

KUKJE GALLERY

PRESS RELEASE

Jean-Michel Othoniel Solo Exhibition "Black Lotus"

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Exhibition Date February 2 – March 27, 2016

Exhibition Venue K3, Kukje Gallery



Black Lotus, 2015, Black anodised aluminium cast, steel, 150 x 150 x 150 cm

Photo by Antoine Cadot, Image provided by Kukje Gallery

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Flowers play a very important role in my work. My obsession with the hidden meaning of flowers and their symbolism offers me a new way of looking at the world; for me, reality remains a source of perpetual wonder.

Jean-Michel Othoniel

Kukje Gallery is pleased to announce *Black Lotus*, a solo exhibition of new works by Jean-Michel

Othoniel, one of France's most acclaimed contemporary artists. *Black Lotus* is the artist's second exhibition at Kukje Gallery since 2010 and will include ten new works that showcase his interest in metaphoric imagery and the beauty found in nature. The exhibition will run from February 2 to March 27, 2016.

Since the late-1980s, Jean-Michel Othoniel has explored diverse artistic practices including photography, sculpture, installation, writing, and performance. His work deals with subjects such as metamorphosis and the scars left by suffering and loss. Othoniel first came to international attention as an artist working with unorthodox materials like sulfur, wax, and phosphorous, all of which possess an innately paradoxical character. In 1993, the artist began using blown glass and was immediately celebrated for his mastery of the medium and his balance of beauty and ephemerality. Dense but fragile, transparent but full of color, Othoniel brought renewed attention to the duality of glass as a material. His project *Le Collier Cicatrice* (1997), produced in memory of the artist Félix Gonzales-Torres, functions as an analogy for our hidden scars and the personal suffering each person experiences. Pushing his practice in glass to include installation-sized sculptures, the artist presented compelling and fantastical works such as *Mon lit* (2003), a bed adorned with glass beads, as a space reflective of a private and personal history. Since the late-2000s, the artist has further diversified his use of glass to create works that are both abstract and dynamic in their shapes and form. Expressing themes of the "other" and psychology in his *Lacan's Knot* (2009) series, this period marked the point in his practice where glass became his primary medium.



Black Lotus (#1), 2015, Ink on white gold leaf, lithographic monotype on canvas
160 x 120 x 5 cm, Photo: Antoine Cadot, Image provided by Kukje Gallery
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For his solo exhibition at Kukje Gallery, Jean-Michel Othoniel is presenting a new series of sculptures and paintings inspired by the lotus flower. Moved by his experience of seeing the flower in his travels around Korea, Othoniel chose the lotus as a focus for its symbolism of perfection, truth, and serenity. This exhibition at Kukje Gallery has given the artist an opportunity to explore the rich philosophical and spiritual meaning of this unique flower, a symbol traditionally found in Korean culture in gardens, art, and architecture, and to express the poetry that informs his distinct exploration of nature.

Installed throughout K3, the sculptures and lithographs are arranged to evoke a radical and abstract embodiment of spirituality. The sculpture *Black Lotus*, which shares its title with the exhibition, takes inspiration from the contradictions implicit in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire's *fleur de mal* and Arthur Rimbaud's *splendeur invisible*. *Black Lotus* is exemplary of the more limited palette Othoniel has used for this body of work. Using primarily black and white, violet and dark blue, mirror and white gold, the artist creates a powerful tension between the interior and exterior of the sculpture. This paradox is something Othoniel likens to the spiritual journey embodied by the lotus, which rises from dark muddy waters. *Black Lotus* also serves as the title of five paintings which are composed of thick lithography ink painted on canvas gilded with gold leaf. Inspired loosely by calligraphy, the stark contrast of the black ink on the white gold highlights the themes and formal investigations of the show.



Gold Lotus, 2015, Aluminium cast, gold leaves, painted steel, 360 x 230 x 180 cm

Photo by Antoine Cadot, Image provided by Kukje Gallery

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The lotus flower series is inspired by the exuberant shapes found in nature. *Gold Lotus* in particular is formally connected to several previous works. This focus on flowers follows the vein of works such as *La Rose des Vents*, a kinetic sculpture designed to move with the wind, and originally installed at the San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers and Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston.

This concern with installation can also be seen in the works *Blue Knot* and *Pink Lotus* which are suspended in the air. Made of fluid lines and mirrored glass, these sculptures elicit the viewer's gaze through their highly reflective surfaces, creating a fantastical atmosphere. These evocative works are both organic in form and daring in their bold use of glass.

In *Black Lotus*, Othoniel has masterfully combined both highly personal motifs with universal symbols in a powerful and poetic exhibition. Expanding the boundaries of his practice, his works installed at Kukje marry sensuous beauty with spiritual contemplation. Their distinct poetic and minimal vocabulary provides a chance to experience the ever-expansive vision of internationally renowned artist Jean-Michel Othoniel.



Jean-Michel Othoniel with *Les Belles Danses*, 2015
Gardens of the Palace of Versailles, Photo: Philippe Chancel
©Jean-Michel Othoniel / ADAGP, Paris - SACK, Seoul, 2016

Born in 1964 at St. Étienne, France, Jean-Michel Othoniel graduated from École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts, Cergy-Pontoise in 1989. From 1985 he actively exhibited sculptures, installations, and media works, and became widely known after his participation in dOCUMENTA IX in 1992 at Kassel, Germany, for his sulfur sculpture.

He began using glass in his work in the early 1990s after meeting artisan glassblowers from Murano, Italy, and has been creating his signature glass necklaces since the late 90s. In 2005, the artist's sculpture *Bateau de Larmes* was honored at the entrance of the Art Basel Unlimited section. Othoniel had his first retrospective *My Way* in 2011 at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, and the show then travelled to Plateau, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul; the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; the Macao Museum of Art; and the Brooklyn Museum.



Le Bateau de larmes (The Boat of tears), 2004

Murano glass, metal, wood, 3.45 x 5.35 x 2.15 m, LVMH Collection, Paris.

View of the artwork at Art Basel, 2005.

Photo: Galerie Perrotin, Image provided by Othoniel Studio

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Jean-Michel Othoniel is also passionate about projects with public institutions. In 2000, Othoniel received his first public commission to transform the Parisian subway station Palais-Royal – Musée du Louvre in celebration of its 100th anniversary, where he installed the Murano glass and aluminum *Le Kiosque des Noctambules*. In 2015, the Palace of Versailles welcomed the artist's *Les Belles Danses* as its first permanent installation inside its gardens.



Le Kiosque des Noctambules (The Kiosk of the Night walkers), 2000

Entrance of the subway station Palais-Royal – Musée du Louvre, on Place Colette, Paris

Photo: Jean-François Mauboussin / RATP

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Recent major exhibitions include *Jean-Michel Othoniel: Secret Flower Sculptures* (2015) at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston; *Nouvelles impressions de Raymond Roussel* (2013) at Palais de Tokyo, Paris; *Chefs-d'œuvre?* (2010) at Centre Pompidou-Metz, France; and *Glasstress* (2009) at the 53rd Venice Biennale. Othoniel's works are in numerous renowned collections, including Centre Pompidou and Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris; Museum of Modern Art and New York Public Library, New York; Boghossian Foundation, Brussels; Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul; Budi Tek-Yuz Museum, Shanghai; and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice. Othoniel's latest project includes an artistic intervention in the artifact conservatory of the Cathédrale d'Angoulême, France.