

ART Ai Weiwei's Monumental Chinese Zodiac Sculptures Staying at Plaza Hotel This Spring

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Coming soon to Midtown.

China's best-known contemporary artist, **Ai Weiwei**, seems to be perpetually kept under **house arrest**, or banned outright from **traveling** by officials in his country, but that's never kept his work from surfing the international art circuit. Next stop for his monumental twelve-part sculpture "Zodiac Heads/Circle of Animals," first seen last fall in Sao Paulo: the Plaza Hotel. Or, rather, the fountain in front of the Plaza.

For the set of twelve massive bronze heads atop totems, Weiwei recreated the traditional Chinese zodiac animals that formerly adorned the fountain of the Yuanming Yuan, the Old Summer Palace, in Beijing. The original figures were commissioned from a pair of European Jesuits by the Manchu emperor Qianlong, and functioned as a clock fountain in the garden of the Old Summer Palace. When French and British troops looted the palace in 1860 the heads disappeared, though seven of the twelve have been recovered since.

Whereas the sculptural installation's debut at the 29th Sao Paulo Biennale in Brazil in September 2010 just featured the heads and their pedestals arrayed in a circular formation, the new installation in Midtown will actually feature waterworks courtesy of the nearby Pulitzer Fountain. The public exhibition, which runs from May 2 until July 15 in the square at 59th Street and Fifth Avenue, was organized by New York City and the Chinese, Chelsea-based art organization **AW Asia**. No word whether Weiwei will be granted a temporary travel visa to attend the opening.

(ArtsBeat)