

AI WEIWEI
Wearable Art



Limited Edition Bags and Scarves by Ai Weiwei



CITIZENS' INVESTIGATION

5.12
大地震
公民行动



CATS AND DOGS



ZODIAC

AI WEIWEI.
THE CHINA BAG
Edition of 2,500
64.5 x 47 cm (26.1 x 18.8 in.)
€ / £ 400

Papercutting is a traditional Chinese art going back 2,000 years. The colored, intricately cut papers are used as a story-telling medium in festivities, for prayers, and as everyday decoration.



HAIRCUT



CITIZENS' INVESTIGATION



CATS AND DOGS

AI WEIWEI.
THE SILK SCARF
Edition of 2,500
90 x 90 cm (35.4 x 35.4 in.)
€ / £ 250

The bags and scarves take their motifs from papercuts created by Ai Weiwei as part of his *Papercut Portfolio*, published by TASCHEN in 2019.



CATS AND DOGS THE SILK SCARF

The scarf takes its motif from a papercut created by Ai Weiwei as part of his *Papercut Portfolio*, which was published by TASCHEN in a signed and limited edition in 2019.

Using the traditional Chinese art of the papercut, Ai Weiwei's *Cats and Dogs* reflects on a decisive period in the artist's life and work: from his return to Beijing in 1993 after a decade-long stay in New York to building his renowned Caochangdi home and studio on the Beijing outskirts in 1999. At the center of the papercut, he gives the finger to the Forbidden City, effectively obscuring the portrait of Mao Zedong that presides over Tiananmen Square. This motif is from a 1995 photograph that marked the beginning of his series *Studies of Perspective*, in which his outstretched middle finger measured the Eiffel Tower, the Mona Lisa, the White House, and many other sights and non-sites around the world. Another familiar trope of Ai's Beijing years was the word "FUCK," which he sunburned into his chest for a photo piece and installed as a huge neon sign in his garden. Ai's Chinese company is named FAKE—pronounced closely to "fuck" in Chinese.

In this period, Ai developed two iconoclastic groups of works with Neolithic vases or antique Ming (1368–1644) and Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) furniture. *Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo* (1994)—of which two versions can be seen in the papercut—brands a historical artifact with the trademark of contemporary capitalism. "The Coca-Cola logo is a clear announcement of property, and of cultural or political identity," Ai says. "But it is also a clear sign to stop thinking. It's full of ignorance, but it's also a redefinition." He also joined Ming and Qing Dynasty tables into sculptural permutations such as *Table with Two Legs on the Wall* (1997; upper right), *Table with Crossed Corners* (1998; lower right), *Table with Three Legs* (1998; lower left), and *Tables at Right Angles* (1998; upper right). All carpentry was done using traditional mortise and tenon techniques, fitting the pieces together without nails or glue. "We took great care with the cutting and sanding to make sure the patina of the furniture looked untouched," Ai explains. "Even an expert would be confused because everything is so perfect." Among these tables, *Stool* (1997; middle left) stands out as the poor cousin. It is composed of a pair of three-legged stools, ubiquitous to every Chinese household, sharing a leg.

Ai Weiwei's cats, numbering over forty, have become famous in their own right. Among other animals, including dogs, peacocks, and hedgehogs, they freely roam his studio and garden at 258 Caochangdi, and are inscrutable fixtures in thousands of selfies with visitors from all around the world. A short film, *258 Cats*, was made about them in 2013.

Text by Chin-Chin Yap. © 2020 TASCHEN GmbH, Hohenzollernring 53, D-50672 Köln, www.taschen.com;
for the artwork: Ai Weiwei; for the text: the author. Produced in China

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Edition of 2500

TASCHEN



CITIZENS' INVESTIGATION THE SILK SCARF

The scarf takes its motif from a papercut created by Ai Weiwei as part of his *Papercut Portfolio*, which was published by TASCHEN in a signed and limited edition in 2019.

Using the traditional Chinese art of the papercut, Ai Weiwei's *Citizens' Investigation* reflects on a momentous event for the artist's life and work: on May 12, 2008, a massive earthquake of magnitude 7.9 struck China's Sichuan Province. The papercut shows people amid the rubble: a woman holding up a picture of her missing child, helpers and investigators trying to find victims and survivors. The death toll reached almost 70,000 and appeared particularly high among schoolchildren, but the Chinese government barely provided any information about the victims' identities. Ai Weiwei organized a team of volunteers to investigate and compile a list of the deceased children, a project known as the "Citizens' Investigation." They compiled a somber list of 5335 child victims with their name, age, gender, school, hometown, and family details. It was discovered that corruption had caused many of the schools to be constructed far below official safety standards, causing a disproportionate number of deaths when the earthquake struck.

