

CHECK OUT JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL'S SITE-SPECIFIC SCULPTURES AT BOSTON'S ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

Text by Hannah Martin | Photography by Claire Dorn courtesy of Galerie Perrotin | March 13, 2015



Jean-Michel Othoniel with *Peony, The Knot of Shame*, 2015, made of mirrored glass and stainless steel.

When artist Jean-Michel Othoniel was 14 years old he began dutifully taking note of flowers. He documented blooms from magazines, popular literature, and classical texts, scribbling his musings about the meanings of their presence.

So in 2011, when he found himself part of an artist-in-residence program at Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, there was one thing he noticed right off the bat: "Isabella was just as obsessed by flowers as I am."

In the late Gardner's enchanting home-turned-museum, Othoniel noticed he was surrounded by flora: "[Flowers] were in the carpet, in the paintings, in the furniture, and in the tapestries." Not to mention, in the masterfully planted courtyards that Gardner tended with the utmost care. Othoniel even wrote a book—*The Secret Language of Flowers*—that documented the decorative flourishes in the home.



Jean-Michel Othoniel's *La Rose des vents*, 2015 is made of gold-leafed aluminum and steel.

It comes as no surprise that Othoniel has returned to the museum to install "Secret Flower Sculptures," an exhibition that opened yesterday with several site-specific sculptures. Like many of his works, Peony, *The Knot of Shame*, which hangs from the ceiling in the museum's new Hostetter Gallery, resembles an elegant strand of glass beads. Its impression of delicateness is only an allusion—the sculpture actually weighs one

ton. “Like a car,” he compares.

The peony is considered a symbol of shame or bashfulness, Othoniel explains. “So I decided to make this huge, flamboyant sculpture about how to be proud of your own shame.”

To contrast the peony, which he calls “the rose for the simple people,” out in Gardner’s lush garden he installed *La Rose des Vents*, a whimsical gold aluminum kinetic sculpture that moves with the wind.



A watercolor rendering of Jean-Michel Othoniel’s forthcoming Versailles project.

“You have the most elegant and aristocratic flower and the simple flower in a dialogue between the old building and the new.”

The show will also include four new monoprints on white gold as well as Othoniel’s plans for a history-making project in Versailles, which was conceived during his time at the Gardner museum. *Les Belles Danses*—a series of three sculptures—was inspired by an obscure dance annotation system developed by Roger-Auger Feuillet for Louis XIV in 1701 where Feuillet imagined the king dancing in his vast garden. The work will debut at Versailles’ Water Theater Grove on May 12, the first permanent contemporary sculpture to inhabit the garden in 300 years.

Through September 7 at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 25 Evans Way, Boston;
gardnermuseum.org

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