




# An Activist Artist in the Face of Refugee Crisis: Ai Weiwei

## Mülteci Krizi Karşısında Aktivist Bir Sanatçı: Ai Weiwei

Saime Uyar<sup>1</sup> 

### ÖZ

*Bu makale, günümüz dünyasında yaşanan mülteci krizi karşısında sanatçı ve aktivist Ai Weiwei'nin sanatıyla verdiği mücadeleyi araştırıyor. Siyasi ağırlıklı mesajlar içeren eleştirel ve düşündürücü çalışmalarıyla çağdaş dünyanın mülteci krizi karşısındaki duyarsızlığı ve gündelik politik amaçlarla sınırlarına kurdukları barikatlara meydan okuyan uluslararası sanat çalışmalarıyla ele almaktadır. Çağımızın önemli problemlerinden biri olan mülteci krizleri, iç savaşlar, doğal afetler veya siyasi baskılar nedeniyle milyonlarca insanın evlerini, yurtlarını terk etmek zorunda kaldıkları ciddi insani olaylardır. Etkileri ulusal ve uluslararası olan bu küresel sorun, beraberinde birçok yeni probleme neden olabilmektedir. Farklı kurum ve kuruluşlarca ele alınan bu sorun sanatın da odak noktasını oluşturmaktadır. Bu çerçevede sanatın toplumsal rolü oldukça önemli ve değerlidir. Çok yönlü olan mülteci krizini çağdaş sanat ekseninde değerlendiren Ai Weiwei, sanatın objektifliği ve evrenselliğini kanıtlayıcı işleriyle toplumsal hafızada sanatsal reformlar bırakmaktadır. Son 10 yılda yaşanan Suriye iç savaşıyla zirve noktasına ulaşan mülteci krizi, sanatçı ve kendisi de göçmen olan Çinli sanatçı Ai Weiwei'nin sanatının ana teması haline gelmiştir. Uluslararası platformda gerçekleştirdiği sanatsal aktiviteleriyle insani politikaların geliştirilmesine ve insani amaçlara ulaştırılmasındaki etkin rolünü gösteren güçlü sanatsal formlar sunmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ai Weiwei, mülteci krizi, sanat, eleştirel sanat

### ABSTRACT

*This article explores the struggle of artist and activist Ai Weiwei in the face of the refugee crisis in today's world. With its critical and thought-provoking works containing politically weighted messages, he addresses the insensitivity of the contemporary world to the refugee crisis and the international artworks that challenge the barricades it has been established on the borders for everyday political purposes. Refugee crises, one of the major problems of our time, are serious humanitarian events in which millions of people are forced to leave their homes and homelands due to civil wars, natural disasters or political pressures. This global problem, whose effects are national and international, can cause many new problems. This problem, which is addressed by different institutions and organizations, is also the focus of art. In this context, the social role of art is very important and valuable. Evaluating the multifaceted refugee crisis on the axis of contemporary art, Ai Weiwei leaves artistic reforms in social memory with works that prove the objectivity and universality of art. The refugee crisis, which reached its peak with the Syrian civil war in the last 10 years, has become the main theme of the works of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, who is also an immigrant. He offers strong artistic forms that show his active role in developing human policies and achieving humanitarian goals with his artistic activities on the international platform.*

**Keywords:** Ai Weiwei, Refugee Crisis, Art, Critical Art

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author: Malatya-Turkey, saime44uyar@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0001-8665-8038



**INTRODUCTION:****Recent Challenges in Migration and Refugee Crisis**

Migration and refugee problem, which is one of the important problems of today, is a serious global problem that affects almost the whole world. This problem, which affects society deeply, and the various problems it creates and the possible solutions that can be taken against these problems have been the reason for this study.

Rapidly intensifying globalization, migration and colonialism have also deeply shaken the backbone of the traditional understanding of belonging. Especially on September 11, 2001, after the terrorist attacks that took place as a result of the collision of four passenger planes to the skyscrapers of the World Trade Center in New York, an involuntary and uncontrolled defense mechanism against “foreigners” began to be established worldwide. The framework of international politics has been redrawn upon this never-forgotten terrorist attack.

The marginalization policy for migrants and refugees from the past has been strengthened even more with this terrorist attack in 2001. After the Syrian civil war of 2011, when the migration and refugee problem experienced after 2001 peaked, racial discrimination, marginalization, and anger against foreigners can be described as inhuman defense mechanisms where nations justify themselves.

