

JAUME PLENSA

► Featuring works from the **late 1980s to the present**, the exhibition *Jaume Plensa* takes us on a journey showing **the dialogue** that takes place **between the representation of the human figure and abstraction**.

► The exhibition includes **over twenty works**. Thanks to a collaboration with the CCCB, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, **for the first time the exhibition goes out of the Museum and takes visitors to the 'sculpture patio'** – the space between MACBA and the CCCB – where the pieces *The Heart of Trees* (2007) and *The Heart of Rivers* (2016) are installed.

► Twenty-two years after his last exhibition in a Barcelona museum (Fundació Joan Miró, 1996), Plensa's work can again be seen in the city. **The exhibition at MACBA will run from 1 December 2018 to 22 April 2019**. Running in parallel, the Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, will present a new project by the artist titled *Invisible* at the Palacio de Cristal, during practically the same dates.

► The exhibition *Jaume Plensa* will travel to the **Moscow Museum of Modern Art** (11 June – 22 September 2019)

Title: Jaume Plensa **Opening:** November 30, 2018, **Dates:** December 1, 2018 – April 22, 2019
Organisation: MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona **Curator:** Ferran Barenblit

JAUME PLENSA

Jaume Plensa has often said that sculpture is an ideal way of posing questions. *Firenze II* (1992), the work that marks the start of Plensa's exhibition at MACBA, is a huge question mark that leans against the wall. We stand before the interrogative itself. The sign '?' reminds us that, every time we use it, a statement becomes a question. Isn't that precisely one of the functions of sculpture? Keeping up uncertainty, celebrating imprecision? Generating perplexity, hesitation, unsureness? Inspiring suspicion, increasing incredulity, sowing scepticism?

-excerpt from the catalogue text by Ferran Barenblit, curator of the exhibition and director of MACBA-

Jaume Plensa (Barcelona, 1955) is an artist of materials, sensations and ideas. His references include literature, especially poetry, music, religion and thought. He considers himself, above all, a sculptor, although his creative process has included multiple disciplines. His work addresses the very condition of being: its physical and spiritual essence, ontological awareness of present and past, moral codes and dogmas, and our relationship with nature. What we cannot explain is, precisely, what makes us human. Plensa's objective is not to create objects, but to develop relationships that embrace everyone.

The MACBA exhibition will feature works from the 1980s to the present, in a journey showing the dialogue that takes place between works that represent the human figure and those that are abstract. This tension is the thread that runs through the whole of his work, a corpus that highlights the strength of binomials such as weightlessness/compactness, light/dark, silence/sound, spirit/matter and life/death.

Jaume Plensa's MACBA exhibition offers a broad overview of the work of one of Catalonia's most internationally recognised sculptors. Awarded the **National Visual Arts Prize of the Generalitat de Catalunya** (1997), the **Velázquez Prize for Visual Arts of the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture** (2013) and the **City of Barcelona Prize** (2015), among others, he is recognised worldwide for his public works in cities such as Chicago, London, Montreal, Nice, Tokyo, Toronto and Vancouver. On 6 November he was invested **Doctor Honoris Causa** by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

JAUME PLENSA

excerpt from the catalogue text by Ferran Barenblit



Jaume Plensa, Mémoires Jumelles (1992)

Jaume Plensa has often said that sculpture is an ideal way of posing questions. **Firenze II** (1992), the work that marks the start of Plensa's exhibition at MACBA, is a huge question mark that leans against the wall. We stand before the interrogative itself. The sign '?' reminds us that, every time we use it, a statement becomes a question. Isn't that precisely one of the functions of sculpture? Keeping up uncertainty, celebrating imprecision? Generating perplexity, hesitation, unsureness? Inspiring suspicion, increasing incredulity, sowing scepticism?

