



THE CAIRO REVIEW INTERVIEW

THROUGH A HOLE IN THE WALL

Ai Weiwei speaks out on change in China, the promise of art, and the beauty of globalization

Though confined to China, **Ai Weiwei** manages to traverse the globe like no other artist. In a satirical protest against authority in June, he Instagrammed a picture of himself holding up a leg to resemble a gun; social media around the planet exploded in a torrent of leg-gun selfies snapped in solidarity.

Ai's work spans everything from sculpture and photography to installations and architecture; he was the artistic consultant on the design for the "Bird's Nest" Beijing National Stadium for the 2008 Olympic Games. His art is relentlessly political, whether critiquing China's democracy and human rights deficits or questioning the human condition. In the 2007 installation *Fairytale*, Ai brought 1,001 ordinary Chinese to documenta 12 in Kassel, Germany, and had them sit on stools. For a show at London's Tate Modern, Ai created 100 million hand-painted porcelain sunflower seeds and poured them into the exhibition space.

Ai documented the names of some five thousand children who died in the Sichuan earthquake in 2008 as the result of shoddy school construction; in 2011, he was arrested on tax evasion charges in a case seen as a move to silence the critic. Though released after months in prison, authorities fined him \$2.4 million and barred him from foreign travel. Ai is unknown in China outside elite circles; mention of his name is banned from media and websites. But his global stature only continues to rise, with another two major international exhibitions this year: *Ai Weiwei: According to What?* at the Brooklyn Museum, and *Evidence* at Berlin's Martin-Gropius-Bau. *ArtReview* magazine hailed him as the most powerful artist in the world. *Condé Nast Traveler* Contributing Editor **Dorinda Elliott** interviewed Ai at his home-studio in Caochangdi on the outskirts of Beijing on June 13, 2014.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *I've just seen your shows in both Brooklyn and Berlin. They're fascinating.*

AI WEIWEI: I haven't been able to see my international shows for several years. I have no passport.

◁ **Ai Weiwei, Beijing, Nov. 29, 2013.**

*Eric Gregory Powell/
Contour by Getty Images*

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *What are you working on these days?*

AI WEIWEI: I'm working on new works, and I am designing a new show at Alcatraz in California in September, as well as several other shows.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Will those be new works?*

AI WEIWEI: New works. Only new works make me engaged or excited. I always like to work with materials I haven't had a chance to work with before, or same materials I have used but haven't fully explored its possibility. All materials require a certain kind of knowledge and skill, and have their own expression.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *When did your work become so political?*

AI WEIWEI: I don't think you can *become* political. I did not become radical, I was born radical. I'm in a society where everything is political. Two days ago, our team started to do a kind of selfie on Instagram, a leg-gun. It's all over everywhere. It's fun because it's such a ridiculous posture, but everyone can do it. Because you have the material and everyone can do it. Everyone can very easily be attracted to these silly jokes. Of course, there is some hidden meaning there. Nowadays, everywhere you see armed policemen in China. The excuse is terrorism. But in my lifetime I would never see a terrorist but I would always see an armed policeman. Is that psychologically a police state or terror? Trying to intimidate whom? I mean, so if there are terrorists they cannot stop it. So you see how they can abuse power, how creative they can be, when they have a new concept how much they abuse. Talk about [National Security Agency whistleblower Edward] Snowden, power always has the right to go too far, always abuse it when there's no restriction. So we're doing that leg-gun suddenly, everybody is doing it. Actually, it's like flipping the bird. But flipping the bird seems so rude. But this, everybody loves it. It shows everybody is critical. It shows not just people's attitude, but shows their sense toward [the] current condition, and individual identity, working space. That's their body, their body is art. It's a weapon. It's so beautiful.

