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## ai weiwei: 'free expression is the most important of human rights' – interview ahead of E.A.T.

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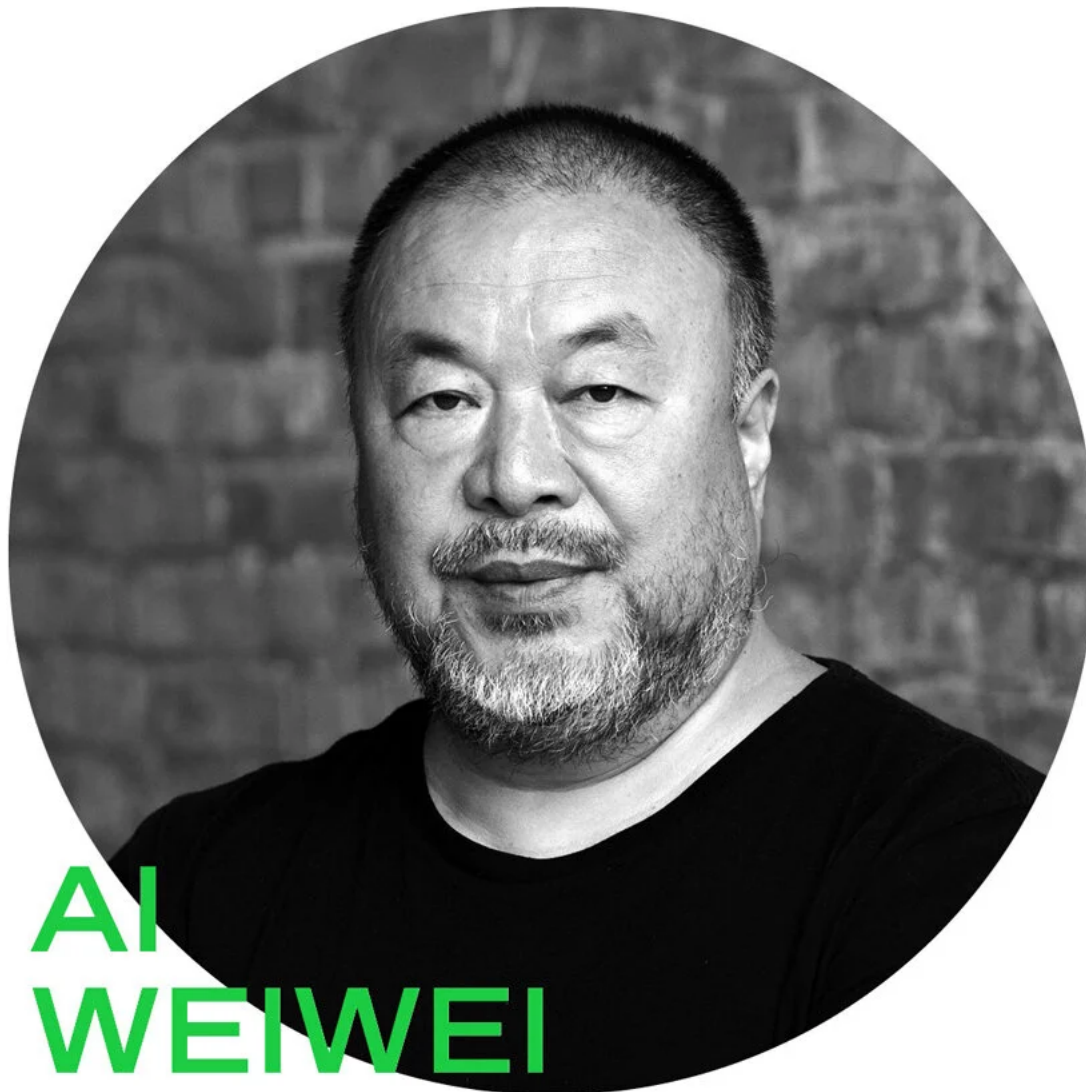
### AI WEIWEI AT ENGADIN ART TALKS (E.A.T.) 2023

Ai Weiwei participates at this year's Engadin Art Talks (E.A.T.) from 27 to 29 January, 2023, in Zuoz, Engadin. Under the theme of HOFFNUNG? HOFFNUNG! / HOPE? HOPE!, the weekend-long event will explore the different meanings of hope through the lens of the creative, humanitarian and scientific fields. Part of this year's panel of international speakers, [the Chinese artist](#) leads a diverse and prolific practice driven by his social activism and political beliefs. Encompassing sculptural installation, filmmaking, architecture, photography, ceramics, painting, writing and social media, his artistic work moves between modes of production and investigation.

