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RHIZOME

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Image: Film still courtesy Praxis Films

BREAKING NEWS: Rhizome and New Museum Announce the Release of a New Film by Laura Poitras, Documenting the Making of a Collaborative Artwork by Artist Ai Weiwei and Activist Jacob Appelbaum for Rhizome’s art-tech conference Seven on Seven—now live at New York Times Op-Docs

For this new artwork, Ai and Appelbaum replaced the stuffing in twenty toy pandas with shredded Edward Snowden documents and an SD card and then distributed the stuffed animals to free speech activists around the world, including Julian Assange and Snowden himself.

NEW YORK, NY...**Rhizome** and the **New Museum** are pleased to announce the premiere of ***The Art of Dissent***, a new film by **Laura Poitras** released online today as part of the *New York Times* Op-Docs series and created for the seventh edition of Rhizome’s acclaimed Seven on Seven Conference. The activist and artist-filmmaker’s first project since *CITIZENFOUR*, her celebrated portrait of Edward Snowden, *The Art of Dissent* portrays a 72-hour collaboration in Beijing between contemporary artist **Ai Weiwei** and leading WikiLeaks and Tor Project activist **Jacob Appelbaum**.

The collaboration was part of the seventh edition of New York–based nonprofit **Rhizome**’s art-meets-tech event, **Seven on Seven**, which was held at the New Museum on May 2, 2015. Rhizome is a longtime affiliate of the **New Museum**, and **Lisa Phillips, Toby Devan Lewis** *Director* of the New Museum, is an executive producer for *The Art of Dissent* with film producer Dorothy Berwin.

Recognizing their shared, urgent concerns for free speech, civil liberties, and the proliferation of surveillance technologies, particularly in the US and China, Rhizome brought Appelbaum and Ai together for the first time in Beijing in April 2015 to spend three days together in deep discussion and open-ended collaboration. The two were invited to create something new—an artwork, an action, a provocation, a piece of technology, or whatever they imagined—alongside the other participants in this flagship program, which brings together seven pairs of artists and technologists to partner. (The other teams met at the New Museum in New York.)

The film draws connections between Ai and Appelbaum via the making of their collaborative artwork ***Panda-to-Panda***, comprised of **twenty toy pandas** from which the stuffing was removed and **replaced with shredded Snowden documents and an SD card** (contents unknown, supplied by Appelbaum). Panda is a term used in China to describe a member of the secret police. The pandas were then distributed to **art, technology, and free-speech activists around the world**, including **Julian Assange** and **Edward Snowden**.

“To have Laura Poitras there, filming Appelbaum and Ai as they made an artwork together, was incredible,” said **Heather Corcoran, Executive Director of Rhizome**, who orchestrated the collaboration and oversaw its production in China. “These two figures are urgent, as activists who have faced significant restriction on travel, who have been detained and heavily surveilled, and whose use of technology has been crucial to their work. It’s a film that gets to the heart of what the Seven on Seven project is about: the untapped potential in bringing together artists and technologists to create change in society through creative and critical thinking, and ‘sideways strategies’ that engage the public in unexpected new ways.”

“Rhizome, with its twenty-year history at the forefront of art and technology, had the vision to pair these two together and the experience to make this extraordinary and daring collaboration happen. It was also imperative to support the project and Poitras’s film personally and institutionally given the Museum’s mission and my own commitment to free expression,” said **Lisa Phillips**, an executive producer of *The Art of Dissent*.

ABOUT LAURA POITRAS

Laura Poitras is a filmmaker, journalist, and artist. *CITIZENFOUR*, the third installment of her post-9/11 trilogy, won an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, along with awards from the British Film Academy, Independent Spirit Awards, Directors Guild of America, Cinema Eye Honors, and others. She has received many honors for her work, including a MacArthur Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Peabody Award.

ABOUT JACOB APPELBAUM & AI WEIWEI

Jacob Appelbaum is an independent computer security researcher and hacker and a core member of the Tor Project. He represented WikiLeaks at the 2010 HOPE (Hackers on Planet Earth) 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.

Ai Weiwei is an artist and activist whose work encompasses sculpture, installation, photography, film, architecture, curation, and social criticism. His art has been featured in major solo exhibitions at venues including the Mori Art Museum, Minato, Japan; Tate Modern, London; and the New Museum, New York. He was the recipient of the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent from the Human Rights Foundation in 2012.

ABOUT SEVEN ON SEVEN

Founded in 2010 at the New Museum and organized by Rhizome, the Seven on Seven conference pairs seven leading artists with seven luminary technologists and challenges them to make something new together—be it an application, artwork, provocation, or whatever they imagine—over the course of a single day. They unveil their creations, and discuss their process, at an intimate public event.

The **2015 participants**, in addition to Ai and Appelbaum, included artist **Trevor Paglen** with **Instagram co-founder Mike Krieger**; artist **Stanya Kahn** with **Vine co-founder Rus Yusupov**; and artist **Liam Gillick** with **FiveThirtyEight founder Nate Silver**; among others. See documentation of the 2015 Seven on Seven conference at sevenonseven.rhizome.org.

ABOUT RHIZOME

Rhizome is an art organization based on the internet and an affiliate in residence at the New Museum in New York. It is dedicated to the creation, presentation, preservation, and critique of emerging artistic practices that engage technology and advocates for internet art and contemporary art that create richer and more critical digital cultures. To learn more about Rhizome, please visit rhizome.org.

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