

PERROTIN

Jean-Michel OTHONIEL

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"The Flowers of Hypnosis" features six new flowers and is sponsored by Dior's Cultural Gardens initiative. BY KRISTEN TAUER

Here and below:
Installation views.



There was a temporary disturbance in the water at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's Japanese Hill-and-Pond Garden this past weekend.

French artist Jean-Michel Othoniel's team took an immersive approach for the installation of "The Flowers of Hypnosis," an exhibition of six new sculptures across the park that aims to bring visitors closer to nature. The show marks the largest exhibition of Othoniel's work Stateside since his retrospective at the neighboring Brooklyn Museum in 2012.

The artist had an opportunity to reflect upon his latest works the day before the exhibition's public debut. Although closed to visitors on Mondays, the park was still buzzing with activity.

"Gardens are my passion," says Othoniel, seated on a bench inside the pond's shaded wooden viewing platform. The artist looked out on his three gilded lotus sculptures floating across the pond, their reflection shimmering on the surface as a turtle glided through the otherwise still water. Othoniel describes his sculptures, which accompany the pond's permanent red Shinto shrine, as "portals" to contemplation and beauty.

"The Flowers of Hypnosis" is the third and final exhibition of Othoniel's work sponsored by Dior's Cultural Gardens initiative. Dior helped bring his work to gardens in three cities; the first exhibition was at the Petit Palais in Paris in 2021, followed by the Seoul Museum of Art in 2022.

"A constant source of artistic inspiration to our founder, flowers and their gardens have remained at the creative heart of the House since its beginnings," said Charlotte Holman Ros, president North America for Parfums Christian Dior. "Jean-Michel, who shares this same passion for the natural world as Monsieur Dior, translates nature's ephemerality so beautifully through the works created for this exhibition, and exceptionally exemplifies the ethos of the Dior Cultural Gardens initiative, which aims to inspire a continuous dialogue between artists and gardens."

"The connection with LVMH is very important for me, but also for a lot of French artists because they are a real supporter of contemporary art," says Othoniel, casually dressed for the



blistering summer day outside in a navy Dior men's T-shirt, marked with a small bee emblem. In 2019, Othoniel wore a custom uniform designed by men's designer Kim Jones for his induction into the Académie des Beaux-Arts.

The Brooklyn exhibition's most direct link with Dior Parfums is evident in the Fragrance Garden, where Othoniel pays homage to the rose with a single gilded sculpture, situated as the "eye" of the oval-shaped space.

"The rose is the queen of the flowers, but also the queen of the perfumes," says Othoniel, pointing out the garden's sensory attributes including braille labels and plants selected for their aromatic qualities. In August, Dior will host a fragrance activation in the garden geared toward young visitors.

"When you are talking about the young public, it's important to make the connection between flowers and contemporary art. To escape the virtual world and go back to the real world," adds Othoniel, making his way past a cluster of pollinators ping-ponging across one of the garden's many vegetation-flanked paths. He notes a distinct similarity inherent to fragrance and sculpture: "You can't experience [either] on your mobile phone."

His largest two sculptures in the exhibition are situated within the shallow Lily Pool Terrace, where dragonflies were darting between lily pods and weaving around the polished stainless steel sculptures.



"Here you see the direct connection between the flower and the sculpture," says Othoniel, pointing out a fully bloomed lily that matched the outline of his beaded sculpture. Each mirrored surface reflected the park's surroundings and the sculpture itself. "If you look closely, you see yourself in each bead," he says. "You can start to look at the reflection and enter into this spiral, and enter this world of beauty and contemplation." The artist likened the effect to that of a strand of DNA, constantly replicating and slowly changing with the passage of time. "When the leaves turn yellow, the sculpture will be yellow," he adds.

Othoniel will get to see the seasonal color change reflected for himself; he'll be

back in the fall, first for an event hosted by Dior at the Botanic Garden, followed by the opening of a solo exhibition at Perrotin's Lower East Side gallery.

In a few hours, Othoniel was headed back to Paris to continue working on that forthcoming exhibition, titled "Reconciliation of Opposites." The show will pay homage to the flower-adorned brick altars that Othoniel saw during a trip to India; one floor of the gallery will house brick sculptures, with flower paintings displayed on the floor above.

"I have known Jean-Michel for over two decades and I am always inspired by the joy his work brings to each place it is presented," said Perrotin New York partner Peggy Leboeuf. "Jean-Michel's works are so powerful when they exist in nature, which has been an important part of his practice since an exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim in 1997," she added. "At the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, he creates a hypnotic space where visitors are able to briefly escape from everyday life and dream."

After his Brooklyn Botanic show closes in late October, Othoniel will transport his flower series to the Oscar Niemeyer Museum in Brazil. The exhibition will highlight the mathematical aspect of his sculptures, which tie into knot theory.

"Here it's more theatrical – there it will be more theoretical," he says of the impact that scenery will have on perception of his work. "The idea of recollection, minimalism – it's also part of those pieces."

In between all of the work for upcoming exhibitions, Othoniel will also be tending to his own garden, a new acquisition. "I was so frustrated by not having a garden, so I bought a house," he says, quickly clarifying the thought. "I bought a garden, and in this garden there was a small house."

"Gardens are really a place where you can escape reality," Othoniel adds, still taking it all in: the reflection of his sculptures in the water, the flowers in the park that had still yet to bloom, the relentless midday sun that sustained the whole ecosystem. "You can relax, take a big breath, and then go back to the craziness of the city."