However, ideological tensions, ethnic and racial conflicts in the world have created new racism problems for nation-states.

When we look at today's world, immigrants, refugees, and borders cause a great sense of non-belonging. During these intersectional crises, thousands of people without identity, whose existence is unknown, are quietly disappearing for various reasons such as war, conflict, human trafficking, and illegal sea crossing.

The refugee problem we are witnessing today is a serious problem that is being experienced with the history of humanity. The famous political theorist Hannah Arendt has done many studies on the situation of people who immigrated from their countries between 1918-1945. She stated that in the ongoing process after the First World War, minorities and undocumented immigrants were equal in terms of legal rights, and that there was no improvement. Making radical statements about refugee rights, Arendt stated that people lost all their human rights rights from the moment they became refugees. Arendt, who argues that human rights are of no importance for stateless people, states that the past time has not impacted any positive improvement on refugee rights, and that the statelessness problem of individuals who become refugees has not been resolved, on the contrary, they have become normalized and today's order. Making statements about the lives of refugees, Arendt states that human rights are of no use to stateless people. She stated that it is now very difficult for these people to obtain their old rights (Wessel, 2016).

**The Artistic Perspective of Ai Weiwei in Tackling the Refugee Crisis**

The refugee crisis, which affects societies/nations in many respects such as social, cultural, political, geographical, and economic, which is one of the main issues of politics, has also become one of the focal points of art.

In this article, the refugee-themed works of Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei, who also came from a migrant family, were examined and the effects of art on the social structure were investigated.

In today's art, which hosts the refugee tragedy, Ai Weiwei has carried out many artistic projects inspired by refugee lives.

To document the international refugee crisis, Chinese artist Ai Weiwei created works in different categories such as sculpture, video, photo, installation, documentary film. He tried to raise public awareness in the face of inhumane events (Amirkhani, 2016).

Especially in response to the attitude of Europe, which closed its doors after more than 1 million refugees entered Europe by land and sea in 2015, Ai was on the Lesbos Island of Greece to closely witness the violence on the coast and to support various humanitarian efforts. He called on the European Union to account for "shameful and immoral" refugee policies in the face of the atrocities. After the Syrian crisis, he mentioned the mistake of burdening the refugee burden only on the border countries (Amirkhani, 2016).

Born in Beijing, China in 1957, Ai has come to the forefront with its art in the international arena and attracted attention in international media with its political-artistic projects with its artist and activist identity that produces versatile creative work. Resisting the negativities around the world, Ai performs his art as an active advocate of human rights (Britannica, n.d.).

Ai, a freethinker, had a great interest in art in his youth and invested in art life between China and the USA. In 1978, he founded an avant-garde group named "Stars", then moved to New York to attend the "Parsons School of Design" and started focusing on painting, followed by sculpturing (The Famous People, n.d.).

The artist, whose works are similar to the works of the French painter Marcel Duchamp and the German sculptor Joseph Beuys, has seriously focused on the problems of his age and has signed many works that are influential around the world about this topic. Coming from an immigrant family, the artist pioneered the production of solution-oriented works with the feeling and experience of knowing the problems experienced by immigrants closely (The Famous People, n.d.).

As a child, due to the right-wing politics of his father, who was a poet, he was forced to leave Beijing, where he was born with his family, and started to live in exile. He openly criticized the Chinese government's stance on democracy and human rights. The artist, who gained fame with political art creations defending human rights and freedom of expression in China, was detained in 2011 and his passport was canceled. The artist, whose travel documents were delivered to him in 2015, moved to Berlin, Germany, and started to focus on the refugee problem, one of the critical problems of the period, in a studio he established there (Tang Contemporary).

In addition to the human rights violations created by the closed borders, the fact that the brutality experienced in the border regions where they took refuge is being pushed behind the scenes in the face of the potential threat posed by refugees in today's world, has increasingly resulted in negative consequences for refugees. Serious problems such as the breakdown of families, rape of women and children, attacks on refugee camps, and human smuggling are among the main problems faced by refugees (Field, 2010).

The fact that European countries, as well as Arab countries, abstain from regulations aimed at refugees plays an important role in transferring the refugee problem from generation to generation. Palestinian refugees are the most concrete indicator of this. Most of the countries in the Arab League did not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention. Only 9 out of 22 members stated that they were party to the 1951 Refugee Convention (Akram, 2018).

