

Process Paper

How did you choose your topic and how does it relate to the annual theme of communication in history?

As an avid lover of both art and history, I was interested in researching a topic that explored the intersection between art for aesthetic value and art as a means of communication. After viewing the works of several artists, I was especially drawn to the work done by Ai Weiwei. Amidst an oppressive Chinese regime, Ai fearlessly used his art to communicate his criticisms of the government. Inspired by his contributions to the art community, I concluded that this topic perfectly suited this year's theme.

After the Cultural Revolution, Chinese artists were expected to create works that communicated communist ideals, and art as a means of social commentary was deemed unacceptable by the government. Unwilling to accept this cultural shift, Ai began to use his artistic talents to communicate his criticisms of the Chinese regime. Following the deadly 2008 Sichuan earthquake, Ai created artworks that articulated his dissatisfaction with the government's handling of this tragedy. However, after receiving international fame from *Sunflower Seeds*, several attempts by the Chinese government were made to silence his voice. Undeterred by this retaliation, Ai continues to use his artwork to advocate for freedom of speech and artistic expression, encouraging other artists to use their artwork to communicate their beliefs on political and social issues.

How did you conduct your research?

Having had an interest in the impacts of political art on modern culture, I began to research several artists who were unafraid to use their artwork as a form of communication. As my research expanded, I learned that dissent artist Ai Weiwei used his radical pieces of literature and art to promote freedom of speech and artistic expression. I immediately began analyzing documentaries and interviews with Ai. Then, I explored Ai's artwork and numerous books, including *Weiwei-isms* and *Humanity*. As I researched, I conducted an interview with Angelica Semennbauer, a curator of modern Russian art in New York City.

How did you create your project?

Having previous experience with website design, I knew that a website would be organized, clean, and easily accessible. Moreover, due to the nature of Ai's artwork, I knew that photographs and videos were absolutely essential for my project. Therefore, I concluded that a website would be a perfect presentation category to fit my topic.

What is your historical argument?

After the Cultural Revolution, all Chinese art was expected to preach Communist Party ideals. By challenging these rules of society, Ai Weiwei used his art as a means of communicating his dissatisfaction with the Chinese government. Although attempts were made to silence his voice, Ai continued to use his work to advocate for artistic liberties and freedom of speech.

In what ways is your topic significant in history?

The message Ai Weiwei conveyed through his art has served as a precedent for artists working amidst artistically oppressive regimes- most notably Russia and the Middle East. He has inspired younger Chinese artists as well as international art groups to question authority and fight for their civil liberties. Ultimately, through his outspoken advocacy for art as a means of communication, Ai has encouraged a new generation of artists to use their art to voice their beliefs on society.