

“A White House in Basel: Ai Weiwei Installation Looms Large at Swiss Art Event,” Euronews, June 17, 2016



CULTURE

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Ai Wei's Wei's temple-like 'White House' is one of the main attractions of Art Basel's Unlimited section, a space focusing on big art, featuring massive sculptures and paintings, video projections, large-scale installations, and live performances.

Belgian artist Hans Op De Beeck has recreated a large living room in grey clay complete with books, children and even a dog, typing the scale and scope of the event.

A total of 88 works are on show at this pioneering exhibition that transcends classical art-show standards.

Though most of these works won't fit in your living room, all of them are for sale.

Gianni Jetzer, curator of Art Basel Unlimited says the event tries to break new ground: "The quality, and what people like about 'Unlimited' is this museum level presentation. Eventually it's about great contemporary art and I don't think people really care where they encounter great contemporary art. The most important hard fact is that they are enthusiastic and that they have something to look at and to think about."

Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko have created an unmistakably political video installation, with surveillance as the main theme.

It consists of a room filled with video cameras, facial recognition software and projectors, projecting the people in the room on the walls with data about how they are positioned compared to other people in the room.

"So this project is a natural extension of the revelations of Snowden," said Lozano-Hemmer.. "This understanding that Orwell's idea of surveillance is not science fiction but it's a reality today."

Another artist to the fore in the Unlimited section is Chiharu Shiota.

The Japanese artist's installation is entitled "Accumulation, searching for destination". It consists of hundreds of suitcases suspended from the ceiling.

Less physically imposing and at least less visible are "mimed sculptures", a performing installation by artist Davide Balula. Above empty plinths of various sizes, a group of mime artists shape the air with their hands, rebuilding iconic modernist sculptures by Louise Bourgeois, Alberto Giacometti, Barbara Hepworth, David Smith, and Henry Moore. Recalling the shallow objects of Virtual Reality, these invisible sculptures are perceptible only when their contours are being exposed and touched.

Art Basel Unlimited and the main halls of Art Basel, open to the public on June 16 and run through to June 19. In total, 280 galleries will show works from over 4000 artists with around 100,000 visitors expected to attend.

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