

Ai Weiwei makes his mark on downtown Vancouver green space

Cast iron sculpture titled F Grass is part of Vancouver Biennale

BY DANA GEE, THE PROVINCE DECEMBER 17, 2014



A view from above shows the calligraphic form of Ai Weiwei's new work. Vancouver Biennale/Roaming the Planet

Photograph by: roaming-the-planet

The City of Vancouver is getting a great early Christmas present as renowned Chinese artist Ai Weiwei leaves his distinct and thought-provoking mark on a downtown green space.

Located at Harbour Green Park on the edge of Coal Harbour, Ai Weiwei's 13.5-by-13.5-metre cast iron sculpture titled F Grass is part of the Vancouver Biennale's ongoing public art series.

Arranged in the shape of a large calligraphic F, the 3,000-plus cast-iron blades of grass took two months to install and will be on display for a year.

Ai Weiwei was not on hand for Wednesday's unveiling. His freedom of movement has been curtailed since criticism of the Chinese government's human rights record landed him in jail for 81 days in 2011.

Following that detainment, he was under house arrest, and to this day he does not have a Chinese passport, so he cannot leave the country.

However, Biennale officials said the 57-year-old's studio recently confirmed he can now travel within China.

"It's an interesting part of the story that his artwork has to speak for him in the world because he can't go out," said Vancouver Biennale marketing director Miriam Blume.

The Vancouver Biennale was able to open dialogue with the Beijing-based Ai Weiwei through its senior Asian curator Shengtian Zheng, a friend of the artist.

"Ai Weiwei, like many of our artists, was inspired by the fact that the Biennale is all about art in public spaces and that we have a huge educational component, so the art becomes purposeful," said Blume. "We want to have an impact in our community."

Weiwei chose the location for F Grass after looking at photographs of nine locations.

"He wanted the water and he wanted to be in the urban hub of it all. The urban piece is very important to him," said Blume.

"It's hard not to interpret this as him sending his artwork to our democratic shores to send a message back to his homeland."

To celebrate the new work, a live Twitter event is happening Thursday (Dec. 18). To take part, go to [@van_biennale](#) use [#van_biennale](#) and [@aiww](#) in your Tweets

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