

## JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL MOTION – EMOTION

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts  
Contemporary Art Square – Jean-Noël Desmarais Pavilion – Level S2  
June 20 – November 11, 2018

Montreal, May 28, 2018 – Starting June 20, 2018, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) will be presenting *Motion – Emotion*, an emotionally evocative exhibition themed on the violence of the elements. This will be the first-ever solo exhibition of Jean-Michel Othoniel in Canada, and will present recent works by the world-renowned French artist.

Since 2016, the Museum’s visitors have been able to enjoy the *Peony Knot*, a sculpture on permanent display in the event stairway of the MMFA’s Michal and Renata Hornstein Pavilion for Peace. This monumental work is composed of 212 beads of mirrored blown glass and stainless steel. The orange, amber, red, pink and plum beads evoke the peony’s various shades. Suspended from the ceiling, the sculpture presents as a dynamic graphic line, a string of beads that appear to move in space. *Peony Knot* is the first work by the prolific artist to become part of a Canadian museum’s collection.



Jean-Michel Othoniel (born in 1964), *Black Tornado*, 2017, aluminum, steel. Courtesy of Galerie Perrotin  
© Jean-Michel Othoniel / SODRAC (2018). Photo Claire Dorn

### *Motion – Emotion*

The elements and the shapes of nature have always been a source of inspiration for Othoniel. Here, however, the artist has selected sculptures and paintings that depart from a feeling of wonderment and reflect instead his preoccupying concern for the environment in works with a darker side.

**Nathalie Bondil**, Director General and Chief Curator, MMFA, explains: “Seeing Jean-Michel’s latest production during a recent visit to his Paris studio, I wanted to invite him back to the Museum. I was impressed by the graphic power of his tornadoes and waves... a humble homage to mighty Nature and the violence of the elements in these precariously balanced sculptures.”

In 2011 in Japan, Othoniel experienced the Fukushima earthquake and tsunami first-hand. This incredibly intense and moving event subsequently influenced the artist’s work on an unconscious level, and he turned to materials such as obsidian, a type of volcanic glass, anodized black aluminum and ink painting on gold leaf. “*I am moving away from playful, colourful and ornate works and focusing instead on darker subjects, with an even more radical, minimal and telluric approach. While my works can sometimes evoke a story, they now have a dark side,*” explains **Jean-Michel Othoniel**.

His monumental *Tornadoes* in chromed aluminum or mirror-polished stainless steel, four of which are suspended in space like mobiles in the Contemporary Art Square, surround the viewer as they approach them. Through their twisted motion and imposing size, they evoke the violence of the elements. The reflective surfaces that characterize most of Othoniel’s works engage the viewer in a dialogue with architecture and the environment. As they get close to the sculptures, viewers see their reflections infinitely multiplied. These gigantic mirrors can thus be seen to reflect our personal fears and desires.

The artist wanted to take this idea even further for the Montreal exhibition: To keep his *Tornadoes* moving, he mechanized them with the help of engineers. In doing so, he integrated a fourth dimension to his sculptures – movement. His suspended *Tornadoes* rotate in space and move as people pass by. Instead of the tornado blowing people over, it is the people around the tornado who set it in motion.

Born in 1964 in Saint-Étienne, France, Othoniel has been creating in a wide range of techniques for over 30 years. *“An exceptionally versatile creator – choreography, drawing, writing, installation, performance, photography and sculpture – Jean-Michel Othoniel stands apart for his highly poetic imagination. In his view, the signature beauty and marvelousness of his works are not an aesthetic feature but a necessary condition for their existence. He uses beauty as a weapon in addressing serious and societal themes, fully embracing this genre,”* adds **Diane Charbonneau**, curator of the exhibition and Curator of Modern and Contemporary Decorative Arts, MMFA.

The artist makes no secret of the fact that the kinetics of American Alexander Calder’s mobiles have been a major source of inspiration for him. Incidentally, the MMFA will be exhibiting **Alexander Calder: Radical Inventor** from September 22, 2018, to February 24, 2019. *“I’m very pleased and honoured that an exhibition on Calder is being presented at the same time as mine. This will be my first ‘discussion’ with the artist, in which our mobile sculptures engage in dialogue at the same time in the Museum. Calder remains the master of the mobile and reinventing it is a true challenge,”* says Othoniel.

