



FACTORY INTERNATIONAL ANNOUNCES COLLABORATORS FOR REENACTMENT OF AI WEIWEI'S DETENTION

A unique 24-hour performance piece by artist and activist Ai Weiwei will be presented at Aviva Studios, the home of Factory International, from 3 to 4 July. *Sewing a Button* marks the 15th anniversary of Ai Weiwei's secret detention by Public Security for 81 days in 2011. It is the first time he has reenacted his experience live, and is the artist's first durational performance work.

A recreation of the cell in which the artist was detained will sit in the Hall at Aviva Studios, measuring 7.2m by 3.6m, and created by Hawkins\Brown. Starting at 5pm on 3 July, audiences are invited to bear witness to the artist's experience across a single night and day, bookable in two-hour slots or as a 24-hour ticket. Audience members will be able to watch Ai Weiwei sleep, eat, exercise, write, wash and be interrogated.

The interrogators are journalists and broadcasters **Nihal Arthanayake, Emma Dabiri, Lemn Sissay** and **Zing Tsjeng**, all of whom have experience interviewing leading politicians and cultural figures. They will each bring their own distinct style of interrogation as they pose a series of questions to Ai Weiwei, from personal, to political, to philosophical. A cast of nine actors will appear across the performance, acting as military guards and doctors.

Low Kee Hong, Creative Director of Factory International, said:

"*Sewing a Button* is the first live performance that Ai Weiwei has given about his secret detention in 2011. Although he has referenced this period in previous works, including *S.A.C.R.E.D.* (2011-2013) and *Dumbass* (2013), this live performance will provide additional insights and scenarios from his time in prison that are not documented elsewhere. The contribution of the collaborators announced today will give audiences greater insight into Ai Weiwei as an artist, activist and person."

Audiences will also be able to observe Ai Weiwei, like the guards could, through footage from three CCTV cameras set up in the Hall. Elements of the footage will be shown in screens around Aviva Studios and available to view on the Factory International website. The footage will also be broadcast online to reach audiences around the world, with screenings at ACMI (Australia), MAXXI L'Aquila (Italy), ARTHAUS (Argentina), and CIRCA (London). A screening and event will also take place at Dover Street Market (Paris).

Manchester and Berlin-based electronic duo Space Afrika have composed a soundscape for *Sewing a Button*. They will appear for a live-mixing slot as part of the performance.

Sewing a Button is part of *Ai Weiwei: Button Up!* the largest site-specific exhibition by the artist, on show at Aviva Studios from 2 July - 6 September 2026. For the first time at Aviva Studios, audiences will be able to see the exhibition across 24 hours coinciding with the performance.

Audiences also will be able to take part in free activities across the night in Aviva Studios' public spaces, to accompany the performance. A traditional Chinese tea house will be open throughout.

Credit Information:

Sewing a Button

Co-created by Ai Weiwei and Low Kee Hong

Performed by Ai Weiwei

Commissioned and produced by Factory International

Set Design by: Hawkins\Brown

Costumes: Ai Weiwei Studio

Movement Director: Lousieanne Wong

Sound Design: Space Afrika

Special Guest: Nihal Arthanayake, Emma Dabiri, Lemn Sissay and Zing Tsjeng

Stage Manager: Janine Bardsley
Assistant Stage Managers: Sunny Chu, Jade Fearnley

Listings Information

Sewing a Button

5pm on 3 July – 5pm on 4 July 2026

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

Tickets from £15; 24-hour ticket £68.

Concessions and limited Aviva £10 tickets available

www.factoryinternational.org

Ai Weiwei: Button Up!

2 July–6 September 2026 (closed Mondays)

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

Tickets from £15

www.factoryinternational.org

For details on events and workshops please see:

www.factoryinternational.org

Press Information

For further press information please contact:

Erica Bolton, Bolton & Quinn

Erica@boltonquinn.com / 020 7221 5000

Notes to Editors

About Factory International

Factory International is the organisation behind Manchester International Festival and the city's landmark cultural space, Aviva Studios. Factory International commissions, produces and presents a year-round programme of original creative work and special events at Aviva Studios, online, and internationally through its network of co-commissioners and partners. It also stages the city-wide Manchester International Festival (MIF) every other year.

Factory International builds on the legacy of Manchester International Festival, one of the world's leading arts festivals, and the first to be entirely focused on the commissioning and producing of ambitious new work. Staged every two years in Manchester since 2007, world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work in venues and spaces across Greater Manchester.

Aviva Studios was designed by the world-leading practice Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), with Ellen van Loon as lead architect – their first major public building in the UK. Its development was led by Manchester City Council, with backing from HM Government and National Lottery funding from Arts Council England.

Ultra-flexible in design, the building is based around large, open, adaptable spaces that can be constantly reconfigured, enabling artists to develop and create large-scale work of invention and ambition of a kind not seen anywhere else in the world. A unique canvas to make, explore and experiment, audiences can enjoy the broadest range of art forms - from major exhibitions and concerts to intimate performances and immersive experiences.

Factory International plays an important role in the lives of Greater Manchester residents, bringing jobs, skills, training and creative opportunities. Through the Factory Academy, Factory International is training the creative workforce of the future, while its pioneering creative engagement and artist development programmes create year-round opportunities for local people to get involved, from participating in flagship commissions to shaping the organisation through involvement in its public forums.

Factory International is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.
factoryinternational.org

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. Our vision, set out in our strategy *Let's Create*, is that by 2030, we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. Between 2023 and 2026 we will have invested over £467 million of public money from Government, alongside an estimated £250 million each year from The National Lottery, to help ensure that people in every part of the country have access to culture and creativity in the places where they live. Until Autumn 2025, the National Lottery is celebrating its 30th anniversary of supporting good causes in the United Kingdom: since the first draw was held in 1994, it has raised £49 billion and awarded more than 690,000 individual grants.

Visit [our website](https://factoryinternational.org) to learn more about our work.

PUBLIC SECTOR FUNDERS



Aviva Studios
Water Street, Manchester M3 4JQ
factoryinternational.org