

PRESSBOOK

Jean-Michel OTHONIEL

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Jewelled Waves

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A huge wave, made of thousands of dark green bricks of glass, rears up at the [Centre Régional d'Art Contemporain \(CRAC\)](#) in Sète, south of France. Given how the art centre looks onto the waterfront and is located near the town's harbour, [Jean-Michel Othoniel's](#) vision of the sea is electrifying. Executed with technical precision, the crest of the wave dips into the void, conveying a sense of movement. The piece exemplifies the French artist's move towards making sculptures on an architectural scale, employing glass as his material of choice.

Born in 1964, Othoniel made sculptures using sulphur and wax in his early work, before starting to use glass in 1993. Seven years later, his first piece of public sculpture 'Le Kiosque des Noctambules' (The Kiosk of Night Owls), was installed on Place Colette above the Palais Royal-Musée du Louvre metro station in Paris.



Jean-Michel Othoniel, Thee Wild Pansy, 2017, Courtesy Galerie Perrotin. Photo : Marc Damage

The pinnacle of his career thus far, however, is the commissioned 'Les Belles Danses', made of 1,750 glass balls filled with gold leaf, installed permanently in the Water Theatre Grove in the gardens of the Château de Versailles. Made in collaboration with landscape architect Louis Benechin, the sculpture comprises four abstract fountains that pay homage to Louis XVI, who would watch outdoor ballets in the Water Theatre Grove.

Glass balls, produced with glassblowers in Murano and Basel, have become Othoniel's signature. For his new works on show at the [CRAC](#) until September 24, Othoniel has also employed cast aluminium. The geometric forms seem to twist, spiral and dance in the gallery spaces, appearing different depending on one's viewpoint, thereby engaging the dynamic interaction of the visitor.



View of the exhibition « Géométries Amoureuses, Se collectionner soi-même (Le verre, 1992-2016) » at Carré Sainte-Anne, Espace d'art contemporain de la Ville de Montpellier, from 10 June to 24 September 2017. Photo : Jérôme Bryon

In another room, a group of nine sculptures, made of obsidian and placed on wooden plinths, signals a new direction for Othoniel. Upstairs around 100 drawings realised between 1996 and 2017 reveal Othoniel's inspirations and thought-processes, shedding light on the genesis of his artworks.

The second part of the Géométries Amoureuses exhibition takes place at [Carré Saint-Anne](#), a desecralised church in the nearby city of Montpellier that is used to stage contemporary art exhibitions. A carpet-like installation of gleaming turquoise bricks leads from the former altar to the back of the church.



Jean-Michel Othoniel, Black Lotus, 2016 (sculpture, first plan), Courtesy Kukje Gallery.



Jean-Michel Othoniel, Black Tornado 2017, Black Tornado 2017 and Purple Tornado 2016. Courtesy Galerie Perrotin

Brightly-coloured, jewel-like sculptures in the forms of bows and necklaces for imaginary processions rest on the turquoise installation and hang from the ceiling, creating a conversation with the stained-glass windows. Along the walls are drawings and texts of different flowers and plants, taken from Othoniel's book, *The Secret Language of Plants*.