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AI WEIWEI

April 15 – May 29, 2010

Please join us for a reception on

Saturday, April 17, 2010, 3 PM to 5 PM

Haines Gallery proudly presents recent work by Chinese conceptual artist and activist Ai Weiwei. This is Ai's first major solo exhibition on the West Coast. His ability to succinctly infuse his work with cultural, political, and historical references has propelled him into an internationally recognized iconic figure with significant critical and institutional support. It is perhaps because of this support that Ai is also able to articulate his socio-political concerns through both his popular blog and overt activism, despite the Chinese Government's efforts to quiet him.

This past year has been a particularly complex one for the artist, having recently closed two critically acclaimed survey exhibitions at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo and the Haus der Kunst in Munich, a major installation at the the Pavello Mies van der Rohe in Barcelona, and numerous group exhibitions worldwide. His upcoming inclusion in the Sao Paulo Biennial and the Turbine Hall commission at the Tate Modern this October solidifies his importance as an articulate and influential presence in the international contemporary art dialogue. We are very fortunate to have this opportunity to exhibit Ai Weiwei's work in light of his demanding schedule. His exhibition at Haines Gallery includes large-scale installations and smaller sculptural works drawing from a wide range of influences and materials.

Works in the exhibition include *Snake Bag*, in which Ai employs 380 children's backpacks to create a large serpentine form on one of the gallery walls. A mergence of art and activism, this work serves as a memorial to the thousands of children who lost their lives in the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan Province. Ai has been at the forefront of a guerrilla investigation aimed at collecting the names of these victims, but has come up against significant resistance, including violence and imprisonment, from the Chinese government in its efforts to conceal the death toll and their culpability.

Other works in the exhibition employ porcelain, with its unique role in Chinese history as a material used to make everything from mass-produced household wares to handmade aesthetic objects. In *Kui Hua Zi*, translated as "sunflower seeds", the artist worked with the porcelain masters of Jingdezhen to create 250 kg of handmade individual seed forms, a process that took twenty assistants over a year to complete. His *Dress with Flowers* series, also in porcelain, depicts everyday children's dresses purchased by Ai from a grocery store in Jingdezhen. These dresses, reproduced with all of their patterns, pleats, and folds, appear both beautifully delicate and hauntingly lifeless, testing the limits of this traditional material.

Ai Weiwei's signature work, *Colored Vases*, incorporates Han



Dress with Flowers, 2006, Porcelain, 2.75 x 35.5 x 25.5 inches

Dynasty vases (206 BC – 220 AD) that have been dipped in brightly colored industrial paint. The resulting objects echo both avant-garde paintings of the American mid-century and China's current consumer kitsch. This transmogrification from ancient to contemporary disrupts their stability and calls into question the identity, authenticity, and value of these objects. As such, their conflicting layers of imagery create a complex commentary on time and place within China's contemporary culture.

Ai Weiwei was born in Beijing, China in 1957. He is the son of renowned poet Ai Qing, who was sent to a work camp during the Cultural Revolution, where Ai himself was interned for a time. In 1978 while attending the Beijing Film Academy, Ai founded The Stars, an avant-garde group that would soon catalyze the development of contemporary art in China. Ai lived in New York from 1981 to 1993, where he briefly attended Parsons School of Design and developed his career through performance and conceptual art. He has since returned to China and expanded his practice to include installations, photography, sculpture, curatorial work and architecture, the latter for which he received international recognition for his collaboration with Herzog & De Meuron in the design of the Bird's Nest stadium for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Ai's work has been included in exhibitions at the Berkeley Art Museum, Guggenheim Museum, Shanghai Museum of Modern Art, Tate Modern, Seattle Art Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Serpentine Gallery London, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Israel Museum, Kunsthalle Bern, Groninger Museum in the Netherlands, Ulrich Museum of Art, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Cisneros Fontanals Collection, Moscow Biennale, the Liverpool Biennial.

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