

By Leah Borromeo

Artist Ai Weiwei has been missing for 40 days, Leah Borromeo reports from the opening of his new show.

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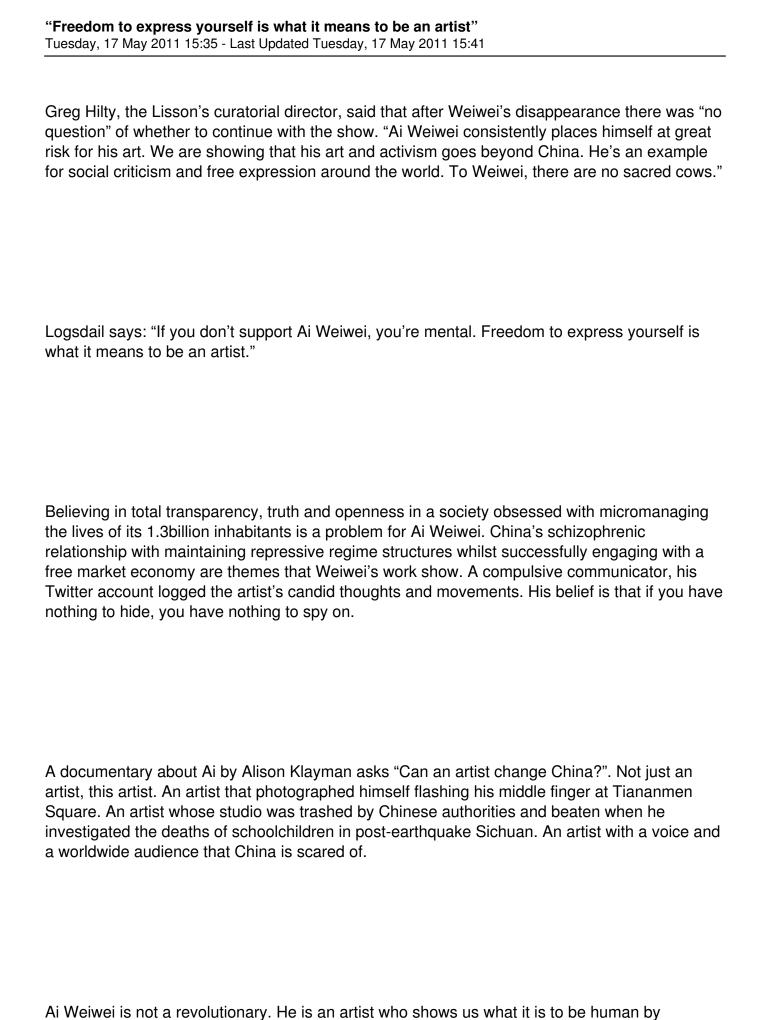
Chinese artist Ai Weiwei was detained on 03 April 2011 by the authorities at Beijing Capital Airport preparing to board a scheduled flight to Hong Kong. He has yet to be charged and the state has not yet confirmed his whereabouts.

"Freedom to express yourself is what it means to be an artist"

"Words can be deleted, but the facts won't be deleted with them."

The Lisson's founder and director Nicholas Logsdail argues that Weiwei's work "has become politicised because of his position. The genius lies in politically gentle forms that are open to interpretation — only when you look into what constitutes the work can you see he's rebaptised antiquity with a message."

In the days of the Young British Artists, established galleries like the Lisson and larger institutions like Tate and the Guggenheim were depoliticised. Should political art be shown it was obfuscated beneath layers of visual rhetoric or in historical retrospectives where the immediacy of the message passed its dateline. Thanks to Ai Weiwei and his disappearance at the hands of his own state, an art world already politicised by funding cuts is speaking out. We've all become agit-prop. Tate Modern stencilled "Free Ai Weiwei" across the top of its building. Anish Kapoor dedicated his Leviathan sculpture in Paris to Ai Weiwei. Bob and Roberta Smith held a reading of names to remind people that dozens of other artists, writers, and supporters of free expression have either been detained or gone missing at the hands of the Chinese. The Guggenheim has launched an online petition for his release and the Lisson is inviting all visitors to its show to be photographed with a "Free Ai Weiwei" placard that will be broadcast on the internet. There is no scope to be subtle when freedom is at stake.



example. He is the bridge between China's past and its future.