



*Black Lotus*, 2015. Mirrored glass, stainless steel. 130 × 150 × 100 cm / 51 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 59 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 39 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. © Othoniel / ADAGP Paris, 2018. Photo : Claire Dorn

## Jean-Michel Othoniel

### *Dark Matters*

**Opening March 3, 2018, 4pm - 8pm**

**March 3 – April 15, 2018**

Perrotin New York is pleased to present “Dark Matters”, Jean-Michel Othoniel's 7<sup>th</sup> solo show at the gallery. With an ensemble of new and original works, some specially created for the occasion, the show spans several levels of the building to mark the inauguration of the whole building at 130 Orchard Street. “Dark Matters” is the title of the text written by the French-American curator, writer and critic Natasha Boas, within the eponymous book published on the occasion of the exhibition.

A prominent artist on the French and international art scene, Jean-Michel Othoniel prefers materials with poetic and sensitive properties. From an exploration of drawing and sculpture, to installation and photography, writing and performance, he began working with glass, now his signature material, in the 1990s.

Exhibited around the globe, Jean-Michel Othoniel is an internationally acclaimed artist who questions how to live in today's world through works in which beauty is no longer an aesthetic element, but a condition of existence.

#### **Wild Knots**

The artist's latest creations in New York are characterized by the figure of the oxymoron, bringing together the monumental and the fragile, the austere and the marvelous, minimalism and baroque. All of the elements brought into play—glass, mirror, metal, ink, white gold—pertain to this desire for violent, minimal and telluric enchantment, contrasted today with the sorrow of the world.

In Othoniel's enchanted world, heaven and hell have the same face: one of a phantasmagorical universe over which the pain and judgment of our human realm have no hold. The phantasmagoria receives and unifies opposites, be they moral judgments (good and evil) or aesthetic divisions (beautiful and ugly, abstract and figurative). It attains the artistic fulfillment sought by the Romantics. Schelling said that art was the resolution of an infinite contradiction in a finite object<sup>1</sup>. An awareness of the infinity of contradictions, which has marked the artist's oeuvre from the start, finds fulfillment here in an understanding of art as a mechanism of phantasmagorical investment. In doing so, he takes up the radical stance that



*Tornado*, 2017  
 Chrome painted aluminium beads, steel. 450 × 260 × 250cm / 177<sup>3/16</sup> × 102<sup>3/8</sup> × 98<sup>7/16</sup> in  
 © Othoniel / ADAGP Paris, 2018. Photo : Claire Dorn



*The Knot of Shame*, 2016. Painting on canvas, ink on white gold leaf  
 140 × 105 × 5.5 cm / 55<sup>1/8</sup> × 41<sup>5/16</sup> × 2<sup>3/16</sup> in.  
 © Othoniel / ADAGP Paris, 2018. Photo : Claire Dorn

influential artist James Lee Byars brought to the contemporary art scene. Byars responded to endless doubts with a quest for perfection that took him to the outer limits of art: the total transformation of the world into an object of contemplation, then, as a final step, the proposition of art as the only truly habitable world for the human spirit. Othoniel develops in his own language a conception of art as “a world in which to live”,<sup>2</sup> an expression Gianni Vattimo used in reference to Byars ; a conception that can only materialize in a work in which beauty is no longer an aesthetic element, but a condition of existence.

### Beauty and its reflections

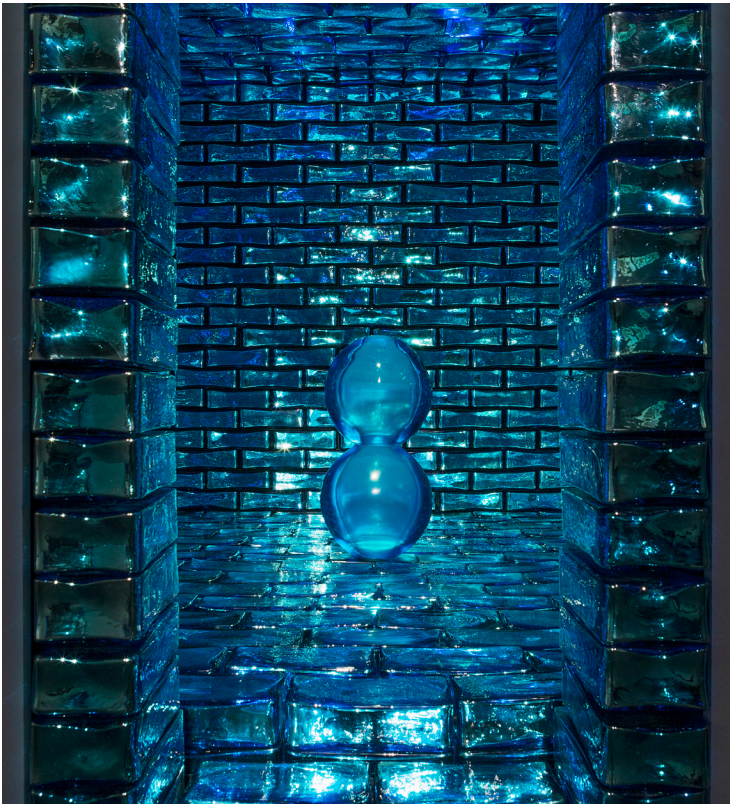
Mixing polished metal with mirrored glass, the works in this new show are devoted to storms and the violence of the elements. The central pieces, a spring gushing forth from a blue grotto and gigantic tornadoes spinning like mobiles, are surrounded by walls of mirrored bricks, cascading necklaces and large suspended glass beads knots. The sculptures seek the violence of shapes; they demonstrate the perfect balance of hanging ellipses and the reflections between them. The artist also draws from his fascination for observing the mathematical combinations of reflections endlessly multiplied, which gave rise to a dialogue with Mexican mathematician Aubin Arroyo. The images he develops in his research echo the reflecting sculptures that Othoniel created in homage to Jacques Lacan. This encounter between sculpture, psychoanalysis and mathematics inspired their book, *Nudos Salvajes*<sup>3</sup> has been published in December 2017. At the same time, a piece by Jean-Michel Othoniel, *The Infinite Knot*, entered the Institute of Mathematics collection at the University of Mexico.