The exhibition *Motion – Emotion* also features a selection of seven paintings from the “The Knot of Shame” and “Black Tornadoes” series, demonstrating the same formal concerns, including outlines, gestures and patterns, as well as their luminosity and materiality. They reveal the artist’s progression from his creation of *Peony Knot* and works from the “Black Tornadoes” series. With seemingly expressive simplicity, the subjects of this series depict *“the purity of the peony sullied by ink, as the world is sullied by humans,”* explains the artist.

#### **Credits and Curatorial Team**

An exhibition organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, in collaboration with Jean-Michel Othoniel and Galerie Perrotin. It is presented with the support of the MMFA’s Young Philanthropists’ Circle and Air Canada.

The exhibition is curated by **Diane Charbonneau**, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Decorative Arts, MMFA.

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**Jean-Michel Othoniel will attend the opening on Tuesday June 19, 2018, at 5:30 pm. Invitations will be sent shortly.**

**Press Room:** [mbam.qc.ca/en/media](http://mbam.qc.ca/en/media)

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#### **About the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts**

The MMFA is one of Canada’s most visited museums and the eighth-most visited museum in North America, boasting more than 1.3 million visitors. The Museum’s original temporary exhibitions combine various artistic disciplines – fine arts, music, film, fashion and design – and are exported around the world. Its rich encyclopedic collection, distributed among five pavilions, includes international art, world cultures, decorative arts and design, and Quebec and Canadian art. The Museum has seen exceptional growth in recent years with the addition of two new pavilions: the Claire and Marc Bourgie Pavilion, in 2011, and the Michal and Renata Hornstein Pavilion for Peace, in 2016. The MMFA complex

includes Bourgie Hall, a 460-seat concert hall. The MMFA is one of Canada's leading publishers of art books in French and English, which are distributed internationally. The Museum also houses the Michel de la Chenelière International Atelier for Education and Art Therapy, the largest educational complex in a North American art museum, enabling the MMFA to offer innovative educational, wellness and art therapy programmes. [mbam.qc.ca](http://mbam.qc.ca)

## BIOGRAPHY

### Jean-Michel Othoniel

Born in 1964 in Saint-Étienne, France. Lives and works in Paris.

Since the end of the 1980s Jean-Michel Othoniel continues to invent a boundless universe from drawing to sculpture, installation to photography and writing to performance. Initially exploring materials with reversible qualities such as sulphur and wax, since 1993 he has turned to glass. These days his works have an architectural dimension and harmoniously adorn gardens and historical sites through public and private commissions all over the world.

### Metamorphoses, sublimations and transformations

Favouring materials with poetic and sensitive properties, at the start of the 1990s Jean-Michel Othoniel starts to produce works in wax or sulphur presented by Jan Hoet in 1992 at documenta in Kassel. The following year, the introduction of glass marks a real turning point in his work. Collaborating with expert Murano craftsmen, he explores the properties of this material that will become his trademark. The delicacy of the glass and the subtlety of its colours relate to the artist's large-scale project: to romanticize and re-enchant the world. In 1994, he takes part in the exhibition "Féminin/Masculin" ("Feminine/Masculine") at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, in which he presents a series of works in sulphur as well as an installation/performance, *My Beautiful Closet*, featuring dancers filmed in the darkness of a cupboard. In 1996, he boards at the Villa Medici in Rome. From this moment on, he starts to make his works interact with the landscape, hanging giant necklaces in the Villa Medici gardens, in trees in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection garden in Venice (1997), as well as at the Alhambra and at Generalife Palace in Granada (1999). Like forbidden fruits, his works merge into the landscape and the foliage, like organic outgrowths absorbing shadows and diffracting light.



Jean-Michel Othoniel / SODRAC (2018). Photo © Guillaume Ziccrelli.

### Between museum and public space

In 2000, Jean-Michel Othoniel receives a public commission for the first time and, one century after Hector Guimard, transforms the Parisian underground station Palais-Royal – Musée du Louvre into *Le Kiosque des Noctambules* (*The Kiosk of the Nightwalkers*): two glass and aluminium crowns conceal a bench intended for chance encounters whilst the city sleeps. His artistic creations are henceforth split between public places and museum spaces; *in situ* works or exhibitions are new opportunities for him to test out the many possibilities provided by his preferred materials and to develop themes that are important to him. In 2003, for the exhibition "Crystal Palace" presented at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain in Paris and at the MOCA in Miami, in Venice and at the International Glass Centre in Marseille (Cirva), he produces blown glass forms that serve as enigmatic sculptures between jewellery, architecture and erotic objects. The following year, in 2004, an invitation to exhibit in the spectacular Mesopotamian rooms in the Louvre Museum at the "Contrepoint" exhibition, presents an opportunity for him to produce his first self-supporting necklaces, including the large *Rivière Blanche* (*White River*) with beads adorned with nipples, subsequently purchased by the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris.