Rather than the fact that they are not parties to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, it is possible to say that it is a document that has lost its effectiveness today and is only left on paper when the applicability of the Convention is examined (Crisp, 2018).

If we look at the point of art, which is far from all these political and sociological concepts but cannot remain independent from these, it is possible to understand the level of social corruption. It shouldn't have been a photo of a refugee child who washed ashore while trying to escape the war and reviving his death. Of course, it is important to have such reactions that perform their art in response to this inhuman crisis and act with their humanitarian identity before their artist identity. However, when it is examined not only from an artistic perspective but also from many perspectives that constitute social values, it is a painful indicator that the attitude of all world nations towards the possible crises that are and might be experienced has gone to decay in all aspects.

When evaluated from an artistic perspective, we can say that art fulfills the role of social responsibility. Many people who do not even know the concept of refugee in different geographies of the world have become aware of the existence of many refugee lives that have been devastated on earth after the news of Alan Kurdi's lifeless body washed ashore. Here, it is of great importance that the photograph reaches as large audience as possible thanks to today's technology without any addition (Image 2). It is far beyond an artistic production that the activist artist wants to draw attention to the seriousness of the problem by reviving this case with his artistic performance (Image 1). This is an act of rebellion, a cry, a protest. It is an uncomfortable impulse that leads people to think and question and especially conscientious questioning. It is not only a work of art for those who are interested in art but also a political action involving political anxiety.

In the face of this public insensitivity, which the world remained deaf and ignored, the artist, who revived the tragedy of the baby named Alan, also emphasizes the role of aesthetics of pain, persecution, and tragedy in art. In today's world, where reality and art are intertwined, it is possible to see that reality gets ahead of aesthetic anxiety.

If we evaluate the performance of this role-play of the artist, it is possible to reach important details. It is possible to describe the fainted face of a dead person surrounded by a lens as a cry to the whole world.

The revitalization of the death tragedy of an innocent baby, which causes this extraordinary disturbing image between the human body and the landscape in the viral and black and white frame all over the world, brings with it the danger of people falling for what they see in parallel to show the dimensions of the refugee crisis. It poses an accommodation hazard in which the meaning is lost in the face of visual focus.



Image 1. Source: <https://www.dw.com/en/essential-or-impudent-the-debate-about-art-and-refugees/a-39177781>

The refugee crisis is one of today's most serious questions. However, vital problems such as uprisings in Arab countries, violent conflicts in the East and North Africa region, the endless Palestinian-Israeli war, ever-shifting geopolitical changes as a result of all these, and climate change have gained global character in the process, although these didn't exist at the first place.

While all this was going on, the pandemic of Covid-19, which was effective around the world and caused the deaths of millions of people, emerged in Wuhan, China in January 2020 and painfully revealed the situation of world states in the face of possibilities and impossibilities within a year.

Human beings, who have been helpless in the face of natural disasters throughout history, should seek solution-seeking doors when they encounter possible problems. Otherwise, as a result of the ignored and remained-deaf attitudes, the current problem turns into a huge crisis in the process and turns into a giant that crosses the borders and that problem who's only a group of people has now reached the feature of being everyone. The refugee problem, which emerged especially in the last 10 years, has become a crisis that concerns not only Syria but also the whole world as a result of the world states' perspectives on the problem and the effect of the years-long Syrian civil war.

In the face of all this, it is impossible to expect art to remain stagnant and unchanged in a turbulent atmosphere. As a part of what is happening in the world, art has its share. It exhibits an original resistance that leads to thought, questioning, and criticism in the radical life adventure (Dhillon, 2016).

Creative imagination is not limited to rules or education but is provided by the tools and a foundation on which it can work (Bullen, 2010).



Image 2. Source: <https://www.yenisafak.com/hayat/aylan-bebek-yilin-fotografi-secildi-2440543>

The image of the washed ashore corpse of the baby named Kurdi has become a symbol of the international refugee crisis.

Here, a mutually silent, ethical, and empathetic emotional relationship has actually been created between the audience and the subject. There is no mediator between the audience and the subject, only the depth of the tragedy experienced and a state of evoking humanitarian emotion.