Endowed with an immense capacity for production, Plensa continues to construct a way of looking at the world that serves to explore its internal relations. Sure of the capacity of his work to transform, he scrupulously argues his conclusions. At all times, he shows that he is acting freely. He dialogues fearlessly with the concept of beauty, which he does not always seek, but, when he does, it is with the utmost conviction. He does not display an ingenuous optimism, expressing, rather, the confidence that everything is possible. In his works he takes on the force of volume, of the image, of the word or of sound, without fearing the contradictions

Plensa's exhibition at MACBA takes us on a journey through nearly three decades of his work. To access it, visitors must pass a large photograph of his studio, where models and sketches, materials and tools, notes and traces of a life accumulate. Following this, the itinerary offers a coherent entry into the artist's world and, for the first time in the history of MACBA, includes an outdoor space as though it were an additional gallery in that itinerary, with the installation of two works – **The Heart of Trees** (2007) and **The Heart of Rivers** (2016) – in the Museum's sculpture courtyard. In many ways, this unfolding corresponds with the artist's own way of working, having always alternated the use of indoor and outdoor spaces with remarkable dexterity. The unexpected often arises from the tensions generated between opposites: weight and lightness combine in the material presence of a metal that aspires to weightlessness, sometimes resting on a single point, and at others not even touching the ground.

This tension through opposition emerges forcefully in **Mémoires Jumelles** (1992), a work composed of eleven Acrow props, metal supports tensed horizontally between two facing walls that support everyday objects, probably from the work environment of the artist himself, that has been cast in bronze, and which the viewer must pass under. The whole is held up by tension, by the force of the sculpture itself. Like all of the artist's sculptures, it does not occupy a space so much as generate another, and it does so by means of pressure and the distance brought into play by the objects.

Similarly, sound and silence are opposed and alternated. If sound accompanies the visit to the exhibition, then it is sound created by the oscillation of material, sculpture that vibrates and penetrates the public's mind through their ears. In **Matter-Spirit** (2005), it is the visitor who hits the piece with a mallet. In this way, not only do they activate it, they also announce their presence to others in the gallery. **Rumor** (1998) materialises the spirit of the William Blake poem from which it takes its inspiration. A drop of water, light and minimal, creates a sound that literally fills the entire space. **Glückauf?** (2004), with its tinkling of metal letters, generates a hum thanks to the movement of people and air. The murmur of **Dante's Dream** (2003) is similar to that of a monastic cloister. As a counterpoint, other pieces speak with the power of the absence of sound. **Silence** (2016) offers a space where it is not necessary to speak. Its protagonist operates from a place of utmost serenity and invites the spectator to do the same in a beautiful balance that finds its natural place in calm. Self-Portrait with **Music** (2017) is presented as a thunderous silence: by means of musical notation, it fills the space with multiple melodies. Plensa's work conceals numerous references to poetry, music and science. **Islands III** (1996) is a good summary of his personal references, such as the glass bottles enclosed, in turn,

in resin prisms that seem to conserve their concentrated essences with the utmost security

Renaissance to the historical avant-garde movements. Some, like Duchamp, are quite patent. Plensa dialogues with the art and the artists of the past, taking their intellectual and formal legacy as raw material. But at the same time, he is also an artist who reviews social and cultural history in order to cast light on individuals and societies. Plensa has, throughout his career, engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the history of ideas, especially with modernity as the moment in which the present time is set. The big story was solid with no cracks and, at its peak, projected the European order onto the whole world. It was an ideological project that spread through the various areas of human activity: economic and military, of course, but also scientific, cultural and spiritual. It prioritised individualism over the collective, based on the definition of an apparent legal parity and equal opportunities that were, ultimately, unfulfilled promises. It maintained its faith in social development through technological and scientific progress, in the confidence that people would always live better lives. It promoted the advance of capitalism as the only valid economic model, trusting to growth as the driving force of progress.

It is in this context that we must understand *Dallas? ... Caracas?* (1997), which questions all possible modernities by means of the contrast between two cities with almost parallel histories that have become almost opposite symbols. Both are symbols of cities that have believed in the promises of modernity and that proposed to their inhabitants a horizon of progress thanks to the extraction of oil. And both, also, are scenarios of disappointment at the failure of their expectations. Plensa presents these two cities by means of some two hundred photographs taken in domestic kitchens. There are no people in them. Just furniture, fittings and some foodstuffs. We believe we can distinguish which ones are taken in each city. They share the basics: the place where food is prepared, the same food that will later become a part of our organism.

The body as a representation of the human is constantly present in Plensa's work. First of all, with his own measurements. This is not a new theme in art. Greek art set forth its canon. Leonardo da Vinci drew *Vitruvian Man* as a study of the ideal proportions of the body, establishing the relations between the various parts of the anatomy that could be projected metaphorically to the entire world. Le Corbusier, the architect who believed in modernity, proposed his Modulor. Plensa proposes Plensa. He goes for the simple and the honest. The height of *Mémoires Jumelles* is that of the artist with upraised arms; it is his body that is outlined in *Continents I and II* (2000); *The Heart of Trees* and *The Heart of Rivers* show the artist crouched, hugging trees whose dimensions are ideal for his body. But the presence of the individual, of his body and his soul,

goes much further. It is present in each and every one of his works; if we had to define Plensa in just one way, this could be it: the sculptor of the human.

