



# Association for Public Art

For Immediate Release

May 2017

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## **ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC ART IN PHILADELPHIA UNVEILS A MAJOR NEW PUBLIC ART WORK BY CAI GUO-QIANG IN THE FALL**

### **The Artist's Largest Public Art Project in the US in a Decade is Commissioned for the Benjamin Franklin Parkway to Celebrate its Centennial**

Philadelphia, PA – In September, the Association for Public Art (aPA) in Philadelphia presents a major new site-specific work by the internationally acclaimed artist Cai Guo-Qiang. Commissioned by aPA with Fung Collaboratives on the occasion of the centennial of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, *Cai Guo-Qiang: Fireflies* invites the public to actively experience the grand boulevard as a nocturnal dreamscape conjured from the languorous movements of bobbing clusters of glowing handcrafted Chinese lanterns and groups of customized peddle vehicles.

*Fireflies*, the artist's largest public art project in the US in a decade, runs for approximately four weekends, Thursdays through Sundays, four hours a night, from Thursday, September 14 to Sunday, October 8, 2017.

For the opening ceremony on September 14, Cai Guo-Qiang will orchestrate a dream-like light and movement performance. Employing as many as 900 luminous colorful lanterns attached in clusters, 27 customized pedi-cabs will glide along the Parkway, moving as an ensemble and sending the lanterns into swirls and bobs, creating a luminous choreography.

The key participatory element of *Fireflies* commences the next day, as members of the public are invited to board the vehicles to take rides up and down the Parkway from Sister Cities Park to

Iroquois Park near the Philadelphia Museum Art. Others will observe the delicate aerial dance of the luminous orbs from a distance.

The lanterns in *Fireflies* are being handcrafted in Cai Guo-Qiang's hometown of Quanzhou, China. Their bright, twinkling lights evoke the artist's own childhood memories. Among them will be orb and star shaped lanterns, as well as designs of emojis; pandas, roosters and tigers; space aliens and UFOs; cars, trains, boats, submarines, helicopters, and rocket ships; and hamburgers, sushi, watermelons and donuts. Transported to Philadelphia, their various colors and shapes evoke the diverse cultures and peoples that come from all over the world to take root in the United States.

"I hope this project is particularly meaningful, given the context of this history and the national flags that line the city's artery," says Cai Guo-Qiang. "I am shedding the conventions of large-scale celebrations to inject childlike playfulness and laughter into the centennial's festivities."

"As an organization with a long tradition of supporting the art and artists of our time, whether it be 1887, the year we commissioned a work from Alexander Milne Calder, or today, with Cai Guo-Qiang, the Association for Public Art has always been devoted to working with artists to activate public space," says Penny Balkin Bach, Executive Director and Chief Curator, aPA. "I am especially thrilled to see how Cai has managed to tap into this city's egalitarian spirit and community pride in conceiving this extraordinary collective experience."

Lance Fung, guest curator, says: "This is the first time since 2013, when Cai created *One Night Stand* in Paris that he has conceived a large-scale event that depends on the participation of the public for realization. How perfect that *Fireflies* will unfold on Philadelphia's own Champs-Élysées, which is lined with national flags of other countries."

*Fireflies* is not the first time that Cai has worked in Philadelphia. Many there still remember the evanescent pink blossom of fireworks that exploded in front of the colonnaded facade of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in December 2009, as part of an homage to the late Anne d'Harnoncourt, its former director, organized by the museum and The Fabric Workshop and Museum. *Cai Guo-Qiang: Fallen Blossoms*, a four-month long, five-part project, addressed time's passing and the role memory and memorials play in attending to the past.

“I look forward to seeing Philadelphians from all walks of life gather on the grand stage of our tree-lined parkway in September,” says Mayor Jim Kenney. “A century ago, city planners believed that art and beauty could help to bind together our community and make our city great. Today we Philadelphians celebrate that legacy.”

### **Video Documentation**

A five-minute documentary video accompanies *Fireflies*, taking viewers from Quanzhou to Philadelphia. Directed and produced by the videographer Xia Shanshan, the video will be screened outdoors at two locations along the Benjamin Franklin Parkway during the exhibition period.

### **Sponsorship**

Major support for *Cai Guo-Qiang: Fireflies* has been provided by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, with additional support from the Association for Public Art, National Endowment for the Arts, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Philadelphia Cultural Fund, Prudent Management Associates, The Hess Foundation, and individual donors (as of April 2017). In-kind support provided by Tierney, Expert Events, and Park Towne Place. The media sponsor is WHYY. Partners include: Velo-Park LLC; Philadelphia Parks & Recreation; the Mayor’s Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy; Center City District; and The Parkway Council.

### **The Artist**

For more than 25 years, Cai Guo-Qiang’s practice has spanned a range of media in contemporary art, including drawing, installation, video, and performance art, and drawn from Chinese traditions in medicine, art and place making.

The artist is perhaps best known for his use of fireworks and gunpowder on a massive scale and the development of signature explosion events, including the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing and *Sky Ladder* (2015) in the artist’s hometown of Quanzhou. The latter project is the subject of a film released by Netflix in 2016.

Cai’s many solo exhibitions have included *Light Cycle*, an explosion event sponsored by Creative Time that illuminated Central Park (2003); *Cai Guo-Qiang on the Roof: Transparent Monument*,

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2006) and *I Want to Believe*, a retrospective that opened at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 2008 before traveling to the National Art Museum of China in Beijing (2008) and the Guggenheim Bilbao (2009).

In 1999, Cai received the Golden Lion at the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999 and, in 2012, was named one of five Laureates for the Praemium Imperiale, an award that recognizes lifetime achievement in the arts in categories not covered by the Nobel Prize. He received the first U.S. Department of State - Medal of Arts award for his outstanding commitment to international cultural exchange. More recently, he has been awarded the Barnett and Annalee Newman Foundation Award and the Bonnefanten Award for Contemporary Art (BACA).

### **Fung Collaboratives**

As chief curator of Fung Collaboratives, Lance Fung conceives and realizes art exhibitions around the world. These include *The Snow Show* (2003-2006), wherein he partnered artists with architects to realize structures made primarily from snow and ice; *Lucky Number Seven*, the seventh SITE Santa Fe International Biennial, for which he assembled 26 artists from outside the US to create site-specific installations; and *Artlantic* (2012-2014), which transformed vacant lots in Atlantic City via “giant living sculptures” designed by such diverse artists and designers as Diana Balmori, Robert Barry, Ilya & Emilia Kabakov, and Kiki Smith. Currently he is organizing *Migrations* for the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) to bring ephemeral, temporary and permanent artworks along and within the Bay Trails.

### **Association for Public Art (aPA)**

The Association for Public Art (aPA, formerly the Fairmount Park Art Association) commissions, preserves, interprets, and promotes public art in Philadelphia. The aPA is the nation’s first private nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a “Museum Without Walls” that informs, engages, and inspires diverse audiences. We honor the past while supporting originality and innovation, and we advance opportunities for creative people to contribute to the city’s places and spaces. Established in 1872, the aPA integrates public art and urban design through exemplary programs and advocacy efforts that connect people with public art.

For more information, the public may visit <http://www.associationforpublicart.org/>.