When addressing the refugee problem, space and time must be chosen well. An artistic action carried out in a devastated region of Syria will be an interpreter of the feelings of the local people and will allow them to make their voices heard. However, if there is a message concern that these should be conveyed to certain authorities, it should be conveyed to as many masses as possible not only in that geography but also in various ways. When they address serious problems such as the refugee crisis, international artists like Ai Weiwei plan the concept of space and time well. Ai Weiwei directly confronts the refugee crisis by taking the refugee crisis to New York, the center of America.

The artist's installation named "Gilded Cage", which makes a metaphorical reference not only to refugees but also to the racist and discriminatory policies of the Americans towards the blacks for centuries demonstrates in a very concrete way that the humanitarian policies of the developed and rich countries towards foreigners are not only differentiated on iron bars.



Image 3. Ai Weiwei, Gilded Cage, 2017. Ai Weiwei Studio / Courtesy of Frahm & Frahm. Ai Weiwei Studio, Photo: Courtesy of Public Art Fund

The artist called out to the press from the Doris C. Freedman Plaza, where there is a high circular fence that resembles a giant golden birdcage, and said, "Fences or areas are always about our identity, as well as our understanding of ourselves and our attitude towards others."

Stating that we live in unpleasant times, Ai expressed that they separate people according to colors, race, religion, and nationality.

Ai, who argued that the attitude of people in the face of events is effective in positively shaping the events, explained that for his public exhibition "Good Fences Make Good Neighbors", although it does not have instant emotional effects on people, it can make them stop and think.



Image 4. Ai Weiwei, Circle Fence, 2017. Courtesy of the artist. Photo Timothy Schneck, Courtesy of Public Art Fund

The artist, who paid attention to the choice of space, placed his two installations at the main points of the city such as public transportation routes and parks, which can be seen by a wide range of New Yorkers.



Image 5. Ai Weiwei, Arch, 2017. Ai Weiwei Studio / Courtesy of Frahm & Frahm. Photo: Jason Wyche, Courtesy Public Art Fund, NY

Designed to draw attention to the refugee crisis around the world, he exhibited these works in about 300 places in and around New York. Stating that discrimination is a coup against freedom and humanity, the artist stated at press conferences that human values should be rebuilt (Lesser, 2017).

Chinese conceptual artist Ai Weiwei placed his 258-figure installation in Prague, the capital of the European Union, and said, "It is almost a crime to reject so many helpless people." Ai creates both the plastic boat and the figures in it in a way that is close to their real form and reveals this human drama, where the world remains silent, in a striking way. He has disturbingly demonstrated that this problem is a humanitarian crisis that concerns all of humanity.

While performing these artistic installations, the artist took care to create as close to their real form as possible. This plastic boat, which is produced from the same material as the plastic boats that carry to Greece over the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, where these people who have to leave their lands, go out to die with the hope of a new life, presents the real state of the boat symbolized by the death of thousands of refugees during their passage through the Aegean Sea and the size of the brutality in the black waters in a striking way.

The fact that Ai placed 258 passengers (made of the same material as the boat) in the 70-meter black plastic boat installation also clearly reveals the fact that the impossibility experienced and the insignificance of human life and the extent to which refugee lives are ignored (CBC, 2017).

Before creating the giant work called the "Law of the Journey", Ai visited many refugee regions, including the Greek island of Lesbos (VOANEWS, 2017).

He emphasizes that the human values lost in the face of human drama should be questioned again (VOANEWS, 2017).





Image 6. The view of the installation of Ai Weiwei's "Law of the Journey". The photo was used with the courtesy of the Prague National Gallery. (AP / Petr David Josek)

