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Recycling Neolithic Urns and Vinyl Records: Transcultural Aspects of Iconoclasm

The Chinese artist Ai Weiwei (b. Beijing 1957) achieved visibility when, having returned to his country after twelve years spent in the US, he began breaking and recycling Chinese antiquities in the mid-1990s. In 1998, the US artist Dario Robleto (b. San Antonio 1972) started grinding and melting vinyl records and other mass-produced and organic materials to produce sculptures accompanied by detailed listings of their ingredients. While Ai is generally hailed as an iconoclast and Robleto could be defined as an iconophile, both share a crucial yet ambivalent, even at times paradoxical relation to the materials they use. This lecture will examine this relationship and ask what role the transcultural aspects of the two artists' lives and works have played in their respective contributions to present-day "iconoclasm".