

# World-Renowned Spanish Artist Jaume Plensa Uses The Body And Letters As His Trademark



**Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle** Contributor   
Watches & Jewelry

[Jaume Plensa](#) is best known for his oversized human figure sculptures – heads or entire bodies sprouting from the ground – made of cast iron, bronze, stainless steel, marble, alabaster, glass, wood, cement, dolomite, fiberglass or polyester resin and weighing many tonnes each. Powerful and silent, they display serene facial expressions with their eyes closed, as if dreaming or meditating. It is a call to look inward to understand the beauty hidden inside oneself for a more honest relationship with oneself. The 64-year-old Barcelona-based artist places utmost importance on the interaction between the audience and his work. By introducing art into the public sphere, he transforms the space and enriches a community with beauty by bringing art to all and not just to the elite.



Wonderland, painted stainless steel, 480 inches in height, in front of the Bow Building, Calgary, Alberta, Canada PHOTO COURTESY OF GALERIE LE LONG

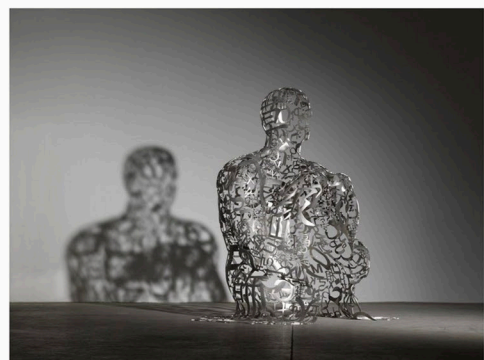
The idea is to use ordinary people in pieces of monumental public art. Plensa's models are real people – often young girls – whose likenesses he captures using a laser scanner, before he manipulates, elongates and flattens the image using 3-D computer modeling software. The heads are stretched, like an optical illusion, as if you were looking at them from an angle. Rather than a straightforward portrait, he plays with proportions, giving a sense of spirituality to the faces, as he examines the relationship between body and soul.



Laura, marble, lead and stainless steel, 20 x 6 x 8 feet, in front of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York PHOTO COURTESY OF GALERIE LE LONG

Plensa repeatedly uses lexical elements in his work, where he sometimes incorporates letters and words; other times, entire quotations from classic literature by poets like Shakespeare or William Blake. “Art many times is just a beautiful excuse to transform the way that you look at the reality around you, and it’s also the idea of communication, building bridges, putting people in touch with one another,” says Plensa.

“All these elements are so important in my work. That’s probably the reason why I choose alphabets for my projects. These alphabets from different cultures, all working together, create an amazing and dynamic effect of beauty. That’s a very positive message to the world: how well we are when we are together. Obviously, I’m not able to speak many of the languages, but I love Japanese and Chinese. When I’m there, I listen and watch the way they write their own words. An alphabet is probably the best portrait of one culture, and to put all these alphabets together is a beautiful metaphor for our world today.”



A stainless steel sculpture two meters tall and weighing 145 kg, whose contours are formed from the signs and letters of eight different languages – Latin, Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Hindi – that have been laser-cut then assembled by hand, where each alphabet celebrates one culture and their combination global unity PHOTO COURTESY OF RUINART



## Q&A with Jaume Plensa

### How did you develop your artistic language around words?

If we have something different from animals, it's our capacity to talk and communicate. I love music and, for me, words are like music. The instrument is our body and we are permanently playing this music, which is our conversation. The capacity to spread words in space fills everything with energy. I love this invisible energy surrounding us, creating amazing clouds that embrace us like in a dream.

### From where did the idea to elongate faces stem?

Years ago, I did a big video project in Chicago, *The Crown Fountain*, where I filmed 1,000 faces of people living there. During that period, I stretched faces to get exactly the proportions that I wanted. The elongation of my heads today is in exactly the same proportions that I had done in video in Chicago, but in marble or alabaster. I love this kind of elongation because it gives a certain spirituality to the person. It loses materiality in some ways; it's much lighter. It loses weight in an essential way.



Spanish artist Jaume Plensa PHOTO COURTESY OF RUINART

### Describe your creative process.

The main material in my work are ideas. To verify if those ideas are right, I use materials as a vehicle to transport them. I have a great team of 14 in my Barcelona studio, but I also work with a network of workshops in the places that have the expertise or with technicians

who are highly skilled in different materials like metal, marble and alabaster. I blow glass in Murano, white marble is from southern Spain, alabaster is near Saragossa. I work a lot in public spaces, and often the production of these pieces is in different places around the world, which is great because I can learn different attitudes and ways of working. I sketch, but since *The Crown Fountain*, I use the computer because I need to manipulate the shape of the head and also the 3-D mesh that I generate when scanning a person's head. I then spend time transforming the images into something physical that people can touch. I was born in the Mediterranean, which means that I need to touch everything, to caress my objects and to touch my dreams. My fingers are my eyes.



Looking Into My Dreams, Awilda, fiberglass with marble dust, 39.4 x 14.3 x 11.5 feet, at the Pérez Art Museum Miami, Florida, in 2016 PHOTO COURTESY OF GALERIE LELONG

### What are your future projects?

That's always the obsession in my studio. When you finish a piece, you're forgetting about it and starting to think about the next. I still have a lot more to do with the portraits, but more and more, I'm working on the interior of the body – the blood stream, organs and systems – because our body is not just a container. It's something in movement.



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