

Plensa unveils plans for new sculpture in Chichester Cathedral

Spanish born Jaume Plensa has been commissioned by Chichester Cathedral to create a new sculpture, entitled 'Together'. Plensa is an internationally renowned sculptor, best known for the Crown Fountain in Chicago, which broadcasts images of local citizens, and Dream, a giant white stone head of a girl situated on the site of a former coal mine in St Helens, near Liverpool. Plensa's work celebrates ordinary people and their community and he says he is inspired by the poet, who works for no money, only the gratitude of his audience.

Chichester Cathedral, in West Sussex in the South of England, has a long history of commissioning modern art, thanks to the work of Walter Hussey, who was Dean of Chichester from 1955 to 1977. Dean Hussey was believed by Kenneth Clark to be the last great arts patron within the Church of England. One of his most famous commissions for the Cathedral is a stained glass window by Marc Chagall. In 2009, to mark his centenary, Chichester Cathedral developed the Hussey Commission, to find a new piece of art for the Cathedral. A long list of 30 international artists was drawn up, which the Hussey Commission then whittled down to 5. Of these, none of the original designs were chosen, however Jaume Plensa was one of the artists invited to resubmit. He agreed to substantially revise his initial idea and so developed 'Together', the hand of Christ raised in blessing, made from stainless steel lettering.

'Together' will hang in the space above the bridge, in front of the run-up to the altar. The space was previously dominated by a crucifix and angels, which were taken down in the 1960s. After an initial idea to replace the original crucifix, it was decided to commission a new work. Plensa's sculpture has been designed to complement the space, and work with the empty space around and through it.

The sculpture is a contemporary reinterpretation of crucifixion. The hand will be made up of letters from 8 different alphabets, which represent cultural diversity. Plensa believes the sculpture will be a metaphor for humanity's skill to illuminate life. He thinks that dialogues create energy and the individual letters within language (or the hand sculpture) must be linked together to create meaning, much like cells link to create human body. Part of the brief from the Hussey Commission was that the sculpture had to be accessible to all. The blessing hand is an internationally recognised symbol. The design for the hand itself comes from Plensa's own hand, which has been scaled up and elongated. The title 'Together' is about creating a community and inviting in outsiders. The fingers point up to encourage the viewer to look up, potentially to the heavens, but also to better admire the beautiful architecture of Chichester Cathedral.

After lengthy discussions between Plensa and the Cathedral body, it was decided that the sign of the stigmata must be included in the sculpture. This is partly to reduce ambiguity as to who's hand 'Together' represents, especially as there is a stature of St Richard, his hand raised in blessing, situated outside the cathedral. The stigmata will emphasise that the sculpture is the hand of Christ and will be depicted simply by leaving a gap in the middle of the hand on both sides. Plensa has decided

upon the medieval representation of the stigmata as it is well known and so accessible to the viewer, although it has since been proved scientifically impossible.

In order to make the sculpture, Plensa first carves a hand out of wood and then wraps the metal letters around it. The letters are chosen at random according to how best they fit the shape. The finished piece will be 3.5m high and weigh 65kg. The relative lightness of the sculpture is due to it being made from 4mm thick brushed stainless steel. The sculpture will not move as it is to be suspended in the space via a double cable connected to each side of the hand, anchored into the wall via a thin, unobtrusive plug. This is so that the fixings do not detract from either the sculpture or blemish the Cathedral walls.

Chichester Cathedral still does not have consent from the CFCE to include the sculpture. It will be funded by private donors, rather than cathedral funds. There is conservation project planned to run alongside, as part of the existing refurbishments.