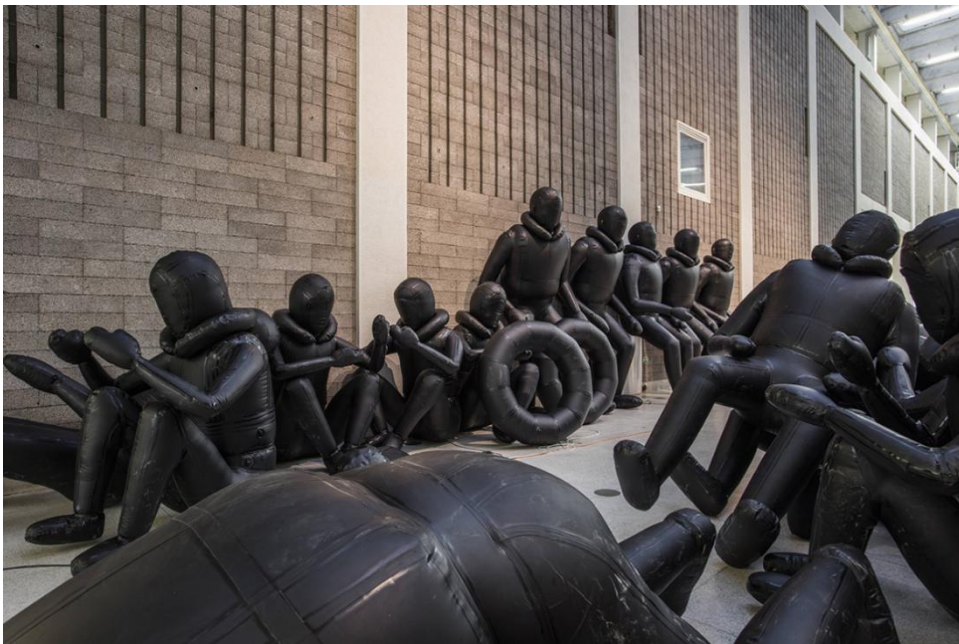


Image 7. The view of the installation of Ai Weiwei's "Law of the Journey". The photo was used with the courtesy of the Prague National Gallery.

Ai stated that in the face of all these events, humanity should be questioned again, that human values are being lost day by day, and that the most urgent problem to be questioned is not a refugee crisis, but a humanitarian crisis. He underlined that people need each other, tolerance, compassion and trust are needed. While looking away at the refugee problem with a grimace, he sadly expressed that the loss of our human values, which is even worse than this problem, has reached a serious level (Phaidon, n.d.).



Image 8. Ai Weiwei, Six Portraits of Refugees, 2018 Source: Courtesy Public Art Fund and eBay

Nicholas Baume, director and chief clerk of the Public Art Fund, said: “In many ways, this sale is a natural extension of Public Art Fund’s mission, (Ai’s) body of work, and eBay’s values. This sale enables a broad audience, including both serious longtime collectors and those who are just starting out, to bring a piece of this landmark exhibition by the most famous artist in the world into their homes.” (Leow, 2018).

Ai held an extraordinary celebration by presenting its works at a price lower than its value in order to support the organizations that benefit refugees on June 20 World Refugee Day.

These works of the artist consist of six portraits of refugees and migrants printed on laser-cut plates like a streetlamp banner. Each of these limited works has been produced as 500 pieces. All revenues of these works, which brought \$26.8 million, were donated to charities (McGrath, 2018).

The faces depicted in this poster-style work of the artist have not been chosen as random. It consists of portraits of immigrants living on Ellis Island by amateur photographer Augustus Sherman, clerk of the immigration bureau, official portraits taken by Ai Weiwei’s studio, and famous migrants from history, and a few snapshots taken by the artist while visiting refugee camps in Kenya and Iraq (McGrath, 2018).

Looking at the portraits, it is possible to see classic and contemporary faces together. These portraits, which are designed to represent a wide history and universe, are a visual record that refugees date back to ancient times. Emotions such as worry, anxiety, uncertainty, despair, and sadness are reflected coldly as a common feeling of all times on the faces created with laser cutters (McGrath, 2018).



Image 9. Ai Weiwei, Installation, Konzerthaus, Berlin, 2016 Photo: Mehmet Kaman / Anadolu Agency/ Getty Images

Among the activists and artists who produce politically charged artworks, Ai Weiwei has been on an opposing line with his art in the face of current problems on a global basis.

Inspired by the life jacket symbolized by the lives of refugees in recent years, the activist artist has performed an activist masterpiece at Konzerthaus in Berlin. The materials used in the placement consist of life jackets left on the coasts of Greece while passing from Syria to European countries.

It publicly draws attention to the scale of the refugee crisis, representing the traumatic deaths of thousands of refugees the dangers faced by refugees, how their journey is made unsafe, and the line between life and death is connected with a simple life vest with 14,000 life jackets placed in the historical columns of the Berlin Konzerthaus Portico on February 14, 2016.

Ai, who also comes from an immigrant family, stayed in the camps where the refugees lived for a long time to closely witness their lives. Reflecting on his time in Lesbos, Weiwei said, "My moments with refugees in the past months have been intense. I saw thousands come daily, children, babies, pregnant women, old ladies, a young boy with one arm." (Werft, 2016).

