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**MAYOR BLOOMBERG DISCUSSES FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AT OPENING OF
CHINESE ARTIST AI WEIWEI'S HISTORIC OUTDOOR SCULPTURE EXHIBITION:
*CIRCLE OF ANIMALS/ZODIAC HEADS***

*Prominent Members of City's Arts and Cultural Community Join Mayor to Commemorate the
Exhibition and Speak the Words of Ai Weiwei, Who Remains in Detainment in China*

*First-Ever Public Art Exhibition at the Landmarked Pulitzer Fountain in Manhattan's Grand Army
Plaza – May 4 through July 15, 2011 – Kicks Off Five-City Outdoor Public Sculpture Installation*

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's Remarks As Prepared Follow:

“Good morning. It’s a bittersweet honor to welcome you all here to celebrate the opening of a remarkable piece of public art by one of the world’s most creative and courageous public citizens: Ai Weiwei. Ai Weiwei could not be here with us for the unveiling of his latest work, *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads*. He has been detained by the Chinese government, and the fact that we do not know where he is, or when he will be released, is very disturbing.

“Today, we stand in solidarity with the millions of people around the world who are hoping that Ai Weiwei is quickly and safely released. And we stand in solidarity with the billions of people who do not have the most fundamental of all human rights, the most cherished of all American values, and the most valuable of all New York City’s riches: free expression.

“Artists risk everything to create. They risk failure. They risk rejection. They risk public criticism. But artists like Ai Weiwei, who come from places that do not value and protect free speech, risk even more than that. His willingness to take those risks, and face the consequences, speaks not only to his courage, but also to the indomitable desire for freedom that is inside every human being.

“New York is a city that fully embodies that spirit and fiercely defends the right of all people to express themselves. Our city is a cacophony of voices – bustling, jarring, provocative. We are a marketplace of ideas, where all are welcome to debate, and argue, and even to agree. For more than 400 years, the best and brightest from around the globe have come here for that reason – and that includes Ai Weiwei.

“Ai Weiwei is one of the most talented, respected, and masterful artists of our time. We are honored to be presenting his work. And it is especially fitting that we are the first stop on his exhibition’s international schedule because of his special connection to our City. Ai Weiwei lived here for more than a decade and studied at Parsons School of Design. He is among the millions who have come to our City, drawn by the lamp of liberty that shines from our shores.

“That is the history of our City – and, if we are to remain the world’s greatest city, it must be our future. We became a City of Immigrants because we were a City of Promise and Possibility. And we remain a City of Promise and Possibility because we remain a City of Immigrants.

“The more a city embraces diversity and tolerates dissent, the stronger it becomes. And there is no place on earth that gives freer rein to more voices and viewpoints than New York City. Freedom is our competitive advantage. That is what attracts those with new ideas, big dreams, and fervent beliefs. And it is what makes New York - New York.

“We can never take that freedom for granted – never. And we can never stop defending that freedom from attack, whether at home or abroad.

“The defense of freedom existed here in New York City long before there was a First Amendment or even a United States of America. In 1735, a jury of 12 New Yorkers stood up for the right of German immigrant John Peter Zenger to publish articles that were critical of the British colonial government. After being imprisoned for almost a year in New York’s City Hall, Zenger was released, and the free press was born. Our City and our Nation were founded on the principle that every one of us has the right to say what we want, and worship as we wish and where we wish, without any interference from the government.

“The 12 distinguished members of our cultural community that you see here today are able to express themselves without the risks that Ai Weiwei has had to face. And the same can be said for the millions more artists, thinkers, writers, and every day New Yorkers who have come here to enjoy this most basic of human rights.

“We will continue to fight to protect them. We will continue to be the international stage on which all voices from all corners of the Earth can be heard. And I will continue to stand up – and speak out – when attacks on freedom of expression affect our great City.

“There is much to admire about China and the great Chinese people. Eight years ago Ai Weiwei helped design the most famous stadium since the Coliseum: Beijing’s Bird’s Nest. And like the Coliseum of old, the Bird’s Nest will echo through the centuries and come to symbolize the nation that created it. How that stadium is remembered will depend much on how its creator is treated today.

“Freedom’s march is not always straight but it is always forward. And right now in Beijing a young girl is staring at the Bird’s Nest, dreaming her own vision of tomorrow’s masterpiece. And tomorrow a young boy will look up at this exhibit behind us and will begin to create the next great work of art.

“Beauty and inspiration are irrepressible; they are alive in every human heart – in every nation – and wherever an artist creates Ai Weiwei is there. And today Ai Weiwei is here. Because even though he could not be here physically, he continues to speak to us, to delight us, and to challenge us through his art.

“*Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* is an extraordinary piece of work – set in an extraordinary location. It is the first piece of art to be incorporated into the landmark Pulitzer Fountain. The fountain itself is a symbol of the diversity that defines our City: it was donated by a Hungarian-born benefactor, fashioned by Austrian and Italian-born sculptors from the design of a New York-born architect. It is the perfect setting for a work of art by someone who considers himself both a citizen of the world – and a New Yorker.

