



# FREDERIK MEIJER Gardens & Sculpture Park

---

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

[Photos, video and full media kit available at bit.ly/FMGExpansion2021](https://bit.ly/FMGExpansion2021)

CONTACT: John VanderHaagen | Director of Communications | 616-975-3180 | [jvanderhaagen@meijergardens.org](mailto:jvanderhaagen@meijergardens.org)

FREDERIK MEIJER GARDENS & SCULPTURE PARK ANNOUNCES COMPLETION OF SPECTACULAR NEW WELCOME CENTER, PART OF THE \$115 MILLION EXPANSION PROJECT *WELCOMING THE WORLD: HONORING A LEGACY OF LOVE*  
*Expansion driven by significant growth in guest attendance and programming*

Grand Rapids, Mich. – November 22, 2021 – Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, one of the nation's most significant botanic and sculpture experiences, is excited to announce the completion of the spectacular new Welcome Center and installation of *Utopia* by Jaume Plensa as part of the \$115 million *Welcoming the World: Honoring a Legacy of Love* expansion project. The Welcome Center will be dedicated and open to the public on November 30, 2021.

Since opening in 1995, Meijer Gardens has experienced tremendous growth in guest attendance, membership, art collections, dedicated garden spaces, and educational programs. Because of this success, major expansion was needed in several key areas. The new facilities allow Meijer Gardens to further its mission to promote the enjoyment, understanding, and appreciation of gardens, sculpture, the natural environment, and the arts.

The Garden Pavilion, a massive new entry and gathering space, features breathtaking horticultural displays and the stunning new sculpture *Utopia* by Jaume Plensa, the world's foremost sculptor working in the public realm. *Utopia* is Plensa's largest indoor work to date.

"With *Utopia*, I wanted to set out to transform an expansive space into a single piece," said Jaume Plensa. "I wanted to do something unforgettable for the Gardens. I wanted to create something that seemed invisible, but with 400 tons of marble, which I know seems like a contradiction. I spend my life trying to work through that duality, that poetry."

"The concept of "utopia" has perhaps consumed mankind forever, but certainly since long before the word was apparently coined by humanist philosopher and author Sir Thomas More in 1516," said Paul Gray, Principal at Gray gallery, Jaume Plensa's representing gallery. "I think that what is experienced in the Garden Pavilion at Meijer Gardens, through the imagination and labor of Jaume Plensa, whose sculpture is embraced by an almost

dreamlike space created by Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects | Partners, takes this search meaningfully closer. And that is truly something, as your heart tells you immediately when you experience it.”

“The Welcome Center brings together world-class, cutting-edge architecture by celebrated architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien and sculpture by leading artists of our time,” said Meijer Gardens President & CEO David Hooker. “Inside and outside the building, guests will experience the works of Tony Cragg, Jaume Plensa, Yinka Shonibare, Marshall Fredericks, Alexander Calder, George Segal, and El Anatsui.”

The project, which broke ground in 2017, includes:

- The new 69,000-square-foot Welcome Center, designed to be LEED certified.
- The new 20,000-square foot Covenant Learning Center, designed to be LEED certified.
- The new Peter C. and Emajean Cook Transportation Center.
- An expanded and upgraded Frederik Meijer Gardens Amphitheater.
- The new Frey Foundation Entry Plaza.
- A reimagined and expanded BISSELL Corridor.
- The new outdoor Meijer-Shedleski Picnic Pavilion.
- The new Stuart and Barbara Padnos Rooftop Sculpture Garden.
- Expanded and accessible parking and urban gardens.

Still to be fully completed and ready for members and guests are the indoor sculpture galleries, Volunteer Tribute Garden, and the all-new and expanded Tassell-Wisner-Bottrall English Perennial Garden. All elements of the *Welcoming the World: Honoring a Legacy of Love* project are expected to be fully ready in June, 2022.

New York firm Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects | Partners was selected to re-envision and expand the facilities. Well known for their masterful design of the iconic Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia and, most recently, chosen to design the Barack Obama Presidential Center in Chicago, Williams and Tsien see architecture as “an act of profound optimism.” They have discovered a similar spirit in Meijer Gardens’ unique marriage of beautiful art and inspiring green spaces.

