

## CONVERSATIONS: AI WEIWEI 14 MAY 2021



### INTRO: ANNE O'BRIEN, FESTIVAL DIRECTOR

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, kātoa. Ko Anne O'Brien toku ingoa, hei Kaiurungi o Waituhi o Tāmaki, nau mai haere mai. It's a tremendous privilege to stand on this stage this evening and introduce this session, at the end of what has been a pretty extraordinary day. Thousands of people, wonderful writers, incredible energy in this space. And now, to introduce one of the writers and artists, who I've long hankered to bring to an Auckland audience; and actually, the Covid opportunity has meant that the digital space has opened and we have been lucky and privileged enough to do this.

Tonight, we are going to be joined by an incredible Chinese artist, writer, activist, thinker, provocateur, Ai Weiwei; and to speak with him, one of our own great, strong, creative wahine. Chelsea Winstanley is a writer, a film producer, a documentary maker, and a great thinker in her own right. When we spoke with Ai Weiwei, he said he wanted a Māori to interview him. He wanted someone who he could connect with in terms of both the political and the artistic, and I couldn't think of anything better than Chelsea, who has returned home to Aotearoa in recent days; and amongst other things has been working on a documentary about Toi Tū Ora, the recent contemporary Māori art exhibition at the Auckland Art Gallery. So without further ado, I'm going to welcome Chelsea to the stage to speak with Ai Weiwei, for you all. Thank you.

### CHELSEA WINSTANLEY

*Kia ora koutou. Kei te a, Ai Weiwei. Tēnei ka mihi ki a koe, e te tā Tāriki, te ka Hāpai i te Manawhangata, ahakoa nohia, ahakoa ko wai. Ai Weiwei, good evening, we are honoured to have you with us tonight. Greetings to you, champion of all the peoples no matter where they are from, or who they are. Thank you for joining us in conversation for the Auckland Writers Festival in Tāmaki Makaurau.*

*I could probably spend the entire hour that we have with you just trying to summarise your life in this introduction, because there is simply so much to cover, and to say about you. You are many things. As an artist you traverse many disciplines - sculpture, photography, painting, online activism, film making. You are an architect, a writer, a public intellectual.*

*In 2001, you were detained and jailed for speaking out against the Chinese government. You left China in 2015, when you were given your passport back; and you have since gone and lived in Berlin, London, and now Portugal. This evening, I hope we can expand on your dedication as an artist, and your work; and that speaks directly to our collective humanity.*

*Please help me to welcome, Ai Weiwei, homai te paki paki.*

*Engari, ko te mea tuatahi, before we begin its customary in this type of hui and this situation for us here in Aotearoa, to not only honour those that are living amongst us, but to also honour those that have parted in this world. And so, I would like us to take a moment to honour the anniversary of the devastating 2008 earthquake, in the Western Sichuan Province, where 90,000 lives were lost and more than 5,000 young school children perished that day. As an artist you have created several art projects and films relating to this tragedy. To this day you continue to use your artistic voice to bring awareness, not only to those lives lost, but the continued denial from the Chinese Government, in relation to its participation in the tragedy.*

*Most recently, on the social media platform Clubhouse, you created an audio work called: 'Commemoration', where the names of 5,197 school age victims were read out aloud, non-stop, for 39 days, 24 hours a day, ending on May the 12<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the tragedy. That was 13 years ago. So please, allow us to take a minute of silence to acknowledge and honour those lives lost. No reira. Haere, haere, haere atu rā.*

*[silence]*

*Ngā mihi nui, kia ora.*

*Can we talk about 'Commemoration' for a moment? In an interview recently with Ian Boyden, you talk about how lovely it is that 'Commemoration' is so quiet; and not a lot of promotion had been done and no big scale media attention, unlike the project 'Remembrance' in 2010, which also dealt with the anniversary of the tragedy. You said of 'Commemoration', "I don't want to promote it. It's such a beautiful moment, I want to keep it for myself."*

*Can you talk about the power of stillness, and the quiet, in relation to 'Commemoration'?*

First, thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak, I'm very grateful you bring this up, you're probably one of the very few people who have paid attention to a project like this. It's ongoing, poetic, poetry-like; a little stream, the water is drop after drop. It takes an individual going through those names, and read it, in its own way, very private way; some use their own accent of the local language which I will never have a chance to hear it in the public.