It is also in the organic accumulation of *Tervuren* (1989), which recalls Artaud's words: 'Where it smells of shit, it smells of being.' The immense spherical shape leaves no doubt about its referent. An essential human product, useless, malodorous and distasteful, but fundamental to our life and to generating more life. Similar to art: something that no one knows exactly what its use is – it has none, it has them all – apparently unproductive, but essential for creating other works of art. Here, it appears in the form of a sphere of human dimensions, heavy, forceful, textured.

The reference to the human makes a radical appearance, too, in *Glückauf?*, with the literal text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948. Inspired by the French Revolution of 1789 (modernity crosses our path once again), it alludes to a great 'human family'. Even today, the text is a promissory, distant aspiration. It is arrayed in full, occupying the central space of the largest gallery in the exhibition. It is a portrait that the visitor can walk through. It displays humankind in its most fundamental aspiration: the defence of its dignity and respect for all its potential. Today's Europe, a Europe that is plunged into contradictions, between the rise of fascism and the resistance of a large sector of its population (the same sector that is outraged when people trying to cross the Mediterranean are allowed to die), is compelled to demand compliance with human rights around the globe. Here, they occupy a space, calling us with their sound, forcing the spectator to read, understand and become aware of their declaration.

We live in intense, confusing times. On the one hand, we are seeing the dehumanisation of the public sphere. Art and culture are under pressure to find a comfortable, uncommitted place, one of soft, easy consensus. It is an apparently tempting place, but it is crowded. There you can find everything from mere celebration of form to pure entertainment: pleasing but totally unsatisfactory destinations. On the other, a need cries out: the search for new conquests, new strongholds to gain. They are not ours, and we have to conquer them inch by inch. This means providing ourselves with spaces where we can live life in common and explore formulas for effective emancipation. There, imprecisely arranged, dreams, desires, potentials and new goals emerge.

The great story of modernity began with little space for questions, particularly ones with no immediate answer. Initially it offered solid evidence, but later turned out to have cracks. Re-emerging from these crevices come questions that corroborate the impossibility of absolute certainty. In Plensa, radical

questioning and doubt find their way in and manifest themselves in even the most forceful of the cast works, in the immutable metal that has served to immortalise so many historical personalities and deeds. Perhaps this is why he points out that there is just one final stronghold of relative certainty: **Firenze II**, the work that opens the exhibition, is inscribed with the word *rêve*, 'dream', the place beyond consciousness where fear and desire become image. The dream, like art, draws us closer to the answer to a question that is never explicitly formulated. There is no dream without desire, but without a dream there are only question marks drawn in the air. We find ourselves, once again, faced with the question itself.

JAUME PLENSA

excerpt from the catalogue text by **Clare Lilley**



Jaume Plensa, Prière (1989)

Jaume Plensa: material resonance

In media ranging from iron, aluminium, steel and bronze, to glass, resin, light, sound and letters, Plensa forges a careful interplay with material, light and shadow, elucidating the infinite potential of the mind and soul.

Tactile and other sensory awareness, even before language and consciousness invade us, form the basis of our initial response to the world and also to sculpture. For Plensa, the act of sitting inside his father's upright piano –with openings at the bottom – next to the soundboard as his father played is not so much a childhood memory as a sensory accumulation of the space, sound, smell and the vibrations running through his body

....

Sometimes, the enormity of how an artist brings into the world new words, music, images and objects – those which are explicitly their own – is overwhelming. Most know the

achievements that have preceded them and comprehend the challenge ahead; how might an artist find his or her own voice, stay true to a path, challenge themselves and continue to grow and develop? In this exhibition, we see Plensa's singular voice evolve across 30 years, his extraordinary physical poetry and an astute analysis of the condition of sculpture.

