



**@LARGE**  
**AI WEIWEI**  
**ON ALCATRAZ**

**@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz Attracts More Than Half a Million International Visitors Since Opening in September 2014**

**Exhibition Inspires Active Engagement and Dialogue About Human Rights and Freedom of Expression**

**@Large Closes April 26, 2015;  
Tickets and Special Access Tours Are Selling Rapidly**



A visitor pauses on her tour of Alcatraz to write a postcard to a prisoner of conscience in *Yours Truly*, Ai Weiwei's interactive installation in the penitentiary Dining Hall; photo: Jan Stürmann

San Francisco, CA, February 24, 2015—In the five months since it opened, artist Ai Weiwei's acclaimed exhibition *@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz* has attracted more than half a million visitors from across the world. Organized by the FOR-SITE Foundation in partnership with the National Park Service and Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, the exhibition



features seven sculpture, sound, and mixed-media works installed across four locations on Alcatraz. Inspired by the island's potent and layered history, the exhibition serves as a platform to engage with some of the most complex and pressing social issues of our time.

**A final press tour of @Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz will be held for media on Tuesday, March 24.**

The works in @Large balance aesthetic elegance with political impact, raising questions about human rights and freedom of expression that have resonated deeply with visitors. The most directly interactive installation in the exhibition, *Yours Truly* encourages visitors to the penitentiary Dining Hall to write postcards addressed to current prisoners of conscience. As of February 1, 2015, FOR-SITE, in collaboration with Amnesty International, has sent nearly 50,000 postcards to prisoners in more than 20 countries, with the highest percentages going to those incarcerated in the United States (12.3 percent), India (8.7 percent), and Vietnam (8.1 percent). Art Guides positioned at the installation have noted that many audience members have acknowledged learning about prisoners in their home countries for the first time through information provided in the exhibition.

Postcards have included notes of kindness, beautiful illustrations, and personal communications by visitors across ages, ethnicities, nationalities, and backgrounds. Ai created *Yours Truly* in response to the feeling of isolation that afflicts incarcerated people and the fear that their causes have been forgotten. The families of prisoners who have received messages from *Yours Truly* visitors have testified to the work's powerful effect. Sukanya Pruksakasemsuk, wife of Thai prisoner of conscience Somyot Pruksakasemsuk, confirmed that her husband has received "thousands" of *Yours Truly* postcards and wrote, "I really appreciated what your foundation has done for my husband and the others who have been suffering and fighting for their faith. Somyot has passed his regards to all of you who made his days in prison brightening." In Egypt, Mostafa Maher, the brother of prisoner Ahmed Maher, has received postcards on his sibling's behalf. Ahmed is not allowed access to paper or writing implements, so Mostafa shows him images of the postcards on his cell phone when he visits Ahmed in prison.

"Part of the vision for @Large was to put real faces and voices to the complex issue of incarceration used as a tool to restrict freedom of expression. When Ai first conceived the exhibition, he wanted to shed a greater light on the widespread nature of this societal problem," said Cheryl Haines, executive director of the FOR-SITE Foundation and exhibition curator. "For me, to have visitors reconsider their understanding of human rights and acknowledge the struggle of so many would have made this exhibition a success; to have this number of people engage with the exhibition and Alcatraz as a site of historic importance is more than we could have imagined."

The exhibition has also supported a growing understanding of the history of Alcatraz and extended engagement with the National Park Service and the Art in the Parks program.

"The National Park Service helps connect people with the stories of humanity that have developed this nation and the world," said Golden Gate National Recreation Area General Superintendent Frank Dean. "Sometimes it is their own story they have lost connection to, but often it is a story or part of history not otherwise talked about, like this one that Ai

Weiwei has brought to life through his work. As the National Park Service prepares for our centennial, we look at partnerships like this one to help keep these areas relevant and part of the American dialogue.”

“@Large takes on themes that are relevant to the history of Alcatraz in a way that has spurred a conversation about the world we live in now,” said Greg Moore, president and CEO of the Parks Conservancy. “We are especially pleased to have experienced a 65 percent increase in visitors coming from the Bay Area, and shed light upon the island in a new way to local communities.”

During the run of the exhibition, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy and the Crissy Field Center, in coordination with the FOR-SITE Foundation, have mounted the @ccess Alcatraz program, which supports outreach to underserved schools and community organizations across the Bay Area by providing 7,000 discounted tickets to Alcatraz and @Large. Thus far, the program has facilitated visits to @Large for almost 5,000 children and adults from 27 schools and 65 community organizations, including Lighthouse for the Blind; Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice; and the Bayview YMCA.

Social media has also played an important role in connecting visitors with exhibition content, providing a platform for them to engage with Ai, the Art Guides, the organizing partners, and one another, all facilitated by wireless installed on the island at the request of the artist. The hashtag #AiWeiweiAlcatraz has been used more than 5,000 times by users on Twitter and Instagram, and Ai himself has been actively reposting visitor comments and photos on his widely followed feeds. Among the many photos circulating on Instagram are images of visitors who have brought their own LEGO bricks to the exhibition to create small-scale replicas of the LEGO portraits in *Trace*, an installation in the New Industries Building depicting 176 portraits of prisoners of conscience.

@Large will close to the public on April 26, 2015. A limited number of Early Bird tickets and special access tours are still available from the [Parks Conservancy](#). The exhibition is included as part of general admission to Alcatraz sold by [Alcatraz Cruises](#).

