

Ai Weiwei Comes to Istanbul for His Exhibition at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum

The “Ai Weiwei on Porcelain” exhibition opens at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum with the support of Akbank

The first solo exhibition in Turkey of work by Ai Weiwei, one of the most influential figures of contemporary art, has opened at Sabancı University's Sakıp Sabancı Museum with the support of Akbank.

Ai Weiwei attended a press conference for the exhibition, which is entitled “**Ai Weiwei on Porcelain.**” Museum Director Dr. Nazan Ölçer and Akbank Chairman Suzan Sabancı Dinçer both spoke at the conference, saying that in terms of the number of exhibits, this is the most comprehensive exhibition of Ai Weiwei's work, in terms of the number of works included, ever held anywhere in the world.

The exhibition consists of over a hundred art works displayed on three floors of the museum and focuses particularly on those made of porcelain. Over the course of his career Ai Weiwei has produced works in many media, including video, wallpaper and photography as well as porcelain, and all of these are represented in the exhibition. “Ai Weiwei on Porcelain” ranges from his first porcelain work produced in 1976-1977 to new pieces produced specially for the Istanbul exhibition, and presents an unequalled opportunity for exploring the world of the artist.

“Ai Weiwei on Porcelain” enables visitors to gain detailed insight into his art by means of arranging the works according to concepts such as "appropriation", "reproduction" and "iconoclasm". The exhibition traces the life story of Ai Weiwei, who has produced his art in line with the principle "art is life, life is art."

Ai Weiwei references both the Chinese tradition of handcrafts and Western art history in his works and his selection for the Sakıp Sabancı Museum exhibition encompasses examples that reflect these characteristics. Porcelain is the focal point of this exhibition, functioning as a door opening onto the fundamental questions that the artist asks about authenticity, the historical transformation of value systems and the role of art in influencing social change. Ai Weiwei treats Chinese porcelain as a material infused with meanings relating to both history and the present day, using its traditional form and idiom within topical debates. Works in the "Ai Weiwei on Porcelain" exhibition, which covers three storeys of the Sakıp Sabancı Museum, represent all the methods that are the defining elements in his porcelain works.

Ai Weiwei's porcelain art is represented by iconic works such as his *Sunflower Seeds* installation, which put him at the forefront of contemporary art debates and made him one of the best known artists of our time. This installation is an example of how he uses both the connection of porcelain production with history and interpretations of the contemporary state of porcelain as a material. One of Ai Weiwei's iconoclastic works, *Dropping a Han Dynasty*

Urn, is an example of the different transformation methods designed to question the artist's existing value systems. His *Blue-and-White Porcelain Plates* and *Stacked Porcelain Vases as a Pillar*, which he produced specially for the Istanbul exhibition, stimulate ideas about the cyclical structure of history by reflecting the crises of our time in reference to ancient Greek and Egyptian carvings and ceramics.

Ai Weiwei sees art not just as an aesthetic activity, but as an opportunity to broach new questions. In reacting to events in daily life, he frequently references this uniquely Chinese material. In his works shown at this exhibition the artist reflects on the subject of history in the light of surviving fragments of antiques, and presents a comprehensive view of the contemporary world.

Throughout the "Ai Weiwei on Porcelain" exhibition, a programme of workshops, children's educational sessions, lectures and panels will take an in-depth look at Ai Weiwei's art. The first of these activities consists of a talk by the artist and a conversation about his art production methods with Sir Norman Rosenthal, former director of the Royal Academy of Arts in London, on Wednesday 13 September at 18.00.

A catalogue whose contributors are Sir Norman Rosenthal, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Stacey Pierson will be published to accompany the "Ai Weiwei on Porcelain" exhibition. As well as the artist's own work, the catalogue will examine the tradition of Chinese handcrafts on which he draws, and will be a comprehensive source for Ai Weiwei's work. The "Ai Weiwei on Porcelain" exhibition will remain open until 28 January 2018 at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum.

On the "Ai Weiwei on Porcelain" exhibition

Sabancı University's Sakıp Sabancı Museum Director Nazan Ölçer:

“We are delighted to be hosting Ai Weiwei, who is regarded by the world's foremost art critics as one of the most important and influential names in contemporary art, at Sabancı University's Sakıp Sabancı Museum. The "Ai Weiwei on Porcelain" exhibition will give visitors the opportunity to see a wide-ranging selection of Ai Weiwei's art, from his first porcelain work to new works that he has produced specially for this exhibition in Istanbul, and become acquainted with his life.

“A fascinating story lies behind this exhibition. In March 2016 Ai Weiwei came to visit Turkey's refugee camps, and while in Istanbul he visited me at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum. The next day we met up to visit the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, where I worked for many years, and this was the first step in the birth of this exhibition. During our visit Ai Weiwei saw a work produced as a result of the encounter between Chinese porcelain and Ottoman craftsmanship, and his face virtually lit up. That was the spark that gave rise to the project. During our first discussions about the exhibition with Ai Weiwei, we decided, under the influence of that moment on all of us, that his first exhibition in Turkey should focus on the production of porcelain, which had interested him for so long. I am certain that art lovers visiting the exhibition will find much to surprise them. In the words of the artist himself, the ‘Ai Weiwei on Porcelain’ exhibition is the most comprehensive and largest exhibition of his work ever held.

“Ai Weiwei is an artist who works and produces for world peace. By reflecting the tragedies of today's world in his art, he expresses his peaceable approach with a success that I am sure will have a profound impact on everyone who visits the exhibition and perhaps inspire them.

Akbank has enabled us to organise many major exhibitions since our museum was founded, so giving Turkish art lovers the opportunity to see works by leading world artists, and the bank has again lent its generous support to the ‘Ai Weiwei on Porcelain’ exhibition. On behalf of Sakıp Sabancı Museum and all art lovers, I wish to thank Akbank for enabling us to welcome such a world famous artist.”

Akbank Chairman and Executive Member of the Board, Suzan Sabancı Dinçer:

“Our cooperation with Sakıp Sabancı Museum dates back to the museum's inception. In 2003 we supported the ‘From the Medicis to the Savoias: Ottoman Splendour in Florentine Collections’. This was the museum's first exhibition and was later followed by the Rodin, Dali, Anish Kapoor and ZERO exhibitions, which brought the work of world famous artists to Turkish art lovers. This year we are supporting the first exhibition in Turkey of the work of Ai Weiwei, one of the world's foremost contemporary artists, who has made his mark on our time.

“We extend our thanks to Sakıp Sabancı Museum Director Dr. Nazan Ölçer and her team, with whom we have cooperated for many years, for their successful work. This year we were delighted by their decision to present the work of Ai Weiwei.

“Akbank is very happy to enable Turkish art lovers to become acquainted with the foremost names and movements in the art world and by this means to open the way forward for innovative thought.

“We always want the best for Turkey and work with dedication to implement ideas that will carry our country forward.

“On the occasion of this exhibition we are particularly proud to be reflecting a true image of Istanbul and our country overseas and hope that all art lovers who visit the exhibition will enjoy the experience.”