As an activist, he has been critical of the lack of respect for human rights and freedom of speech in China, which, in 2011, led to his arrest and consecutive 81-day detention on charges of tax evasion. Continuing to speak out on social and political issues he believes important, Ai Weiwei has emerged as one of the leading cultural figures of his generation in China and beyond. *'Artists are usually understood as people who undertake a particular kind of work,'* [Ai Weiwei](#) **tells designboom ahead of his talk at Engadin Art Talks**. *'This understanding is wrong. In fact, artists are people who think independently, have independent perceptions, and attempt to find their own ways of expression to exchange ideas, almost instinctively.'* Read our interview with the artist in full below.



## Engadin Art Talks 2023 Hoffnung? Hoffnung!



Artist  
On the run

Portrait of Ai Weiwei © Ai Weiwei Studio

### INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTIST

designboom (DB): How does the 2023 Engadin Art Talks theme, HOPE? HOPE!, relate to your practice?

**Ai Weiwei (AW):** My work is mainly about trying to explain my relationship with myself and the world. This explanation is usually about who I am and what kind of world I live in. The question of who I am can only be raised

<https://www.designboom.com/art/ai-weiwei-expression-human-rights-interview-engadin-art-talks-eat-01-12-2023/>

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through reflections and expressions. If there is any hope in our life, this hope encompasses desperation, disappointment, all our aspirations, what we consider to be correct, how we hope to be understood, and how we understand other people's worlds. Hope will remain hope if it is not acknowledged and confirmed by reality.

ai weiwei: 'free expression is the most important of human rights' – interview ahead of E.A.T.

Ai Weiwei, 'Gilded Cage' at Central Park, image © designboom | [more here](#)

teamLab expands its digital museum in tokyo with an immersive garden of  
**12k views**

reinhard mucha exhibits over 60 long-unseen sculptures in his first major show  
**10k views**

**DB: What is the role of an artist within our current sociopolitical landscape?**

**AW:** Artists are usually understood as people who undertake a particular kind of work. This understanding is wrong. In fact, artists are people who think independently, have independent perceptions, and attempt to find their own ways of expression to exchange ideas, almost instinctively. All the effort of artists reflects human beings' most important activities; any individualistic thinking about human nature will be an artists' language.


ai weiwei: 'free expression is the most important of human rights' – interview ahead of E.A.T.

Law of the journey, 2016 | image by [Carol Quintanilha](#), more [here](#)


**DB:** You recently signed a series of blank A4 sheets of paper with invisible UV ink, and gave them out for free in Hyde Park on the occasion of Human Rights Day. Can you tell us more about this initiative?

**AW:** Free speech and free expression are the most important foundation stones of human rights and humanitarianism. Although the concept of human rights has been established for a long time, not everyone can clearly express its concrete ideas, attributes, and ways of expression. For me, free expression is the most important part of human rights.

On the Human Rights Day, the act of signing my name on sheets of A4 paper in UV ink and distributing them to people who came for one at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park is very symbolic. It symbolizes two things. Firstly, free expression needs to have a unique language that belongs to each individual and is expressed in accordance with their relationship with the world, and the attributes of the sociopolitical environment in the world nowadays. Secondly, free expression is a behavior that is gradually shrinking and losing its value system. In our environment today that is generally considered as democratic, free, and open, free expression is still a very rare behavior.

 aiww und maybe.art  
Original audio

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Gefällt 841 Mal

aiww

10 December 2022 is Human Rights Day. I will be signing blank A4 sheets of paper with invisible UV ink from 2-4pm, and giving them out for free at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, London.