### **About the Exhibition**

@Large raises urgent questions about the social implications of incarceration and the definitions of liberty, justice, individual rights, and personal responsibility as interpreted through the lens of Ai Weiwei’s personal experiences. The site-specific installations are located in the two-story New Industries Building where “privileged” inmates were permitted to work; the Hospital main ward and psychiatric observation cells; A Block, the only cellblock not remodeled since the military prison was constructed in the early 20th century; and the Dining Hall. With the exception of the Dining Hall, these spaces have previously been restricted to visitors, but are open to the public throughout the run of the exhibition.

For Ai, the inspiration for the exhibition is not simply an exploration of social issues or artistic themes; it is rooted in the reality of his life. In spring 2011, Ai was detained by the Chinese government for 81 days on charges of tax evasion. Following his release, he was prohibited from leaving Beijing for one year, and he is still forbidden to travel outside of China. Because Ai could not visit Alcatraz, he developed the works in his Beijing studio

with support from the presenting partners, Bay Area volunteers, and Amnesty International, which provided research material.

Learn more about the exhibition and the individual installations at [aiweiweialcatraz.org](http://aiweiweialcatraz.org).

### **Exhibition Catalogues**

*@Large* is accompanied by two richly illustrated, full-color publications. A softcover edition, published by the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, documents the exhibition for visitors to the island, while an expanded hardbound publication from Chronicle Books features contributions by Adam Fortunate Eagle, Václav Havel, and Martin Luther King, Jr., among others, as well as an interview with Ai Weiwei by the curator and critic Hans Ulrich Obrist. Bringing together newly commissioned essays, extensive photographic documentation, and an array of archival materials, these catalogues are the comprehensive record of this groundbreaking exhibition, providing readers with an expanded historical and political context for the project. Both are available at the Parks Conservancy [online store](#) as well as on Alcatraz.

### **About Ai Weiwei**

One of the most prominent cultural figures of the 21st century, Ai Weiwei is a Beijing-based artist and activist whose work encompasses sculpture, installation, photography, film, architecture, and social criticism. His work often responds to conditions in China, including limits placed on free speech and expression, as well as his personal experience of incarceration. Ai's art has been featured in major solo exhibitions including the touring retrospective *Ai Weiwei: According to What?*, which was organized by the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, in 2009 and traveled to North American venues in 2013–14; *Evidence* at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin, 2014; and *Ai Weiwei at Blenheim Palace* in Woodstock, England, 2014. Ai's work was previously presented in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in 2010–11 as part of the FOR-SITE exhibition *Presidio Habitats*, for which artists and designers created animal habitats.

### **About Alcatraz**

Beyond its notoriety as a world-famous former federal penitentiary (1934–63) that once held criminals like Al Capone, Alcatraz has undergone numerous incarnations that have contributed to its unique and deeply layered history. First inhabited by native peoples who arrived more than 10,000 years ago, the island was recognized for its strategic value as a military fortress in the Civil War era, and later catalyzed the Native American Red Power movement with the revolutionary 18-month occupation by the Indians of All Tribes from 1969 to 1971. Today, Alcatraz is part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and stands as one of the country's most popular national park sites and visitor destinations, attracting more than 1.4 million people each year. The island is also the site of the West Coast's first lighthouse and home to gardens, tide pools, and nesting birds.

### **About Art in the Parks**

*@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz* is a presentation of Art in the Parks, a cooperative effort of the National Park Service, the Presidio Trust, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, and the Headlands Center for the Arts to work with a variety of community partners to bring the arts to park settings and provide new ways of experiencing and learning about

place. The FOR-SITE Foundation has been a significant contributor to Art in the Parks, with exhibitions in the Presidio and at Fort Point. Learn more at [parksconservancy.org/visit/art](http://parksconservancy.org/visit/art).

### **About the FOR-SITE Foundation**

Established in 2003 by Cheryl Haines, the FOR-SITE Foundation is dedicated to the creation, understanding, and presentation of art about place through commissions, artist residencies, and educational programs. Since 2008, FOR-SITE has broken new ground and provided a model for engaging the public through artistic collaborations on national park land. FOR-SITE's recent projects include *International Orange*, a group show at Fort Point featuring work by leading contemporary artists to mark the 75th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge; and a series of installations by Andy Goldsworthy in the Presidio of San Francisco. *Art About Place: FOR-SITE Foundation in the Presidio*, an exhibition of selected works from previous FOR-SITE projects, is on view through March 8, 2015, at 103 Montgomery Street on the Main Post of the Presidio. Learn more at [for-site.org](http://for-site.org).

### **About the National Park Service**

The National Park Service (NPS) is a federal agency within the U.S. Department of the Interior charged with managing the preservation and public use of America's most significant natural, scenic, historic, and cultural treasures. The NPS manages the Golden Gate National Parks, as well as 400 other park sites across the United States. Learn more at [nps.gov/goga](http://nps.gov/goga).

### **About the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy**

The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy is the nonprofit membership organization that supports the Golden Gate National Parks—the most-visited unit in the U.S. national park system. Since 1981, the Parks Conservancy has provided over \$300 million in aid for site transformations, trail improvements, habitat restoration, research and conservation, volunteer and youth engagement, and interpretive and educational programs. Conservancy-funded projects, in partnership with the National Park Service and Presidio Trust, are visible across the parks' 80,000 acres—including the Presidio, Crissy Field, Muir Woods, Lands End, Alcatraz, and more. The Conservancy's work is made possible through the dedication of its members and donors; contributions from foundations, businesses, public agencies, and generous individuals; and earned income from the operation of park stores, cafes, and tours. Learn more at [parksconservancy.org](http://parksconservancy.org) or call 415.561.3000.

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