Xinhua, People's Daily, all posted this thing on their front page. Young people recognize me, but [media] can't use my name. So they used a picture of me, and talked about a new trend. Then it was posted on the most hardcore Communist paper's website! But then they figured it out, and they deleted everything. It's everybody, everybody's doing it! So easy, everybody can do it! It started here, in my office. That's why it's interesting. That's what I'm doing, all kinds of things. By doing that, I lost three thousand followers in one day. Some people thought it is too much. But those are followers I don't need. They think repeatedly doing something, that's not beautiful. But for me, it's very beautiful. A simple study of our leg and our body gesture. Some point to the places they hate or places they like. It's so funny! [Ai scrolls through Instagram.] That's me! Chinese net,

Sobu, front page. There's Lei Feng with a leg. There's military. They are all holding leg. Nobody knows what it's about but everybody is doing it. I think it's very successful.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *You use humor all the time as part of your art.*

AI WEIWEI: It's not that I use humor. The humor is there. It's our life. It's full of ridiculous things. I'm just trying to find a form, so everybody can understand it. And you know, it's a simple thing to do. This Internet can be quite powerful. This is all inspired by an image from the Red Women's Army. So funny!

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *What do you think about the rapid economic development in China, how does it affect your art?*

AI WEIWEI: Talking about political conditions, what I'm saying is things like this, they will be deleted. You won't see it on Chinese Internet. If I think about my condition, my father was a poet, jailed, exiled. I grew up in that condition, and I have so many friends, artists, poets, my lawyer, they all have been in jail. How can I avoid looking at those cases and making some comments? I've made very little comment. I feel ashamed of myself. How can a healthy person, who knows all those things, not talk about them? My argument is always very rational, very restrained. What I'm talking about is most elementary, there's nothing profound in there. When you ask when my art became political, I say I was born like that. I was born in the year of the Anti-Rightist movement, 1957. Chairman Mao had a crackdown on intellectuals, from high school teachers to people like my father. Half a million people—the voice of the nation—had to be silenced, and sent to hard labor.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *What happened to your father?*

AI WEIWEI: He was one of the rightists. Sent to Xinjiang, I grew up there. Spent sixteen years there, in hard labor. We all measured how far you feel the heart. The heart is Beijing. But all the way to Xinjiang, so far away, there was almost no energy there.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *What are you trying to achieve with expressions like this Instagram flashmob?*

AI WEIWEI: I don't want to achieve anything. I achieve my own happiness, other people's happiness. The whole world is about happiness. You know this censorship, by censoring information they are shortening people's lives, cheating young people. They are limiting young people's ability to obtain adventures in life. No way to find passion, courage, imagination. Life has been shortened, cheated. This is much worse than air pollution. Yeah, this is really a mind being twisted. It's not "lacking," it's really twisting. It's not you don't have enough, but they do not give you enough to change your perspective as a human being.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Do you think that eventually China's culture will catch up with all the rapid economic development?*

AI WEIWEI: Eventually, yes. China is changing, and it's inevitable. Seems like nothing can stop it now. But the change is not happening consciously or willingly, especially on the political side. So change is more toward material life. Dealing with necessary problems. Pollution and corruption: the government will fight them for unexpected reasons. They have to do something about it, because these things affect their stability and control, their ability to stay in power. So they have to do something. It's all about keeping control and fully grabbing power.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Despite the age of globalization, you can't see your own shows; most Chinese people can't see your art. Isn't that so strange?*

AI WEIWEI: It's normal. You have a big castle like China. It used to be totally sealed from the outside world, nobody knows what's going on. But now some windows are open, and people can peek in and see how Chinese people live. Outsiders try to understand what structure, what happens inside the castle. It's a pity that the window shows a very limited area. There is such limited information. Maybe just a hole in the wall. And maybe what they see through me doesn't necessarily reflect the structure of the castle, but they don't have other holes. It's not by my choice that I wanted or refused it, it just happened that way.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Journalists are always lectured in China about the role of the media, that they should be positive and promote stability. China has the same idea about art. Is that concept changing at all?*

AI WEIWEI: No, China has only one idea. The whole Communist performance is based on one idea, one act. Unified ideas, unified voice, unified acts. Which is why we need the party, that's what the party is about. If you have eighty meetings and one party and eighty meetings of the Communist Youth League, and lots of other meetings, the army, all those organizations, what do you want? Why do you need such control?

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Some scholars compare Communist leaders to Red emperors. Do you see it that way?*

AI WEIWEI: I don't really know. I try not to comment on individuals, because there is very little information. I comment on what's happening in the country, because I am so sure about it. But how can one know what's happening in a leader's mind?

