

## Circle of Life

CELEBRATED CHINESE dissident-artist Ai Weiwei has shown his 2011 series *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* at some 40 international venues, but it has never been exhibited in New England. This spring, *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads: Bronze* (there is also a smaller version made in gold) went on view at the Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland, Maine, marking its debut in the region and the first time any work of Ai's has been shown in Maine. The series will be on view through December 30.

The series features 12 gilded bronze heads, each one representing the animals of the Chinese zodiac: the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig. The heads are modeled after those on the zodiac water-clock in the "Gardens of Perfect Brightness" (or Yuan Ming Yuan) in the Beijing Summer Palace that were made by Jesuits during the Qing dynasty. During the Second Opium War, British and French troops destroyed it, looting the clock's bronze zodiac heads in the process. Ai's work brings up issues of cultural repatriation as well as China's history of copying or creating "fakes."

The series was Ai's first large-scale work of public art. It is also significant because Chinese authorities detained him on April 3, 2011, a month before this work was first exhibited in New York. He was held for 81 days without communication and was subsequently placed under house arrest in Beijing until July 2015. His detainment incited a massive international protest that saw museums, artists, and activists banding together on Ai's behalf.



## From Ashcan to Taos

THROUGH JUNE 29, paintings and works on paper by Taos modernist Louis Ribak will be on view at Rosenberg & Co. in New York. Ribak is well known in the Southwest but until this exhibition had not received his full measure of recognition in New York,



the city he started out from. He arrived there as a child in 1912, fleeing with his Jewish family from Czarist Russia, and put himself through art school at the Art Students League and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Ribak's early work, from the 1920s and '30s, was social realist, depicting boxers, miners, and victims of fascism; as

an artist and a political activist, he was a champion of the working class.

In the 1940s, Ribak and his wife, the artist Beatrice Mandelman, tired of the infighting of the New York art world and decided to seek a more peaceful life in New Mexico. There, like so many artists before them, they were entranced by the landscape and the Native American cultures. The effect of these on Ribak was to move him toward abstraction rather than figurative representation of the New Mexico scene. His abstract landscapes, which revel in bright colors, are distinguished by a vertical format that flattens space and makes



the elements to float in space. Later, he experimented with a calligraphic style using the Japanese *sumi-e* technique. Ribak insisted that his abstraction never completely parted company with representation and was proud to call himself a realist. In 1947 he opened the Taos Valley Art School, where he refused to impose any doctrine on his students. "I'm not truly for anything," he said. "I'm against everything."