Ai faced escalating government retaliation for his investigation and his political commentary on Twitter. In 2009 he went to Chengdu to testify as a witness for Tan Zuoren, an activist who had also been investigating corruption-related issues around the earthquake and was now facing trial for subversion of state power. The night before the trial, on August 12, Ai and his colleagues were assaulted in their hotel rooms and detained by police until the trial was over to prevent his testimony. The image in the papercut's center is based on a famous photograph that Ai took of his colleagues and himself in the elevator immediately after the assault. Ai suffered a brain hemorrhage as a result of the police beating, which is documented in the CAT scans at the bottom of the composition. The Chinese phrases read "Citizens' Investigation of the Great Earthquake of May 12" (left) and "Cherish Life and Reject Forgetting" (right).

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HAIRCUT THE SILK SCARF

The scarf takes its motif from a papercut created by Ai Weiwei as part of his *Papercut Portfolio*, which was published by TASCHEN in a signed and limited edition in 2019.

Using the traditional Chinese art of the papercut, Ai Weiwei's *Haircut* reflects on an important event in the artist's life and work: his participation in documenta XII in Kassel, Germany, in 2007, when he brought 1001 Chinese citizens to the city for his work *Fairytale*. They had responded to an open call Ai had posted on his blog, which was answered by more than 3000 applicants. He selected people belonging to every section of Chinese society including farmers, homemakers, police officers, street vendors, students, teachers, artists, and the unemployed. It was an extraordinary opportunity for many people who could otherwise never have traveled abroad—several had to apply for their first passport as a necessary condition for this “fairytale.” Ai designed clothes, suitcases, and other items especially for the participants, and—as displayed in the papercut's borders—also cut their hair in idiosyncratic fashion. The 1001 Chinese citizens were free to move around and do as they wished, except to leave the city; they were functioning both as spectators and part of an artwork. Their number correlated to another component of *Fairytale*, 1001 Ming (1368–1644) and Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) chairs that were installed in Kassel for the exhibition's duration, shown in the upper right panel within the frame.

Also exhibited in Kassel was the monumental outdoors installation *Template*, constructed from Ming and Qing Dynasty wooden doors and windows salvaged from demolished buildings. *Template*'s original, upright form can be seen in the lower left center. Only a few days after the opening of documenta XII, the massive installation collapsed in a thunderstorm, yet miraculously remained in one whorled, newly shaped “found object” as seen in the lower right center. “*Template* was really made for indoors, it was not prepared for the German weather and wind,” Ai comments. “So it collapsed after six days of showing there. I was a little surprised but not very surprised, because I knew it was not strong. When I saw how the site had collapsed—not totally, it has turned into some other shape—I thought it is now really like a ruin. It comes from ruins and now it's really a ruin.”

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ZODIAC THE CHINA BAG BY AI WEIWEI

The bag takes its motif from a papercut created by Ai Weiwei as part of his *Papercut Portfolio*, which was published by TASCHEN in a signed and limited edition in 2019.

Using the traditional Chinese art of the papercut, Ai Weiwei's *Zodiac* offers a new perspective on one of his seminal works: the sculpture series *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* (2011). Here the artist took up one of the most notorious incidents in Chinese history, a complex and still ongoing story about war spoils, nationalism, and repatriation.

The original bronze-plated sculptures of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac—rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, ram, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig—were part of a majestic waterclock fountain designed by the Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione for the court of the Emperor Qianlong (1711–1799). The fountain was located in the Yuanmingyuan, Beijing's Old Summer Palace which served as the Qianlong Emperor's primary residence. During the Second Opium War (1856–1860), British and French troops sacked the Old Summer Palace. To this day, the ruins are preserved, now a public park, as a nationalist reminder of China's "150 years of humiliation." Huge amounts of art and antiquities were looted, largely ending up in European museums and collections. Over the years, some items appeared on the market for sale and were acquired by Chinese buyers under often-controversial circumstances.

Ai rendered seven animal heads in their exact form in bronze and gold for his own work. As the remaining five (dragon, snake, ram, rooster, and dog) were lost and their likenesses unknown, he designed these animals himself, raising a new set of questions about authenticity and cultural borrowing. "Are they truly lost, or at the auction house?" Ai asks of the originals. "One of the missing zodiac heads may just show up next season, so we will see how it compares with our version of it."

In the composition, the *Zodiac Heads* surround an elaborate full-circle version of Ai's *Grapes* (2010), made from interlocking three-legged stools. These handcrafted stools were common fixtures in ordinary Chinese households for many centuries. "They're from different ages, a few hundred years apart, all collected by antique dealers... Most of them have been through the Cultural Revolution, because stools are so practical and they show no traces of any specific culture.

So they survived."

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