

# NOBLIAN

## The Reality of Beauty

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# THE REALITY OF BEAUTY

EDITOR CHOI YUNJUNG  
COOPERATION KUKJE GALLERY(82-2-735-8449)



*Five years since his last visit, French contemporary artist Jean-Michel Othoniel returns to Korea for an exhibition. Within the abstract and beautiful things we see on the surface is the nature of the world that surrounds us.*

봄에 만개한 벚꽃은 아름답다. 분홍빛으로 물든 거리에는 수많은 사람이 모여든다. 영원할 것 같은 아름다움도 잠시. 꽃잎은 오래 지나지 않아 땅에 떨어져 시들고, 비바람에 자취를 감춘다. 가만히 생각해보면 우리가 꽃을 보며 아름다움에 감탄하고, 상실의 슬픔을 느끼는 시간의 간격이 그리 크지 않다. 그래서 찬란한 아름다움을 뽐내는 꽃을 보면 기쁘지만 왠지 모를 쓸쓸함과 슬픔이 느껴진다. 하지만 프랑스 현대미술가 장 미셸-오토니엘Jean-Michel Othoniel은 꽃의 쇠락이 아닌 생명력에 집중했고, 여기에 이중성의 가치를 더해 작품의 미학적인 변주에 적용했다. 국제갤러리에서 열리는 전시 <검은 연꽃Black Lotus>에서 대표적인 유리 조각 설치 작품에서부터 회화에 이르기까지 그의 폭넓은 예술 세계를 반영하는 신작 10점을 만날 수 있다.

그는 그동안 꽃을 이용한 작품을 주로 선보였는데, 특히 꽃의 형상과 상징성에 주목했다. 캘리포니아 골든게이트 파크의 '바람의 장미', 미국 보스턴 이사벨라 스투어트 가드너 미술관의 '작약, 수줍음의 매듭'이 대표적이다.

"꽃이 담고 있는 의미나 상징성은 무척 매력적인 것으로, 이는 세상을 새롭게 바라볼 수 있는 촉매 역할을 합니다. 세계 있어 끊임없는 경이의 원천은 꽃처럼 '실재하는 것들'입니다."

장-미셸 오토니엘은 그동안 여러 번 내한할 때마다 정원, 그림, 조각상 그리고 옛 건축물에서 전통적 모티프로 활용된 연꽃을 발견했다. 그의 마음을 움직인 건 연꽃이 지닌 복합성이었다.

"연꽃은 하루에도 몇 번씩 변합니다. 아침에는 봉오리가 피고 저녁에는 꽃이 지지요. 또 보는 각도에 따라 다르고, 실제로 외적인 요소에 의해 형태가 바뀌기도 합니다."

그는 여기에 연꽃이 지닌 순수함이나 완전함과 같은 영적 상징에 자신만의 시적 해석을 더했다. 대표 전시 작품인 '검은 연꽃'은 샤를 보들레르의 '악의 꽃'과 아르튀르 랭보의 '보이지 않는 찬란함'에서 영감을 받아 모순된 단어의 조합에 양가적 가치를 표현했다. 기존의 유리가 아닌 검은색 산화 알루미늄을 이용한 조각으로, 순백으로 인식되는 연꽃의 시각성과 밝음에 깃든 어둠을 상징한다. 검은색이나 보라색 등 어두운 색을 이용해 깨달음, 깨끗함과 같은 연꽃의 본래 가치를 극적으로 드러냈다.

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The cherry blossoms that flourish in the spring are beautiful. People crowd the streets lined in hues of pink. But its beauty is fleeting. Before long, its petals fall to the floor and shrivel up, dissolving with the rain. The expanse of time between our joy at seeing its beauty and the sadness we feel at its loss is not great. That is why the brilliant beauty of flowers is bittersweet. However, French contemporary artist Jean-Michel Othoniel focuses on the life of a flower, rather than its

demise, applying the significance of its duplicity in aesthetic adaptations. Othoniel's solo exhibit at Kukje Gallery titled <Black Lotus> will feature 10 new works, showcasing a wide range of his works, from bead installations to lithographs.

Flowers have been the subject in many of Othoniel's works, with concentration on their form and symbolism. 'La Rose des Vent' displayed at the Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, California, and

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'Peony, the Knot of Shame' at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston are prime examples.

"The meaning and symbolism encapsulated within each flower is mesmerizing, and inspires me to look at the world in a new light. For me, 'real things', like flowers, is a source of perpetual wonder."

During several visits to Korea, Jean-Michel Othoniel discovered the lotus as a traditional motif for gardens, paintings, sculptures, and old architecture. What moved him was the duality of the lotus.

"A lotus changes shape several times a day. It blooms in the morning and withers in the evening. It looks different from every angle, and actually changes its shape with its external environment."

Othoniel adds his own poetic variation to the lotus' spiritual symbols, such as purity and completeness. The centerpiece of the exhibit, 'Black Lotus', was inspired by the contradictions present in French poet Charles Baudelaire's 'Les Fleurs du Mal', and Arthur Rimbaud's 'Splendeur Invisible'. Casting black anodized aluminum over his signature glass beads, the artist symbolizes the darkness that shrouds the clarity found in the pure white lotus. By implementing dark colors like black and violet, the artist dramatically reveals the lotus' essential values of truth and purity.

His paintings are another highlight to this exhibit. For the first time in Asia, five of his paintings, also titled 'Black Lotus', will be featured.

"I've been in the art industry 30 years, but I have yet to show paintings in my exhibitions. Presenting this work in Asia is not only important, but exciting. Although abstract in form, a profound meaning is condensed within them. Moving beyond the vibrant aura and images found in Eastern calligraphy, I tried to reveal their spirituality."

With the exception of his paintings, all of his works are created from beads. Is it merely for aesthetic appeal?

"I have been using beads in my works for a long time. Like flowers, beads are found in every culture, and are an ordinary material that

helps me open my work up to different cultures effortlessly. More interestingly, beads are also wearable, connecting it to the body.

Beads are the best material to help me convey sentence, aesthetics, and connectivity in my work."

Besides beads, Jean-Michel Othoniel sequentially worked with materials such as wax, obsidian, sulfur, phosphorous, and glass since the late 1980s. His exclusive work with glass began in the late 1990s. Starting in 1997, he created the 'Le Collier Cicatrice', a necklace made of red beads that represents the hidden scars and suffering that each person experiences; for the Unlimited Section at Art Basel 2005, Othoniel presented 'Le Bateau de Larmes', to represent the anguish endured, and the freedom attained by the Cuban boat people. He also actively participated in publicly funded projects. In 2000, he transformed the Parisian subway station Palais-Royal—Musée du Louvre in celebration of its 100th anniversary, where he installed Le Kiosque des Noctambules, and in 2015, the artist permanently installed Les Belles Danses in the garden pond of the Palace of Versailles. He recently completed a project to modernize the artifact conservatory at Cathédrale Saint-Pierre in Angoulême, France. Set to unveil later this year, this project took 7 years to complete, making us anticipate what aesthetic chef-d'oeuvre he has in store for us.