JAUME PLENSA

excerpt from the catalogue text by **Hèctor Parra**



Jaume Plensa, The Heart of Trees (2007)

From creative energy to the conformation of a sculptural space-time: musical tension in the work of Jaume Plensa

This world that opens up to us between reason and dream, between the living and the inert, between energy and material, invites us humbly and naturally to submerge ourselves in a silence of musical qualities, which is the subject of analysis here. We should close our eyes to allow the birth of an inner space of reflection, of vibration with oneself, of listening to the organic murmur that keeps us alive, and which, in turn, urges us to continue an existential quest beyond what our fears and our instincts initially allow us to glimpse. Because a creative mind is a mind that listens and welcomes, with pain and suffering, but also with pleasure, the conflicts and the internal contradictions characteristic of the tragic condition inherent to our species. This listening offers us an opportunity to reach artistic or scientific achievements, perceived as new paths that take us closer to the beauty and the unattainable complexity of nature.

...

We consider the work of sculpture or the musical score as global structures that the human spirit can only appropriate in the form of time flow. For Jaume Plensa, more than a problem of material and space, sculpture emerges as a problem of time and energy, positioning itself at the junction between rest and movement, between the absence of time and the permanent flow of time.¹ In the words of Jacques Monod, our very evolution as a species in the biosphere is an irreversible process that defines a direction in time.² But human beings, thanks to the development of consciousness, have the unique capacity to project themselves towards the past or the future.³ In this respect, the complex, monumental nature of Jaume Plensa's work highlights the tense friction experienced by the artist between the mental flow of creation, often extremely fast and multiconnected, and its physical materialisation: 'Sculpture has a tempo that is always slower than that of the head', says the artist.⁴

¹ Interview by Catherine Millet, 'Jaume Plensa. Faces of Memory', *Jaume Plensa*, op. cit.

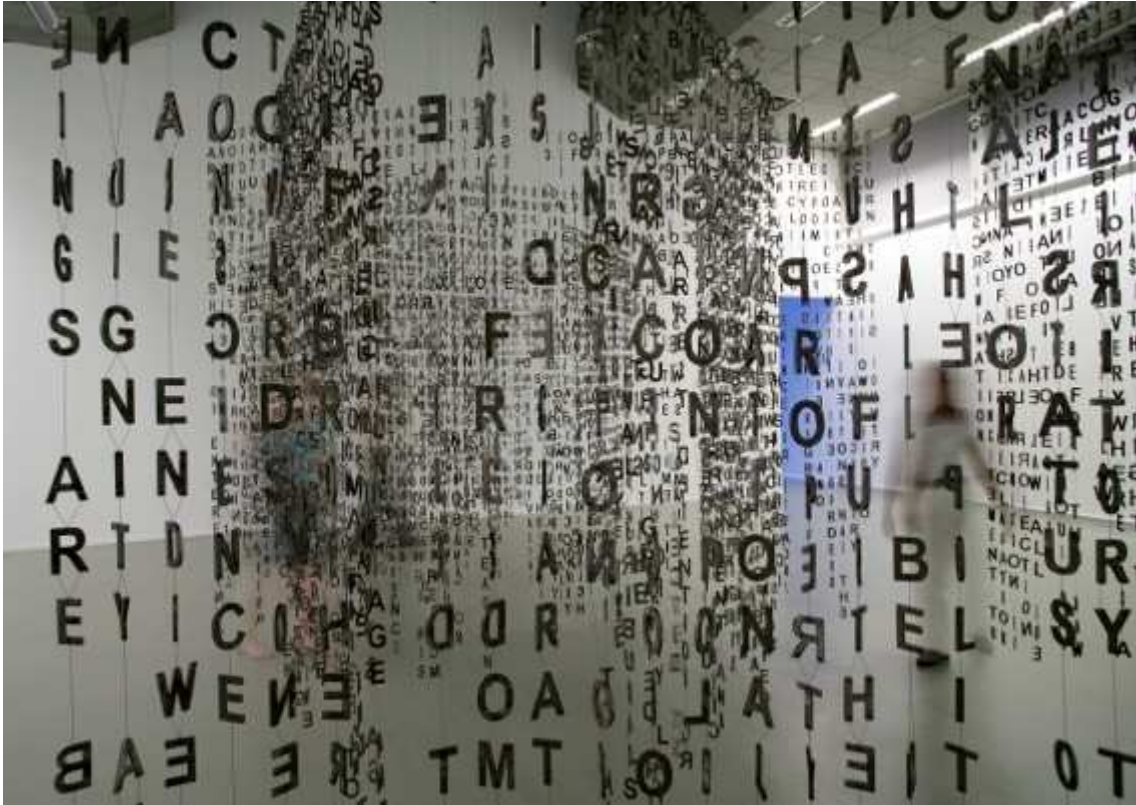
² Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*. New York: Vintage Books, 1972. Originally published in France as *Le Hasard et la nécessité*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970.