Globally, among the Chinese community mainly has participated to read those names. But it creates a long-lasting private moment for individuals to concentrate on what is in front of their face and you have to be very focused because otherwise they will read it wrong, each name only appears for about four seconds.

So that experience is very much like nothing else, because in today's world you have all kinds of things happening, online or offline; it's just too many instances, and make it that you almost cannot be alone and be a person or a private centre. So, we created this 39 days of practice, and a bit like a Buddhist, the

practice, is to focus on one idea, or one concept, and to follow the concept precisely; and through the most common practice, to read, you know reading, repeatedly read. It's a very unique experience.

*Can you explain to us the translation of the Chinese word 'commemoration', because apparently it's such a potent word in the Chinese language? Can you elaborate on that a little bit more?*

The word in Chinese is 'niànniàn', they repeat the words twice, niàn - niàn. Chinese words come from ancient time, it's probably one of the very few languages which still has the stamp of imagery, meaning it directly reflects how it writes, every part means something when combined. It's really like poetry. So niànniàn consists of the upper part which means presence, it's about now, and the lower part is the heart. So, it's how do you reflect the happening, or current situation. So, it's very beautiful word; when we talk about, 'I miss you', I would say that word 'niànniàn', that means 'you're in my heart at this moment'. That's what the words are about.

*Connecting people is really important to you. In our language there is a saying: He aha me a nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata. And that simply means: what is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people.*

*And you've spent a large part of your life creating art that is guided by your values of human dignity, and you have throughout your work, presented pieces and made films about the need for all of us to examine our relationship to humanity. And I think you for that.*

*But given, we are here to discuss this book: 'Conversations', let's talk about that a little bit. This book is a publication of six public discussions that you had in New York City, in 2017, and in relation to the public artworks that you created, called: 'Good Fences Make Good Neighbours'. And those public works of which there are over 300, focus on a global crisis that you initially made a film about.*

*Can you tell us what inspired 'Good Fences Make Good Neighbours'?*

I think this sentence comes from an unwritten poem or dream. It can be interpreted in many ways. Today we are under this globalisation, and of course many non-physical borders have been completely disappeared, such as the corporate control or corporatisation in every direction. The world, finally, it's become like you have big borders which sometimes you may have many more, and they are still building new borders. But, to keep the poor people, unfortunate people to move; sometimes to push them away into most dangerous situations. But in another reality, the border is being taken down by this new capitalism, or globalisation under technology; so the local culture disappears. The language disappears. The originality, it's not good words anymore because people are just constantly changing their places; and do not have kind of private moment.

So in this poetry, I think, I reflect on these two conditions we're living in extremely fast-developing time, we quickly lost our sense of character and identity. I am more talking about identity, about a sense of 'selfness' because the 'selfness' really comes from the so-called recognition of the uniqueness. So when those things disappear, you just become nobody. That's how I think.

*That exhibition was directly influenced by 'Human Flow', was it not? Can you tell us a little bit about that film?*

Yes. In 2015, finally, I got my passport back from Chinese authority; and about four or five years of detention and the solitary detention. I travelled to Germany where they give me opportunity to teach, and also they did a big effort to negotiate with Chinese authority to release me. Fortunately, I left my motherland - but many people like me, or less active are still being in jail, or sentenced for a lifetime. Lifetime. So, once I arrived in Germany, I realised back in 2014, I had a chance to send my studio members to Iraq, to a refugee camp. So, we did a documentary, interviews and filming about who they are; why they become refugees. Because, you have people who have lost their home, old or young; they still get under some sort of protection no more like jail, and this is much worse than jail. Because you have an irregular life, that means you don't know what happens tomorrow, you don't have a clear sentence; and most important, you don't have your crime - you are being put somewhere because someone wants to put you somewhere.

So I was very frustrated. And once I went to Germany, I want to see how those people approached Europe, because by then it's a bit over a million refugees already approaching Europe. So, you know, I am a person who has curiosity, I really want to know and understand, I really believe in truth I have experienced for my lifetime experience. If you really want to know something, be there and see it for yourself, otherwise you have to doubt all the information given to you.

