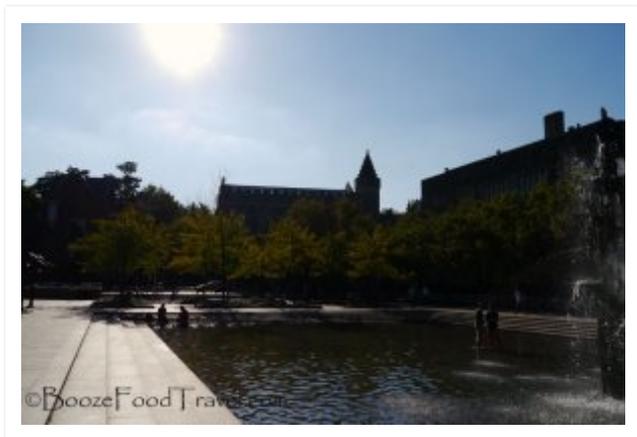


Booze, Food, Travel



Ai Weiwei at Princeton

Posted on September 30, 2013 by jcmatt



Before I head out on my next big adventure, I decided to visit my friend at Princeton University. Unfortunately, my friend hasn't been in the area long and doesn't know most of the buildings on campus. We walked around a bit so I could see at least some of the architecture around campus. Fortunately, he did know of one stop that was of interest.

Last year, Princeton brought the art of Ai Weiwei (艾未未) to campus. For those who aren't familiar with Ai's work, he's a controversial figure in modern China—he's been arrested, harassed, and injured by China's police.

He is also banned from traveling outside China. He also helped design the 2008 Beijing Olympic stadium (the Bird's Nest). He became more of a political activist after the Olympics, for which he has faced a few charges. He has become more popular on the international stage in recent years.



Princeton brought Ai Weiwei's Chinese zodiac heads for a year-long display outside Robertson Hall. The zodiac heads are modern representations of the ones that were pillaged from the old Summer Palace by British and French forces in 1860. Some of the original bronze sculptures were auctioned off by Christie's in France in 2009, generating outrage from China (and even a winning Chinese bidder who refused to pay).



The original bronze sculptures aren't all that interesting; the history behind them is all that makes them significant. Ai Weiwei's recreation of the heads is more impressive—there's more artistic detail in his version. Also, the surrounding fountain adds to the atmosphere for viewing such artwork.



Despite spending three and a half years in China, this was my first encounter with the artwork of Ai Weiwei.