020, designed by Perkins Eastman with paterh n ives, LLC. McCarthy Building Companies and the Simms Building Group serve as construction managers. Master planning for the East End was led by landscape architect Michael Vergason.

The East End Transformation creates a new front door for the university, strengthens academic connections, enhances campus green space and circulation, improves parking and accessibility and better frames iconic Brookings Hall. The transformation also improves links between the university's Danforth Campus and the adjacent, 1,300-acre Forest Park—home to the Saint Louis Art Museum, the Missouri History Museum and other popular attractions.

About the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts

A leader in architecture, art and design education, the Sam Fox School is committed to advancing those fields through innovative research and creative practice, excellence in teaching, a world-class university art museum and a deep commitment to addressing the social and environmental challenges of our time. Through the work of its students, faculty and alumni, the school strives to create a more just, sustainable, humane and beautiful world.

The Sam Fox School encompasses three primary units, each with a rich individual history. The College of Art, founded in 1879, was the first professional, university-affiliated art school in the United States. The College of Architecture, established in 1910, was among 10 founding members of the Association of Collegiate Schools of

Architecture. The Kemper Art Museum dates back to 1881 and was the first art museum west of the Mississippi River.

About Washington University in St. Louis

Washington University in St. Louis is a medium-sized, independent university dedicated to challenging its faculty and students alike to seek new knowledge and greater understanding of an ever-changing, multicultural world. The university is counted among the world's leaders in teaching and research, and draws students from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Students and faculty come from more than 100 countries around the world.

The university offers more than 90 programs and almost 1,500 courses leading to bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in a broad spectrum of traditional and interdisciplinary fields, with additional opportunities for minor concentrations and individualized programs.

Relevant Links:

Kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu, or follow the museum on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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