

RESNICOW
SCHROEDER

Los Angeles Times

September 12, 2014

'@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz' to explore artistic liberty and
more

By David Ng



Chinese contemporary artist Ai Weiwei, shown here at his studio in Beijing, won't be present for his exhibition "@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz." (Zachary Bako / The Washington Post)

When the exhibition "@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz" opens later this month on the former prison island, there is one key person who is guaranteed to be a no-show.

Since 2011, Ai Weiwei has been unable to travel outside of China, a restriction stemming from his many legal battles with officials in Beijing.

The Alcatraz exhibition, opening Sept. 27, will feature sculptures, sound installations and other mixed-media work scattered among various locations on the Northern California island.

The artist, who spent 81 days in secret detention after being arrested in 2011 by Beijing officials, has created a show intended to address issues of incarceration and individual freedom.

Organizers said Ai has had input on every aspect of the show, though he hasn't physically visited the site. A few of the artist's Beijing assistants have traveled to San Francisco to assist in the installation, but the show is being spearheaded by curator Cheryl Haines.

"One of the qualities that first struck me about Ai's practice is how profoundly he explores the confluence of art and the built environment and how aware he is about the impact his work has on the viewer," said Haines in a statement.

The curator has made several trips to Ai's studio in Beijing in the last several months to provide the artist with information about Alcatraz. Ai has had access to maps, archival materials, photographs and video footage that convey the history of the island and the spaces where the works will be installed, said the show's organizers.

Ai, 57, has become an international star thanks in large part to his presence on social media and his habit of speaking his mind on taboo subjects such as freedom of speech. He has also received significant national exposure in recent years thanks to his traveling exhibition "According to What?," which wrapped up a run at the Brooklyn Museum of Art last month. His art often juxtaposes the ancient and contemporary, and usually comes with a dash of impish humor.

The artist's online activism has centered primarily on Twitter (@aiww_en), since he has been effectively blocked from Chinese social media sites such as Weibo.