Ai Weiwei reacted to societies that treat refugees inhumanly with only the following words: "They just want basic human dignity, no bombs, no fear...They come with nothing. They have to walk barefoot, in such cold, across the rocky beach." (Werft, 2016).

The artist, who has performed a dramatic artistic exhibition by placing numerous life jackets on the pillars of the famous concert hall in Berlin, Germany, which hosts more refugees than Western countries, reveals the reflections of the mass human migration crisis in the modern age (Werft, 2016).

Ai Weiwei addresses the refugee crisis with a sculptural iconic installation with its first museum exhibition “Life Cycle” in Los Angeles.

The exhibition of Life Cycle, which carries traces of the artist's own culture, has a surreal festive mood. He created figures inspired by a traditional Chinese text dating back to the 4th century BC.



Image 10. Source: <https://www.designboom.com/art/ai-weiwei-life-cycle-10-05-18/>

In this work, the artist discusses the refugee crisis from a very broad perspective. This work, which he designed in a mystical aura, makes his defense strong by including the thoughts of important names who have taken place in history.

With these surreal images pointing to the invisibility of refugees in society, there are references to many countries that reject the situation refugees are in. With the historical descriptions he used in this study, he also admits that the refugee crisis is not new. Possibly a reference to the Old Testament tale of baby Moses swimming in the Nile, the bamboo ship and the emptiness of all the souls in the ship, the shipwreck and the voyage, deepen this refugee problem in history and mythology, making it a masterpiece of French Romantic painter Théodore Géricault. It connects the raft of Medusa (1818–1819). It is possible to associate this study with the tragedies of immigrants that are taking place in the cold waters of the Mediterranean and Aegean today (Nimptsch, 2018).

As can be seen from Ai's work, the problem of the refugee crisis, which has been discussed in the past and today, is a humanitarian crisis that dates back to ancient times and is likely to continue in the future. This problem, whose only its causes and boundaries have changed, is a problem that continues to grow like a snowball as it moves away from its solution and can always remain up to date. It is a humanitarian crisis so important that the artistic community cannot remain insensitive as

it is reflected in the political, economic, sociological, and psychological aspects of the solution of the problem.

## CONCLUSION:

Despite all the obstacles they face, artists and activists, who are oppressed in response to the emotional situations that countries try to pacify in their own interests and represent the images of quiet people, try to make these people's voices heard all over the world under the guidance of conscientious navigation.

Addressing the structures of statelessness and insecurity with its aesthetic responses to the refugee crisis, Ai Weiwei, who also comes from an immigrant family, criticizes the relative and hollow cultural freedom and security situations directed to stateless people in the face of unique cultural freedom in the West with visual creations.

He criticizes the silence of the world in the face of the traumas experienced by refugees and immigrants who have to travel illegally due to political conflicts and chaos, calls for the inner voice of the society through the art projects he has created in public spaces, and refers to political authorities. It is possible to see the critical, thought-provoking, questioning, constructive and solution-oriented holistic mechanism of art in the contemporary world through the refugee crisis in the art of Ai Weiwei.

This study once again reveals the importance of the active role of art and the artist in social events. Although there are social, economic and political solutions to the refugee problem, which is a global problem, the role of art in the face of social problems cannot be ignored. Art, raising awareness of the current problem, the problem; It is obvious that thanks to today's technology, it has made a strong contribution to making it known globally and being addressed on the international platform for necessary precautions and solutions.

### ***Etik Standart ile Uyumluluk***

***Çıkar Çatışması:*** [TR] Yazar / yazarlar, kendileri ve / veya diğer üçüncü kişi ve kurumlarla çıkar çatışmasının olmadığını beyan eder.

[EN] There is no conflict of interest between the authors or any third party individuals or institutions.

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***Teşekkür:*** Teşekkürümüz yoktur.

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## **EXTENDED SUMMARY**

### **Purpose of the Study:**

The aim of this study is to investigate the struggle of artist and activist Ai Weiwei with his art on the refugee problem, which is one of the most important problems of today, which is international in nature and whose effects are increasing day by day, and to reveal the effects of the effort of art against social problems by supporting it with visual interpretations. The term "refugee" has become one of the most frequently encountered problem titles of today, as millions of people who have to leave their country of birth or residence for various reasons such as war, civil conflicts, natural disasters, seek refuge in other countries with the hope of a new life. The refugee crisis, which has reached its peak with the Syrian civil war in recent years, is one of the most protracted problems of our age. The refugee problem, which has gained an important place in today's contemporary art, has also directly concerned many artists. In this study, we focus on the art of Ai Weiwei, an artist and activist with a migrant identity. It is possible to see the reflections of refugee problems in Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's art in an intense and striking way. Through his artistic activities on the international platform, he presents powerful artistic works that show his active role in developing humanitarian policies and achieving humanitarian goals.

