

July 8th, 2011

## Ai Weiwei's "Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads"

One of the most important figures in the Chinese world of contemporary art is the artist and architect Ai Weiwei. Ai is also a political activist who speaks openly about the Chinese Government's stance on democracy and human rights. In fact, this past April, Ai was arrested in Beijing and was held for more than two months without any official charges made. I was very happy to hear of his recent release and to learn that he is working on his art again. I have always admired Ai's art and had the great honor of visiting his phenomenal studio when I traveled to Beijing in 2007.

On Wednesday of this week, I stopped by Central Park in Manhattan to view an outdoor exhibit of Mr. Ai's called "Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads." "Circle of Animals" is a series of 12 heads of the creatures of the Chinese Zodiac, which also correspond to their calendar years. These heads, which Ai cast in bronze are enlarged versions of those that were designed by European Jesuits in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for the Manchu emperor Qianlong. They were part of a famous fountain clock in the Summer Palace and were looted when the British and French troops stormed the complex in 1860. Over the years, some of the heads resurfaced, but 5 may be lost forever. This exhibit is Ai Weiwei's interpretation of those famed zodiac heads. This impressive exhibition ends on July 15<sup>th</sup> and I urge anyone who is able to see it.



The Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads are displayed at the Pulitzer Fountain at the entrance to Central Park.