

GRAY

875 N Michigan Ave, Ste 3800
Chicago, IL 60611
+1 312 642 8877

1018 Madison Ave, 2nd Fl
New York, NY 10075
+1 212 472 8787

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Jaume Plensa
Utopia, 2021

Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids, Michigan

richardgraygallery.com

WED, NOV 24, 2021 – GRAY announces the unveiling of *Utopia*, Jaume Plensa’s latest major sculpture, commissioned by Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park. The dedication ceremony and public opening of *Utopia* will be held on Tuesday, November 30, 2021.

Defining the perimeter of a vast interior space in the institution’s new Welcome Center designed by Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, Plensa’s *Utopia* is comprised of four 20-by-90-foot carved marble portraits depicting the faces of *Marianna*, *Julia*, *Laura*, and *Wilsis*. Each of *Utopia*’s floor-to-ceiling portraits utilizes the human form to symbolize the capacity for a shared humanity. The monumental installation is crafted from white marble, a material chosen by the artist both to harmonize with the architecture and for its nuanced reactions to light and shadow. In the words of the artist, “*Utopia* is our human landscape, a space to embrace humanity and our collective dreams.”

Partner in *Utopia*, GRAY gallery began its decades-long relationship with Jaume Plensa in the early 1990s. “The concept of ‘utopia’ has perhaps consumed mankind forever, but certainly since long before the word was apparently coined by the humanist philosopher Sir Thomas More in 1516,” noted Paul Gray, Principal at GRAY. “I think that what is experienced in the Pavilion at Meijer, through the imagination and labor of Jaume Plensa, whose sculpture is embraced by an almost dreamlike space created by Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects | Partners, takes this search meaningfully closer. And that is truly something, as your heart tells you immediately when you experience it.”

Utopia is Plensa’s second site-specific commission for the Meijer: In 2006, while planning their extensive career survey for the artist, the Meijer commissioned the work, *I, you, she, he...*, for permanent display in their sculpture park. *Utopia* joins one of the largest collections of outdoor sculpture in the world, joining major works by artists such as Auguste Rodin and Henry Moore, Alexander Calder and Jim Dine, Yinka Shonibare and Jonathan Borofsky.

“The Welcome Center brings together world-class, cutting-edge architecture by celebrated architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien and sculpture by leading artists of our time,” stated David Hooker, President & CEO at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park. “Inside and outside the building, guests will experience the works of Tony Cragg, Jaume Plensa, Yinka Shonibare, Marshall Fredericks, Alexander Calder, George Segal,

and El Anatsui. We are sincerely grateful for the extraordinarily generous support of the Meijer family and so many others in creating a cultural institution that has served over 11 million people.”

“From our very first visit, it was clear that Fred and Lena Meijer have given Grand Rapids an extraordinary gift,” commented the architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien. “Our design approach has evolved to be one of horizontal buildings and walls, forming a calm and unifying frame so that sculpture and the gardens move to the forefront. This design philosophy is clearly expressed in the [Welcome Center], a space that holds Jaume Plensa’s *Utopia*, our belief in the harmony and unity of place and of humankind.”

ABOUT JAUME PLENSA

Born in Barcelona where he currently lives and works, Jaume Plensa (b. 1955) is one of the world’s foremost sculptors in the public realm with celebrated projects spanning the globe in such cities as Calgary, Chicago, San Diego, Montréal, Los Angeles, London, Dubai, Bangkok, Shanghai, and Tokyo. Recent sculptures include *Water’s Soul* on the Hudson River waterfront in Jersey City, New Jersey; *Laura* in Century City, Los Angeles, California; *Dreaming* in Toronto; and *Voices* permanently installed at 30 Hudson Yards in New York City. In the last thirty-five years, Plensa has produced a multifaceted body of work that speaks to the capacity and beauty of humanity, bringing people together through the activation of public spaces. Conventional sculptural materials like glass, steel, and bronze blend with unconventional media such as water, light, and sound to create hybrid works of intricate energy, psychological weight, and symbolic richness. Exploring material and conceptual juxtapositions—interior and exterior, light and dark, earth and sky—Plensa’s practice ranges from intimate works on paper to monumental public projects, including the iconic *Crown Fountain*, 2000-2005, a modern-day agora amidst the urban landscape of Chicago; and *Echo*, 2011, at the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle. Plensa is the recipient of numerous awards including honorary doctorates from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2005 and Universitat Aut’onoma de Barcelona in 2018, and the 2013 Velazquez Prize awarded by the Spanish Cultural Ministry. Solo museum exhibitions include those at MACBA: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Spain; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain; MAMC—Musée d’art moderne et contemporain Saint-Étienne Métropole, Saint-Étienne, France; Max Ernst Museum Brühl des LVR, Brühl, Germany; The Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio; Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Yorkshire, England; and Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas.

