

# The Artist: He Pushes

For much of the year, the art world has been riveted by the story of Ai Weiwei, the Beijing artist who was detained by police for nearly three months this spring. Now, a documentary debuting Sunday at the Sundance Film Festival, "Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry," offers a rare, insider's look at the artist's work and free-speech struggles.



A new documentary paints Ai Weiwei as both impish and serious

Alison Klayman, a freelance reporter for National Public Radio, met the artist in 2008 and followed him around for the next three years gathering footage for the film. Initially, she said she was drawn to his irreverent photographs and conceptual sculptures—often made from porcelain, tea or temple wood—but her film also captures his awakening as an activist.

In recent years, the artist best known for helping design Beijing's "Bird's Nest" Olympic stadium has gained an international reputation for openly criticizing his Communist government. Last spring, museums and human-rights organizers around the world held protests after the artist was arrested, allegedly for tax evasion. Mr. Ai has denied the charge; he's been under police surveillance since last June.

Mr. Ai emerges in Ms. Klayman's portrait as both impish and serious. At one point, he walks out of a restaurant and approaches a stranger who has been trailing him around town all day in an unmarked car. Leaning into the car's open window, he asks, "Are you following me?" The driver, angry, speeds off.

Crow, Kelly. "The Artist: He Pushes", *The Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 2012

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After one confrontation with authorities escalated into scuffling, Ms. Klayman said officers tried to confiscate her camera and its footage, but she was able to hide her original tapes and hand over blank decoys instead. "It felt like watching his Twitter feed come to life," she added, referencing the artist's habit of writing online about confrontations.

Last week, Mr. Ai was spotted chucking stones at the surveillance cameras trained on his studio door. He was questioned afterward by police. "He's not the kind of guy to stop," Ms. Klayman added. "He pushes."

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