

Press Release



April 2012

Brooklyn Museum Presents Retrospective of Jean-Michel Othoniel

On View August 17 through December 2, 2012

Jean-Michel Othoniel: My Way, a mid-career retrospective of the work of Jean-Michel Othoniel, one of France's most prominent contemporary artists, features sixty-seven pieces that trace the artist's career over the past twenty-five years.

My Way presents Othoniel's early works from the 1980s, rendered in sulfur, phosphorus, and wax, that touch upon sexual identity and suffering, and his more recent large-scale works made with colorful Murano glass from Italy, a medium that combines strength and fragility. His organic and geometrical glass sculptures conjure historical and popular references while also evoking the fantasy universe of the fairytale. Included will be the Museum's own Othoniel, *The Secret Happy End* (2008), as well as four pieces loaned by New York City collectors. The title of the exhibition is taken from the song made famous by Frank Sinatra, *My Way*, which is symbolic of a unique vision unaffected by popular trends.

Works on view include *Self-Portrait in Priest's Robe* (1986), an early meditation on mourning and desire made after the death of a former lover; *The Soul Molded in the Bottom* (1989), rendered in sulfur, a substance Othoniel considers beautiful yet vulgar and is drawn to for its metamorphic qualities; *Black is Beautiful* (2003), a monumental work comprised of a double-stranded necklace of black-colored Murano glass beads, the title of which references the cultural movement launched by African Americans in the 1960s; *Lacan's Knot* (2009), a piece made with futuristic mirrored glass and steel that evokes the three Borromean rings that provided Jacques Lacan inspiration for his theory of human subjectivity; and *Drawings Series (Aquarelle)* (1996-2000), a group of detailed watercolor sketches for large-scale projects and commissions realized later, including the *Kiosk of Nightwalkers* (2000), a Metro entrance that has become one of the most beloved landmarks of Paris.

In the early 1990s, while visiting the Aeolian Islands, Othoniel became interested in obsidian, a naturally occurring volcanic glass that he was able to create artificially for works like *Spoonerism* (1992). Fascinated by its malleability and transitional properties, he made glass the predominant element in his work and began collaborating with glassmakers in Murano, Italy, and elsewhere around the world. The exhibition will

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feature his larger-scale glass works including *My Bed* (2002); glass bead heraldic banners; glass forms that hang like strange fruit or creatures; necklaces magnified to architectural scale; and the artist's most recent glass sculptures, which are suspended or rise from the ground and feature rows of beads that trace curves and knots suggesting mathematical equations or molecular structures.

Also in the Brooklyn Museum presentation is *The Precious Stonewall*, a major work produced in India (New Delhi, Firozabad) at the invitation of the French Embassy in collaboration with Institut Français (Paris) and the Alliance Française de Delhi and with the support of the Centre Pompidou. This work is a tribute to the piles of bricks that line Indian roads adorned with hundreds of necklaces, each of whose stones have been hand cut like a jewel. Made of hundreds of amber glass bricks, this monumental work is also the artist's poetic homage to the iconic Stonewall Inn in New York City where the gay rights movement was born.

A Paris-based artist, Jean-Michel Othoniel was born in 1964 in Saint-Etienne, France. Beginning in the 1980s he made art with such mutable materials as sulfur, lead, and beeswax. In 1993, he began using glass, receiving widespread recognition for his sparkling, jewelry-like artworks made with glass globes crafted on the Venetian island of Murano and in other glass centers around the world. He has had solo exhibitions at such venues as the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain (2003) and Centre Pompidou (2011) and has participated in international exhibitions including *Too French* at the Hara Museum ARC in Japan (1991), Documenta IX in Germany (1992), the Kwangju Biennale in South Korea (2000), and the Tenth Istanbul Biennial (2007). An upcoming solo exhibition presented by L&M Arts, New York, from September 6 through October 6, 2012, will include a number of new artworks. Othoniel has also been chosen to create a permanent landscape installation at the Water Theatre Grove in the Gardens of the Palace of Versailles in 2013.

The exhibition is organized by the Centre Pompidou. The Brooklyn Museum presentation is organized by Lisa Small, Curator of Exhibitions, Brooklyn Museum.

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Macau Museum of Art (April 4–June 17, 2012)

Brooklyn Museum (August 17–December 2, 2012)

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