

Meijer Gardens adds sculpture by artist-activist Ai Weiwei

By David Runk
The Associated Press

DETROIT — A large iron sculpture by Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei that's designed to prompt thoughts about how different people and cultures come together has been acquired by the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in western Michigan, according to the organization.

Made of 99 iron pieces, the reddish sculpture called "Iron Tree" looks like a tree without leaves, but oversized stainless steel bolts that hold it together give it a mechanical, somewhat awkward appearance. A mold for each piece was made from branches and other wood the artist found being sold in southern China, said Joseph Becherer, vice president and chief curator at Meijer Gardens.

"Before there was an 'Iron Tree' there was a wooden tree and each piece of wood was from a different tree," Becherer said in a telephone interview.

Ai, a sculptor, author, and installation artist whose work is well-known internationally, isn't allowed to travel outside of China. He spent nearly three



months in prison in China in 2011 and last year directed the transformation of the former island prison of Alcatraz into a tribute to the world's political prisoners. With "Iron Tree," Becherer said the more than 22-foot-tall sculpture's size and detail help make it compelling.

"From a distance it registers as a tree,

but when you get up close you realize that it's composed of all these different parts," Becherer said.

Meijer Gardens worked with Ai and his Beijing studio and foundry to bring the sculpture to Grand Rapids, and Becherer said the organization consulted closely with him on how to display the sculpture

AI WEIWEI ORIGINAL. "Iron Tree," a large iron sculpture by Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei, is seen in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The sculpture, which was designed to prompt thoughts about how different people and cultures come together, has been acquired by the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in western Michigan, according to the organization. (AP Photo/Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Dean Van Dis)

and landscape the site. The acquisition was supported by Fred and Lena Meijer.

A dedication ceremony is scheduled for April 20 as part of events marking the 20th anniversary of Meijer Gardens. Following that, Becherer plans a lecture about Ai.

The acquisition and dedication are part of a series of events planned this year at the gardens and sculpture park.

"Splendors of Shiga: Treasures from Japan" is on display ahead of the June opening of a new Japanese garden. The exhibit features more than 75 works of art, most of which have never been displayed outside Japan. The Richard & Helen DeVos Japanese Garden is a \$22-million project that includes Zen-style moss and bonsai gardens as well as bridges, waterfalls, and a tea house.

Asian carp could be on menu at University of Missouri

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The University of Missouri is testing recipes and gathering reactions as it considers adding the invasive Asian carp to the menu in its dining halls.

About 40 students tried different recipes using the fish during recent taste tests at the Sabai Culinary Development Kitchen on the Missouri campus, and their reactions will help the culinary staff decide whether to serve the fish.

Executive chef Eric Cartwright led preparation of experimental dishes such as Italian fish stew, pasta puttanesca with seafood, and bacon and jalapeno chowder, *The Columbia Missourian* reported.

"It's a very versatile product," said Cartwright, who noted he heard almost no negative comment from the taste-testers. "It's economical, and it has potential."

Junior Abigail Auner ate a plate of carp in pasta sauce and said the fish tasted like ground beef. "I'm very impressed," said Auner. "I wouldn't assume it's fish."

Professor Mark Morgan, who works in the state's Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, has been trying to find a market for the nuisance fish, which has invaded rivers across the state. He believes Missouri



would be the first university in the nation to serve Asian carp to students.

If approved, food vendors in the Student Center would be the first to offer the fish, with the possibility of expanding to other dining locations on campus.

Moser's Discount Foods last year became the first store in Missouri to sell Asian carp dishes to retail customers, offering boneless ground, fillets with some bones, and fish

NOSHING ON NUISANCE FISH. An Asian carp, jolted by an electric current from a research boat, jumps from the Illinois River near Havana, Illinois, in this file photo. The University of Missouri is testing recipes and gathering reactions as it considers adding the invasive Asian carp to the menu in its dining halls. (AP Photo/John Flesher, File)

heads. Meat manager Ron Baucom said sales have been above average.

Morgan said he is working to persuade Mexican and Chinese restaurants in Columbia to use Asian carp.

Serving Asian carp in the dining halls is primarily designed to make students aware of the negative impact the fish is having on rivers from New Orleans to the Great Lakes.

"It's a culinary solution to an environmental problem," Cartwright said.

Although a small effort on campus won't have a significant impact, "doing something is better than doing nothing," Morgan said.

Kitzhaber commutes sentence of 25-year-old Sang Dao

By Jonathan J. Cooper
The Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. — As one of his final acts in office, Oregon's outgoing governor, John Kitzhaber, commuted the prison sentence of a young inmate convicted of attempted murder.

Sang Dao, 25, sentenced to more than 12 years in prison, will be released this month, more than three years early. Dao earned a bachelor's degree from Portland State University while behind bars, and Kitzhaber's fiancée, Cylvia Hayes, spoke at his graduation ceremony last summer.

Hayes was at the center of the ethics controversy that prompted Kitzhaber to step down last month. She has been accused of using their relationship to land work for her consulting firm.

Kitzhaber has denied wrongdoing on both their parts. The commutation, obtained by The Associated Press, was signed a day before Kitzhaber handed power to his successor, Kate Brown. Brown signed the document in her former role as secretary of state.

It was not immediately clear why Kitzhaber granted Dao clemency.

Dao will leave prison March 17. Department of Corrections records show his earliest possible release date had been November 2018. His attempted murder conviction included unlawful use of a weapon and assault.

In earning his degree while at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility, however, Dao "took advantage of all the benefits and the programs that we offered, and he made the most of them," spokesman C.J. Drake said.

"His conduct and his reformation while he was with us was exemplary," Drake said.

Hayes, speaking at the graduation ceremony, told the graduates "education is something no one can take from you."

Dao was transferred in November to a state prison in Salem when he aged out of the youth correctional system.

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