

## 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—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](http://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 celebrations on Oct. 5, 2013. Further details will be announced by the City of Toronto later this summer.

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### **ABOUT CIRCLE OF ANIMALS/ZODIAC HEADS**

Crafted in China, Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads recreates a series of sculptures designed in the 18th century by Italian artist Giuseppe Castiglione, which once adorned the famed fountain-clock of the Yuanming Yuan (Garden of Perfect Brightness), an imperial retreat outside Beijing. In 1860 the original zodiac sculptures were pillaged by invading French and British soldiers during the Second Opium War and only seven are known to still exist; five have been repatriated to China, but ownership of two remains contested. In re-interpreting the original zodiac sculptures on an oversized scale, Ai focuses attention on questions of looting and repatriation, while extending his ongoing exploration of the 'fake' and the copy in relation to the original. The dual title alludes to the two ways viewers can understand the work—as a literal menagerie and as a traditional Chinese cycle.

### **ABOUT AI WEIWEI: ACCORDING TO WHAT?**

Organized by the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, *Ai Weiwei: According to What?* arrives at the AGO for its only Canadian appearance following a successful run at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington D.C. and at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. Featuring large-scale sculptures, photography, installations, video and audio work, Ai's art draws on both western consumerism and traditional Chinese symbols and objects. With humour and wit alongside solemn expression, the exhibition chronicles the artist's work from the mid-1990s to the present and makes visible the often fragile links that bind individuals to history, art and each other. Following its run at the AGO, *Ai Weiwei: According to What?* will be presented at Pérez Art Museum Miami.

### **ABOUT AI WEIWEI**

Ai Weiwei (b. 1957, Beijing) has been the recipient of numerous grants, honours and awards, most recently in 2012 the inaugural Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent of the Human Rights Foundation; the International Center of Photography Cornell Capa Award; an honorary fellowship from the Royal Institute of British Architects; an Honourary Degree from Pratt Institute; and a foreign membership in the Royal Swedish Academy of Arts. Other honours over

the past five years include a Chinese Contemporary Art Award for Lifetime Achievement; an International Architecture Award for Tsai Residence; Das Glas der Vernunft (The Prism of Reason), Kassel Citizen Award; The Bianca Jagger Human Rights Foundation Award for Courage; the Skowhegan Medal for Multidisciplinary Art; Wallpaper Design Award Best New Private House for Tsai Residence; and a Wall Street Journal Innovators Award (Art). Ai Weiwei is consistently included in top artist and human rights lists, including GQ Men of the Year in 2009 (Germany); the Art Review Power 100, rank 43 in 2009; the Art Review Power 100, rank 13 in 2010; the Art Review Power 100, rank one in 2011; Foreign Policy Top Global Thinkers of 2011, rank 18; and runner up in Time's Person of the Year in 2011. Ai Weiwei helped establish Beijing East Village in 1993, co-founded the China Art Archives & Warehouse in 1997 and founded the architecture studio FAKE Design in 2003. He studied at the Beijing Film Academy, Parsons School of Design and Art Students League of New York; upon returning to China he collaborated with Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron as the artistic consultant on the Beijing National Stadium for the 2008 Olympic Games.

## 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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## ABOUT THE AGO

With a collection of more than 80,000 works of art, the [Art Gallery of Ontario](http://www.ago.net) is among the most distinguished art museums in North America. From the vast body of Group of Seven and signature Canadian works to the African art gallery, from the cutting-edge contemporary art to Peter Paul Rubens' masterpiece *The Massacre of The Innocents*, the AGO offers an incredible art experience with each visit. In 2002 Kenneth Thomson's generous gift of 2,000 remarkable works of Canadian and European art inspired Transformation AGO, an innovative architectural expansion by world-renowned architect Frank Gehry that in 2008 resulted in one of the most critically acclaimed architectural achievements in North America. Highlights include Galleria Italia, a gleaming showcase of wood and glass running the length of an entire city block, and the often-photographed spiral staircase, beckoning visitors to explore. The AGO has an active membership program offering great value, and the AGO's Weston Family Learning Centre offers engaging art and creative programs for children, families, youth and adults. Visit [ago.net](http://ago.net) to find out more about

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upcoming special exhibitions, to learn about eating and shopping at the AGO, to register for programs and to buy tickets or memberships.

Aug. 17, 2013 – Oct. 27, 2013: [Ai Weiwei: According to What?](#)

Sept. 25, 2013 – Nov. 27, 2013: [David Bowie is](#)

Nov. 30, 2013 – March 2, 2014: [The Great Upheaval: Modern Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Collection](#)

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