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Will the Communist Party eventually lose control?*

AI WEIWEI: The party's policy is first to maintain stability, then trying to have a

so-called socialism with Chinese characteristics, which in the more sensible words is “crossing the river by touching the stone.” But it’s nothing more than that. So that means you can do *anything* necessary to cross the river. That’s the message of the past thirty years, and it’s still the only message. First, they think the other side of the river is the Chinese dream. But I don’t think they have a clear historical or intellectual understanding of human development, about society, or profound thinking about society at all. So the result is that they have to maintain stability, which becomes a real test of fast development. It’s like you drive an old vehicle in a fast track. Or you have a ship and need to sail for one thousand kilometers but have to plug the holes *while* you are sailing.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *How long can that go on?*

AI WEIWEI: How long can human society go on? You have so many problems all around the world. Unbelievable. It happens not only this side of the planet but almost everywhere.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Like climate change? In the United States, people don’t understand just how serious the problems are.*

AI WEIWEI: People will realize more and more the effects of globalization. After that we will be really much tied together. The glory will be shared and the guilt. The sins also will be shared. I think we need a long study of how, with the Internet, humanity is so connected. Problems have never been so unified. There are almost no local problems anymore.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Yes, if the American economy sinks, then the Chinese economy is affected, and vice versa.*

AI WEIWEI: Everybody is nervous and so everybody becomes an opportunist.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *In the short term, what do you think are the most important things that will affect the Chinese people, for better or worse?*

AI WEIWEI: The government always thinks it’s the economy. I have a very different idea. I think it’s self identity. As an individual or as a society, as a nation, China still does not clearly understand or make an effort to make a society that people can trust, that has some credibility, that has legitimate rights for power or for the ones to control or be controlled. Even those controlled, you still need to feel what are your rights, and what are the rights you give to those in power. Only by doing that can a society be healthy, because everybody can bear the responsibility and the consequences. Life can be better or worse. But to really bear responsibility, to make a society responsible and help itself, and of course, maybe you help others along the way. I think that’s a big struggle.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Do you see anything that will push that change?*

AI WEIWEI: No, nothing, if China refuses to accept so-called common values: democracy, freedom of press, freedom of judicial, society maintained by law. China has openly opposed those things. They have said that this is not the Chinese way. But of course they couldn't tell you what is the Chinese way. They have been trying to figure that out for the past thousand years.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Are they saying you are not Chinese? Or that your lawyer, who is in jail, is not Chinese?*

AI WEIWEI: The first time I was arrested, they thought I must have some connections, all my acts must be, you know, they said, "you're a pawn of the West." It's easiest to set up a condition and a defense, in which the condition is not real. So many things like this happen in our society. They try to set up an enemy which is not there.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Did jail change you?*

AI WEIWEI: Jail must have changed me somehow, I have no idea. It's not a normal acceptable condition, so...

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *How do you feel about your current position? Could you be jailed any moment?*

AI WEIWEI: I'm always very naïve. I think that period is passed. I think the people who jailed me are smarter, they are more informed, they understand better who I am, they don't feel I am that much of a danger to them. I think they are smart people as individuals. But as a system, a society, they are very uncomprehending. You've got to understand Chinese society. If there's an old guy there, the whole family sits around and listens. That's our culture. You don't argue with your parents. You don't even argue with your brothers and sisters. You may totally disagree but you keep a big smile on your face. In one way it's good. You protect people in their freedom. Don't need to argue to make absolute truth. Our society has survived that way.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Will China's inability to deal with history hold the country back?*

AI WEIWEI: It's very difficult to make progress and improve if society can't learn from the past, for society to not be conscious. They should understand that to announce those mistakes, it's not a loss of face. You don't have to bear that responsibility, as long as you consciously understand that was a mistake. Everybody can fall. But it's very strange if after you fall, you try to glorify that gesture and just sit there, and not move.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Does that inability to look at the past and admit mistakes make the system brittle?*

AI WEIWEI: I think [the government] is lacking a profound understanding of how to make a nation move forward. They are sacrificing the human conscience or intelligence for the small mistakes somebody made along the way. They really underestimate the whole society's ability to adjust themselves and to learn from mistakes. It's against the intellect.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *What do you think about the art market?*

AI WEIWEI: The art market has been crazy ever since I have seen it. Since the 1980s.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Is it crazier now?*