So, I went to Lesbos, take my son, my girlfriend; I said, "Let's have a vacation, you know, for Christmas." So we went to Lesbos, and we just landed and drove along the seashore, Lesbos is so beautiful; the water - it's a kind of blue; you never see it elsewhere. During our driving I see something very shocking - a boat approaching us, the people on board in orange life vests and they are slowly approaching in this postcard-like picture, scenery.

We jumped out of the car and the boat landed, reaches the shore, right in front of me, so I turn on my camera and start recording. I cannot use the words to describe what I experienced. The old people have to climb out of this dinghy boat, looks very fragile and there are children crying. And they come to the shore and almost nobody helps them except a few volunteers, or NGO volunteers, who try to pull them out and try to rescue, and bring some water for them.

So, since that day, that moment, I decided I would stay.

*Did you know, did you have an idea that you were about to witness what you were about to see? And you had told your son and your girlfriend, "Let's go for a holiday," but really, you had an idea about what you were going to witness?*

I had ideas that come from there. I want to really experience it, and you know, to read something is very different. The knowledge is very different from experience. Today, we have too much knowledge, and too little experience. I had that in my mind, so basically I tricked them. But they were also shocked. From that moment, so many questions were raised in my head, how Europe was going to handle that, and who are those people? What is the reason they would risk their life, taking this unthinkable vehicle to come across the ocean? So, what's it like on the other side of the ocean; you know? and I said let's move house to here, let's do a film documentary.

I think this is a very unique experience.

So, from that day, day and night I would stay on the shore and wait for the boats. The boats sometime come with a few dozen.

*And your son, how did he react in that moment? How old was he then?*

Yes, I mentioned my son and my partner went with me to Lesbos. They are used to my activities. I always have things come up, accidentally I should say, so unpredictable. It's not only unpredictable to them, but also unpredictable to myself. I always get into a situation which I can never imagine, but I would fully get involved.

*Is that part of your curiosity, you mentioned?*

Yes, because, to have curiosity you should have one condition; you have less knowledge and you're somehow innocent, but today it is very difficult to become someone who has no knowledge and innocent. So most people are tired about knowing too much, and also tired by doing so little.

To answer your question, my son was about five. You know, in China, if we drove a car, and he turned back and looked at the road to say, "Hey, there's a police car following us." I said, "What?! Why are they following us?" You know, I don't believe it. But, I said, "let's pay some attention then". Very often, almost every time, there's secret police following us. In restaurant, in the park, and you know and when I have to walk this five-year old boy; so my son also get very used to the situation like that.

So, he starts working with volunteers to build the temporary houses for those unfortunate people, to move those rocks. And I organised my team to come to Lesbos, and we start the journey of our film, the documentary, 'Human Flow'. That film pushed us into 23 nations, 40 most important or largest refugee camps.

I did a lot of interviews, about 600 interviews with the same topic. So, that's the background before I had this show called 'Good Fences Make Good Neighbours' in Europe.

*You said to Vivian Yee in this book, "That's why I like to make art, because it's a little bit dangerous. It's a little bit of an unknown situation." What was the danger? Tell us about the danger involved in making 'Human Flow'.*

Yes, there are so many...because 'Human Flow' was shot in 23 nations, so there is physical danger you know. A camera person can be hit by bullets, in the border of Turkey and Syria, and also in Iraq, in many areas it's just like a war zone. But they are experienced, they are war time journalists. But the most dangerous...you are mentally and psychologically, you're constantly losing the illusion of humanity. You can usually tell those people are desperate; they are kind people, they are nice; they still hold their family, children; some elderly are carried by an unknown person for thousands of miles. Some girl will carry a little cat; and to go through this journey carrying little cat, so I said, "Why you carry this cat?" She said, "That's part of my life."

So, to see another life as part of your life. Well, it's easy to understand, but often we forget, and we forget a life as one. One single grass, in a field of grass, very different – it's one. They don't want to be alone just as one, they want to be next to millions. But those grass or trees are simply just being pulled out. They are fields, and under the sun and the wind, and all the harsh weathers, they all trying to find a location which they can be rooted, and then their children can have a proper education in a safe area. Is that asking too much?

But that kind of call cannot be answered in Europe. You know, Europeans are simply, shamelessly, hopelessly, turn their face away. That is the most dangerous thing to me, it's more to me, to feel the end of our humanity, it's not somebody desperate, it is someone privileged but not willing to help. Not to share any compassion.

