

Ai Weiwei's first outdoor public sculpture in London



'Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads' by Chinese artist [Ai Weiwei](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ai_Weiwei) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ai_Weiwei) will be the first contemporary sculpture to go on display in the historic courtyard of Somerset House. The first European venue of this international touring exhibition, 'Circle of Animals' at Somerset House will also be the first major public outdoor sculpture installation by the artist in London.

The installation will comprise 12 monumental bronze animal heads, re-creations of the traditional Chinese zodiac sculptures which once adorned the fountain-clock of [Yuanming Yuan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuanming_Yuan) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuanming_Yuan), an 18th-century imperial retreat just outside Beijing. The heads will be installed in an arc around Somerset House's Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court in a close recreation of how they were originally displayed at Yuanming Yuan.

Designed in the 18th century by two European Jesuits at the behest of the Manchu [Emperor Qianlong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qianlong_Emperor) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qianlong_Emperor), the fountain-clock of the Yuanming Yuan featured the animals of the Chinese zodiac, each spouting water at two-hour intervals. In 1860, the Yuanming Yuan was ransacked by French and British troops, and the heads were pillaged. Today, seven heads – the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, horse, monkey and boar – have been located; the whereabouts of the other five are unknown. In re- interpreting these objects on an oversized scale, Ai Weiwei 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 12 heads are cast bronze and positioned on bronze bases. Each head weighs approximately 800 pounds and measures approximately 4 feet high and 3 feet wide. The head and base together are approximately 10 feet high.

"My work is always dealing with real or fake, authenticity and value and how value relates to current political and social understandings and misunderstandings," said Ai Weiwei. "However, because Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads is composed of animal heads, it's a work that everyone can understand, including children and people who are not in the art world. I think it's more important to show your work to the public. That's what I really care about."

'Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads' by Ai Weiwei will be on view at Somerset House in London from 12 May to 26 June 2011.

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