AI WEIWEI: I don't really know. I'm not a person who is so involved in those matters. Of course I think there's so much hype in terms of the prices in the market. It's another game. Not one that artists control, but rather speculators. Society makes it that way.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Do you see a lot of good art around you in China?*

AI WEIWEI: What is good art? I see all those photos when I turn on my phone, and I think that's brilliant art. But this art may not end up on museum walls. I think making art is a human need. It's not a museum need or a collector's need. But others often define what is good or bad. Some kind of perspective that doesn't really reflect individual acts.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Do you follow any of the "public artists" who are expressing their views through art in the Middle East, like Tunisia's eL Seed and his "calligraffiti"?*

AI WEIWEI: I haven't followed. I even have a difficulty catching my voice. [A train roars past.] You see, trains rushing by! I would love to follow that, but these days there are so many things going on in different places. So many talented people, so much energy and it's very different.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Are there some people you feel you learn from, who have changed your art?*

AI WEIWEI: I am mostly learning, not from art history, not from artists, but by self practice. I don't know if what I'm doing is even art. I don't think it matters if it's art or not, but it matters if it's successful communication. If I have to have some kind of measurement, I would say to what level, to whom, and how people would view it. Those questions remain in every work.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *How do you view your audience? Are they foreigners, Chinese?*

AI WEIWEI: I don't think there's a fixed audience for my work. I think the audience has to discover my work, and my work needs to discover the audience. Before people see my work, there is no audience, but if an audience develops, then the work is there.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *You've become such a famous artist. How does that affect you?*

AI WEIWEI: Hah! Famous artist! For three years, my name can't even appear in any media here. Yesterday, with the Instagram pictures, was one exception that we celebrated. Yesterday they saw some image and people loved it. I broke through once!

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Can fame become a burden for an artist?*

AI WEIWEI: For many artists, burden of fame, or to live in somebody else's measurement or standard, but for me, I'm very lucky. I don't have to be that way because I was trained in this society, which was so strongly enforcing ideology in every waking second. I was trained to be anti-market.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Lots of Chinese artists are very market-oriented.*

AI WEIWEI: It's like, if you see a gambling table. Some people are so happy to grab what they got. But if I have glory, I would lose everything. At the end, I don't really care that much. I keep playing. It's a moment, not really gambling. It's a game. It's so unpredictable, and not even controllable. You would have a sense of survival, and also there's the idea that your act maybe gives some courage to other people. So I'm satisfied.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *That seems very Maoist. He called for art to serve the people, and your art has very powerful social messages.*

AI WEIWEI: Maoist! I don't see it that way. Why we should do this? We could easily find a nice place, grow organic vegetables, raise some animals very quietly, and live a very peaceful beautiful life. But if you are already in some kind of public domain, artists or politicians or musicians or whatever, then of course you bear a little more responsibility with that. Because we *don't* grow food. I always tell people I know, we don't grow food, our daily supplement. We don't weave fabric. Where do all those things come from? Somebody has to make it. Do we hear their voice? Their voice is something we wear or eat. So as an artist, we have a responsibility. Don't tell me you're such an elite, or so superior, that you bear no responsibility. Come on, that's obviously a lie.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *You're always giving a voice to the local people through your art. Like your Sunflower Seeds installation, which represents something regular people love.*

AI WEIWEI: That piece surprised me. I was worried. I thought maybe this is too local an experience. But I suddenly realized globally people can accept it. Very surprising. And when I brought 1,001 Chinese to Germany, very local farmers, minority people, all kinds of people, I faced their problems. They couldn't really travel, they have no knowledge about art. They're completely cut off from contemporary life. It was dangerous. Very risky. For them and for me! What if they all escaped? How could this guy come back to China? Nor could I stay in Germany any more. I would have had to find someplace else, Puerto Rico or something!

