

**Ai Weiwei's *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads: Gold*  
To Appear At New York's LongHouse Reserve**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 internationally acclaimed Chinese contemporary artist and political dissident **Ai Weiwei's** twelve-piece art installation, ***Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads: Gold***, will open at **LongHouse Reserve** in East Hampton, NY. The installation will complete the summer 2013 season at **LongHouse**, legendary textile designer **Jack Lenor Larsen's** not-for-profit art museum, sculpture garden, and art education organization. The exhibit—a life-like reinterpretation and re-examination of the legendary bronze zodiac animal heads that once surrounded the water-clock fountain of the Yuanming Yuang Beijing imperial retreat—will make a two-month stop at the East Hampton reserve before continuing on its international tour. In anticipation of its official opening, the installation, which presents the gold-gilded collector series of Ai's probing body of work, will preview at the Reserve's annual summer benefit, **WHITE NIGHT**, on July 20<sup>th</sup>.

"He is the true contrarian, in my view," says contemporary art collector Uli Sigg of provocative Chinese artist and political activist, **Ai Weiwei**. "He will always go one-hundred-and-eighty degrees against the mainstream." Indeed, the public has come to expect the extreme from the prolific artist and dissident. Aside from the astounding success of works like *Sunflower Seeds* (2010) and his collaboration on the "Bird's Nest" Beijing Olympic Stadium design, Ai Weiwei is known for his risky run-ins with the Chinese Communist Party. While his open criticism of the Chinese government and their stance on democracy and human rights has resulted in censorship, brutal confrontations with the state (including 81 days of secret house arrest), and his present inability to leave the country, Ai Weiwei continues to communicate his message of free speech and inquisitive, active citizenship through his work and his use of social media as an artistic and political medium. "I call on people to be 'obsessed citizens,'" Ai says, "forever questioning and asking for accountability. That's the only chance we have today of a healthy and happy life."



Chinese contemporary artist and political dissident Ai Weiwei with the Rooster Head mold of his *Zodiac Heads: Bronze* collection

***Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads: Gold*** is a prime example of Ai's appeal to the critical eye. The exhibit explores questions of historical truth and authenticity—the fraught distinction between the 'real' and the 'fake'—as they relate to matters, or in this case, physical *materials*, of national myth. Ai's body of work is a reinterpretation of the twelve animals of the traditional Chinese zodiac and the legendary bronze zodiac head statues that surrounded the fountain-clock at Emperor Qianlong's Yuanming Yuan imperial retreat in Beijing. The original statues were designed in the eighteenth century by Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione for the retreat's European-style gardens, but were later pillaged by French and British troops. While seven of the original sculptures have been recovered, five remain missing. As Chinese collectors seek to reunite all twelve statues and ownership remains an issue of international dispute, the figures have become a matter of great national significance and sensitivity.

As always, Ai Weiwei asks his spectators to question. With his attempt to decompose a national myth, Weiwei probes at notions of ownership and national treasure. "It has nothing to do with national treasurer," Ai says. "It was designed by an Italian and made by a Frenchman for a Qing dynasty emperor, which actually is somebody who invaded China." "If we talk about 'national treasurer,'" he asks, "which nation do we talk about?" To Ai, the framing of the original zodiac heads as an issue of repatriation is but another case of the Chinese Communists' uninformed positions. "They're not clear on what is most important in the so-called traditional classics," he says. "The zodiac is a perfect example to show their ignorance on this matter."

Ai's ***Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads*** was created in two series: the Zodiac Heads: Bronze and the Zodiac Heads: Gold. The bronze works are each approximately ten-feet high and are predominantly exhibited in public, outdoor spaces. In this respect, they fulfill Ai's characteristic mission of "democratizing public space." The bronze collection was first seen at the 29<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennale, Brazil in 2010 and later launched at the historic Pulitzer Fountain at the Grand Army Plaza in New York City in 2011. It has traveled the world with appearances at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C., the Somerset House in London, and The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, among other venues. The bronze series is presently in residence at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University. The gold works, which are the set to appear at LongHouse Reserve, are a 'collector' series of gilded bronze zodiac heads plated with gold patina, each 20 to 30 inches tall and meant for indoor exhibition. Each of these twelve gilded, 130-pound sculptures is displayed on handmade *huali* wood pedestals custom-crafted by Ai Weiwei.

***Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads: Gold*** is a collaborative project between **Ai Weiwei**, his studio, and **AW Asia**—a private art organization and exhibition space located in the heart of the NYC Chelsea art district. The installation, which is a spectacular display of the artistic and political aesthetic of contemporary Chinese artist and activist **Ai Weiwei**, will preview on the evening of July 20<sup>th</sup> at LongHouse Reserve's annual summer gala benefit, WHITE NIGHT, and open on August 2<sup>nd</sup> with a stunning concert celebration by the accomplished and famously inventive **Voxare**

## ALISON MAZZOLA COMMUNICATIONS

**String Quartet.** The exhibit will remain open to the public from August 2 — October 12 at **LongHouse Reserve**.

**August exhibit hours:** 2:00 – 5:00PM, Wednesday through Saturday

**September & October exhibit hours:** 2:00 – 5:00PM Wednesday and Saturday only.



The complete series of Ai Weiwei's *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads: Gold*. The collection includes all twelve animals of the traditional Chinese zodiac: snake, ox, dragon (the one mythical creature), dog, monkey, ram, tiger, horse, rat, rabbit, pig, and rooster.

### **About LongHouse Reserve**

**LongHouse Reserve** is a not-for-profit organization with close-to-16 beautiful acres in East Hampton, New York. Through its art collections, arboretum, sculpture gardens, and educational programs, **LongHouse Reserve** brings together art and nature, aesthetics and spirit, with the strong conviction that living with art in all its forms is central to living fully and living creatively. It seeks to expand the imaginations of all its visitors, no matter what age or level of appreciation. Each year the **LongHouse Reserve** presents major exhibitions in the pavilion and the gardens. Currently, there are more than 60 sculptures for the gardens including works of glass by **Dale Chihuly**, ceramics by **Toshiko Takaezu**, and bronzes by **Miquel Barcelò**, **Peter Voulkos**, **Lynda Benglis** and **Willem de Kooning**. Works by **Alfonso Ossorio**, **Claus Bury**, **Yoko Ono**, **Pavel Opcensky**, and **Takashi Soga** are also on view, while the installation of a "Fly's Eye Dome"

**ALISON MAZZOLA COMMUNICATIONS**

designed by **Buckminster Fuller** and a site-specific **Sol Lewitt** piece add interesting scale and dimension.

###

For additional information please contact  
Alison Mazzola at Alison Mazzola Communications  
[amazzola@mazzpr.com](mailto:amazzola@mazzpr.com) or 212.755.2100