As Aubin Arroyo explains, “up until today, mathematicians have cataloged more than one and a half million different knots, starting from the simplest one towards the more complicated, and the catalog is still growing. However, the attempt to order all the existing knots in such a catalog can never be completed. This catalog only considers a class of knots called *tame* knots. A knot is tame if it can be constructed with the cord of a string formed by a finite number of beads, or pearls. There also are some knots that will never satisfy this property. These knots are called *wild knots*<sup>4</sup>.”

The Surrealists were fascinated by mathematical objects and shapes. They found something inherently poetic in their abstraction, which we tend to see as random and disconcerting. These linear shapes, schematic translations of thought that start from the simplest to reach the complexity of logical formulation, are the very expression of the mystery of shape. Indeed, no one doubts they hold meaning, esoteric to the average person, but essentially clear and demonstrative. Visualizations of a theory, a hypothesis, a system, they inscribe pure thought in space. In mathematical objects, the eye perceives something beyond the shape, an abstraction that is not disincarnation, but quite the opposite, a material expression of the immaterial.

“A *knot diagram* can be thought of as the projected shadow of the knot over a plane surface<sup>5</sup>.” These projected knots the mathematician refers to are a perfect description of Othoniel's paintings on display in the new Perrotin exhibition space. They are abstract figures, but based on observation of nature and its shadows. They invade the canvas like spurts of ink, a cold gesture that brushes the surface covered with white gold leaf. Like stained and frozen icons, these paintings are placed around the sculptures of black, amber and purple mirrors. This series of works on canvas shows the importance of drawing, suspended movement and the distanced body in Othoniel's work. Is the first painting not merely the shadow of a lost lover?





*Grotta Azzurra*, 2017  
Blue & mirrored indian glass bricks. 180 × 201 × 205 cm / 70<sup>7/8</sup> × 79<sup>1/8</sup> × 80<sup>11/16</sup> in  
© Othoniel / ADAGP Paris, 2018. Photo : Claire Dorn



*Precious Stonewall*, 2014  
Amber & mirrored indian glass bricks. 131 × 99 × 23 / 51<sup>9/16</sup> × 39 × 9<sup>1/16</sup> in  
© Othoniel / ADAGP Paris, 2018. Photo : Claire Dorn

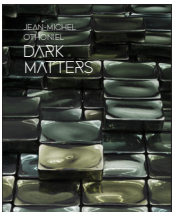
## A new architecture of glass

"The face of the earth would be much altered if brick architecture were ousted everywhere by glass architecture. It would be as if the earth were adorned with sparkling jewels and enamels<sup>6</sup>"

For all his apparent rigor, Othoniel is, like his knots, wild. Free to drop everything and travel to India for several months to explore the country's glassmaking tradition. This trip was the only way for him to work in Firozabad, an Indian city famous for its glassworks, where he learned the age-old techniques of the local craftsmen. He observed them working right on the floor, as close as possible to the materials and the furnaces. These moments of creation, born of this close physical contact between the molten glass and the glassblower suffering in the sweltering heat, moved him deeply. India changed everything he thought he knew about glassmaking. Ever since this memorable experience, he has created giant walls of glass bricks built using Indian techniques. These abstract, monochrome works stem from his observation of the bricks piled up along the roadsides of India. The artist saw these brick monoliths as monuments bearing the hope of their owners, a symbol of their dreams to one day build their own homes. Today in New York, Othoniel exhibits his *Precious Stonewalls*, sculptures bordering on radical architecture. These walls-in spaces, his *Blue Brick Road* of 17 meters long and his *Grotta Azzurra* pay a poetic homage to the historic Stonewall demonstrations on Christopher Street and condemn the silence that still threatens the meaning of this worldwide march that began in NYC in the beginning of the 70's.

