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235 BOWERY
NEW YORK NY
10002 USA
MUSEUM

RHIZOME



Breaking News: Jacob Appelbaum, Wikileaks activist and Tor Project leader, travels to Beijing to work with artist/activist Ai Weiwei for Rhizome's Seven on Seven conference at the New Museum.

Laura Poitras documents the pair in her first film since *Citizenfour*, premiering excerpts at the event on May 2.

On Saturday, April 19, **Jacob Appelbaum**—notable Wikileaks and Tor Project activist—traveled to Beijing for five days to take part in a collaboration with dissident artist **Ai Weiwei**, at the invitation of art-meets-tech organization **Rhizome**, on the occasion of the seventh Seven on Seven conference at the New Museum. Director **Laura Poitras**, whose portrait of Edward Snowden won the 2015 Academy Award for Documentary Feature, filmed the duo's work.

Seven on Seven is an annual signature conference with a unique format that pairs artists and

technologists together to make something new in 24 hours. The pair worked to create an artwork that underscores their mutual concerns with privacy, surveillance, and their state-restricted movement.

Excerpts of the short film documenting this collaboration—Poitras' first since *Citizenfour*—will be premiered at the event, held at New Museum in New York on May 2, and the final film will be released online later in May.

The Appelbaum/Ai collaboration was organized by **Heather Corcoran, Executive Director of Rhizome**, who said: "It was important to bring together these two courageous people who are disseminating their messages using art and technology, respectively, and facing similar levels of scrutiny and hardship as a result. It represents the best that Rhizome achieves with Seven on Seven, which brings the worlds of technology and art into closer proximity, to share strategies for thinking critically about digital culture and communicating those ideas. Seven on Seven creates a bridge for luminaries in these two fields to work together. That Poitras chose to document this film as her first since *Citizenfour*, illustrates just how intertwined aesthetics and protest can be, linking together the narratives of Appelbaum and Ai with the subjects of Poitras other films. It's important to recognize these people are not working in isolation."

In 2009, Ai used a blog to convey his critical messages about the Chinese government to the public, before it was shut down due to its popularity and influence. Appelbaum has been repeatedly targeted by US law enforcement agencies, who obtained a court order for his Twitter account data. Both face restrictions in their travel—Ai currently cannot leave China, and Appelbaum cannot travel to the USA due to fear of detainment regarding his involvement with Wikileaks and the Snowden revelations.

Both Ai and Appelbaum expressed a desire to use this project to raise awareness of the causes they champion. Appelbaum says of his work with Wikileaks, Snowden and Tor: "My one goal is that in twenty years time no one can say they didn't know what was happening, so we'll know who didn't act to stop it." Ai's typically elliptical reflection was that: "I see my art as a way of reminding people of certain facts."

Lisa Phillips, an Executive Producer of the Poitras film and *Toby Devan Lewis Director* of the New Museum says, "Only Rhizome, with its twenty year history at the forefront of art and technology, has the vision to pair these two together, and the experience to support them in making something new. It is my personal commitment to further freedom of artistic expression and one that is carried out through both the New Museum and Rhizome's core mission."

ABOUT RHIZOME & SEVEN ON SEVEN

Seven on Seven is a signature program organized by Rhizome, and the first conference took place at in April 2010. It pairs artists and technologists together to make something new in under 24 hours, and reveal it in a public conference at the New Museum. In addition to Ai and Appelbaum, this year's event features notables like **Nate Silver (FiveThirtyEight founder)**, **Mike Krieger (co-founder, Instagram)**, **Rus Yusupov (co-founder, Vine)** and artists **Trevor Paglen**, **Liam Gillick**, **Camille Henrot** and more. The art and tech pairs will meet at the New Museum on May 1 to work together behind closed doors, and will present their new projects to the public at the event on May 2.

Rhizome is a leading art and technology organization, and an affiliate organization of the New Museum in New York. It supports contemporary art to create richer and more critical digital cultures, through programs online and off – including commissions, exhibitions, events, an online journal, and a collection of digital art. A thriving nonprofit, Rhizome has played an integral role in the history, definition and growth of contemporary art engaged with technology and the Internet.

For full event information, visit sevenonseven.rhizome.org. The event will be livestreamed at rhizome.org and at fusion.net.

ABOUT JACOB APPELBAUM

Jacob Appelbaum, born in the US on April 1 1983, is an independent computer security researcher and hacker, and core member of the Tor Project. He represented Wikileaks at the 2010 Hope conference, and, as a confidant of the former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, was among those who gained access to documents for public release during the 2013 global surveillance disclosure. Appelbaum has been detained at airports and had his electronic equipment seized several times, and as a result, can no longer travel to the US. In 2010, the US Department of Justice obtained a court order compelling Twitter to provide data associated with the user accounts of Appelbaum, as well as several other individuals associated with Wikileaks.

ABOUT AI WEIWEI

Ai Weiwei, born 28 August 1957 in Beijing, is a Chinese contemporary artist and activist. He has been highly and openly critical of the Chinese government's stance on democracy and human rights. He has investigated government corruption and cover-ups, in particular the Sichuan schools corruption scandal following the collapse of so-called "tofu-dreg schools" in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. In 2005, Ai was invited to start blogging by Sina Weibo, the biggest internet platform in China. The blog was later shut down by Sina on 28 May 2009 due to its popularity and Ai's outspoken attitude on events such as the Sichuan earthquake and the Beijing Olympic Games.

ABOUT LAURA POITRAS

Laura Poitras is a filmmaker, journalist, and artist. Her film *Citizenfour* won an Academy Award for Best Documentary in 2015. She has received many honors for her work, including a MacArthur Fellowship, Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Peabody Award. In 2006, the U.S. government placed her on a secret watchlist and, through 2012, she was detained and interrogated at the U.S. border each time she traveled internationally. In January 2013, she received the first encrypted email from Edward Snowden who used the alias, "CITIZENFOUR." After five months of correspondence, she traveled to Hong Kong with Glenn Greenwald. Her video from Hong Kong of Edward Snowden revealing his identity was broadcast worldwide.

Executive Producers, Laura Poitras film: Lisa Phillips, Toby Devan Lewis Director, New Museum and Dorothy Berwin, independent film and theater producer.

Image: Left to right: Jacob Appelbaum, Laura Poitras, Ai Weiwei. Photo: Rhizome