³ Michael S. Gazzaniga, *¿Qué nos hace humanos?*, op. cit.

⁴ Jaume Plensa, *El cor secret*, op. cit., p. 187.

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excerpt from the catalogue text by Catherine Millet



Jaume Plensa, Glückauf? (2004)

The Silence of the Scribe

Letters and words in the work of Jaume Plensa

Anticipating Jaume Plensa's exhibition at MACBA as I write this text for the accompanying catalogue, what dominates my thoughts is the extreme variety of forms and materials used in his work. Between the heavy and massive cast iron sculptures of the 1980s, the sound installations, and the faces in steel wire that sometimes seem to melt into their surroundings, the contrast is huge. But in all these works we can sense a tension that the artist has no desire to release: far from it.⁵ One of his pieces is a gigantic question mark (Firenze II, 1992) and I am sure that he prefers to make the viewer ask questions and to keep them in a state of suspense and

⁵ In an interview with Alicia Chillida, Plensa speaks of his "desire to work with opposing concepts." *Chaos-Saliva* [exhib. cat.], Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2000.

The interviews given by Jaume Plensa have been brought together and published in French by Galerie Lelong, under the title *Le Cœur secret*, 2016.

expectation rather than provide them with ready-made answers.⁶ And so much the better! There are far too many artists around today who purport to explain what we should think. And although he is constantly using letters and words – which elements, indeed, are what link these very diverse works –, Plensa is the least voluble artist you could find. This is the paradox I wish to consider here.

...

The sculptor has personally entered into the images that his childhood curiosity put before him. I should add that, like the representative of pharaonic times, he is extremely ambiguous. Just as the scribe who is about to write, and therefore to convey a message, remains deeply enigmatic, this artist of the global era, who sculpts with letters from all the alphabets of the world, is a reserved man, affable but not talkative, one of those people who, without being evasive, nevertheless seems to be sheltering their secret garden.

...

One of Plensa's great qualities is that, while his practice is extremely modern in its choice of materials and techniques, he also knows how to revive very ancient traditions.

⁶ Indeed, Achim Sommer chose the title "Sculpture as a Form of Questioning" for his text in the exhibition catalogue *Jaume Plensa, The Inner Sight*, Brühl, Max Ernst Museum Brühl des LVR, 2017.

JAUME PLENSA RELATED ACTIVITIES

Sessió de treball entorn de l'exposició Jaume Plensa

ACTIVITATS PROFESSORAT **SESSIÓ DE TREBALL ENTORN DE L'EXPOSICIÓ** **JAUME PLENSA** **DIRIGIDA A MESTRES DE PRIMÀRIA**

En aquesta sessió explorarem el treball escultòric de Jaume Plensa no sols com una sèrie d'objectes que ocupen un espai, sinó com a espais on es desenvolupen relacions que ens inclouen a tots. Plensa és un artista de materials, sensacions i idees. Treballarem amb els seus diversos referents (la literatura, la poesia, la música i el pensament) i també amb la força i la tensió que generen els binomis (llum/foscor, silenci/so, lleuger/compacte) que travessen moltes de les seves peces.

Per a Jaume Plensa l'escultura és una forma d'interrogació radical, i aquest serà el nostre punt de partida: no buscar afirmacions, sinó examinar la potencialitat de l'escultura com a eina d'interrogació a l'aula. A partir d'aquestes interrogacions i dels elements que conformen el treball de Plensa, veurem com podem activar aquestes qüestions a l'aula a través del treball amb el llenguatge, el cos, el so, l'absència, el desig, la impossibilitat o el temps.

Adreçat a mestres de primària per preparar la visita autònoma amb els seus alumnes.

