

The New York Times

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Berlin Gallery Spotlights Ai Weiwei, Detained Chinese Artist

By **Emilie Trice** May 2, 2011 6:00 am

The annual Gallery Weekend Berlin, which just finished its seventh iteration, welcomed a deluge of collectors, curators and artists to the city for a three-day marathon of 44 official openings and countless other events. One important artist was absent from the festivities: Ai Weiwei, the detained Chinese artist, whose exhibition will continue into June at Galerie Neugerriemschneider.

Since he was detained by Chinese authorities last month, the outspoken Mr. Ai has become a symbol of political dissent. His absence is especially felt in Berlin, where the artist had intended to move, albeit temporarily.

Mr. Ai was offered a guest professorship at the Universität der Künste and had confirmed plans to build an expansive studio in a former cable-manufacturing plant in the Oberschöneweide neighborhood. After his detainment, a series of protests were staged around the world (including in Berlin), including “1001 Chairs for Ai Weiwei,” a reference to the artist’s 2007 installation at the art festival Documenta. There is currently an online petition campaign focused on his release.

Mr. Ai’s work at the gallery (Linienstrasse 155; 49-30-2887-7277) consists of two large-scale sculptures — entitled “Tree” and “Rock” — that were fabricated before his arrest. The artist digitally rendered the final installation last year and, according to the gallery’s owner, Tim Neuger, he was prophetically adamant that, in the event of an arrest, the show open without him.

The rocks are actually painted porcelain from the Chinese city of Jingdezhen, where ceramics have been produced since 200 B.C. The trees are, in fact, trees, albeit

deconstructed and reconstructed. They're composed of remnants of fallen trees collected from southern China and combined using ancient Chinese methods.

9:45 a.m. | Updated A previous version of this post referred to Mr. Ai as Mr. Weiwei. The former is the correct Chinese style; it has been fixed. It also referred to work by other artists at the gallery; Mr. Ai's work is being shown there solo.

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