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Maybe that's what poetry is. It's about the human condition.*

AI WEIWEI: Yeah, poetry is talking about the human condition. But it's always focusing on very common sensitivity to show uniqueness or an unpredictable moment.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *So true globalization is about defining commonness and human universality?*

AI WEIWEI: I think true globalization is finally people in any place and any condition, any circumstance—economic, political, religious—can examine or challenge what has been there in a more common language, to confront things. It doesn't mean disappearing or gaining from either side, but this is a moment, which may lead to new thinking, new order, or new understanding of human behavior.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Do we need these moments because the world is changing so fast?*

AI WEIWEI: Because people, we humans, need another idea. Another view of other people, another perspective of what life is. Humanity is always about sharing or thinking about other people's position or condition. Then we can talk about humanity. It's just that simple. To accept differences. To accept differences, you first have to recognize differences. And first you need to express what is there.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Many Chinese artists are critical of you and your work. Why is that?*

AI WEIWEI: Many people have different perspectives, and that's fine. But the problem is that to criticize they should first build a platform for all the ideas to reveal themselves. You cannot criticize somebody who doesn't even have the right to have his name mentioned in a show. That's the first thing you have to establish. You should respect the person, you think his idea may be worth criticizing, then please put up a platform. I have close artist friends who have not called me once after I was jailed. I don't need them to protect me. If I get jail or killed, that's my problem. But to not protect the idea of fighting for freedom of expression, I don't understand. But it's like

your enemy disappears, that's the most dangerous. You have to recognize the position of your enemy. That's China, not only among artists but also the political system is also the same. The (party) doesn't recognize the opposition. So after sixty years of playing games, they're still amateur. They never would let you move three moves that would throw the table. To beat you, they change the game rules. They reinterpret the game again. If you do that, then how can you become a master? I mean this is so simple. I even told my interrogators, "Just tell me how you will become a master if you don't let me, a stupid artist, make an argument. You cannot say the real reason I am here but instead tell people I have tax problems. You have made the game too easy. You would not enjoy your glory! Then you put my lawyer in jail and say he has some kind of unheard-of problem. Of course if you don't have one person out of 1.3 billion people who are different, you have lost so much. You don't have a healthy mental condition. You don't have dignity or integrity to behave right. I mean, a government has to uphold this kind of moral standard. That's one purpose of power, to set up rules and uphold moral standards. If you lose them, then you are not legally there. You have no legitimacy." My guards, they said, "You talk too much." I know, I know, I talk too much.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *What artists inspire you?*

AI WEIWEI: Me. I think my weakness is my impossible, my lacking of courage, my lack of intelligence. That's the human, how desperate. How that pushes me! It makes me understand humanity. Then I have to compare my act to all those masters, and I feel I'm not so good. I'm keeping my self-criticism!

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Everything that drives China today seems to be the desire for fuqiang wealth and power. Where is that going?*

AI WEIWEI: I think China still hasn't put much profound thinking into how *fuqiang*, wealthy and strong a human can be, what's our relation to nature, to the planet, to our neighbors, and what comes after you get so rich and powerful. What's that power for? So I think they are too immature in those things.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Your art seems to play a very important role in helping people see that.*

AI WEIWEI: No, no, not really. A good museum show, maybe twenty thousand people will see it. And it occupies them for one afternoon.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *But it changes people.*

AI WEIWEI: It's evidence of time or some kind of effort or thinking that's not so

profound. But you know, we need material traces. We need marks. History. Look at the Bronze Age, the Stone Age, what tools people were making to fight, the images they made, the craftsmanship. What kind of price does a society pay for this kind of act?

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *You mean there's a limit to art's impact?*

AI WEIWEI: I think there's no limitation for art as long as humans care about our feelings and our thoughts. But of course my art is so limited. It's just one individual. I take art as a human activity. But for myself, I have gotten old very fast. I may change my ideas tomorrow! Everything is so conditional.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *What makes you really happy?*

AI WEIWEI: Simple things. If I see my son when he's small. So content. Or if you look at an insect, a bug. Or if you pay enough attention to the details of life. It serves no clear purpose but it's there. It's there not because of your attention, but because of a meaning or reason you don't know. That wonder, that feeling that there's life parallel, reasons beyond logic. That's a lot you can appreciate.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *That's religion, isn't it?*

AI WEIWEI: I can't touch that word! I don't know.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Spirituality?*

AI WEIWEI: Maybe. It's a sense that we are part of it. A tiny part of it. It's amazing, eh?

