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Ai Weiwei Re-Creates Zodiac Clock in NYC

March 11, 2011 By [Marion Maneker](#) [Comments](#)

[Robin Pogrebin](#) covers the announcement that [Ai Weiwei](#) will mount a public sculpture in the fountains in front of the Plaza Hotel recreating the fabled Zodiac clock built by Jesuits for the Qianlong emperor. Two heads from that clock became the center of an international controversy during the Bergé/Saint Laurent sale when Beijing demanded the sculptures be returned to China. Bergé still owns them:

“It’s a busy area, so it can be seen by ordinary people, but also it’s not exactly an art center,” said Mr. Weiwei in a telephone interview from China. “ I like that people can notice it and at the same time, not to bother them too much.”

The sculpture, “Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads” was inspired by the fabled fountain-clock of the Yuanming Yuan, an 18th-century imperial retreat just outside Beijing. Designed in the 18th century by two European Jesuits at the behest of the Manchu Emperor Qianlong, the fountain-clock featured each animal of the Chinese zodiac, spouting water at two-hour intervals. In 1860, French and British troops ransacked the Yuanming Yuan, pillaging the heads. Seven of them have since been located — the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, horse, monkey and boar — the other five are still missing.

“It’s very interesting to offer this complete set,” Mr. Weiwei said. “People can really appreciate public art on different levels.”

[Plaza Hotel Fountain to Be Home for Ai Weiwei Sculpture](#) (ArtsBeat/New York Times)

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