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Amid Chinese Reports That Ai Weiwei Has Confessed Guilt, a Global Protest Is Planned and Blackjack Players Remember Their "Guru"



Courtesy AFP/Getty Images

Artist Ai Weiwei has been detained by the Chinese government for the past twelve days.

As **Ai Weiwei's** detention by the Chinese government stretches onto its 12th day, his family and supporters, unable to contact the artist, remain in the dark about his fate. Despite that information blackout, jarring, sometimes contradictory news continues to trickle out through official state media outlets, and supporters — including some unlikely ones — are building up campaigns around the world, with demonstrations planned for this weekend. Here is a roundup of latest developments:

Ai Said to Have Confessed Guilt: In the face of global scrutiny and diplomatic denunciations, the Chinese government has continued to press its case against Ai before the public. The latest twist comes from the Hong Kong-based newspaper *Wen Wei Po*, controlled by mainland authorities, which has declared that Ai Weiwei himself has confessed to crimes. "A source revealed to this newspaper that firm evidence has been collected about Ai Weiwei's suspected economic crimes," the paper wrote, according to the Guardian, adding, "As the investigation has deepened, the public security authorities have accumulated quite solid witness,

documentary, and circumstantial evidence and Ai Weiwei has had quite a good attitude in co-operating with the investigation and has begun to confess about the issues." Citing an unnamed source, the paper said that authorities had obtained "a large amount of evidence that Ai Weiwei is suspected of avoiding taxes, and the sums are quite large."

New Bigamy Charge: Not content to stop with merely one attack, Wen Wei Po piled on that Ai was also suspected of "spreading pornography on the internet" and even bigamy. According to the Telegraph, "the basis for the bigamy allegation is that Mr. Ai's name appears on the birth certificate of a child he is said to have had with a woman who is not his wife." The Telegraph adds that Ai supporters have commented online that he is, indeed, the father of the child, but was never married to the mother. (The scatter-shot character assassination from state papers seems to be the modus operandi of authorities — most recently, the official Xinhua newswire attacked him, not just for tax evasion, but for plagiarism and being a "third rate" artist, also mainly citing unnamed smearers.) Regarding the new spate of charges in the Chinese media, Ai's sister **Gao Ge** told the Guardian: "This is not evidence. It's using a small paper to push their own position without giving Ai Weiwei any fair redress. It's clearly against the law to hold him for so long without any notice to us."

Ai's Wife Summoned: Suggesting that the investigation into his taxes is the primary front, Ai's wife **Lu Qing** was summoned on Tuesday by Chinese tax officials. She spent about an hour at the tax office, according to another Guardian story. In a rather cruel twist, she was asked to take financial documents with her, even though these had already been confiscated by police.

Global DIY Protest Planned This Weekend: Public-art nonprofit **Creative Time** — which put out a statement calling the artist's detention "shameful" — has issued a call to support Ai this weekend via a protest at Chinese embassies and consulates around the world. Dubbed "1,001 Chairs for Ai Weiwei," the action has been called a "sit-in," but it is really more of a sit-on, asking participants to show up at 1 p.m. on Sunday at their local Chinese embassy with a chair "to sit peacefully in support of the artist's immediate release" for an undefined amount of time. The action, of course, is inspired by a project by the artist for **Documenta 7** that had him distribute 1,001 Qing Dynasty chairs around Kassel. While this protest is more or less DIY, without much clear structure or planning, a Facebook page for the Stockholm demonstration already lists 778 attending — so its well on the way to surpassing Ai's modest participant tally at Documenta.

Museum Heads Continues to Speak Out: The Guggenheim's petition from major museums demanding the release of the artist continues to gather big names. New figures attached to the call since it first launched include **Julián Zugazagoitia** (director of the **Nelson Atkins Museum**, Kansas City); **Ann Philbin** (director of the **Hammer Museum**, Los Angeles); **Olga Viso** (director of the **Walker Art Center**); **Alfred Pacquement** (director of Paris's **Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle**); **Arnold Lehman** (director of

the **Brooklyn Museum**); **Jill Medvedow** (director of the **ICA Boston**); **Julia Peyton-Jones** and **Hans Ulrich Obrist** (both of London's **Serpentine Gallery**); **Poul Erik Tøjner** (director of the **Louisiana Museum of Modern Art**, Denmark); **Nathalie Bondil** (director of the **Montreal Museum of Fine Arts**); **Neal Benezra** (director of **SFMOMA**); **Tony Ellwood** and **Suhanya Raffel** (director and deputy director of Australia's **Queensland Art Gallery**); and **Thomas W. Lentz** (director of the **Harvard Art Museums**).

Chicago Now reports that **Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago** director **Madeleine Grynsztejn**, and curator **Michael Darling** have also signed on. Darling issued a statement: "We join our friends and colleagues in the international arts community in expressing our concern for the release of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. His work and ideas have had a tremendous impact on the art world, and we have always seen a strong and positive response when we exhibit works by Weiwei and other contemporary Chinese artists in our galleries. We hope China will keep its pledge to nurture creativity and advance independent artistic ideas."

Ai's Cause Unites Right and Left: Think only lefties care about Ai Weiwei? Think again. In today's Los Angeles Times, **Nicole Galinas**, a scholar at the libertarian **Manhattan Institute**, uses the furor around Ai Weiwei to speak up for corporations operating in China. Consumer products giant **Unilever** — the sponsor of Ai's **Tate** Turbine Hall institution, as Galinas points out — was recently asked by the Chinese government not to raise prices on its products. Unilever assented, presumably to preserve its access to the world's second-largest economy. And this is bad news, as Galinas writes, because "prices, after all, are an expression of free speech." Elsewhere on the conservative spectrum, last week Republican senator **Charles Grassley** — a longtime foe of **Smithsonian** abuses — has taken to Twitter to weigh in on the matter, personally addressing Chinese president **Hu Jintao** [sic throughout]: "Chairman Hu I demand to know inwhich dungeon u hv dumped Ai Weiwei. Freedom loving people aronnd the world hv right to know."

Pro Gambling Community Goes All In With Ai: Finally, in what is without a doubt one of the more unexpected communities to become galvanized by Ai's detention, professional blackjack players in the United States have united behind the artist, who, it seems, became a gambling legend of sorts while supporting himself by playing the tables in Atlantic City when he was at **Parsons** art school. In an article wonderfully headlined "Arrested Chinese Blackjack Guru Ai WeiWei Also an Artist and Activist," the Web site blackjackchamp.com shared a fond reminiscence from a gambler who goes by the name **Snake Eyes** that is worth quoting in full:

"I came here to Atlantic City now to unwind a bit at the blackjack table. It was here I met him some 25 years ago. I was playing and losing bad, and then this Asian guy with a beard right out of the Kung Fu movies, playing next to me, starts telling

me when to hit, split, or stay. I don't listen to nobody but every time I don't listen to him, I lose the hand. So I start listening. I was up a few grand that night. I always listened when he explained smart strategies. He is the best.... He showed me once those things he makes. I don't get art, but he never talked much about anything but blackjack, card counting systems, girls, and casinos with me. He is a good guy. They better let him out."

Blackjackchamp.com reported that "casino insiders" were thinking of holding a series of fund-raising card tournaments, to the end of pressuring the U.S. government to take strong action against China until Ai is freed