



Ai Weiwei's Circle of Animal / Zodiac Heads - Internationally Acclaimed Public Sculpture on Display in Houston: March 3 - June 3

Houston Arts Alliance Presentation Only South and Midwest Region Stop on Work's International Tour



Houston Arts Alliance Logo. (PRNewsFoto/Houston Arts Alliance)

HOUSTON, Feb. 22, 2012 /PRNewswire/ -- An 18th century imperial retreat near Beijing and Houston's Hermann Park may seem too far apart in space and time to have anything in common. But from March 3 through June 3, [Houston Arts Alliance](#) (HAA) unites the two worlds with the first major public sculpture by internationally renowned Chinese contemporary artist Ai Weiwei, titled [Circle of Animals / Zodiac Heads](#), to be on view outdoors at Hermann Park near the southeast corner of McGovern Lake.

HAA's presentation of Ai Weiwei's work will be the only South and Midwest venue on the work's international, multi-year tour, which is making just six domestic stops. Houstonians and visitors from around the world will have the opportunity to view Ai Weiwei's work in one of the city's finest public spaces and share in Houston's tradition of exceptional creativity.

Circle of Animals / Zodiac Heads, comprising 12 monumental bronze animal heads each weighing 800 pounds, is Ai Weiwei's re-creation on an oversized scale of the traditional zodiac sculptures that once adorned the fabled fountain-clock at Yuanming Yuan (Old Summer Palace) outside Beijing. Through his work, the artist brings to light questions of looting and repatriation, while extending his ongoing exploration of the "fake" and the copy in relation to the original.

Designed by two European Jesuits in the 18th century the original animal heads surrounding the fountain-clock of Yuanming Yuan spouted water every two hours. In 1860, French and British troops raided Yuanming Yuan, and the heads were looted. To date only seven of the legendary 12 heads have been recovered; the location of the remaining five is still unknown.

"Public art has the power to redefine our public spaces, stimulate dialogue and transform the way we experience art," said Jonathon Glus, CEO of Houston Arts Alliance. "Ai Weiwei's *Circle of Animals / Zodiac Heads* furthers our tradition of providing world-class exhibition programs in Houston outside the walls of museums and galleries for all to experience. Thousands from Houston and beyond will share in this culturally relevant experience, which helps build our city's visibility as an international arts center."

A leading figure in contemporary art and design, Ai Weiwei gained global recognition for his *Bird's Nest* stadium designed for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, and this week he was commissioned to reunite with Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron to make the Serpentine pavilion in London.

The exhibition is presented by Houston Arts Alliance in partnership with City of Houston, Houston Parks & Recreation Department, Hermann Park Conservancy and AW Asia. The exhibit is scheduled to coincide with the April 14 – 15 opening of Asia Society Texas Center's stunning new Taniguchi-designed Texas headquarters, and, concurrently, Architecture Center Houston will exhibit Ai Weiwei's *Five Houses*, April 19 – May 25.

For additional information about HAA's presentation of Ai Weiwei's *Circle of Animals / Zodiac Heads* and related programming, visit <http://www.aiweiweihouston.org>.

Quick Facts about the *Circle of Animals / Zodiac Head* exhibit in Houston:

- The cast bronze heads represent the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac.
- Each head weighs approximately 800 pounds and measures about four feet high.
- Together each head and base weighs nearly 1,000 pounds and stands roughly 10 feet high.
- Today, only seven of the original 12 animal heads that once adorned the fabled fountain-clock of Yuanming Yuan have

been recovered – the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, horse, monkey and boar. The location of the other five – dragon, snake, goat, rooster and dog – remain unknown.

- The sculptures require three 40-foot trucks to be transported. Thirty man hours (or three 10-hour shifts) are needed to install all 12 sculptures in Hermann Park.
- According to Census data, Asians make-up approximately seven percent of Houston's population, about 420,000 Houstonians.

About Houston Arts Alliance

Houston Arts Alliance (HAA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit arts organization that exists to enhance the quality of life and tourism in the Houston region by supporting and promoting the arts through programs, initiatives and alliances. HAA distributes grants to more than 220 nonprofit arts organizations and individual artists on behalf of the City of Houston. In addition, HAA manages the city's civic art collection of 450 artworks, as well as new acquisitions.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Amy Noesser
Edelman
amy.noesser@edelman.com
713.970.2152

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