



Culture Monster

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

Ai Weiwei's new art installation expected to tour U.S.

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Ai Weiwei, the outspoken artist whose [online political activism](#) has frequently landed him in hot water with Chinese authorities, doesn't exhibit his artwork often in the U.S. Starting in May, art fans around the country will get a rare chance to experience his work when Ai's first major public project, titled "[Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads](#)," tours the U.S.

The installation, which is designed to be displayed outdoors, depicts 12 monumental bronze animal heads of the Chinese zodiac. Organizers said that each head weighs approximately 800 pounds and measures approximately 4 feet high and 3 feet wide. The heads will be mounted on bases for a combined height of approximately 10 feet.

"Circle of Animals" is inspired by the fountain clock at the Yuanming Yuan, an 18th century royal retreat outside Beijing. The original work, which also depicted the animals of the zodiac, was pillaged by Western military forces in 1860 and parts of it are still missing today.

The first stop on the tour will be New York (May 2 to July 15), where the installation will be displayed near the Plaza Hotel, at the Pulitzer Fountain in Grand Army Plaza in Central Park. A tentative stop is planned for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Sept. 15 to March 15, 2012), but a spokeswoman for the museum said plans haven't been finalized.

This wouldn't be the first time that a work by Ai has been exhibited in L.A. In 2007, the Morono Kiang Gallery in downtown L.A. [showed a video installation by Ai titled "Chang'an Boulevard"](#) as part of a group show devoted to Chinese video art. L.A.'s Museum of Contemporary Art [acquired "Chang'an Boulevard"](#) in 2008 in a partnership with East West Bank.

The work was part of the MOCA show "[Collecting History: Highlighting Recent Acquisitions](#)," which ran in 2009.

Other planned stops on the "Circle of Animal" tour include Hermann Park, in Houston (spring 2012); the Warhol Museum & Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (Oct. 1, 2012, to Dec. 31, 2012); and the Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (fall 2012).

The installation is also scheduled to be displayed in London at the Somerset House (May 12 to June 26). The dates overlap with those in New York; a spokeswoman for the project said that the artist has created an identical version of the installation.

In the past, Ai has been critical of the Chinese government's policy toward Twitter and other forms of social media. He has also criticized the government's handling of the Sichuan earthquake in 2008.

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Photo (top): Ai Weiwei, with part of the "Circle of Animals" installation, at the 29th Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil. Credit: Ding Musa, © AW Asia.

Photo (bottom): Ai, in his Beijing studio. Credit: Alexander F. Yuan / Associated Press.