### **Research Questions:**

What is the role of art in the face of social problems? In the face of the refugee crisis, what are the reflections of the artist and activist Ai Weiwei, who himself comes from an immigrant family, on his approach and attitude towards this problem? To what extent is art effective in raising social awareness? Which of Ai Weiwei's works can be evaluated in this context as examples of the way Ai Weiwei addresses the refugee problem?

### **Literature Research:**

When the national and international literature is examined, it is seen that the refugee crisis is not a new problem, but a problem that has existed since ancient times. The refugee problem, which has a very long history, has emerged with the migrations experienced in every period of history and has been among the problems of every era. The refugee crisis, which directly or indirectly affects all areas of life such as social, economic, political and geographical, has become a global problem that has taken a direct place in life, especially after the Syrian civil war in recent years and recent natural disasters. In the face of this international scale crisis, art and artists have also been directly and indirectly affected and tried to influence it. In the analyzes made, it is seen that art has been the visual memory of the society since ancient times, has a direct connection with the current social problems and reflects the period and sheds light on the future with works in this direction. In many parts of the world, artists and activists have taken an active role in the face of the refugee problem. Especially for countries that are insensitive to the refugee crisis, artistic actions have played an effective role in this direction. Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei, who himself comes from an immigrant family, has left a different impact on the art world with his critical and thought-provoking works with politically charged messages, challenging the contemporary world's insensitivity to the refugee crisis and the barricades they set up on their borders for daily political purposes.

### **Methodology:**

In this study, the migrations that took place in the past history and the refugee crises that emerged as a result of these migrations were examined in detail, and their social, economic and political dimensions and their effects on society were analyzed. The refugee crisis, which constitutes the focal point of different disciplines, has also been the focal point of art, which has witnessed the era in every period. In the researches conducted, it has been concluded that art exhibits a very questioning and responsible approach in the face of this refugee

crisis, which is a national and international problem, and that it applies for the necessary solutions. In this context, artistic actions and outputs realized in different geographies of the world in the past and present have been evaluated and the benefits of the problem-oriented solving role of art have been emphasized. Especially in recent years, the intensive migration and the refugee problems it brings with it have had a profound impact on today's art. Artists working in this direction in many parts of the world are trying to make their voices heard with their thoughts and works. Based on the idea that the effects of the refugee crisis on art and artists can be best expressed, the effects of the refugee crisis have been discussed in detail through the art of Chinese activist and artist Ai Weiwei, who himself comes from an immigrant family. With an interrogative and critical approach, the refugee crisis was re-evaluated through an artistic presentation.

### Results and Conclusions:

In the light of the data obtained in this study, the necessity and effectiveness of the social responsibility role of art has been concluded. When the refugee crisis in the past and its artistic reflections are examined, it is possible to talk about an action-reaction situation that is intertwined with life. Art is affected by the problem existing in society and makes improvements regarding the solution of the problem in line with its universal principles. It tries to further strengthen its level of influence by reaching relevant institutions and organizations and social organizations. Especially, thanks to the developing technology, the level of reaching the goals that art has set for itself is concluded much earlier. It has been pointed out that social problems are not limited to related fields such as social-economic and political, but that art is also the focal point and the effectiveness of art in this direction. Artists and activists, who play an active role from individual to mass organization by considering social interests, exhibit solution-oriented performances by using art as a tool to raise awareness of the society. It is possible to read this through the art of activist and artist Ai Weiwei, who reveals this situation with various artistic performances and art forms. In this work, it is possible to see many works of the artist in this direction.

The artistic works of Ai Weiwei, who has an immigrant identity, have shown that art is not independent of social issues, art is affected by social problems and affects society. The art, which keeps up with the times, continues its development in this direction. The idea that art, which undertakes the task of serving the society with a free, questioning and critical approach, plays the role of a torch that illuminates the age in which it lives in every period, is once again revealed with this study.