

[Art&Seek](#)

Arts, Music, Culture for North Texas

September 16, 2013

A SERVICE OF [KERA](#)

## news and features

---

### [\*\*Ai Weiwei's Art Comes to Dallas – In One Of Three New Shows At The Crow\*\*](#)

[Jerome Weeks](#) | September 13, 2013 8:32 AM



**Ai Weiwei inspecting his *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads***

[The Crow Collection of Asian Art](#) is the smallest museum in the Arts District. But this weekend, the Crow will be bustling – opening three different shows. KERA’s Jerome Weeks reports at least one show will be sure to capture attention.

Seen together, the three new shows at the Crow Collection set out to display the museum’s range and flexibility. The little jewel of the Arts District is not all Ming vases and Japanese jades, y’know — especially with the [new sculpture garden on the way](#).

True, one of the shows is more traditional — but it expands the Crow’s cultural/geographic reach. The late Jerry Lee Musselwhite was a long-time docent at the Crow and a collector of Korean art. The museum acquired some 80 pieces — of the thousands Musselwhite owned — and is exhibiting 53 of them, mostly ceramics and furniture.



But the show that people will ooh over is by [Ai Weiwei](#), China’s most famous artist-activist. He’s as known for his house arrests (having angered the Chinese government on occasion) as for his design work on the so-called Bird’s Nest stadium at the Beijing Summer Olympics. One of Weiwei’s models — since his days in New York — has been Andy Warhol, and he certainly matches Warhol in prolific output and variety in everything from conceptual art and paintings to music albums, photography and architecture.

The Crow exhibition is the first time Weiwei’s work’s been shown in Dallas. *Circle of Heads* features twelve gold heads from the symbols of the Chinese zodiac: dragon, dog, snake and so on. The Crow exhibition does not include the original, mammoth bronze heads that Weiwei unveiled in 2010. These are the smaller — but still substantial — bronze versions with a shiny gold patina; they’ve been touring everywhere.

It’s easy to see why: They gleam and they charm. They deliberately mix Chinese and Western characteristics, hence, their friendly-looking qualities. The dragon (left) is the most amazingly elaborate, but others — like

the snake with its polished, faceted dome — have their own exceptional details.

I've made lost-wax bronzes, and I can say that one of the hardest, small-scale, ordinary-technical things to do is to remove all trace of the 'feeder lines' that let the hot, liquid metal flow into and fill out the figure, like cake batter poured into a mold. These lines are placed around the sculpture so there will be no gaps, no bubbles. Once the bronze is cast, the feeder lines are sawed off and filed down. But it's extremely hard to remove all trace of them. Look closely at some of the finest bronzes ever made, no matter how glossy — sculptures by Rodin and Brancusi, for example — and you can still find the telltale scars, little pockmarked circles or tiny burst bubbles. It's a mark of the craftsmanship here: The marks (and the failures of the bronze to fill out the form) are very hard to find (the easiest to spot is on the neck of the rat, for example — it's even visible on the image upfront). But in several cases, they're darn-near impossible. For all their ability to convey the mobility of fur, feathers, eyes and muscles, these bronzes have a hard, gem-like perfection.

But they also recall a historic disaster, an act of pillage. In 1860 during the Second Opium War, the British looted a Chinese emperor's famously elaborate garden clock, designed in the 18th century by the Italian Jesuit priest, Giuseppe Castiglione. It had zodiac-animal sculptures as fountains (they spouted water on different hours). Only seven of the original dozen have ever been recovered. So Weiwei's pretty, seemingly playful sculpture disguises an act of repatriation, an act of historic recovery. It's witty, defiant, commemorative, take your pick.

Karin Oen is a curator and the Crow's newly-appointed director of education. She says this is typical of Weiwei's art. It often has a bright, pop culture charm. "But when you start to dig deeper," she says, "it becomes part of his genuine appeal to consider large issues, issues of national identity, issues of human rights."



The third show is also noteworthy: It's the Crow's first collaboration with, of all things ... contemporary dance. [TITAS](#), the dance and music presenter, is bringing [Jessica Lang Dance](#) to the Winspear Opera House Saturday. One of Lang's dance works, *i.n.k.*, was inspired by the work of Japanese artist [Shinichi Maruyama](#). His title, KUSHO, basically conflates the Japanese words for "sky" and "lettering," so it means "writing in air," more or less. In *i.n.k.*, Lang's dancers interact with slow-motion videos of Maruyama at work, splashing ink with huge brushes. The Crow exhibition displays Maruyama's high-speed photos of the same — they're like mid-air calligraphy.

Oen describes the photographs as "capturing that millisecond when the liquids have collided, and then they're blown up to a majestic scale" so we can appreciate the swirling, curving forms that the human eye normally can't see.