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Spanish Artist Jaume Plensa Sends Four Heads to Chicago

Spanish artist Jaume Plensa has created four monumental heads for the 10th anniversary of Chicago's Millennium Park.

By: **KYLE MACMILLAN** / June 13, 2014



Spanish artist Jaume Plensa sees his sculptures as messages in bottles that he drops into the Mediterranean Sea. "The water brings my messages to other beaches, to other cultures and to other parts of the world."

Four of those large-scale sculptural messages have made their way to Chicago, where they will go on display Wednesday through December 2015 as the artistic focal point of a celebration of the 10th anniversary of Millennium Park.

Mr. Plensa is best known for monumental sculptures in public spaces ranging from Des Moines, Iowa, to Burj Khalifa, Dubai. The artist "handles scale, space and material with immense dexterity," said Britain-based curator and Plensa expert Clare Lilley.

Since 2000 or so, Mr. Plensa has focused primarily on the human body, including depictions of squatting or balled figures molded in resin and figures of steel mesh incorporating letters and numbers. He made his first large head in 2009, with the assistance of 360-degree digital imaging and computer modeling.

These sculptural portraits depict girls ages 8 to 15 from a variety of ethnic and geographical backgrounds—all with their eyes closed. "It's a moment," he said, "when the girls are not kids anymore but they are not yet women. They have this kind of strange interior beauty. They are not yet formed on the outside."

In Chicago, the 24½-acre Millennium Park, which encompasses the Frank Gehry-designed Pritzker Pavilion, ranks among the city's top three tourist attractions. For its 10th anniversary, the Millennium Park Foundation invited Plensa to return for a temporary exhibition that has turned into a big Chicago moment for him.

Mr. Plensa is concurrently showing eight of his smaller heads at the Richard Gray Gallery, which has represented him since 1995, and unveiling Saturday a 12½-foot-tall stainless-steel work at the Ravinia Festival in suburban Highland Park.

The park display showcases four selections from his series of sculptural portraits. The largest, a graceful, elongated resin head titled "Looking Into My Dreams, Awilda," rises 39 feet near the park's entryway at Michigan Avenue and Madison Street.

The temporary pieces stand within eyeshot of Mr. Plensa's original contribution to the park, "Crown Fountain," two 50-foot-tall glass-lined towers at opposite ends of a shallow pool that project video images of 1,000 Chicago residents. "I'm trying always to create a place where people could meet and share dreams," he said. "And I probably could not find a better landscape for that to happen than the human body."