

## Bloomberg Defends Freedom of Expression at Opening of Show for Jailed Chinese Artist

By [David Freedlander](#)  
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Mayor Michael Bloomberg opened a public art exhibit this morning in Central Park by the jailed Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei and delivered a forceful defense of free speech.

"Today, we stand in solidarity with the millions of people around the world who are hoping that Ai Weiwei is quickly and safely released," Mayor Bloomberg said, according to his prepared remarks. "And we stand in solidarity with the billions of people who do not have the most fundamental of all human rights, the most cherished of all American values, and the most valuable of all New York City's riches: free expression."

The decision to deliver the speech comes not without risks for the mayor. His multi-billion dollar business, Bloomberg LP has interests in China, as China has a variety of interests in the city.

The speech had echoes of [Mayor Bloomberg's remarks about the Ground Zero Mosque](#), in which he placed the issue in the sweep of American history. He did the same today, talking about John Peter Zenger, a German immigrant jailed for publishing articles critical of the British colonial government. And he again positioned New York City as a center of First Amendment struggles—and victories.

"New York is a city that fully embodies that spirit and fiercely defends the right of all people to express themselves. Our city is a cacophony of voices - bustling, jarring, provocative. We are a marketplace of ideas, where all are welcome to debate, and argue, and even to agree. For more than 400 years, the best and brightest from around the globe have come here for that reason - and that includes Ai Weiwei."

After a career skirting the lines of authority and freedom of expression in China, Ai was arrested April 3. He had planned to attend the event today.

The exhibit will be up until July 15.

