

factory
international
presents

WHAT TO EXPECT GUIDE
3 JUL – 6 SEP



AI WEIWEI

BUTTON UP!

History, power and empire collide
in this new monumental exhibition

Commissioned and Produced by Factory International.
Image: *Law of the Journey*, 2017, Installation views at the National Gallery in Prague.

AVIVA studios

St. John's, Manchester avivastudios.co.uk

Skip to the bit that you need to know ...

- *About Button Up!* [3](#)
- About the Venue [4](#)
- Arriving at Aviva Studios [5](#)
- The Exhibition Space [7](#)
- The Big Six [9](#)
- Advice on Content [12](#)
- Additional Access Resources [13](#)

Please be advised that this resource contains information that some visitors may not wish to know about ahead of attending the exhibition. If you'd prefer to be surprised by the experience, perhaps give this read a miss.

About Button Up

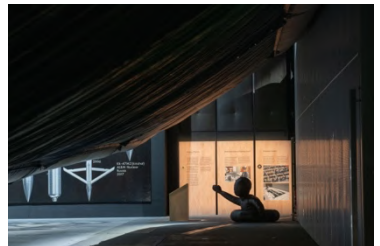
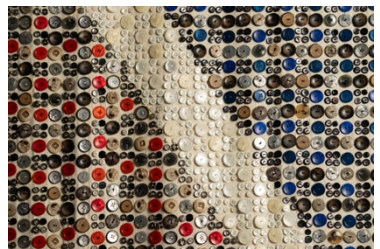
Button Up! is a visual art exhibition by Chinese contemporary artist and activist, Ai Weiwei.

It features **2 new and 17 existing large-scale works** that explore 200 years of Chinese and British relations.

A **variety of materials** are used throughout the exhibition, including buttons, toy bricks, bronze, porcelain, and cotton.

The exhibition is **political** and asks visitors to think critically about things like power, fairness, and human dignity.

Many of the **artworks reference contemporary issues** such as the refugee and migrant crisis, trading agreements between the UK and China, and overconsumption.



About the Venue

Button Up! is being presented at **Aviva Studios** in Manchester.

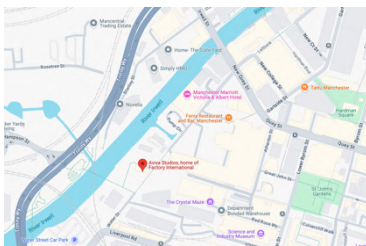
The address is:
Aviva Studios
Water Street
Manchester
M3 4JQ

The What3words location is
///rent.birds.gather

The venue can be accessed by **bus**,
bike, **train**, **car** and **on foot**.

For **more information** about getting
to Aviva Studios, please visit:
factoryinternational.org/aviva-studios/

Facilities available at Aviva
Studios include, but are not limited
to, a **Chill-Out Space**, a Multi-faith
room, a Changing Places Toilet and
portable sensory kits.



Arriving at Aviva Studios

This is what **Aviva Studios** looks like.

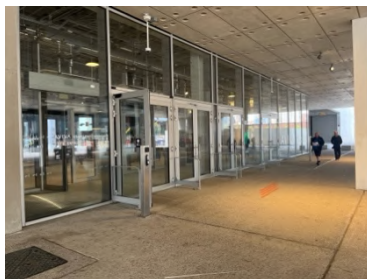
You can enter the building either through the **City** or **River** doors.

Whichever entrance you use, you will arrive into the same place – **the Social**.

In the Social you will find a **bar** where you can purchase food and drinks, and the **toilets**, including accessible facilities and a Changing Places unit.

The Social can be a **busy and noisy** place, especially during the ‘change over’ time between exhibition slots.

There will be audible **announcements** telling visitors what to do and **music** might be playing.



The **digital screens** in the Social will be showing **moving images**.



It's ok to **arrive early** for your exhibition slot to get used to the Social space before it gets too busy. The Social is **open from 10am**.

If you need some help when you arrive, you can go to the **orange information point** that is close to the City-side entrance.



Here you'll find people from our Ticketing team who can **answer any questions** you may have.



Our **Hosts** can also help you if you need anything during your visit.

They wear **orange t-shirts** with black writing on them, like this.



There will be Hosts all around the Social when you come in, and in the exhibition space throughout your visit.

The Exhibition Space

Button Up! is being presented in the **Warehouse**.

To access this space, you will either need to walk up these stairs to the **2nd floor** or make use of the lifts that are available.

To enter the exhibition, you will need to show a Host your **ticket**. It will look like this. You may have a paper or digital copy. It will show the **date and time** of the exhibition slot you have booked onto.

Once your ticket has been scanned, you will be invited into the Warehouse.

You are free to enter the exhibition at any time during the hour-long slot you have booked onto. You can then **stay as long as you like**.



Ai Weiwei Button Up!
Tue 07 July 2026, 10.00AM

The Warehouse, Aviva Studios
Water Street, Manchester, M3 4JQ



ADIC-XZTN

Suitable for all ages. Anyone under the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult aged 18+

Michael Haddon

£0.00-Child (3-11)

Order Number: 26-PS-WTRW



The exhibition space will **feel darker and quieter** than the Social.

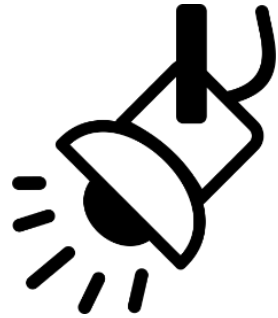
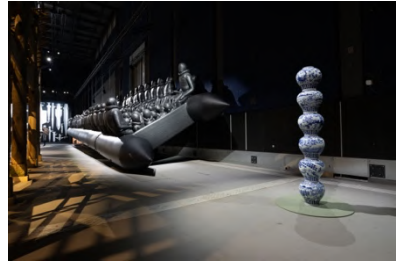
The only recorded sound audible in the space is a recording of volunteers slowly reading a list of names in Mandarin.

