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‘Ai Weiwei: Zodiac Heads/Circle of Animals: Gold’ at the MCASD (Downtown)

March 19, 2012 by [Alexandra Morales](#)



The work of Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei has long been the subject of examination, as he was detained a year ago by the Chinese government as part of a larger crackdown in China on people the government considered dissidents. Locally, this led to a sit-in at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD), Downtown, in protest of Weiwei’s detention.

Fast forward one year later to today, where Weiwei’s works have currently debuted at MCASD Downtown. The exhibition, *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads: Gold (2010)*, is a gallery-sized installation of twelve animal heads, each depicting a segment of the ancient Chinese zodiac. The works themselves reference European versions of the Chinese zodiac, originally designed by Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione.

The original sculptures were built for an elaborate water-clock fountain at the imperial summer home of Emperor Qianlong, just outside of Beijing. In 1860, the twelve zodiac heads were displaced during the Second Opium War and since, only seven have been recovered. Weiwei has continued his work of re-interpreting cultural objects from his own imaginings and historical records, choosing to revise all twelve zodiac heads. Consequently, his work comments on the tension between what is “fake,” what is a “copy” and what that means in the larger picture of art, culture and historical memory.

“Ai Weiwei: Zodiac Heads/Circle of Animals: Gold” is on view at Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego through Sunday, July 29, 2012.