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For Immediate Release
September 17, 2010

AI WEIWEI
ZODIAC HEADS/CIRCLE OF ANIMALS

Installation at the 29th São Paulo Biennale, Brazil
September 25 – December 12, 2010



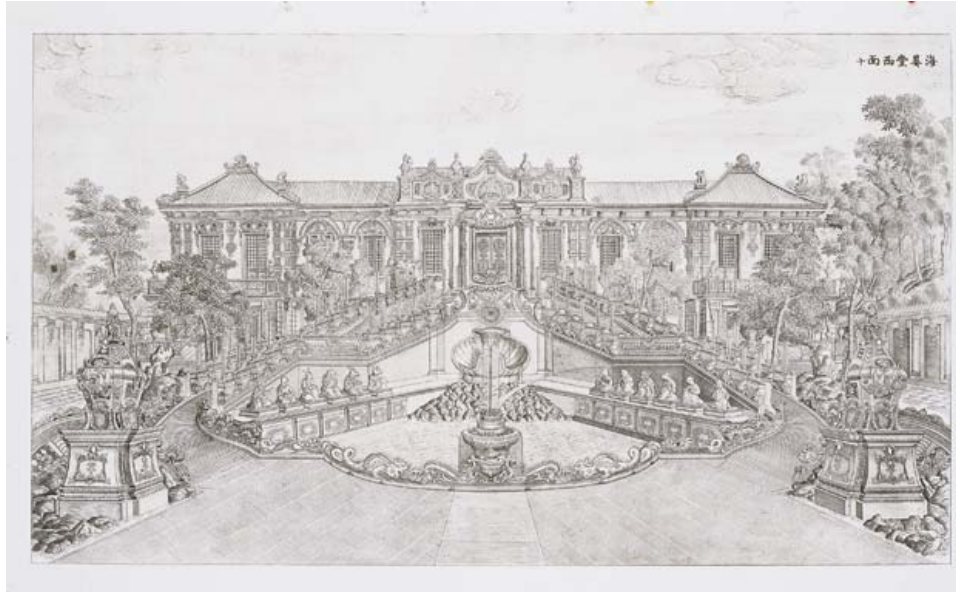
BACKGROUND

Chinese conceptual artist Ai Weiwei is considered one of the most important contemporary artists and social thought leaders both in China and on the world stage. As his first major public sculpture project Ai Weiwei has re-created the twelve bronze animal heads, representing the traditional Chinese zodiac, that once adorned the fountain of the Yuanming Yuan (Old Summer Palace) in Beijing.

The *Zodiac Heads/Circle of Animals* is the centerpiece of a global, multi-year touring exhibition that will be presented in the United States, Europe, and Asia. The set of twelve zodiac heads will first go on display at the São Paulo Biennale in Brazil, opening to the public on September 25, 2010, with additional international and domestic American venues to follow.

Designed in the 18th century by two European Jesuits at the behest of the Manchu emperor Qianlong, the twelve animal heads originally functioned as a water clock fountain in the garden of the Old Summer Palace. In 1860, the palace was ransacked by French and British troops and the heads were pillaged.

In re-creating these objects on an oversized scale, Ai Weiwei focuses attention on questions of looting and repatriation, while extending his ongoing exploration of the “fake” and the copy in relation to the original. In his art, Ai Weiwei has continuously engaged Chinese history as a shifting site rather than a static body of knowledge. His adaptations of objects from the Chinese material canon, such as furniture and ceramics, are known for the subversive wit with which they twist these traditional forms toward new purposes. The re-envisioned zodiac heads address the precarious position of such objects, caught up in a set of cultural power dynamics that are radically in flux and evoke a still-resonant moment in the history of China’s relationship with the West.



ZODIAC ANIMALS

Ox (patient, self-sacrificing)
Rabbit (ambitious, confident)
Snake (calm, intelligent)
Sheep (well-mannered, altruistic)
Rooster (resourceful, adventuresome)
Dog (attentive, loyal)

Tiger (lucky, courageous)
Dragon (intuitive, influential)
Horse (entertaining, powerful)
Monkey (independent, enthusiastic)
Rat (hardworking, thrifty)
Pig (sincere, cultured)

SPECIFICATIONS

The twelve *Zodiac Heads/Circle of Animals* by Ai Weiwei are cast in bronze and positioned on circular bronze bases. Each individual head weighs approximately 800 pounds (364 kilograms), and measures approximately 4 feet (123 centimeters) high and 3 feet (91 centimeters) wide. The head and base together are approximately 10 feet (365 centimeters) high.

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