

Jean-Michel Othoniel Shares His Process in a Small but Poignant Exhibition

Culture

By Gay Gassmann

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At left: Jean-Michel Othoniel's watercolor "Peony, The Knot of Shame," 2013. At right: the 2015 mirrored glass and stainless steel adaptation of same name. Credit Right: Claire Dorn/Galerie Perrotin. All images: Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

For his second American museum exhibition, the French artist Jean-Michel Othoniel says he shares “the hidden part of my work.” “Secret Flower Sculptures,” on view beginning March 12 at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, explores the artistic process he began developing four years ago, when he was an artist in residence at the Gardner. (It was then that he also discovered an 18th-century book, “The Art of Describing Dance” by Raoul-Auger Feuillet, which informed the new Water Theater grove design he created in collaboration with the landscape architect Louis Benech, which opens to the public at the garden of Versailles this spring.)

Othoniel's primary medium is glass. His signature aesthetic is to craft large, hand-blown spheres and string them together like pearls, sculpting the strands into a variety of shapes. At Art Basel in Miami in December, for example, the architect Peter Marino opened his massive exhibition, "One Way: Peter Marino," with a big, commissioned wall piece from Othoniel that greeted guests as they entered the Bass Museum. For the Gardner, Othoniel created two site-specific sculptures: one, "The Peony of Shame," which will be suspended from the ceiling in the Hostetter Gallery, and another, "The Rose in the Wind," which will be installed on the Palace roof. ("The Peony of Shame" began as an original watercolor for T's Picture and Poem series, which was featured in the Spring 2013 Women's Fashion issue.) "The peony and the rose are the two most important flowers in the Isabella Stewart Gardner collection," Othoniel explains. "They are both beautiful and sad at the same time."



Othoniel in his studio. Credit Claire Dorn, courtesy of Galerie Perrotin



Othoniel, "Le Rigaudon de la Paix (The Rigaudoon of Peace)," 2013. Credit Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Perrotin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

In addition to the sculptures, there will also be four new paintings as well as drawings and models of the Versailles commission on view. Othoniel says he draws every morning, and that although all of his drawings do not become sculptures, "all my sculptures are born from drawings." The artist also updated a version of his 2008 book, "The Secret Language of Flowers," with a new format and images of flowers from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Collection. It will be available at the show's opening at the Gardner. "I am very excited about this exhibit. It is not the biggest, but it is very specific and represents a lot of research," Othoniel says. "Most people don't understand how artists work, that inspiration comes from a chance meeting, a book, a trip. This exhibition represents years in the life of an artist — my life."

“Jean-Michel Othoniel: Secret Flower Sculptures” is on view March 12 through Sept. 7 at Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 25 Evans Way, Boston, gardnermuseum.org.



In Nature | The Gardener of Versailles

By DANA THOMAS

André Le Nôtre’s 17th-century masterpiece for Louis XIV has not been altered for centuries — until now. The renowned yet humble French landscape designer Louis Benech is reimagining the four-acre Water Theater, the Sun King’s favorite grove.

A Picture and a Poem

By T MAGAZINE

‘Peony: the Knot of Shame,’ an original watercolor by the French artist Jean-Michel Othoniel, inspired by a new piece by the American poet Brenda Shaughnessy.

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