## The marvelous real

This desire for gatherings, architecture and utopic monuments that foster dialogue and encounters is something the artist would like to reflect upon throughout his exhibition with the students of NYU and the support of the Public Art Fund. By converting one of the gallery rooms into a workshop, he would like to raise the question that haunts him today at a time when the world seems to be falling apart: how can we re-enchant the world? He wonders what happened the day after the Tower of Babel fell and millions of bricks were left scattered on the ground. What did the people do? What did they rebuild and what should we rebuild in their wake?



The book *Jean-Michel Othoniel, Dark Matters* with a text by the French-American curator, writer and art critic Natasha Boas, is published on the occasion of the eponymous exhibition. Within an original layout inspired by the sea swell, playing on the overlay of images, this new book features the artist's latest inspirations as well as his new monumental sculptures.

Jean-Michel Othoniel will have two major solo shows at Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain of Saint-Étienne, France, starting on May 26, 2018 and at Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MBAM), Canada, starting on June 19, 2018.

1. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Le Système de l'idéalisme transcendantal*, translated from German by Ch. Dubois, Louvain, Peeters, coll. Bibliothèque philosophique de Louvain, 1978.
2. James Lee Byars, Gianni Vattimo & Rudi Fuchs, *James Lee Byars – The Palace of Good Luck*, ed. Castello di Rivoli - Museo d'arte contemporanea, Rivoli, Turin, 1989.
3. Jean-Michel Othoniel and Aubin Arroyo, *Nudos Salvajes*, Editions Othoniel, Paris, 2017.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. Paul Scheerbart, *L'Architecture de verre* (1914), translated from German by P. Galissaire, Circé, Poche, 2013, p.52.

## **Jean-Michel Othoniel - Born on January 27, 1964 in Saint-Étienne, France**

**1983-1988:** Graduated from the École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts, Cergy-Pontoise, France

**1996:** Resident at the Villa Medici, Rome, Italy

### **Biography / North America**

#### **2018**

- Solo show "Dark Matters", inaugurating Galerie Perrotin New York, New York, United States.
- Solo show at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MBAM), Montreal, Canada.

#### **2017**

- *La Rose des Vents* is permanently installed in the Conservatory of Flowers, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, United States, to celebrate the twinning between Paris and San Francisco.

#### **2016**

- *Le Nœud Pivoine* enters the MBAM Collection, Montréal.
- Book Award: Jean-Michel Othoniel, Actes Sud and The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum win the 2016 New England Museum Association price (NeMA) for *The Secret Language of Flowers*

#### **2015**

- Solo show "#OthonielVersailles @836M" at the 836M Gallery, San Francisco, United States.
- Solo show "Jean-Michel Othoniel: Secret flower sculptures" at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, United States.

#### **2014**

- Collective exhibition "One way: Peter Marino", Bass Museum of Art, Miami, United States.

#### **2013**

- Solo show "Othoniel, Jewel Boxes", Savannah College of Art and Design, Savannah, United States.

#### **2012**

- Solo show "Othoniel", at L&M Gallery, New York, United States.
- Solo show "My Way", at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, United States.

#### **2011**

- Residency in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

#### **2010**

- *The Secret Happy End* enters The Brooklyn Museum Collection, New York, United States.

#### **2008**

- Solo show "Diary of Happiness", at the Galerie Perrotin, Miami, United States.
- Solo show "Secret Americana", at Sikkema Jenkins & Co. Gallery, New York, United States.

#### **2007**

- *The White Necklace* enters The Corning Museum of Glass Collection, New York, United States.

#### **2004**

- Solo show "Crystal Palace", at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami, United States.

#### **2003**

- *L'Arbre aux Colliers* is permanently installed in The Sidney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden, New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, United States/ at the same time, the artwork enters The Sidney and Walda Besthoff Collection.
- Residency in the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), Portland.

#### **2001**

- Solo show "Parade" at Newcomb Art Gallery, Woldenberg Art Center, Newcomb College, Tulane University, New Orleans, United States.
- Residency in the Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA), Miami.

#### **1999**

- Solo show "Trésors", at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, United States.
- *The Forbidden* enters the MoMA, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, United States.

#### **1998**

- Solo show "P.S.1", at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, United States.
- Solo show "Exhibition Jean-Michel Othoniel", 88 Wooster Street, Yves Saint Laurent, New York, United States.

#### **1995**

- Solo show "Œuvres récentes", at Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, United States.
- Solo show "The Gramercy International Art Fair", at Galerie Ghislaine Hussenot, Gramercy Park Hotel, New York, United States.

#### **1993**

- Solo show "Jean-Michel Othoniel. Œuvres récentes", at Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, United States.
- Solo show "Shooting Gallery", at Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York, United States.

Jean Michel Othoniel has been featured in numerous solo exhibitions worldwide in prestigious museums and institutions such as Centre Pompidou (Paris), Hara Museum (Tokyo), Leem Samsung Museum of Art (Seoul), Peggy Guggenheim Collection (Venice) and Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (Paris). His artworks are collected by these as well as by other important museums of contemporary art, private collections and foundations worldwide, such as Museum of Modern Art - MoMA (New York), Brooklyn Museum (New York), New Orleans Museum of Art (New Orleans), Montreal Museum of Fine Art (Montreal), Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain (Paris) or several FRAC - Regional Contemporary Arts centers in France.

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