

## Let 100 Million Sunflowers Bloom: A Q&A with Ai Weiwei on His Turbine Hall Commission

By Coline Milliard, ARTINFO UK

Published: October 13, 2010



Photo by Tate Photography, © Ai Weiwei

LONDON— Monday morning, **Tate Modern** unveiled **Ai Weiwei's** commission for the **Turbine Hall**: 100 million sunflower seed husks covering the gallery floor, each one a unique porcelain replica. The 150 tons of miniature sculpture were made over two years by artisans in Jingdezhen, the so-called porcelain capital of China. At once spectacular and understated, the installation is overwhelming, though barely noticeable from afar. Infused with the artist's personal memories, "Sunflower Seeds" evokes the place of the individual within the mass, and spurs reflection on the mass-production preconceptions associated with "Made in China." (The installation also coyly echos "The Weather

### **Since porcelain is such an ancient Chinese material, why use it today?**

Porcelain is probably the longest tradition in China. It used to be made for the imperial court, and it has developed into a high-quality product. It's so traditional, and yet I want it to become a contemporary language. Today we have plastic, and all kinds of metals, but porcelain is related to the very essential human act of firing mud and turning it into

something that will last forever, harder than rock. So here, it represents effort and the accumulation of time. And boredom.

**Since you dropped a Han Dynasty vase in 1995 for the photo-triptych "Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn," you have frequently incorporated historical artifacts in your work. You seem to use them as readymades.**

Culture is always a commentary on what we did before, and reinterpreting it is a tool for speaking out about our position today. This is part of contemporary thought.

**An awareness of Duchamp's legacy is important in understanding your work. You've even described yourself as a readymade.**

I'm a readymade, my cultural background and my political situation are readymade. China is a readymade.

**Do you feel like you're part of a larger artistic inquiry? Are there other artists in China working on the same kind of issues, or do you feel isolated?**

I'm very much isolated, but I don't think that's a problem. You only need one person to say what he or she has in mind, and to be heard. The problem isn't that you are an individual, but to find a vehicle for your voice.

**What was the biggest challenge in completing this commission for Turbine Hall?**

The biggest challenge regarded the fact that it's a public project. You really have to devote it to the general public. Not only do you have to state your own position, but you also have to think about how you're intervening in a very public space.