Programa

DIMECRES 12 DE DESEMBRE DE 2018, a les 18 h

Lloc: Sales d'exposició Jaume Plensa

Preu: Gratuït. Amb inscripció prèvia **Places disponibles:** 30

Contacte **Educació** educacio@macba.cat Tel. 93 412 14 13

LET'S TALK ABOUT JAUME PLENSA **GUIDED TOUR**

This solo exhibition of [Jaume Plensa](#) at MACBA offers a broad overview of the work of one of the Catalan sculptors with the widest international profile. Awarded the National Visual Arts Prize of the Generalitat (1997), the Velazquez Prize for Visual Arts of the Ministry of Education and Culture (2013) and the City of Barcelona Prize (2015), among others, he is recognised worldwide for his public works in cities such as Chicago, London, Montreal, Nice, Tokyo, Toronto and Vancouver

► 1 DECEMBER: *Let's talk about Jaume Plensa* with **Ferran Barenblit**, curator of the exhibition

QUIN LLOC ÉS L'ESCULTURA? VISITA-TALLER JAUME PLENSA

A càrrec dels artistes **Cris Celada, Marc Larré, Itxaso Corral i Marc Vives**

Per a Jaume Plensa l'escultura no és un tema de materials, sinó d'emoció. No és una qüestió de volum o d'espai, sinó de temps. Per a Plensa els materials són els vehicles a través dels quals pot formalitzar les seves idees, les quals abans que res són preguntes. I l'escultura és la millor manera de plantejar-les. Les seves obres s'adrecen a la condició mateixa de l'ésser: a l'essència física i espiritual, la consciència d'un mateix i del propi passat, els codis morals i dogmes i la relació amb la natura. El que no podem explicar és, precisament, allò que ens explica com a persones.

Amb motiu de l'exposició que el museu dedica a Plensa, **us proposem una visita en la qual es difuminaran els límits tradicionals entre la visita i el taller, i en què l'objectiu serà establir una sèrie d'aproximacions a les obres que ens incloguin a tots en una experiència corporal, temporal i d'intercanvi amb elements tan dispars com l'error, la literatura, el joc de contraris, el cos, la memòria, el so o la ambigüitat, els quals confluïran com a parts d'un poema en les escultures de l'exposició.**

Una experiència pròxima a la idea de cos que es construeix a partir de diverses situacions obertes que s'uneixen per acollir els interrogants de l'artista i sumar-hi també el dels estudiants.

Programa

DEL 3 DE DESEMBRE DEL 2018 A L'11 D'ABRIL DEL 2019

Horari: dilluns, dimecres i dijous a les 10 h

Durada de l'activitat: 2 hores i 30 minuts

Preu per grup / classe: 80 €

Lloc: sales del museu

Aquesta visita-taller s'ofereix a centres i entitats de l'àmbit de la salut mental.

Secundaria, batxillerat i cicles formatius

Contacte educacio@macba.cat Tel. 93 412 14 13

VISITES EXCLUSIVES PER ALS AMICS DEL MACBA

L'exposició individual de Jaume Plensa al MACBA planteja un ampli recorregut pel treball d'un dels escultors catalans amb més projecció internacional. Guardonat amb el Premi Nacional d'Arts Plàstiques de la Generalitat (1997), el Premio Velázquez de Artes Plásticas del Ministeri d'Educació i Cultura (2013) i el Premi Ciutat de Barcelona (2015), entre d'altres, és reconegut mundialment per la seva obra pública a ciutats com Chicago, Londres, Mont-real, Niça, Tòquio, Toronto o Vancouver.

Vint-i-dos anys després de la seva darrera exposició en un museu de Barcelona (Fundació Joan Miró, 1996), l'obra de Plensa es tornarà a veure en un museu de la ciutat. En paral·lel, el Museo Reina Sofía de Madrid presentarà un nou projecte de l'artista al Palacio de Cristal durant les mateixes dates.

Visita a càrrec de **Ferran Barenblit** comissari i director del Macba.

Programa

DIMECRES 12 DE DECEMBRE, a les 18 h

Lloc: Macba **Preu:** gratuït

Exclusiu per a carnet Amic. Entrada gratuïta. Places limitades. Amb inscripció prèvia.



FOTOS here www.macba.cat/press/jplensa8766

■ MORE INFORMATION AT macba.cat and @MACBA_Barcelona

Segueix-nos a:    #JaumePlensa

■ MACBA: Plaça dels Àngels, 1, 08001 Barcelona, macba.cat

■ TIMES: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 11 am – 7.30 pm. Tuesdays except public holidays, closed. Saturdays, 10 am – 8 pm. Sundays and public holidays, 10 am – 3 pm.

■ Ticket valid for one month

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