

MIT List Center

Jaume Plensa

Catalan artist, Jaume Plensa created the sculpture Alchemist in 2010. Part magician, part scientist, part philosopher, the Alchemist work isn't as far from the mission of MIT as one would think. Jaume Plensa.

Alchemists at the time were dreaming about the very small things to try to understand and catch the cosmos. The idea of the Alchemist, it's to add some humanistic positions inside a very technical university, because talking with the people at MIT, they are dreaming like poets but with numbers.

The Alchemist's skin is forged from stainless steel, a material Plensa finds supple enough to shape and strong enough to endure the elements. The numbers and symbols are drawn from scientific formulas but, as Plensa is quick to emphasize, are not to be taken literally. Seated with a slightly bowed head, this alchemist seems to be in contemplation.

The posture of that figure is maybe a little bit like we are inside of our mother. But the knees and the legs are open, inviting people to go in. To exchange or to share our knowledge with other people was part of this concept.

At night, Alchemist emits a white glow that brings it and the campus to life.

The piece is illuminated from inside. It's the piece illuminating the world around, it's not the world illuminating the piece. And that's quite significant in the way that when people walk inside, they feel completely protected and surrounded by the work. And sometimes they start to smile immediately. It gives a certain very positive energy for the visitor.