

Othoniel finds spiritual beauty in lotus

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Above: Detail view of Jean-Michel Othoniel's "Pink Lotus." Inset: French artist Jean-Michel Othoniel poses with his works on display at Kukje Gallery K3 in central Seoul.

Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

Othoniel finds spiritual beauty in lotus

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French sculptor Jean-Michel Othoniel brings the spiritual beauty of the lotus to his solo exhibit at Kukje Gallery K3 in downtown Seoul.

Titled "Black Lotus," this comes five years after Othoniel's retrospective at Plateau, Samsung Museum of Art, in 2011. The exhibit features 10 of Othoniel's latest works including bead installations and lithographs embodying the dual meaning of the namesake flower.

Born in 1964 in Saint-Etienne, France, Othoniel is known for creating whimsical yet poignant bead installations. In this exhibition, coiled strings of black, purple, gold

and pink glass beads recreate the shape of lotus, blossoming or in full bloom.

For Othoniel, the lotus sculpture is a metaphor for perfection, truth and serenity, symbolized by the flower. The lotus grows from murky mud, but the flower is always clean and thus often associated with purity and beauty.

The artist said he took inspiration from the flower when he visited Korea and saw those flowers often in Korea and decided to interpret the spirituality of the flower in abstract sculpture. Flowers have been one of Othoniel's favorite subjects as he finds the form and symbolism of flowers interesting.

"A lotus changes shape several times a day — it blooms in the

morning and withers in the evening. I was fascinated by the metamorphosis," he said. "It has a double meaning, representing beauty, eros and darkness at the same time."

The dual meaning also replies to the title of the exhibit, which is in line with French poet Charles Baudelaire's "The Flowers of Evil," as the artist combined two words poles apart. "Very opposite meanings are in one title. It is a dramatic poetry," Othoniel said. "The aesthetics of beauty is connected to spirituality."

The centerpiece of this exhibit would be the titular installation "Black Lotus." This sculpture casts black anodized aluminum over Othoniel's signature glass beads, adding a heavier impression to the work.

He has been working with beads for a longtime. "Beads are found in almost every culture, just like flowers. I use such ordinary objects to make my work open. Beads are also wearable and it makes the material more connected to body," the artist explained.

His trademark mirrored glass beads can be found in "Blue Knot" and "Pink Lotus," which feature flexible curves of glass bead coils.

The lithographic monotypes give a glimpse of Othoniel's work process. He usually makes drawings in watercolor and some of them develop into sculpture.

Othoniel's works are on view through March 27. For more information, visit www.kukjegallery.com or call (02)735-8449.

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