The signed edition is available for sale exclusively on @Maybe.artworks for £100 from 10 to 20 December 2022. 100% of the proceeds will be donated to @Refugeesintl

#Ai4paper #A4paper #Aiweiwei #aiww #Refugeesinternational #freedomofspeech #humanrights #chinaprotest #covidprotest #maybeart #speakerscorner

Alle 18 Kommentare ansehen

Komentieren ...

**DB:** Art for Tibet, the annual fundraiser supporting the fight for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and freedom, included your work, 'Hanger', while you are also part of the honorary committee. How did you become involved with Art for Tibet, and do you have more plans to support their mission in the future?

**AW:** People who are persecuted by autocratic regimes, be they Tibetans, Uyghurs, or other peoples in other

countries and areas, need to form their own voice and expression. It is the only way to hold on to the common vision: human society cannot be dissociated from basic fairness and justice. When it is still possible for me, I will continue to support groups and people who lack a platform for their own voices and expression.

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Ai Weiwei, Hanger, Stainless steel, 8 5/8 x 18 7/8 x 3 in, 2012 | image via [Art for Tibet / Bidsquare](#)

**DB:** In 2022 you had your first exhibition of glass sculptures in Venice, while Vienna's Albertina Modern gallery held your biggest retrospective to date. Do you like doing exhibitions? Do you prefer theme-specific shows, or bigger ones where you can touch on more themes?

**AW:** Exhibition is just one way of expression. It exists within a cultural framework and in collaboration with institutions as a form of compromise. As a matter of fact, there are many other ways of expression, e.g., internet, social media, film, and writing. Every medium has its own attributes and its own path of creativity. Exhibition is not the only way of expression for me.

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Ai Weiwei, 'La Commedia Umana' at the Roman National Museum, image by Daniele Peruzzi | more [here](#)

**DB: What are you working on at the moment?**

**AW:** I can summarize it as a retrospective résumé of my past life in old age. In the process I hope to be enlightened in my understanding of life and go through the rest of my life more wisely.

**DB: Are you optimistic about the future?**

**AW:** I don't think we have the so-called future. Our future is just an integrated concept that combines today and yesterday. I am not too optimistic about that.

adin-art-talks-interview-designboom-large

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Ai Weiwei, 'La Commedia Umana' at the Roman National Museum, image by Daniele Peruzzi | [more here](#)



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image courtesy E.A.T. / Engadin Art Talks Stiftung

#### project info:

**event:** [E.A.T. / Engadin Art Talks 2023](#)

**2023 theme:** HOFFNUNG? HOFFNUNG! (HOPE? HOPE!)

**duration:** 27-29 January, 2023

**location:** Zuoz, Engadin, Switzerland and online

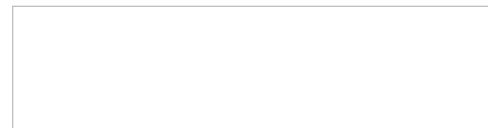
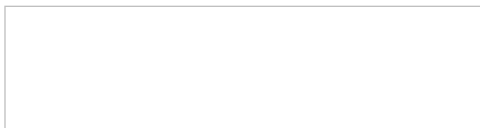
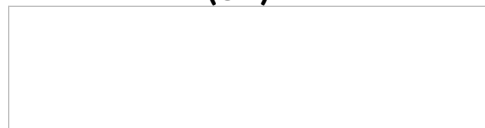
**tickets:** [Eventbrite](#)