The space is **dimly lit** overhead by a cool wash of gentle lighting, and each artwork is spot lit by a slightly more intense warm glow.

You are free to experience the exhibition in whatever way feels most accessible to you. Some people may choose to chat with their friends; others may instead silently observe the work.

There are **chairs available** for you to sit and rest in if you wish, but you are also **free to move around, stim, and explore** the space as you like.

You cannot touch the artworks, however, **tactile bowls** with toy bricks, tea, and buttons inside are available throughout the space.



The Big Six

The exhibition includes 19 artworks, however, there are 6 large pieces that take up most of the space.



History of Bombs (2026)

History of Bombs depicts 50 of the most powerful bombs ever created. The bombs are true to scale (life sized) and are made of WOMA, a Chinese toy brick similar to Lego. 6 countries are responsible for the creation of all the bombs: the USA (23), Russia (13), Germany (9), the UK (3), Italy (1), and Israel (1).



Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads (2010)

The 12 bronze sculptures represent the 12 animals of the Chinese Zodiac. They are replications of famous fountain statues which were stolen by the British and French during their invasion of China during the Second Opium War (1856-1860). Today, the Chinese Communist



Party are actively trying to reclaim them.

La Commedia Umana (2017-21)

A black, glass chandelier made of over 2000 individual pieces titled 'A Human Comedy'. Rather than emitting light, it absorbs it, and features human skeletal shapes, animals, and CCTV cameras. It took Venetian craftsmen over 4 years to make and weights over 3 tonnes.



Law of the Journey (2017)

A 49-metre-long inflatable structure made of black PVC, the same material that is used to make the boats that are used in many migrant crossings around the world. It contains over 200 faceless human figures, including women and children.



Eight-Nation Alliance Flags (2026)

8 large flags representing each of the 8 countries that invaded northern China in 1900-1901; Germany, Japan, Russia, Britain, the



USA, Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Each flag is made of over 500,000 buttons and the work took 33 artisans 281 days to complete.

Wang Family Ancestral Hall (2015)

A 400-year-old structure (c. 1600) from the Ming Dynasty period. It comes from a village in South-East China and is comprised of over 1,300 parts. The sign in the entrance way reads “Order/Politeness – Peace – Hall”.



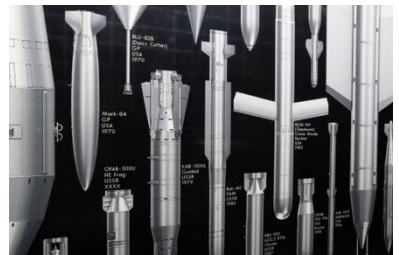
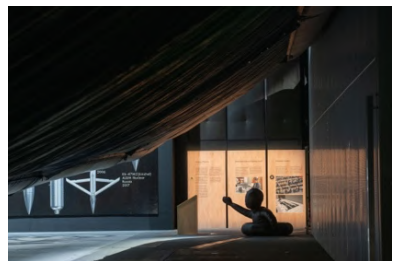
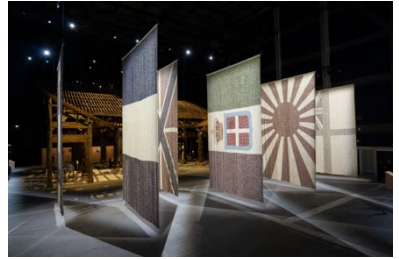
Advice on Content

We know that visitors appreciate detailed information on the content of our exhibitions in order to make informed decisions and to prepare themselves or members of their party.

This exhibition speaks to themes concerning:

- Forced displacement.
- Migration and related risk to life.
- Imprisonment (including interrogation).
- War.
- Contested flags presented in their historical context.

If there are specific themes or technical effects not spoken to above that you are concerned about, please reach out to us by emailing access@factoryinternational.org or by giving us a call on 0161 817 4531.



Additional Access Resources

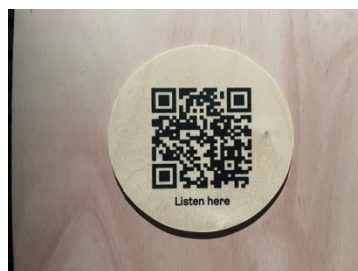
Audio described and touch tours are scheduled to take place at 10am on Wednesday 15th July, Sunday 2nd August, Tuesday 11th August, and Saturday 22nd August. These will be delivered by Anne Hornsby of Mind's Eye.



A **pre-recorded audio-descriptive guide** is also available for visitors to the exhibition. This is accessible on MP3 players that are available to pick-up/borrow from the orange information point located in the Social (on the ground floor).



A standard **audio guide** for the exhibition can also be accessed via QR codes located throughout the exhibition, online, and on MP3 players. This resource is intended to support visitors for whom reading may represent a barrier to attendance.



Relaxed slots are scheduled to take place 10am on Saturday 11th July, Wednesday 22nd July, Sunday 9th



August, and Tuesday 18th August.
Changes made to these slots
include:

- Reduced capacity.
- House lights will remain on low.
- Readmittance freely allowed.
- Sound levels slightly lowered.
- Chill-Out Space available.
- Printed What to Expect Guides.
- Portable sensory kits.



For more information about the event and venue, please visit:
factoryinternational.org/whats-on/ai-weiwei-button-up/

To speak to our team, you can email us at
access@factoryinternational.org or call us on **0161 817 4531**.
Our phonenumber is typically open Monday-Saturday, 10am-6pm.

This guide was produced by Factory International.