### A Travelling work

Since 1991, sparked by an opportunity for an extended trip to Hong Kong during which Jean-Michel Othoniel installed a temporary studio on the roof of the Museum of contemporary art to prepare the exhibition "Too

French,” travelling has become a recurring theme in his work. He retains this taste for nomadic creation, producing pieces with glassblowers in Mexico, Japan and India.

This idea of travel is also reflected in the project *Le Petit Théâtre de Peau d'Âne* (2004, Centre Pompidou collection), inspired by small puppets found in the house of the great traveller Pierre Loti and presented on stage at the Théâtre de la Ville in Rochefort then at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. Cultivating the art of reconciling opposites, the artist creates a dialogue between the poetic and politics in his *Bateau de larmes* (*Boat of Tears*). This tribute to exiles is produced from a Cuban refugee boat, found in Miami, and covered with cascading colourful beads that transform into huge crystal clear tears. This artwork is exhibited at Art Unlimited 2005, in the pond located in front of the entrance of the Basel Exhibition. During a stay in India in 2010, he works with glassmakers in Firozabad with whom he produces a series of works presented the following year at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in his exhibition “My Way.” Retracing his artistic career since leaving the École des Beauxarts in Cergy-Pontoise in 1988 up to his latest works of art, this retrospective relates the multiplicity of his practices and inspirations. After Paris, “My Way” is presented in 2011 at the Leeum Samsung Museum of Art/Plateau in Seoul, then in 2012 at the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo, the Macao Museum of Art and at the Brooklyn Museum in New York.

### **Interacting with history and the contemporary**

In 2012, an invitation from the Eugène Delacroix Museum and studio in Paris enables Jean-Michel Othoniel to engage with this place steeped in history, through a series of sculptures inspired by the structure of the flowers and plates in his *Herbier Merveilleux* – a publication in which he explores the symbolism of flowers through texts and watercolours. From installation to commission, the artist creates works of art that reflect the beauty of a location and extend its magic.

In spring 2013, for its 10th anniversary the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo commissions *Kin no Kokoro*, a monumental heart of gilded bronze beads permanently installed in the Japanese Mohri Garden, thus offering him an opportunity to orchestrate an encounter between the recurring themes in his work and far eastern sacred symbolism. The same year, as part of the development along the banks of the Saône in Lyon, on the former Caluire lock he creates a belvedere formed of coloured glass beads that reflect the lanterns on Île Barbe opposite. The year 2015 is marked by an outstanding project: the redevelopment of the Water Theatre grove in the gardens of the Palace of Versailles with the landscape designer Louis Benech. For this commission, awarded through an international competition, Jean-Michel Othoniel creates three fountain sculptures in gilded glass, based on choreographies by the dancing master of King Louis XIV, Raoul-Auger Feuillet. At Versailles the artist discovers unprecedented prestige and scale and with *Les Belles Danses* (*The Beautiful Dances*) producing the first permanent commissioned work within the palace by a contemporary artist. Developed like an architectural project, these three fountain sculptures reflect some of the major orientations recently adopted by the artist: the monumental dimension and the relationship to history that increasingly highlights his originality.

In 2016, Jean-Michel Othoniel reveals *The Trésor of the Angoulême's Cathedral*, a monumental artwork of spectacular theatricality that he worked on for more than eight years.

Regularly invited to create artworks *in situ* that interact with historical sites, Jean-Michel Othoniel also enjoys encounters with today's architecture. He has therefore repeatedly created sculptures for Peter Marino and Jean Nouvel. Jean-Michel Othoniel is represented by several galleries: Perrotin (Paris, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul, Tokyo); Karsten Greve (Cologne and Saint-Moritz); and Kukje (Seoul). His works are conserved in the greatest museums of contemporary art, foundations and private collections in the world.

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OTO\_001

Jean-Michel Othoniel (born in 1964), *Black Tornado*, 2017, aluminium beads, steel. Courtesy of Perrotin. © Jean-Michel Othoniel / SODRAC (2018). Photo Claire Dorn



OTO\_002

Jean-Michel Othoniel (born in 1964), *The Know of Shame*, 2016, painting on canvas and ink on white fold leaf. Courtesy of Perrotin. © Jean-Michel Othoniel / SODRAC (2018). Photo Claire Dorn



OTO\_003

Jean-Michel Othoniel / SODRAC (2018). Photo © Guillaume Ziccrelli.