

Preface

In 2017, I presented *Good Fences Make Good Neighbors* with the Public Art Fund in New York City. This multisite exhibition included more than three hundred works distributed throughout the city's five boroughs. The works focused on the global refugee crisis, the greatest displacement of people since World War II. Filming my documentary, *Human Flow*, brought me face to face with the people and places impacted by this tragedy and directly inspired the exhibition.

Good Fences was also a homecoming of sorts. I was an art student during the Beijing Spring in the late 1970s. The political and social atmosphere became increasingly suffocating, and I decided to leave for the extreme opposite—New York City, the capital of individualism and capitalism. I lived in the city for a decade in the 1980s as an undocumented immigrant, college dropout, and artist. Back then, the opportunity to show my work to the public was unimaginable.

Conversations consists of six public discussions held in New York City during *Good Fences*. Such conversations involving academic, cultural, and journalistic institutions provided a platform to discuss the most crucial issues of our time: freedom of expression, human rights, and the idea that humanity is one. These conversations are necessary to continue the fight to maintain our shared values and freedoms.

Three years on, I am under self-quarantine due to the newest global phenomenon: an indiscriminate pandemic that knows no borders. At this time, it is more important than ever to be thoughtful and hopeful about our humanity—home or no home, crisis or no crisis—because this is worth striving for.

Ai Weiwei

Conversations