*Thank you. You highlight that, that definitely is dangerous. I was wondering about the danger of the exhibition, 'Good Fences Make Good Neighbours', because there's two large pieces that you made in that exhibition. And you made it with the design studio Urban Art Projects, and you made those particular pieces - one of them is The Arch, in Washington Square, and the other one is The Golden Cages, not far from the Trump Towers. You made them in their Beijing Foundry, and I met up with UAP recently in Brisbane, for a project that I'm filming; and they told me that it could have been quite risky working with you and making those pieces in Beijing.*

*I wondered if that was a deliberate move on your part, to actually make them in Beijing, given that your Shanghai studio was demolished in 2011. Were you playing with a bit of danger with that, or was that just merely practical?*

Well, I always want to test what normally, the thinking is dangerous or impossible, because very often the sense of danger or impossible, is really defined by our human judgment. If you think you are somehow as an individual, or even can think of a moment where you may be unique. So that would be a great opportunity for you to, re-think about the condition of danger, and also the impossible.

That would mean a lot of rather naïve, or even ridiculous situation; but that experience is rich and it always comes out with some little surprise.

*I just wondered if, because your studio had got demolished in Shanghai, that you kind of wanted to - I don't know, to 'middle finger' to China, that you could still make your work there?*

Yes this is true! Those are good words. You know, we're born in this world to take our whole life to make a revenge, not in a bad sense but to respond why we are here, and why we cannot be there; why can't I be in China, and speak my language to my people. So, everything I did is reactionary; and sometimes reactionary can be the same as revenge. Same as, we just did this 'Commemoration', it's revenge. Five thousand students disappeared; the state will never really give the correct numbers or who they are, never able to explain why this building collapsed, and the next building is not collapsing.

And the truth today, you cannot really, overly commemorate it. So we did another revenge.

*Will you keep talking about this? Will you keep talking about this particular event?*

I'm talking about this, it's not to really talk to authority. They are hopeless. I have no illusion about that. I will keep talking about this just for arm myself, to not become someone I don't like. To be careful and to be precious about my inner feelings, and to relate to someone's decency and justice. They are a part of me, so, I'm also part of them. My voice represents the voice asking for justice for them. So, they become my responsibility. I cannot say, "I forget about it."

*A lot of your films come from that perspective, you have a voice for the voiceless, it seems like; and you're dealing with a lot of issues of humanity at large. From 'Human Flow', to Hong Kong Rights in the film*



*'Cockroach', to 'Coronation' - where you highlight the issues of the recent Covid pandemic, which we are not out of yet. You made another film called 'The Rest', and a film called 'Vivos' in Mexico, about the disappearance of students who were studying to be teachers; and the Mexican Government coverup of that. You're currently making a film in Myanmar on the crisis there, and one in Brazil, examining China's growing economic influence in that region. And I heard you say that as a documentary filmmaker, the challenge is: how close you have to get with the reality. And you say you have to be emotionally involved to have a deep understanding about humanity. You say that you've been prepared since you were born, and that it comes naturally. So tell us about being prepared all your life.*

When I was born my father, in 1957, he was exiled, so I cannot prepare for that. I grew up in Xinjiang, the Uyghur region now, there were concentration camps for the one minority who went into those kind of camps to be re-educated or brainwashed. So I grew up in that kind of condition, my father was sentenced to hard labour to be re-educated. He was a poet, he studied in Paris in 1930s, and became the most important poet of China, but he gave back his honours and today is still the most important and his poetry is being read in textbooks by students.

In my life, I have been faced with unpredictable situations. Then I consciously wanted to move out, because I think with my kind of attitude and ideology, at that time I had already sensed the work would be dangerous, so I went to the United States, and was in New York, for the next twelve years. I was trying to become an artist it was not possible for me, and to be part of this hype, I would say, and so I gave up and went back to China.

*Why did you feel it wasn't right for you then? Why not?*

In the 80s the art already become corporate. You have only 50 fortunate artist makes a fortune, and that's mostly abstract type of work or German expressionist, and for someone who comes from China under Chairman Mao, under this kind of cultural revolution, my past has not even one percent reflection of this craziness of New York City. This city, they call 'the bright city' for the beauty and for the rich. So, I cannot join that club. Also, I do feel that the artist, this attitude, this lifestyle, is not necessary to practice in this art world; and also it's not possible - I was drawing, street portraits for the tourists. Once you make street drawings on the street, you cannot be an artist, come on!

