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AGO unveils monumental bronze sculpture series by artist Ai Weiwei in Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square

Majestic 50,000 pound sculpture installation adorns Toronto City Hall's reflecting pool in advance of AGO summer exhibition, Ai Weiwei: According to What?

TORONTO, June 18, 2013 /CNW/ - The **Art Gallery of Ontario** (AGO) unveiled Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei's monumental sculpture series **Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads: Bronze** in the reflecting pool of Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square today. The installation precedes the AGO's summer exhibition **[Ai Weiwei: According to What?](#)**, opening on **Aug. 17, 2013**. Toronto is the only Canadian stop on the exhibition's North American tour.

Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads is a collection of 12 spectacular bronze animal heads representing the traditional figures of the Chinese Zodiac. The installation, made possible in part by the City of Toronto which generously allowed the use of the popular reflecting pool outside City Hall, is on display until Sept. 22, 2013.

Ai, who is under constant surveillance and has been unable to leave China since the government confiscated his passport in 2011, is supportive of the AGO's initiative to share his works publicly. As a political activist and champion of freedom of expression, Ai has been publicly critical of the Chinese government's record of human rights violations.

"*Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* is an incredible piece of public sculpture and a living testament to Ai Weiwei's belief that art is for everyone," said **Matthew Teitelbaum**, director and CEO of the AGO. "By installing this monumental art work in Nathan Phillips Square, we are offering Torontonians a chance to preview Ai's prodigious talent, and proclaiming to visitors that our city is a place with an insatiable appetite for art and culture. I'd like to extend my most sincere thanks to the City of Toronto and City Council for making this extraordinary opportunity possible." **Larry Warsh**, a friend of the artist and organizer of the *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads: Bronze world tour* added, "Ai Weiwei is pleased to see that the Canadian people embrace the democratic spirit behind his work."

The heads are installed in order according to the Chinese zodiac: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig. Standing 10 feet high, each sculpture ranges in weight from 1,500 to 2,100 pounds and is supported by a marble base weighing 600 to 1,000 pounds. The sculptures' combined weight of over 46,000 pounds required consultation from a structural engineer for installation in the reflecting pool. The *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* have been previously exhibited in London, Los Angeles, New York, Sao Paulo, Taipei and Washington D.C. among other cities.

"The City of Toronto is pleased and proud to partner with the AGO to install this important work by such an influential artist," said **Mayor Rob Ford**. "This sculpture series is not just visually powerful, but it is also a great example of public art, as it can easily be appreciated by people of all ages and backgrounds. Staging this work under Nathan Phillips Square's Freedom Arches also shows that the City of Toronto is deeply committed to supporting and protecting artistic expression and the right to free speech for all."

AGO extends invitation to Chinese-speaking Torontonians

The installation of these sculptures is one of a number of initiatives the AGO is undertaking this summer to draw attention to Ai's remarkable work. Directed by Toronto artist **Gein Wong**, the Gallery invites Torontonians who speak a Chinese dialect to participate in *Say Their Names, Remember*, a live reading of the names of the thousands of schoolchildren who perished in the devastating earthquake in China's Sichuan province on May 12, 2008. This initiative was inspired by Ai's powerful art works *Remembrance* (2010) and *Names of the Student Earthquake Victims Found by the Citizens' Investigation* (2008-11). Volunteers who wish to participate in a reading of the names on **Aug. 18, 2013** can register at www.ago.net/aiweiwei-names.

Nathan Phillips Square will host another Ai Weiwei work this fall through **Scotiabank Nuit Blanche** with the installation of a new edition of Ai's *Forever Bicycles* (2013)—a sculpture of more than 1,000 bicycles—as part of this year's

Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) | AGO unveils monumental bronze sculpture series by artist Ai Weiwei in Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square celebrations on Oct. 5, 2013. Further details will be announced by the City of Toronto later this summer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ai Weiwei: According to What? was organized by the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo and the Art Gallery of Ontario. It was curated by the Mori Art Museum's chief curator, Mami Kataoka.

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The installation of *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* was made possible in part by the AW Asia, New York.

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