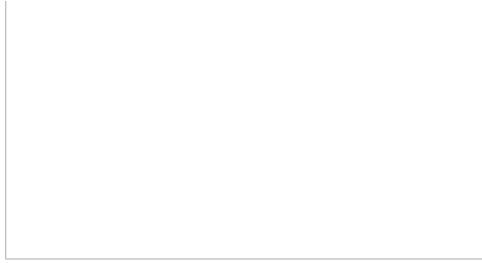
*E.A.T. / Engadin Art Talks is a Forum of art, architecture, design, literature, and innovation that regularly takes place in Zuoz in the Swiss Engadin valley. With a year-round public programme, E.A.T. brings together catalyst thinkers from the creative and scientific disciplines to share their ideas and expertise while posing challenging new questions. By doing so, E.A.T. aims to find novel perspectives on relevant topics that define our present and shape our future. Since its foundation, E.A.T. has featured more than 330 international speakers and contributors. In addition to the annual Forum in Zuoz, E.A.T. presents a nomadic series of talks and collaborations with international institutions throughout the year in some of Europe's cultural capitals to pursue its mission abroad. E.A.T. was founded in 2010 by Cristina Bechtler together with Hans Ulrich Obrist.*

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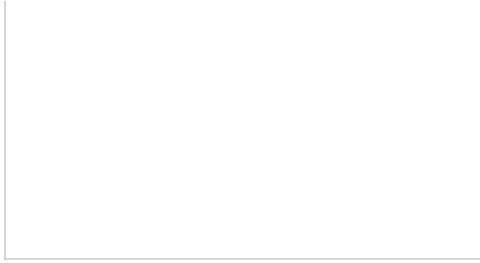
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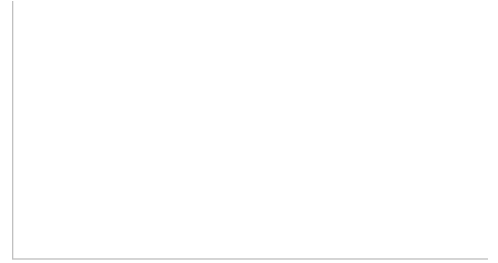




ai weiwei designs tibetan tiger rug to advocate the animal's conservation

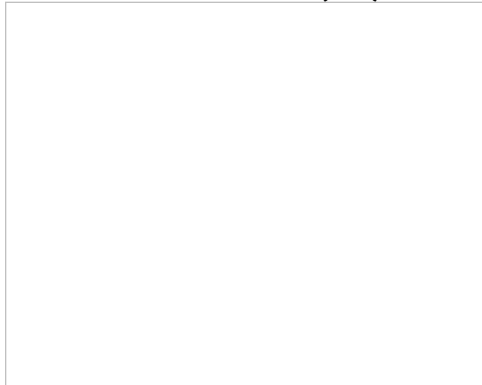


SANAA and ai weiwei among recipients of 2022 praemium imperiale art award

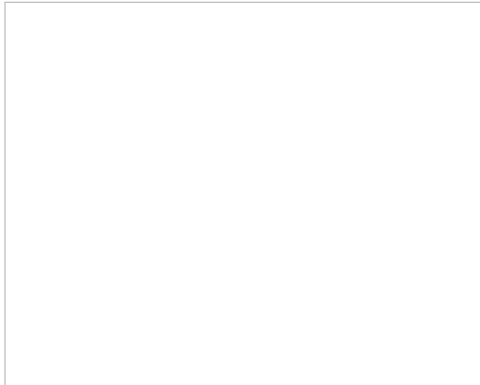


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## ART INTERVIEWS (84)



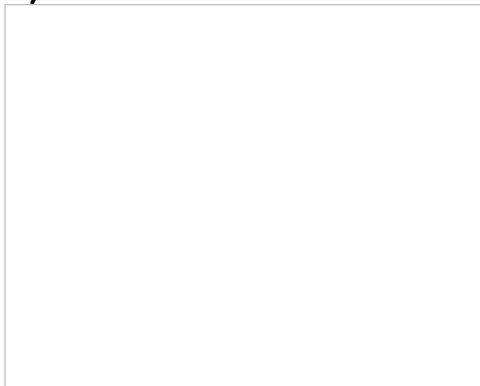
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HOPE? HOPE! interview with engadin art talks founder cristina bechtler on the 2023 theme

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HOPE? HOPE! interview with engadin art talks founder cristina bechtler on the 2023 theme

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designboom speaks with the leading contemporary artist ahead of his participation at this year's engadin art talks.

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