“In its scale and accessibility, *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* follows in New York City’s proud tradition of presenting unforgettable public art that everyone can enjoy. Ai Weiwei believes that art should be for everyone – and we couldn’t agree more. Millions of people will see his work – which will be on display here through July 15th. And it will attract visitors from far and wide – as our cultural attractions across the City do.

“Our arts and cultural community helps drive and define our City’s spirit. And it also helps drive and define our economy, creating good jobs in all five boroughs. That’s why we’re so committed to investing in art and culture and why we’ve worked so hard to bring public art exhibits like this to life.”

Mayor Bloomberg delivered the remarks at the opening of *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads*, the first major public sculpture installation by celebrated contemporary Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. He was joined by First Deputy Mayor Patricia E. Harris, AW Asia Founder Larry Warsh, Cultural Affairs Commissioner Kate D. Levin, Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe, NYC & Company President and CEO George Fertitta, Central Park Conservancy President Douglas Blonsky and members of New York City’s arts and cultural community.

The exhibition – on view from May 4 to July 15, 2011 – is comprised of 12 monumental bronze animal heads positioned on marble bases in the lower two basins of the historic Pulitzer Fountain at Grand Army Plaza in Manhattan, marking the first time an art installation has been presented at the New York City landmark. Ai Weiwei was to attend the opening, but was detained in China on April 3rd and his whereabouts are unknown. Twelve New York arts and cultural leaders – one for each sculpture – read the words of Ai Weiwei at the opening ceremony to make the artist’s voice heard. The Mayor and other participants then turned on the waters of the fountain, marking the official opening of the exhibition.

“Public art provides a unique opportunity for all New Yorkers and visitors from around the world to share in an exciting, creative experience,” said First Deputy Mayor Harris. “Not only does it have the power to transform our cityscape, public art is an essential contributor to our City’s economic vitality. We’re especially honored to host Ai Weiwei’s *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads*, a world-class exhibition that builds on our City’s great tradition of extraordinary creativity.”

“While Ai Weiwei could not join us today, it is very important that he is heard through his voice, his art and his vision,” said Warsh. “He is a force of nature, and we need this energy, and we need it now. New York misses him and I hope he will be here soon to visit his *Circle of Animals*. Ai Weiwei loves this city and its people. He lived here for a decade in the 90s. Because of New York’s energy and amazing diversity, Weiwei told me that he considers New York to be a zodiac city. The installation of his zodiac heads here at the historic Pulitzer Fountain is the realization of his unique vision.”

Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads was inspired by the fabled fountain-clock of the Yuanming Yuan, an 18th-century imperial retreat just outside Beijing. Designed in the 18th century by two European Jesuits at the behest of the Manchu Emperor Qianlong, 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 location of the other five are unknown.

The 12 bronze Zodiac Heads stand on bronze columns atop marble bases arrayed in the lower two basins of the fountain. Each animal head weighs approximately 800 pounds and measures approximately 4 feet high and 3 feet wide. Each head and base together is approximately 10 feet high and weighs nearly 1,000 pounds. The exhibition is presented by the Chinese contemporary art organization AW Asia in cooperation with the City of New York, the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Central Park Conservancy.

The Ai Weiwei quotations read by representatives of New York City’s arts and cultural community were taken from Ai Weiwei’s voluminous writings and interviews, and covered the nature of art and creativity, New York City, and the importance of freedom of expression as a basic human right.

The representatives and the Ai Weiwei words they read were:

Tony Bechara, visual artist

“We must challenge our human intelligence. We have to be positive.”

Melissa Chiu, Asia Society

“In Chinese history we [see] all kinds of animal images repeatedly, and these designs come from three-dimensional forms, from drawings, from embroidery, and from woodcarvings, and it’s endless examples. So you just have to put your knowledge of those materials like the images and try to make something which can relate to the existing ones. But also you want to stretch the idea and to make it acceptable by today’s viewer.”

Tom Finkelppearl, Queens Museum of Art

“Cherishing your life ... and insisting on individual consciousness are the only true possibilities for existence. Throughout your life, these will be an unassailable, inexhaustible source of vitality.”

Susan Freedman, Public Art Fund

“New York is the first cosmopolitan city I’m familiar with. It’s not one kind of people, it’s people [from] everywhere, and a lot of minorities. So I think it’s a perfect place [for Circle of Animals]. It’s a zodiac city.”

Agnes Gund, philanthropist

"Because it's animal heads, I think it's something that everybody can have some understanding about, especially children and people who are not in the art world."

Bill T. Jones, choreographer

"Once you perceive a thing straightforwardly, with a clear mind and no obstacles, you will discover that your resources are inexhaustible. This is because your heart is connected to, and in harmony with, the order of the universe."

Yusef Komunyakaa, poet

"I think, being an artist, I can use language that can really be very symbolic, and also very direct. At the same time, you can pick up the issues that relate to everybody's feelings, and make them feel there is possibility there. In other professions, I think it's ... not practical, it's not possible. But art, I think it's a better way...because it can relate to anybody."

