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Jean-Michel OTHONIEL

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Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle | Oct 1, 2023

In his latest exhibition at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, on view through October 22, 2023, Paris-based artist Jean-Michel Othoniel hopes his abstract floral sculptures in his signature glass and metal beads – imagined as portals into a universe of beauty and contemplation – will hypnotize visitors as they gaze into their limitless reflections. He speaks about “The Flowers of Hypnosis”, his third and final show sponsored by Dior’s Cultural Gardens initiative, which also happens to be his largest solo show in the US since his retrospective “My Way” at the Brooklyn Museum in 2012.



Exhibition view of *The Flowers of Hypnosis* at the Japanese Hill-and-Pond Garden at Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

PHOTO: GUILLAUME ZICCARELLI. COURTESY OF ©JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL / ADAGP, PARIS & ARS, NEW YORK, 2023.

What are your impressions of your exhibition “The Flowers of Hypnosis” at Brooklyn Botanic Garden?

I’m very happy with the show because it’s very spectacular. It was special production for the site, so they are huge sculptures, four meters tall. It’s the same series as the one I did in Korea, but four times bigger. There are six pieces in three different gardens inside the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

How did this exhibition come about?

It’s part of a series with Dior Cultural Gardens. They already sponsored my show at Petit Palais in Paris and then at the Imperial Garden in Korea, and now they wanted a place in the States to continue our journey together, so they told me either in New York or in LA. In fact, I know the Botanic Garden since I had a show at the Brooklyn Museum 10 years ago, so I contacted the director, Anne Pasternak, whom I know very well, and asked her if she wanted to help me to convince the new director of the Botanic Garden to accept the show. He was very excited because he was the one who did the show of Christo in Central Park years ago, so he knows contemporary art very well. He’s a brand-new director, so he said, “OK, let’s do it.” We did it within almost one year and a half, so it was very fast.



Jean-Michel Othoniel's water lily on the Lily Pond at Brooklyn Botanic Garden

PHOTO: GUILLAUME ZICCARELLI. COURTESY OF ©JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL / ADAGP, PARIS & ARS, NEW YORK, 2023.

Will the show continue on to other locations?

No, in fact, it's the last step of our collaboration, but it will end with a collaboration around the L'Or de J'Adore perfume bottle. It was unveiled in September in New York and will be available to the public this fall.

What's the main idea behind this exhibition?

The idea was to make three stories in three different gardens. The first garden is a Japanese garden, which is the oldest Japanese garden in the States, and I really wanted there to pay homage to the lotus in connection with Japanese culture and Asian culture. It's really how the lotus can be important and how gold also is important in Asia and in relation with Buddhism and Confucianism. The second garden is a fragrance garden, which is a smaller garden made in the '50s by a woman who created a landscape around the idea of fragrance for blind people. You have all the flower labels in Braille, and you can touch the flowers or the herbs and they all smell. I put in the center of this garden a rose on a pedestal, a big sculpture. I say rose, but it's an abstract sculpture. We did a performance with perfume with Francis Kurkdjian, the nose of Dior, in September for young blind people. The third garden is about the water lily, so here I did gigantic water lilies in mirror-polished stainless steel. Those pieces are very big and they reflect the whole lily pond, all the color of the water lily around, the sky. This installation is very spectacular. So this is like a small journey in the garden in three different locations that are very close to one another because the garden is so big. I did not want to lose the public, so you can walk from one to another.



Jean-Michel Othoniel's golden rose in the Fragrance Garden of Brooklyn Botanic Garden

PHOTO: GUILLAUME ZICCARELLI. COURTESY OF ©JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL / ADAGP, PARIS & ARS, NEW YORK, 2023.

**Your sculptures celebrate the lotus flower, the rose and the water lily.
What do they represent to you?**

In fact, the lotus was how I discovered Asian culture, so it is very important for me because it was a step to accept beauty in my work and to go further to see how beauty can be a step to spirituality. The rose is a flower I have already experimented with in my show at the Louvre. It's a more contemplative and also very sensual flower with a strong fragrance. Femininity is very important in this flower, and what I love also is it's a very architectural flower; it's very well composed and all the petals are so sharp. What I really love about this flower is it has pushed me in my work to

another level. The water lily is more about my connection with beauty, but more in a European way, like how the Impressionists and Monet used it as a symbol of pure hedonist pleasure. So that's why the three flowers are so important in my work.

How did you come up with the title of your exhibition?

It's because I knew five of the sculptures would be on water, and the reflection is so full of light that it's really like the vibration of the sculpture on water. So if you have this type of double image, it brings a sort of hypnotic vision of the sculpture. That's why I choose this idea of hypnotic sculpture, and it's also a way also to say if you look at a flower, it can really help you to relax and to escape the rudeness of the world, to find a concentration point in the flower. So that's why I called it "The Flowers of Hypnosis".