*You were taking photographs too though for The New York Times?*

Yeah, because of my hands. I look at my two hands, I feel very pity about myself. My hands, there was no purpose. So, I grab the camera, I said, "take some photos" and I never saw myself as a photographer, but really, I think this moment is even senseless to me, but could be meaningful; it's just I don't understand it yet. It takes a long time for me to crawl out of that tunnel. So I went back to China, and China had changed after 12 years; and it had become state capitalism, everything goes, everybody is talking profit and money, and it has nothing to do with me again - I come back from New York, and now this capitalism garbage, I will say.

It's a game of survival, it's necessary for China. So, I stayed there and started collecting old objects, basically giving myself a self-learning lesson about the past; because where I grew up, those objects had all been destroyed. During the fast development, they had dug up a lot of things from underground, because they fix the road, they build buildings; they have ended up in the market. It drew so much to my attention about the past, the past few thousand years and perspective. What happens in China today in

the past 100 years, it's a very small fragment and the history is much longer, and it creates a much richer culture.

So I started also doing some underground books, and organised exhibitions for local young artists; and I never think I would have a chance to show myself, because in China there is a strong ideology censorship. So I am not even interested to show my works. I organised the most aggressive show, called 'Fuck Off', in 2000.

*Great show.*

You know, things like that. I gradually had come out on the surface because I also helped design the 2008 Olympic Stadium, which was a high moment for China. But the same year the earthquake happened about three months earlier, before the big opening; so I got deeply, emotionally involved, but by that time I already know how to use computer and I know how to get online and my blog was one of the most popular blogs in China, and I used it to talk about my own opinion.

But, that time in China, the government is not prepared for censorship online. They don't know how to do it, they kept deleting my things, but I would have a new name, a new account. So, sometimes I have 100 accounts, and also there's a few thousand people who all use my image and my name, and create accounts. So people don't even know which ones are real.

*That sounds like fun, and very busy; very busy, busy work, but fun.*

It was so much fun, it's like I have to write everyday online and I was so... I was crazy, and I was mad, like for 24 hours.

*So you were writing about eight hours a day, constantly on these blogs?*

Oh, more than eight hours, double! I would just stay on there, give out my opinion on every event. It became a commentary of real life, in real time. But, it quickly finished, by 2009, they had deleted all my blogs and my name can never really appear on Chinese internet again. So, I said, "Huh, that was easy, it should take a second", but my beautiful blogs had been deleted, and by 2011, I was arrested.

*I think you'd said to Tim Marlow, that's how you found your voice, was actually through the internet. You weren't quite sure up until that point. Is that right?*

Exactly. Yes, we all have something to express; but we need to find a form, just like an artist. You need to have the medium and the form and very often the medium and the form is the language itself, and it created me, otherwise I never would have had the conversation.

*I wanted to go back to 'Human Flow' because there's a quote in there in that film, and I think that speaks to us in our situation here in Aotearoa; and it's a quote from JFK, and he said, "Every American who ever lived, with the exception of one group, the Native Indigenous Population, was either an immigrant himself, or descendant of immigrants. And Aotearoa is the same, we have an indigenous population and we have an immigrant settler population; and I'm a product of both. My mother is Māori and my father is Pākehā, non-Māori.*



*Aotearoa has been ruled really by one system, that has favoured the British; and it's the colonial system of power, and regardless of there being a treaty signed back in 1840, that was to ensure Māori had authority to exercise their tino rangatiratanga - self determination. It has never been honoured, and subsequently, it has led to extreme inequalities, as one group of people have assumed their privilege over another.*

*In Aotearoa, we are embracing the affirmation of Mana Wahine, and that's the Power of Women. Māori women have always been at the forefront of the protest movement here for indigenous rights, from land to education, health, justice, and so on. And I wonder, Ai Weiwei, if the power of women is something that you have ever considered, or would look to highlight in your future work? I mean, after all, these issues that we're facing in humanity and the crises we find ourselves in are mostly created by men. Would you agree?*

I think, in this world, we have a long history of injustice and we are still living in that history. Thirty years later, or the next generation, they would also question us, question our position: what is it my parents did to end this injustice, this shame or injustice? For selfish reasons, we don't want to be blamed to say, "We did nothing." So, of course, I respect anybody who makes an effort to fight for their own dignity, but to fight for your own dignity is to fight for human dignity, for humanity.

