



Press Release  
23 March 2026

## FACTORY INTERNATIONAL ANNOUNCES 24-HOUR LIVE PERFORMANCE WORK BY AI WEIWEI

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* will give audiences an unflinching look at Ai Weiwei's secret detention by Public Security in China in 2011 and is the first time the artist has reenacted his experience. The performance coincides with *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.

*Sewing a Button* marks the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ai Weiwei's secret detention by Public Security for 81 days in 2011. 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.

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. Audience members will be able to watch Ai Weiwei sleep, eat, exercise, write, wash and be interrogated. They will also be able to observe Weiwei, like the guards could, through footage from 3 CCTV cameras set up in the Hall. Elements of the footage will be shown in screens around Aviva Studios, as well as broadcast online to reach audiences around the world.

*Ai Weiwei: Button Up!* is an exhibition that is monumental in scale and ambition. It explores the legacies of British imperialism, Chinese and British relations and the rise of globalisation. The exhibition will feature two major new commissions created especially for the vast space of the Warehouse: *Eight-Nation Alliance Flags* is a collection of flags which were made in Ai Weiwei's studio in China, each comprising of half a million buttons; and a new iteration of *History of Bombs*, a mural made from over a million toy bricks which will be the largest toy brick artwork by Ai Weiwei.

The new commissions will sit alongside large-scale works by the artist which are going on show in the UK for the first time: *Law of the Journey* (2017), a 47m long inflatable migrant boat containing hundreds of human figures and the artist's largest artwork to date; *Wang Family Ancestral Hall* (2015), a Ming dynasty ancestral temple reassembled from 1,500 individual wooden pieces; and *La Commedia Umana* (2017-21), a black Murano glass chandelier made up of over 2,000 pieces and weighing nearly 3 tonnes. Also on show is *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* (2010), a re-envisioning of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac. The exhibition offers a unique chance for audiences to experience Ai Weiwei's large-scale artworks together in one space.

Throughout the summer the Social in Aviva Studios will be turned into a Chinese Tea Room, with visitors being able to sit on traditional Chinese mazha stools. A series of events and workshops will accompany the exhibition, including an artist talk on 2 July. For full listings see [www.factoryinternational.org](http://www.factoryinternational.org)

### 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

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. Includes exhibition entry.

Concessions and limited Aviva £10 tickets available

[www.factoryinternational.org](http://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

Concessions and limited Aviva £10 tickets available

[www.factoryinternational.org](http://www.factoryinternational.org)

**Press Information**

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**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](http://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](#) to learn more about our work.

PUBLIC SECTOR FUNDERS



Aviva Studios  
Water Street, Manchester M3 4JQ  
[factoryinternational.org](http://factoryinternational.org)