

THE ART OF BEER Imperial Pilsners Get Inside Your Head

BY DON TSE

don_tse@yahoo.com

Jaume Plensa (b. 1955 in Barcelona, Spain) has a big head. In fact, he has many.

Plensa (*jaumeplensa.com*) is world famous for large public works of art based on the human head. In America, his most famous piece is Crown Fountain, in Chicago's Millennium Park. Crown fountain is a large, rectangular fountain made of black granite. On each end stands a 50-ft tower covered in LED lights. These two towers display a slideshow of 1,000 faces of Chicagoans. From time to time, these faces pucker up and a stream of water flows out of the digital screens into the fountain.

Other Plensa works are less complicated, but no less dramatic. Typically, a Plensa work is a very large sculpture of the human form, usually just a head, or perhaps a bust. Some are solid, often made of marble, while others use shapes or letters to form an outer "skin" of shape, with an empty interior, allowing people to wander inside — to literally get inside someone else's head.

There are many public Plensa works in America. "Mirror" on the

campus of Rice University in Houston features two human forms made of painted stainless steel, sitting, cradling their legs, facing each other. Houston also boasts seven large sculptures which collectively comprise a single work entitled "Tolerance," located in Buffalo Bayou Park. "Nomade" is a single, 25-ft-tall human sitting, cradling his legs in Gateway Park in Des Moines. "Laura" is a 20-ft-tall marble sculpture of a female head at the Albright-Knox Museum in the city of Buffalo. A pair of smaller, 10-ft marble heads called "Awilda and Chloe" sit in the lobby of the Grand Hyatt Hotel in New York. If you visited New York's Madison Square Park in 2011, you may have seen "Echo," a 44-ft-tall marble head of a girl, with eyes closed, contemplating. Finally, if you've visited Cambridge Brewing Co. in Cambridge, MA in 2011, you were very close to Plensa's "Alchemist," a large, painted stainless steel sculpture of a person sitting and cradling his legs, which was located on the MIT campus during MIT's 150th anniversary.

These large pieces of art are relatively simple. The human form is, of course, very familiar, so the pieces are cognitively approachable.

Yet, being inanimate, but life-like and being sculpted in contemplative poses, Plensa's works are emotionally engaging. As I look at these sculptures, I am reminded of imperial pilsners, which are approachable and familiar, and yet their bold flavors are enveloping and reminiscent of the size of a Plensa sculpture.

The first imperial pilsner I ever tried was Rogue's Imperial Pilsner, which is part of its Morimoto line of beers made in collaboration with famous Iron Chef Morimoto. This very highly carbonated beer pours with a big head capping a deep gold beer. It has a nice, citric hoppiness to its aroma with the slightest hint of must. The flavor has an initial impression of malt, but a wonderful hop flavor provides balance.

Other imperial pilsners you can enjoy while contemplating the works of Plensa include Dogfish Head My Antonia (continuously hopped), Full Sail Cap Size, Sam Adams Hallertau, Rahr & Sons Pecker Wrecker, Boulevard Collaboration No. 1 and Bruery's Run B.M.C.

Any of these beers will get into your head, just like a Plensa sculpture. ♦♦