ABOUT GRAY

GRAY gallery held its first exhibition for Jaume Plensa in 1994. In addition to *Utopia*, 2021, GRAY has facilitated numerous gallery and museum exhibitions for the artist, as well as private and public commissions across the globe, including Plensa's recent installations, *Water's Soul*, 2020, on the Hudson River waterfront in Newport, New Jersey; *Behind The Walls*, 2018, at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City; *Looking into my Dreams*, *Awilda*, 2012, at the Perez Art Museum; and *Echo*, 2011, at the Seattle Art Museum. With established gallery locations in Chicago since 1963 and New York since 1996, GRAY is a leading dealer of Modern, Post-War, and Contemporary art with prominent private and institutional clients worldwide. GRAY represents and specializes in artists of international recognition, including McArthur Binion, Alexander Calder, Jim Dine, Jean Dubuffet, Torkwase Dyson, Theaster Gates, David Hockney, Rashid Johnson, Alex Katz, Willem de Kooning, Joan Mitchell, Pablo Picasso, Susan Rothenberg, and Evelyn Statsinger. With a reputation for excellence, integrity and discretion, Gray provides high level service and market expertise to new and long-standing collections, advising on the acquisition and evaluation of works of museum quality.

ABOUT FREDERIK MEIJER GARDENS & SCULPTURE PARK

Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, one of the world's most significant botanic and sculpture experiences, was recently listed in the top 100 most visited museums in the world and the 30 most visited museums in the United States by The Art Newspaper, the leading global art news publication. Education programs welcome 80,000 students and guests each year. The 158-acre main campus features Michigan's largest tropical conservatory; one of the country's largest interactive children's gardens; arid and Victorian gardens with bronze sculptures by Edgar Degas and Auguste Rodin; a carnivorous plant house; outdoor gardens, including a replica 1930s-era farm garden; an eight-acre Japanese garden featuring contemporary sculpture; and a 1,900-seat outdoor amphitheater garden, showcasing an eclectic mix of world-renowned touring musicians each summer. The permanent collection highlights hundreds of sculptures from internationally acclaimed artists Magdalena Abakanowicz, El Anatsui, Louise Bourgeois, Alexander Calder, Mark di Suvero, Marshall Fredericks, Henry Moore, Michele Oka Donor, Beverly Pepper, Jaume Plensa, Auguste Rodin, Richard Serra, Yinka Shonibare CBE and Ai Weiwei, among others. Indoor galleries present rotating exhibitions, including shows on Jonathan Borofsky, Edgar Degas, Jim Dine, Laura Ford, Richard Hunt, Rebecca Louise Law, Pablo Picasso, George Segal and others. Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park promotes the enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of gardens, sculpture, the natural environment, and the arts.

ABOUT TOD WILLIAMS BILLIE TSIEN ARCHITECTS | PARTNERS

Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects | Partners is a New York based architecture studio established in 1986 by founding partners Tod Williams and Billie Tsien. Their practice is committed to reflecting the values of non-profit, cultural and academic institutions toward an architecture of serenity and enduring vision. A sense of rootedness, light, texture, detail, and most of all, experience, are at the heart of what they design. The practice is led by Tod, Billie and their partner Paul Schulhof. Over the past three decades, their work has been recognized by numerous national and international citations, and in 2013 they received the Architecture Firm Award from the American Institute of Architects (AIA).

Pictured: Installation view of Jaime Plensa's *Utopia*, 2021, at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park. Photo by Laura Medina.

Photography and video are embargoed until Tue, Nov 30. Media tours and interviews will take place Wed, Dec 1. For press kit and media inquiries, please contact Rebecca Daniel Mottley, rdm@richardgraygallery.com.

Connect with us on [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)