
'ZODIAC HEADS' EXPLORE THE IDEA OF THEFT

MCASD presents sculptures by famed Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei

By [James Chute \(/staff/james-chute/\)](/staff/james-chute/) 12:01 A.M. MARCH 18, 2012 Updated 6:02 P.M. MARCH 16, 2012

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Ai Weiwei's "Zodiac Heads/Circle of Animals: Gold"

Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (downtown galleries, 1100 Kettner Blvd.) Through July 29. \$10 (25 and under free). (858) 454-3541 or mcasd.org (<http://mcasd.org>)



Ai Weiwei's "Zodiac Heads/Circle of Animals" has been installed at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego's downtown location. John Gastaldo • U-T

It's a little confusing. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art earlier this year showed Ai Weiwei's "Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads," portraying it as "the only West Coast venue on the work's international tour."

Now, the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego is showing Weiwei's "Zodiac Heads/Circle of Animals" in its "U.S. museum debut."



An example of the works at "Echoes of the Past." JOHN GASTALDO • U-T

Leave it to the esteemed Chinese artist, whose striking "Zodiac Heads" deal on one level with issues of theft and appropriation, to raise questions of veracity and exclusivity by creating multiple sets of heads: the large-scale set intended for outdoor exhibition, which was shown in Los Angeles and is on a world tour; and smaller-scale (but still larger than life) "gold" editions. One of the gold sets has been shown at New York's Paul Kasmin

Gallery, but never in a U.S. museum before San Diego.



MOPA--The Jazz Loft Project--
W. Eugene Smith, Thelonious
Monk and Town Hall Band in
rehearsal, c. 1957-1965.
Collection of the W. Eugene
Smith Archive. 82131002,
7/14/06, 2:30 PM, 8C,
4202x5920 (908+1272), 100%,
aa_8x10_1, 1/50 s, R81.6,
G69.1, B80.6

Ultimately, what matters is that the 12 heads are in San Diego for the next few months; don't miss the opportunity to see them.

Weiwei ranks as China's most famous living artist, even if he has paid for that fame with the destruction of his studio, constant harassment by the government, and for part of last year, imprisonment.

Weiwei's best-known work, beside his contribution to the design of Beijing National Stadium for the 2008 Olympics, is his "Sunflower Seeds." Originally comprising roughly 100 million porcelain seeds, individually hand-painted by Chinese workers, it was a sensation when installed at the Tate Modern in London in 2010 (not even the lead in the paint, which forced the exhibit to be roped off, dampened the enthusiasm).

Earlier this month, the Tate purchased a smaller version of the sculpture, containing roughly 8 million seeds, at an undisclosed price (another version of the work with 100,000 seeds sold at Sotheby's last year for \$559,394, or approximately \$5.60 a seed).

The "Zodiac Heads" are inspired by the 12 bronze heads created in the mid-18th century by two European Jesuit priests to adorn the fountain clock on the grounds of the Old Summer Palace outside Beijing. The palace was later looted, and only seven of the heads have been recovered.

Like virtually all of Weiwei's art, there's more going on with these striking pieces than first appears. But if you'd rather not think about appropriation, or whether that's a smile on the face of that rat, there's a chart located discreetly near the back of the gallery where you can find your own Chinese horoscope sign.

Weiwei, born in 1957, is a rooster.

"Echoes of the Past: The Buddhist Cave Temples of Xiangtangshan" and "Dyeing Elegance: Asian Modernism and the Art of Kuboku and Hisako Takaku"

San Diego Museum of Art, Balboa Park,

Through May 27. \$12. (619) 232-7931 or sdmart.org (<http://sdmart.org>)

Plan to spend some time with both of these exhibits. "Echoes of the Past" aims to return the Cave Temple artifacts to their original context through digital technology, and the touch screen and 3-D elements of the exhibit are nearly as fascinating as the monumental, sixth-century sculptures. "Dyeing Elegance" presents Kuboku and Hisako Takaku's exquisite work in its first U.S. exhibition.

PAGE:

1 (/news/2012/Mar/18/tp-zodiac-heads-explore-the-idea-of-theft/?
#article-copy)

2 (/news/2012/Mar/18/tp-zodiac-heads-explore-the-idea-of-theft/2/?