

Monumental Art Installation by Ai Weiwei Inaugurates New Public Art Commissioning Program at FDR Four Freedoms State Park

Launching this September, New “Art X Freedom” Initiative to Provide Platform for
Artists Working at Intersection of Contemporary Expression and Social Justice



Ai Weiwei, Camouflage, 2025. Rendering of installation looking Southwest. Image © Ai Weiwei.

New York, NY – Building on its history of activating Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms State Park with dynamic, large-scale interventions, **Four Freedoms Park Conservancy** is launching **Art X Freedom**, a new public art commissioning program that will invite artists to create site-specific installations that interrogate issues of social justice and freedom. Located on the southernmost tip of Roosevelt Island across the river from the United Nations, FDR Four Freedoms State Park was designed by the iconic modernist architect Louis Kahn to commemorate the president and the fundamental human freedoms he championed: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. Art X Freedom will extend FDR’s legacy by transforming the memorial and park into a dynamic, forward-looking catalyst for artistic expression, community building, and social change. The Art X Freedom initiative is co-chaired by Four Freedoms Park Conservancy board member Allison Binns and longtime arts patron and social justice philanthropist Agnes Gund.

Launching on September 10, 2025, concurrent with the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly and the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, the inaugural Art X Freedom commission will be a monumental new public art installation by artist and activist **Ai Weiwei**. Created in direct dialogue with the park’s design and location, Weiwei’s work comprises a monumental open sanctuary and structure draped in a camouflage netting, inviting the public to consider questions of vulnerability

and protection, truth and concealment, and the reverberating impacts of violent human conflicts around the world. The artist invites the public to integrate their own statements on freedom into the fabric of the work, adding a participatory and collective element to the evolving public installation. *Camouflage* by Ai Weiwei will remain on view at the park through December 1, 2025.

“Artists have paved the way in activism and advocacy throughout history. Art X Freedom amplifies this work by inviting contemporary artists to re-envision FDR’s freedoms for future generations by realizing major new public artworks,” said **Howard Axel, CEO of Four Freedoms Park Conservancy**. “It is an honor to be collaborating with Ai Weiwei to launch this initiative, which marks the first of its kind to activate and transform a presidential memorial and state park.”

Art X Freedom Co-Chair Agnes Gund underscored the urgency of the initiative, stating, “Public art is a mirror to our times. Art X Freedom speaks to the urgent need to protect freedom for all, including freedom of speech, expression, and the right to dissent—values that are the bedrock of democracy and justice.” Added **Allison Binns, Conservancy Board Member and Art X Freedom Co-Chair**, “Ai Weiwei is globally renowned for his provocative and thought-provoking body of work and his staunch and unwavering advocacy for human rights. We could not have found a more perfect partner or resonant project to help us introduce Art X Freedom to the world and inspire park visitors.”

About Art X Freedom

Inspired by the architecture of Louis Kahn and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's four freedoms, Art X Freedom explores freedom through the shared experience of temporary public art installations in FDR Four Freedoms State Park. Following its launch with *Camouflage* by Ai Weiwei in 2025, Art X Freedom will commission future projects through a juried request-for-proposal process. Art X Freedom nominators will recommend artists working at the crossroads of social justice and contemporary expression to submit responses to an RFQ, which the Art X Freedom Jury will review. Three artists will be invited to develop full proposals and receive stipends of up to \$12,500 to support their travel to the park and conceptual development of their project. The finalist will be awarded a \$25,000 prize and will have their project realized in collaboration with the Conservancy and NY State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Alongside the annual public artworks, Art X Freedom will support related public activations and educational programming.

The Conservancy plans to announce the 2026 finalists in fall 2025, with the next installation opening in September 2026. Art X Freedom’s Nominating Committee for this cycle includes Lester Burg, former Deputy Director, MTA Arts & Design; Gonzalo Casals, Former NYC Commissioner of Cultural Affairs; Claire Gilman, Curator, Morgan Library & Museum; Samir Goel, Board Member, MoMA PS1; Michelle Kuo, Chief Curator at Large and Publisher, MoMA; Chioma Nwana, Documentary Photographer, Archivist, and Pulitzer Fellow; Smooth Nzewi, Curator, MoMA; Eric Shiner, President, Powerhouse Arts; and Sally Tallant, President and Executive Director, Queens Museum. The Jury includes Co-Chairs Allison Binns and Agnes Gund; Michelle T. Boone, President, Poetry Foundation; Alonzo Jones, Student, Williamsburg High School for Architecture & Design; Shaun Leonardo, Co-Director, Socrates Sculpture Park; Karen Wong, Chief Brand Officer, New Museum; and Leslie Wright, Regional Director, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation.