*For us here, Merata Mita is considered to be the grandmother of indigenous cinema, and she was a very influential filmmaker to a lot of us. And she said, "When you have children you have an investment in the future." And I wondered, if becoming a father changed or influenced your work directly?*

That's for sure. When you're alone you are single, and you feel you clearly know the sense of your life. But once you have a son or a daughter, you will see the continuity of life. Then you sense it very differently. You say, what my responsibility would be, and what they can inherit from what I believe in. So, of course those things are not necessarily going to be real, but still, as an individual, you would have hope and be looking forward. Also you would have a responsibility while you have children. That's how I feel.

*Is that one of the reasons why you are releasing that memoir later on in the year, to offer the opportunity to your son to learn about you; perhaps something that you never talked about, or had the opportunity with your own father?*

Yes. I was in detention, this kind of secret detention, which they suggest nothing to do, besides the interrogation and two uniformed police standing in front of you about 18cm away, and watching you without the eyeballs blinking; just staring at you 24 hours a day. In that condition, even when I slept they were standing next to the bed. If I wanted to take a shower they were standing next to me, and the water would drop on their uniforms. They were standing so close. When I used the toilet, the same; brush your teeth, everything was two persons 19 to 21 years old, watching you clearly to see you are not doing something funny; but how can you do something funny - and there was three cameras on that room.

I think it's really a really severe way to physically torture and to make you, you know, to really... I don't know why they learn these tactics, but very often it works.

So in that time, I had some time to think about the past and what I really did to make me end up in this situation. So I think about my father who was in jail many years ago. I now realise I know very little about

my father, even though we were intimate growing as family in Xinjiang. I never asked him a question, so I feel pretty pissed off why I never did that.

Then, I think about my son. He was just past the two year birthday before I was arrested. The interrogator tells me, “Weiwei, you are in prison for over ten years of jail time. When you come out your son will never recognise you”. So that sentence, probably is the only sentence that hit me very strongly, like I was hit by a truck or something.

I have a sense like any animal, they would have protected their children. Any animal, a cat, or dog, or whatever. This is by nature, even birds. But what can you do? You are under this kind of organisation, a subversive state power.

So I felt if I can come out, I will be write down everything about my father that I know, and about my activities to give that memory to my son. I know he may, by the time he grows up, he may not even be interested to read it. But only if he would like to know, he will just say, “Oh my father wrote that for me.” So that’s basically how I started my book. It’s going to be published this November.

*I’m sure we are all looking forward to reading that. I’m sure your son though, just by being around you and observing, you are creating an exceptional human being.*

*You’ve talked about your father; what about your mother? We have heard you talk about your dad and I guess what you had learnt from him. But what about your mum?*

My relationship based with my mum built up gradually. Even though my mum is the kindest of persons, but like most women in China their social status is not... basically, they are victimised by men. Not by my father, but by my father’s political position, as some kind of refugee. My mum would have to go away with him, to live through that suffering. But my mum is very brave. She made the decision to never be apart from my father, even at the time the Communist Party really gave high pressure to her. Most of those kind of political prisoners, the most tragic thing, besides that they were being punished, was that they lost their family because their wife or their children announce they are not part of it. Because this is the end of us. So, it’s make sense, if my mum leaves my father at the time. She was only 24, have a bright future. She likes to write. But she made the decision and said, “I will never leave you.”

So, you know, every day she is taking care of the family. Four children, and her husband has to do hard labour. She washes, she cooks and she also had to do a lot of physical work in this village.

I can understand she is a very kind person. On one occasion, we met somebody who was a beggar, in the very cold winter. In China the cold winter in Xinjiang could be 40 degrees below zero. So, obviously that’s very, very cold. The beggar, the lady, has a child and is shaking and frozen. So my mum asked me to take off my jacket to give to them. I was hesitating, because that’s my jacket, at that time you don’t have a spare jacket, you wear that jacket for a few years. But I did. She was insisting I did. Then we went back to home and she cooked something to bring back to them. But that did leave a very strong image of my mother.