Kate D. Levin, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs

"For an artist to make a work as public art interests me because you are confronted with very complicated conditions. 'Public' in the real sense is not the museum public; it's for people passing by.... I think the public deserves the best. Before, only a pope or an emperor could see those kinds of things."

Brice Marden, visual artist

"Cherish your mind, stay away from ignorance."

Alexandra Munroe, Guggenheim Museum

"Without freedom of speech, there is no modern world, just a barbaric one."

Shirin Neshat, visual artist

"My work is always dealing with real or fake authenticity, and what's the value... It could be cultural, political, or social, and also it could be art – to put it in a circumstance to make people re-look at what we have done, its original position, to create new possibilities."

Julian Schnabel, visual artist and filmmaker

"I think all aesthetic judgments, all the aesthetic choices we are making, are moral choices. They cannot escape the moral dimension in the broader sense. It has to relate to the philosophical understanding of who are and how so-called 'art and culture' function in today's world."

“Public art contributes to our quality of life and our identity as the world's cultural capital, and New York City is committed to hosting work that intrigues and inspires residents and visitors alike,” said Cultural Affairs Commissioner Levin. “The installation of Ai Weiwei’s *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* is a wonderful opportunity for audiences to enjoy the work of this extraordinary artist, and we are thrilled to launch this international exhibition.”

“We are honored to welcome Ai Weiwei’s *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* to Central Park’s Grand Army Plaza, even as we are concerned about the artist’s recent arrest and imprisonment in China,” said Parks & Recreation Commissioner Adrian Benepe. “This installation is the latest in a more than 40-year tradition of the display of temporary public art in our parks. Ai

Weiwei joins an illustrious roster of artists from around the world and from down the block who have displayed their art in New York City's parks, including Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Olafur Eliasson, Tom Otterness, Ursula von Rydingsvard, and many others. The City is proud to encourage these displays as we work to curate the world's largest outdoor art museum."

"Central Park – a work of art in its own right – is the perfect green setting for Ai Weiwei's stunning sculpture," said Douglas Blonsky, President of the Central Park Conservancy and Central Park Administrator. "As the Park is in full bloom and welcoming millions of visitors in the spring and summer months, this piece of public art serves as yet another attraction and a reminder of how lucky we are to have the Park's 843 acres in the heart of Manhattan."

Ai Weiwei, an artist, curator, architectural designer and social activist, is one of the best-known and most successful contemporary artists in China. He has exhibited in museums and galleries around the world and is well known for headline making projects like his design of the 2008 National Olympic Stadium – "the Bird's Nest" – and, most recently, *Sunflower Seeds*, an exhibition in the Turbine Hall at London's Tate Modern Museum which consisted of 100 million hand-painted porcelain seeds.

The New York City exhibition launches a world tour of the art sculpture. Following its outdoor debut in New York City, the art sculpture will be displayed in cities around the world, including London (Somerset House, May 12 – June 26, 2011); Los Angeles (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, September 1, 2011 – February 15, 2012); Houston (Hermann Park, Winter/Spring 2012); Pittsburgh (Warhol Museum & Carnegie Museum of Art, October 1 – December 31, 2012); and Washington D.C. (Hirshorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Fall 2012).

Grand Army Plaza is one of the gateways to Central Park. When newspaper publisher Joseph Pulitzer died in 1911, he bequeathed \$50,000 "for the erection of a fountain like those in the Place de la Concorde, Paris, France." The resulting 22-foot-high ornamental Pulitzer Fountain in Grand Army Plaza was designed by sculptor Karl Bitter and architect Thomas Hastings and dedicated in 1916. It was developed as a site-specific project that complimented the nearby Sherman Monument, creating a well-designed composition for the plaza. The fountain is topped by the bronze allegorical figure Pomona, the goddess of abundance, who is seen holding a basket of fruit.

Accompanying *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads*, The Arsenal Gallery in Central Park will present an indoor photographic exhibition in collaboration with AW Asia entitled, *Full Circle: Ai Weiwei and the Emperor's Fountain* from May 2 through July 15, 2011. The exhibition looks behind the scenes at the complex history and concept behind the first major public sculpture in New York City by China's most celebrated contemporary artist, Ai Weiwei. The Arsenal Gallery is located on the third floor of the Arsenal, the NYC Parks & Recreation headquarters, in Central Park, on Fifth Avenue at 64th Street. Gallery hours are Monday through Friday, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, excluding holidays. Admission is free.

For more information about the *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* by Ai Weiwei, visit www.zodiacheads.com.

The Bloomberg Administration is committed to making art accessible and visible throughout the five boroughs. Since 2002, the City has hosted major temporary art installations, including

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *The Gates*, Olafur Eliasson's *The New York City Waterfalls*, and Paul Ramírez Jonas's *Key to the City*. Public art enhances neighborhoods, brings pride to residents, celebrates and encourages the arts, and supports the work of artists. Through the Department of Cultural Affairs' permanent art commissioning program, Percent for Art, the City has commissioned 256 projects for civic infrastructure. There are currently 82 permanent art commissions underway.

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