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Ai Weiwei Designs Exhibition for Alcatraz Island

The installations in the former Bay Area prison open to the public on Saturday.

By Sara Johnson

Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's highly anticipated takeover of the San Francisco Bay's Alcatraz Island opens to the public on Saturday. The exhibition, *@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz*, is a joint project between For-Site Foundation, the National Park Service, and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. As ARCHITECT [reported in June](#), the exhibition will open up the former prison's hospital, New Industries Building, and A Block section of the cellhouse, which are typically closed to visitors.

Three of Ai's installations are in the New Industries Building, which was [completed in 1941](#), according to a series of blog entries about the buildings by the foundation. Here, prisoners worked in manufacturing or laundry services, and were paid in reduced sentences and small wages.

Ai's "[With Wind](#)" is a series of handmade kites, the largest of which is a Chinese dragon. The exhibition website says the dragon is a power symbol designed to contrast with the New Industries building's former life.



Credit: Jan Stürmann, courtesy FOR-SITE Foundation



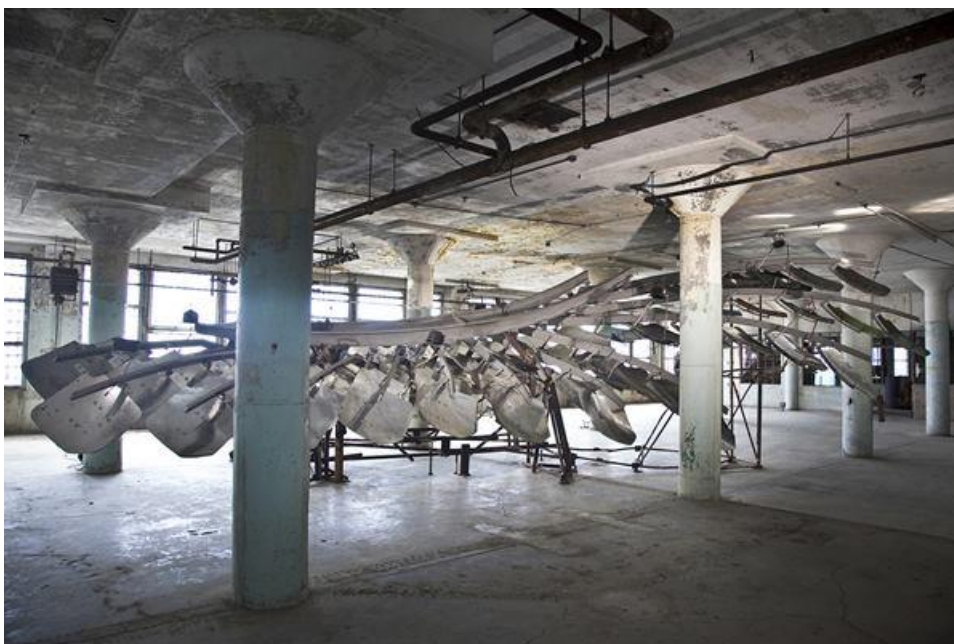
Credit: Jan Stürmann, courtesy FOR-SITE Foundation

"Trace" is also located in the New Industries Building, and features 176 Lego portraits of people incarcerated or exiled for their beliefs.



Credit: Jan Stürmann, courtesy FOR-SITE Foundation

Ai's third installation in the New Industries Building is "Refraction," a massive metal bird wing partially constructed with solar cooker panels.



Credit: Jan Stürmann, courtesy FOR-SITE Foundation



Credit: Jan Stürmann, courtesy FOR-SITE Foundation

A Block, another part of the island that will open to visitors, is one of the few sections of the island's 1912 cellhouse that was not redone when the prison was converted from a military to a federal prison in the 1930s. Ai has designed "Stay Tuned," a sound installation spanning 12 cells, which plays a variety of recordings ranging from the band Pussy Riot to the musician Lolo.



Credit: Jan Stürmann, courtesy FOR-SITE Foundation

Two of the installations are in the Hospital building. The sound installation, "Illumination," is located in the psychiatric area, and plays Native American and Tibetan Buddhist chants. "Blossom," also in the Hospital, fills bathroom fixtures with ceramic flowers.



Credit: Jan Stürmann, courtesy FOR-SITE Foundation



Credit: Jan Stürmann, courtesy FOR-SITE Foundation

The Dining Hall, the site of the "Yours Truly" installation, was already public. This installation asks visitors to write postcards to prisoners.

"@Large: Ai Weiwei on Alcatraz" runs through April 26, 2015.

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