*She taught you values of kindness and care?*

Yes. She is very kind. She is 88 years old now and I make a phone call weekly with her. I never can imagine she call me her baby; I'm 63. She say I am still alive because I care about you. That's a strong statement. I don't even know what to say. I said, "Come on mum, I'm 63." I'm not the baby"

*You will always be the baby. I'm a mother. I know that too.*

*You talked about your father was detained in the north-western provinces of China. I was reading an op-ed that you wrote about the globalisation of politics and economies. From that, I gleaned that a lot of these companies that are now intertwined with China in the west, are in the territories, in this kind of no-man's land if you like. And it's so intertwined now, China and the West. Can you talk a little bit about that – how people think that... is China really going to take over? People don't quite understand.*

Okay. Well, if they don't quite understand, they should wake up.

We are basically a nation which has the biggest population – 1.4 billion people. How many times bigger than your country?

*A lot! Who's a maths expert out there? We're tiny.*

China was poor in the 1970's, which is not that long ago – about half a century ago. They are still struggling to be... it's a new nation. They always have vision versus kind of communist ideas, to basically make...the sentence is to liberate the world. They still have this vision, they still have this kind of vision and they have a clear strategy, even it has nothing to do with communist anymore, is a state capitalism. They played a very strong, this plan in a very efficient way to make China use its fast development. Because they never liked the west. They think of the west ideology is, basically in their words, is fake. They think that will come to an end, this is a Karl Marx idea.

But China has become so developed, only because the West is near China, and have a clear grab of the golden opportunity to have such a big labour market; and now, a big consuming market. So this is the human history, we never faced the same situation before, and maybe we're never going to face it again. It's really a golden opportunity for the West. That's how the West developed in the past 30 or 40 years so much about their connections with China. All the major corporations have their own plan or are deeply involved with China, and China also deeply involved with this world economy, and the politics – banks, media and financial centres, major transportation, electricity and all those major areas, China has been clearly planning. And in that sense, the United States cannot catch up. It's not the same thing. Basically your classic capitalism, is really about trade enterprise. But China is not a trade enterprise, it's a state owned enterprise but they play the same game. There is no competition in China still, even after the pandemic there is very impressive growth, and other nations struggle.

*Has that got anything to do with the film that you are making in Brazil at the moment? Any connection there with China moving into that region?*

I haven't got into that topic. I just want to be quiet life in Brazil and enjoy the sunshine, the birds.

*Are you researching? Researching?*

I cannot have too many enemies. I am just one...



*You're figuring out where to go after Portugal. I've got it, I've got it. We've only got like 30 seconds left – oops! I'm probably supposed to throw questions out to everyone. I did have a couple of questions that people have thrown at me. So, can I just quickly... there is a question here from... and sorry, by the way, if anyone does have a question, there are some microphones down here, and up there somewhere. I can't see up there; but if anyone does.*

*Nigel Burrell, who is the former Māori curator at the Auckland City Art Gallery has a question for you. He says: "How do you think art practice in 2021 can help out humanity that seems to be stuck in a crisis of conscience and commerce?"*

I think first, so called contemporary art practice has been... I will say, 'spoiled'. I'll use a nice word only, 'spoiled'. Art has to come out of the white boxes and this kind of uniform of art, and be ready to pay attention to human struggle; and to individual's feelings, you know our daily sadness and happiness. That of course is not in the art theory and art study in our universities. I'm reading about the great masterpieces we have; but would rather to look at real life and what happens every day. Every day great art is born, but not in the history books.

So the artist should be involved. Only one way to make sure if you're a relevant artist or not; is how deeply you are involved with life. Any artist in the past, if we can really respect them, it's not about what they have done, but rather about how deeply they are emotionally involved and created their own language.

*People won't remember what you have done: they will remember how you made them feel. I think Dr Maya Angelou said that. I'm sorry that we didn't get to too many more questions there. I really thank you for your time..*

*So - tēnā koe e te tā Tāriki. Ko Rangatira tēnei, kaupapa i a koe. E kore e motu ana, ngā mihi Maioha, ki a koe. Thank you so much for the privilege of your presence at this event this evening. We give our deepest thanks. Kia ora.*

Thank you so much.