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *What depresses you?*

AI WEIWEI: Nothing really depresses me. Of course if you can say death, such things, but that's part of life.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *You sound like an optimist.*

AI WEIWEI: Yeah, more and more, when you are more conscious of the human condition or nature. If you have to choose between optimistic or pessimistic, I think optimism is a better position.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Are you optimistic about China?*

AI WEIWEI: I think China is so lucky in the past thirty years. It has made huge progress. But I think China seems not quite ready for contemporary modern life. It's kind of maybe a result of longtime segregation from the world. So there's no clear trust. Trust is so needed in individual private life and in the public sector.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *There are more Chinese tourists traveling the world than any other country. They are seeing the world in a way that their parents never did. What will that mean?*

AI WEIWEI: I think that's the most profound and under evaluated single moment. People using their own eyes to see the world, to wonder. In the past, maybe half our knowledge or more was looking at the world through somebody else's eye. I think that's how we understand the world. Only that act can do more than anything else. They will recognize what is interesting in their own society. Once you have a sense of the differences, then you can compare and make a judgment.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Taiwan opened up for travel back in the 1980s, and it became a huge impetus for democracy.*

AI WEIWEI: Yes, since the 1980s I realized that the U.S. policy to accept students made Chinese lawmakers and many different sectors the first generation who learned in the U.S. Good or bad. For the lawyers there are many problems, of course, because it's too complicated. But it has built some kind of foundation. China is lacking in so many areas. People come back from the U.S. and are in important positions to make important decisions, and their reference is the United States.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *How do you see the future of art?*

AI WEIWEI: If you trust humanity, then you don't have to worry about those things.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *What's your view of the Western perception of China?*

AI WEIWEI: I think there's been a lot of change in sophistication. Today the questions are much more sophisticated. There's more knowledge and common ground. Lots of American and European students here. They love it, in some ways they feel certain freedoms they don't have at home. I think freedom is the search for what you don't have. It's not what you already have.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Do American visitors to China gain something?*

AI WEIWEI: I think Americans start to appreciate what they have. And they start to realize what they don't have. I think Chinese people's relationships are warm, caring. And at the same time very loose. Almost anything goes, anything is possible. If you talk about food, in the West you have hamburgers, club sandwich, whatever. Here you don't even care whoever orders, just pick up this and that. The more you sense the combination of each dish, we all have different dishes, you create a thousand dishes from one table. It's completely unanalyzable. In the U.S., I went to a Polish breakfast shop. I see a person who opens a menu. Eggs. Scrambled, fried, or sunny side up. He

is studying it for so long, trying to decide. I say, come on! Everyday just these three fucking dishes, but you thinking so profound, they even have pictures! Mashed potato or French fries! I just want to laugh, seeing those people there.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Do you worry about Westerners coming and not really understanding what's really going on here?*

AI WEIWEI: It's still better than not coming and not knowing anything. At least there is personal contact, and they are not so scared.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *How do you get that passport?*

AI WEIWEI: I don't really know. That's also very Chinese. To me the authorities are like an old Chinese medicine master. He can look at me, feel my pulse, and he would mysteriously pick up little bit here little bit there. I'm being taken care of.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *But one day they will show up with your passport.*

AI WEIWEI: Oh yeah, that's for sure. I don't think they like my passport that much! They just somehow feel that it's not proper right moment, according to my understanding of my health. Especially when they realize my health is related to the nation's health, then it has to be carefully dealt with. I never blamed them with that. Sometimes I just think: did they set up a schedule? If life is not that long, how long do you need before you decide a guy can move like that?

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *What will happen to your lawyer, Pu Zhiqiang?*

AI WEIWEI: Not good. Two possibilities. Police could not make a trial. Or, they cook the dish, but don't know if the master is going to eat it or not. So I think one possibility is to have him stay there longer, as a punishment. Once you arrest that person, you don't easily let him go. You have to make clear he understands the power can be easily damaged. You don't want to have somebody just come out and celebrate.

DORINDA ELLIOTT: *Are they using him to send a message?*

AI WEIWEI: Yeah, yeah, to other lawyers, not to me. When I have a deep illness, jasmine tea will not help me that much. They will not send a message to me that way. It's a message to the lawyers and to general society. He won't necessarily be heavily punished. They still have to follow the law, to have dignity and respect that idea that the law is above. Otherwise, that would be a total mess for them, create great damage. This is all about damage and control. There's not much ideology.