

LACMA FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EXHIBITION: AI WEIWEI: CIRCLE OF ANIMALS/ZODIAC HEADS
ON VIEW: AUGUST 20, 2011–FEBRUARY 12, 2012
LOCATION: OUTDOOR INSTALLATION, BP GRAND ENTRANCE

LACMA DISPLAYS FIRST MAJOR PUBLIC SCULPTURE BY ARTIST AI WEIWEI

LACMA'S PRESENTATION WILL BE ONLY WEST COAST VENUE ON THE WORK'S INTERNATIONAL TOUR



(IMAGE CAPTIONS ON PAGE 3)

(Los Angeles, August 9, 2011)—The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) will display the first major public sculpture by Chinese contemporary artist Ai Weiwei, titled *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads*. The installation will comprise twelve monumental bronze animal heads that are re-creations of the famous traditional zodiac sculptures that once adorned the fountain clock of Yuan Ming Yuan, the Old Summer Palace, located just outside Beijing. For LACMA's presentation, *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* will be on view outdoors just east of the museum's Lynda and Stewart Resnick Exhibition Pavilion.

Cast around 1750, the original animal heads were located at the Zodiac fountain in Yuan Ming Yuan's European-style gardens, which were designed by two European Jesuit priests in the eighteenth century. In 1860, British and French troops looted the heads amid the destruction of Yuan Ming Yuan during the Second Opium War. Today, seven heads—the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, horse, monkey, and boar—have been found; the location of the other five—dragon, snake, goat, rooster, and dog—are unknown. In reinterpreting these

objects on an oversized scale, Ai stimulates dialogue about the fate of artworks that exist within dynamic and sometimes volatile cultural and political settings, while extending his ongoing exploration of the "fake" and the copy in relation to the original. For *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads*, the twelve heads are cast bronze and positioned on bronze bases, with each head and base together standing approximately ten feet high. Each head weighs approximately 800 pounds and measures approximately four feet high and three feet wide.

Ai Weiwei is known for his engagement with Chinese history as a shifting site rather than a static body of knowledge. His adaptations of objects from the Chinese material canon going back to antiquity, such as furniture and ceramic objects, are known for their subversive wit, twisting traditional meanings toward new purposes often by destroying the artifact in its original, pure state. At LACMA, Ai's investigation of the historical object finds great resonance within the museum's encyclopedic collection, which includes Chinese art from the Neolithic to the Qing Dynasty period. Among the museum's collection are four jade zodiac animals, contemporaneous with the Yuan Ming Yuan gardens, which will be concurrently on view with *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* beginning in December 2011. Although of much smaller scale, each jade piece is in the shape of an animal head on top of a human body, just like those that originally adorned the Zodiac fountain.

Prior to LACMA's presentation, *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* debuted at the São Paulo Biennial, and then began its international tour, traveling to the Pulitzer Fountain at the Grand Army Plaza in Central Park, New York (May 2–July 15, 2011) and the Somerset House in London (May 11–June 26, 2011). Following its display at LACMA, the work will also be on view at Hermann Park, Houston, Texas (spring 2012); the Warhol Museum and Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (October 1–December 31, 2012); and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (fall 2012).

About Ai Weiwei

Ai Weiwei—artist, curator, architectural designer, and social activist—is perhaps the best-known and most successful contemporary artist in China. He was born in Beijing in 1957 and is the son of acclaimed poet Ai Qing, one of the country's finest modernist poets. Ai Qing's work appeared in

nearly every literature textbook until he was branded a rightist and exiled to the countryside. Ai Weiwei's birthright was simultaneously one of a cultural insider and a political outsider. Growing up in exile laid the groundwork for his future as a social activist and spokesperson for freedom of speech and against injustice.

Upon his return to Beijing in 1978, Ai Weiwei became an early member of The Stars (Xing Xing), one of the first avant-garde art groups in modern China. In 1981, he moved to New York where he gained attention for his artwork that was based on transforming everyday objects into conceptual works. Returning to China in 1993, the artist cofounded the Chinese Art Archive & Warehouse, a non-profit gallery in Beijing where he still serves as director. Earlier this year, Ai was released from a Chinese prison after a three-month detention, which was surrounded by waves of international attention; he has since returned to work on his numerous projects. Ai has exhibited in museums and galleries around the world and worked closely with Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron to design the 2008 National Olympic Stadium ("the Bird's Nest").

Credit

Support for this exhibition is provided by Phillips de Pury & Company and Honorable Vicki Reynolds Pepper and Murray Pepper. Official Global Art Logistics Partner: Crozier Fine Arts.

About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, LACMA has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography and represent Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today, the museum features particularly strong collections of Asian, Latin American, European, and American art, as well as a contemporary museum on its campus. With this expanded space for contemporary art, innovative collaborations with artists, and an ongoing *Transformation* project, LACMA is creating a truly modern lens through which to view its rich encyclopedic collection.

Location and Contact: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard (at Fairfax Avenue), Los Angeles, CA, 90036 | 323 857-6000 | lacma.org

Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday: noon-8 pm; Friday: noon-9 pm; Saturday, Sunday: 11 am-8 pm; closed Wednesday

General Admission: Adults: \$15; students 18+ with ID and senior citizens 62+: \$10

Free General Admission: Members; children 17 and under; after 5 pm weekdays for L.A. County residents; second Tuesday of every month; Target Free Holiday Mondays

Images (page 1)

(Left) Ai Weiwei reaching for the Dog Zodiac Head at the bronze foundry in Chengdu, China, photograph taken April 2010, © AW Asia.

(Center) View of Ai Weiwei's *Circle of Animals: Zodiac Heads* installation at the historic Pulitzer Fountain in New York City (May 2-July 15, 2011), Photograph by Adam Reich, © AW Asia.

(Right) Detail, View of Ai Weiwei's *Circle of Animals: Zodiac Heads* installation at the historic Pulitzer Fountain in New York City (May 2-July 15, 2011), Photograph by Adam Reich, © AW Asia.

Press Contact: For additional information and/or images of individual animal heads in *Circle of Animals: Zodiac Heads*, contact LACMA Communications at press@lacma.org or 323 857-6522.

#