

PERROTIN

Jean-Michel OTHONIEL

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Garden Fresh: Artist Jean-Michel Othoniel enlivens the Brooklyn Botanic Garden with a ravishing show of site-specific works

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Sculptures from Jean-Michel Othoniel's "Gold Lotus" series installed in the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's Japanese Hill-and-Pond Garden.

Garden Fresh

Artist Jean-Michel Othoniel enlivens the Brooklyn Botanic Garden with a ravishing show of site-specific works

French artist Jean-Michel Othoniel is no stranger to gardens. Early in his career, he suspended necklaces and rosaries from the trees at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, then he adorned the live oaks at the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden in New Orleans with overscale glass beads resembling the ones thrown during Mardi Gras. And his three scintillating fountain sculptures at the gardens of the Château de Versailles would have dazzled even the Sun King himself. By no means are these the only examples of his work interacting generously and alluringly with the outdoors. He even penned a book, *The Secret*

Language of Flowers (Actes Sud), on nature's symbolism in art history as it relates to the collection at the Louvre.

Now he's harnessing that incredible artistic ability to activate the varied landscapes of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. His exhibition "The Flowers of Hypnosis," on view through October 22 and sponsored by Dior, features six new site-specific sculptures that speak directly to the stylistically diverse environments at the park. "It's really a garden made to promenade," says the artist, who marvels at how other cultures' approaches to horticulture vary from the French style. "You are turning around the ponds and enjoying different experiences—the Japanese gardens and then the



Othoniel, whose exhibition “The Flowers of Hypnosis” is on view at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden through October 22. BELOW: The artist’s *Gold Lotus* (2023).



Lotus Garden and the Fragrance Garden—and in every step of the garden I made pieces in connection with those spaces.”

To heighten those relationships, Othoniel looked to the various materials he favors and their unique responses to nature in the individualized settings. In the Japanese Hill-and-Pond Garden, three sculptures in Othoniel’s “Gold Lotus” series, realized in stainless steel and gold leaf, take on a spiritual tone, drawing on that flower’s connection to rebirth. In the Fragrance Garden, Othoniel plays on the area’s dedication to the senses of touch and smell with *Gold Rose*, a whorl of gilded pearls blooming from a black steel rod. But the most transfixing may be the two gigantic reflective pieces, titled together *Mirror Lotus*, which are installed on the lily pools, where they produce an infinity field of flora.

“Jean-Michel’s works are so powerful when they exist in nature, reflecting the world around them”

PEGGY LEBOEUF

“When I do work in gold leaf or in mirror, the sculpture embraces the nature around it in its reflection,” he says. “Each bead of my sculptures reflects the beautiful garden and also the viewer.”

Peggy Leboeuf, a partner at Perrotin, which represents Othoniel and will host a solo show of his work in New York this October, recognizes the potency of that. “Here, he creates an idyllic landscape that invites visitors to dream, briefly removed from reality,” she says. “Jean-Michel’s works are so powerful when they exist in nature, reflecting the world around them.”

But perhaps the most compelling aspect of the show is how visitors experience something new with each visit as the flowers and terrain evolve over the months. “That’s the magical part of the garden because it’s a living form,” Othoniel says. “The colors change around the sculpture with the weather, whether it’s the fall foliage or the effects of a rainstorm.” Spoken like someone who truly understands the artistry of nature. bbg.org —JACQUELINE TERREBONNE