“From our very first visit, it was clear that Fred and Lena Meijer have given Grand Rapids an extraordinary gift. Yet after 25 years of rapid growth, the campus had become an disparate collection of built forms, taking the focus away from the beauty of landscape and sculpture,” said Williams and Tsien. “Our thought was that all new structures, as well as old, needed to come together as a coherent whole to enhance both the Gardens and the Art. From this simple thinking, our design approach has evolved to be one of horizontal buildings and walls, forming a calm and unifying frame so that sculpture and the gardens move to the forefront. This design philosophy is

clearly expressed in the Garden Pavilion, a space that holds Jaume Plensa's *Utopia*, our belief in the harmony and unity of place and of humankind."

The generosity of the Meijer family and thousands of donors from our community has helped Meijer Gardens become one of the 100 most visited museums in the world and one of the 30 most visited museums in the United States. "We are sincerely grateful for the extraordinarily generous support of the Meijer family and so many others in creating a cultural institution that has served over 11 million people," Hooker said.

# # #

### **About Gray**

Gray gallery has represented Jaume Plensa since 1995. In addition to *Utopia*, Gray has facilitated numerous gallery and museum exhibitions for the artist, as well as private and public commissions across the globe, including Plensa's recent installations, *Water's Soul*, 2020, on the Hudson River waterfront in Newport, New Jersey; *Behind The Walls*, 2018, at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City; *Looking into my Dreams, Awilda*, 2012, at the Perez Art Museum; and *Echo*, 2011, at the Seattle Art Museum. With established gallery locations in Chicago and New York, Gray is a leading dealer of Modern, Post-War, and Contemporary art with prominent private and institutional clients worldwide. Founded in 1963, Gray represents and specializes in emerging and well-established artists of international recognition, including McArthur Binion, Alexander Calder, Jim Dine, Jean Dubuffet, Torkwase Dyson, Theaster Gates, David Hockney, Rashid Johnson, Alex Katz, Willem de Kooning, Joan Mitchell, Pablo Picasso, Susan Rothenberg, and Evelyn Statsinger. With a reputation for excellence, integrity and discretion, Gray provides high level service and market expertise to new and long-standing collections, advising on the acquisition and evaluation of works of museum quality.

### **About Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects | Partners**

Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects | Partners is a New York based architecture studio established in 1986 by founding partners Tod Williams & Billie Tsien. Their practice is committed to reflecting the values of non-profit, cultural and academic institutions toward an architecture of serenity and enduring vision. A sense of rootedness, light, texture, detail, and most of all, experience, are at the heart of what they design. The practice is led by Tod, Billie and their partner Paul Schulhof. Over the past three decades, their work has been recognized by numerous national and international citations, and in 2013 they received the Architecture Firm Award from the American Institute of Architects (AIA). In parallel with their studio practice, Tod & Billie are devoted participants in the cultural community and have long-standing associations with many arts organizations. They maintain active academic careers and lecture worldwide. They and their studio are deeply committed to making a better world through architecture.

### **About Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park**

Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, one of the world's most significant botanic and sculpture experiences, was recently listed in the top 100 most visited museums in the world and the 30 most visited museums in the United States by *The Art Newspaper*, the leading global art news publication. Education programs welcome 80,000 students and guests each year. Culinary Arts & Events offerings include weddings, corporate meetings and award-winning catering. The 158-acre main campus features Michigan's largest tropical conservatory; one of the country's largest interactive children's gardens; arid and Victorian gardens with bronze sculptures by Edgar Degas and Auguste Rodin; a carnivorous plant house; outdoor gardens, including a replica 1930s-era farm garden; an eight-acre Japanese garden featuring contemporary sculpture; and a 1,900-seat outdoor amphitheater garden, showcasing an eclectic mix of world-renowned touring musicians each summer. The permanent collection highlights hundreds of sculptures from internationally acclaimed artists Magdalena Abakanowicz, El Anatsui, Louise Bourgeois, Alexander Calder, Mark di Suvero, Marshall Fredericks, Henry Moore, Michele Oka Donor, Beverly Pepper, Jaume Plensa, Auguste Rodin, Richard Serra, Yinka Shonibare CBE and Ai Weiwei, among others. Indoor galleries with changing sculpture exhibitions have hosted shows by Jonathan Borofsky, Edgar Degas, Jim Dine, Laura Ford, Richard Hunt, Rebecca Louise Law, Pablo Picasso, George Segal and others.

Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park promotes the enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of gardens, sculpture, the natural environment, and the arts.

[Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#) | [YouTube](#)

[#MeijerGardens](#)