“As Regional Parks Commissioner, Franklin Delano Roosevelt believed in the power of state parks to strengthen our nation and our democracy, and to engage the populace in a positive way. As President, he famously illuminated his ‘Four Freedoms’ as pillars of a fair and free society. The Art X

Freedom project, and Ai Weiwei's *Camouflage*, embody those principles and aspects of Roosevelt's legacy," said **Randy Simons, Commissioner Pro Tempore of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation**. "*Camouflage* challenges visitors to engage physically, intellectually, and emotionally with the concept of freedom and its meaning to each of us and to our society. The participatory, immersive nature of Ai's art reminds us that freedom and democracy demand our active engagement to thrive."

About *Camouflage* by Ai Weiwei

On view from September 10 through December 1, 2025, *Camouflage* will activate the entire 3.5-acre FDR Four Freedoms State Park. At the Park's end point, an open architectural structure will rise high above the Park's granite walls, draped with camouflage netting, creating a shelter and sanctuary over the bust of FDR and his engraved Four Freedoms. The granite embankments running alongside the site will also be covered with the same netting, creating a dynamic interplay of light and context as the sunlight, water, and the presence of the United Nations across the East River interact across the material's surface.

The camouflage immediately evokes associations with war and nationalism, as well as its multiple functions as disguise, concealment, protection, and deception. Visitors will notice that the pattern has been reinterpreted from its traditional abstract designs to incorporate images of animals. The imagery at once draws upon the history of Roosevelt Island, which has long maintained a sanctuary for wildlife and abandoned pets, the Wildlife Freedom Foundation, and speaks to the reverberating impacts of human conflict. Adorning the top of the sanctuary is a traditional Ukrainian proverb on the dual nature of war, which causes total ruin for some and profit for others: "For some people, war is war, for others, war is the dear mother." Visitors can participate and contribute to the work by writing reflections on freedom on ribbons and attaching them to the netting, transforming the installation into a collective act of reflection and reckoning.

About Ai Weiwei

A global citizen, artist, and thinker, Ai Weiwei moves between modes of production and investigation, subject to the direction and outcome of his research. From early iconoclastic positions on authority and history, Ai's practice expanded to encompass architecture, public art, and performance. Weiwei unites craftsmanship with conceptual creativity and gives universal symbols of humanity renewed potency through installations, sculptures, films, writing, social media, and photographs. Ai is one of the leading cultural figures of his generation and serves as an example for free expression both in China and internationally.

Ai was born in Beijing in 1957 and now lives and works in Portugal. He attended Beijing Film Academy and later continued his studies at the Parsons School of Design. Major recent solo exhibitions include the current exhibition at Seattle Art Museum (2025); Ordrupgaard Museum, Denmark (2024); MUSAC, León, Spain (2024); Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands (2023); Pilane Sculpture Park, Sweden (2023); The Design Museum, London, UK (2023); and Albertina Modern, Vienna, Austria (2022); among others. Architectural collaborations include the 2012 Serpentine Pavilion and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Stadium, with Herzog and de Meuron. Among numerous awards and honors, Ai won the lifetime achievement award from the Chinese Contemporary Art Awards in 2008 and was made Honorary Academician at the Royal Academy of Arts, London in 2011. His human rights work has been recognized through the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent in 2012 and Amnesty

International's Ambassador of Conscience Award in 2015. He received the Praemium Imperiale for sculpture from the Japan Art Association in Tokyo in 2022.

About Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms State Park and Conservancy

Located on the southernmost tip of Roosevelt Island across the river from the United Nations, Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms State Park commemorates the former president and the basic human freedoms he championed globally. Drawing inspiration from the park's founding vision, unique location, and spectacular architecture designed by the groundbreaking American modernist Louis Kahn, the Conservancy is dedicated to extending FDR's legacy through the lens of art and culture. The Conservancy curates and produces public programs, cultural initiatives, and public art installations at the intersection of social justice and contemporary thought and expression. For more information on the Conservancy, visit fdrfourfreedomspark.org.

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation oversees more than 250 parks, historic sites, recreational trails, golf courses, boat launches, and more. For more information on any of these recreation areas, visit parks.ny.gov, download the free NY State Parks Explorer app, or call 518.474.0456. Connect with us on Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) and the OPRHP Blog. @NYStateParks.

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