



Jaume Plensa, *The Hermit II*, 2011, stainless steel and stone, 35½" x 28½" x 37½". Richard Gray.

## Jaume Plensa

Richard Gray  
Chicago

Barcelona-born sculptor Jaume Plensa is known for his monumental public artworks and installations. *Echo* (2011), a 44-foot-tall sculpture of a head that was on view in New York's Madison Square Park last year, is representative of the artist's grand-scale investigations of the human form.

Titled "The Hermit," this exhibition of three relatively small sculptures and 30 works on paper was, by contrast, an intimate experience. *The Hermit I* and *The Hermit II* (both 2011) are faceless human shapes with "skin" composed of a lattice of stainless-steel letters taken from nine different alphabets. Each figure is crouched, knees to chest, atop a boulder from the Spanish Pyrenees. They cast magical shadows.

Plensa's mixed-media drawings incorporate digital photography on paper coated with resin—the result is a lush surface with a vellumlike quality. In the large *Shadow Study LXIII* (2011), a crouching human, shaped from letters, looms in the center. From the heavily inked top edge, black streaks drip down around the body, enclosing it in a cave or womblike space.

The artist imparts a sense of motion in many of these works despite the apparent stillness of the figures' poses.

Within several smaller drawings, faces are discernible, but softened to the point of looking like antique alabaster busts. In *Veiled Shadow VII* (2011), the figure's eyes are closed, the expression serene. Subtle variations among the faces in the other works call attention to human sameness and difference.

In a third sculpture, *Self Portrait as W. Faulkner I* (2011), a human shape is kneeling, its carapace constructed from stainless-steel letters that cascade from the legs and knees to form the piece's base. Not grounded by a heavy rock, the figure appears as if it could pick itself up or, just as easily, completely dissolve into the floor.

—Ruth Lopez