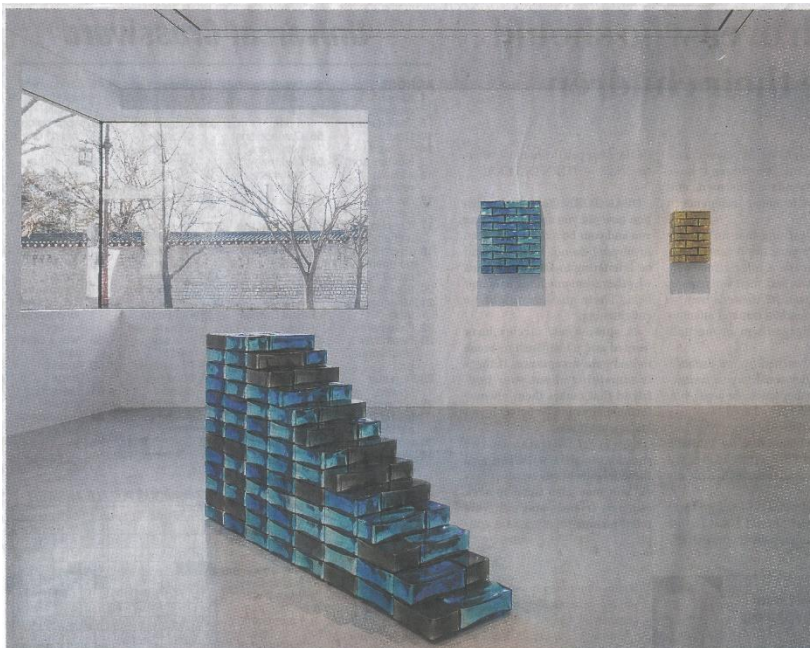


Othoniel's glass work reflects joy, sorrow of life

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Installation view of Jean-Michel Othoniel's "New Works" at Kukje Gallery in central Seoul

Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

Othoniel's glass work reflects joy, sorrow of life

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French artist Jean-Michel Othoniel, who interprets delicate and subtle colors of glass into resplendent sculptures, is sharing what he's come up with during the COVID-19 lockdown with Korean audiences.

At his solo exhibition at Kukje Gallery in Seoul, Othoniel unveils his latest glass brick works as well as his rose paintings and glass sculptures created in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the glass pyramid of the Louvre.

"I think the power of art is also to invite us to escape the reality," the artist said in a video message.

Works from the Othoniel's latest glass brick series "Precious Stonewall" combining different colors are on display at the gallery's new space with corner windows facing the streets of Sancheong-dong and Gyeongbok Palace.

"It is very specific — I started to draw eight months ago when we were all in our houses alone," Othoniel said, explaining how the new idea popped into his mind during the pandemic.

"It's like a diary of drawings, playing with this idea of changing color and very minimalist language. It was a very important period for me because I came back to my first love in art — minimalists such as Donald Judd and Carl Andre," he said. "When I was very young, I had a chance to be in a city where the museum was dedicated to those artists from the 70s. And I saw those artists when I was very young and really my first emotion in art was with those very minimal scul-



Jean-Michel Othoniel's "Precious Stonewall" (2020)

Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

tures."

Returning to his first love of art, he drew the sketches of glass bricks and created this "Precious Stonewall" sculptures in dialogue with Indian glass artisans. The series' title is borrowed from the historic Stonewall Riots in 1969, a catalyst for the LGBTQ rights and equality movements.

The glass brick sculptures come in a variety of color combinations and Othoniel described them "talking to each other." This is the first time for the artist to mix different colors of glass bricks for a piece. With natural ample light, along with calculated lighting, the glass brick pieces leave flame-like reflections on the walls while reflecting the viewers.

"It's a very contemplative sculpture and I hope you would take the time to enter this realm you can feel in the show," the artist said.

In the center of the room is another new piece "Stairs to Paradise," representing humans' unceasing efforts in the form of a staircase, also devised during the lockdown.

"It is a way to show utopian architecture I brought into my work today. You may know The Big Wave I did some years ago, which was real architecture, which evokes the beauty and power of nature at the same time," he said.

"The idea of Stairs to Paradise is more to bring a message of hope and joy — Let's be born again and make a view vision for the new century. It is also a way to escape this moment we are all facing during COVID-19 which is very stressful."

Also on view are a series of lithography based on Othoniel's drawings, which gives a glimpse of how the artist's idea takes shape from drawings to sculptures.

Another room is dedicated to "La Rose du Louvre," a series of works created in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the glass pyramid of the Louvre in Paris.

"The Louvre invited me for a show to celebrate the anniversary and on this occasion, I made a book about secret meanings of flowers in paintings L'Herbier merveilleux," the artist said. "From this book, I did a series of paintings inspired by the rose in Wedding of Marie de Medici to Henri IV, which is an amazing painting by Rubens, to celebrate her wedding."

With the symbolic rose of the world-class museum, Othoniel created six paintings using black ink on white gold leaves in 2019. The paintings are now permanently installed in the museum's Cour Puget, along with the masterpiece sculptures of the 17th and 18th century.

"In the show here in Korea, I decided to continue the series of the paintings, so you have the full series of the old paintings inspired by the rose of the Louvre," he said. "I made four sculptures in continuity with the paintings. Usually I'm working like that — I first make watercolor, then paintings and then sculptures. Here you have the full process of my vision of those roses in paintings and also in volumes."

The sculptures are made with glass, mirrored glass and stainless steel, reflecting the whole room.

"It's a very lively series of sculptures. I also relate them to the ideal of infinity and movement. This fits very well with the surroundings — you have this energy in the painting and the same energy in the sculptures," the artist said.

The exhibit runs through Jan. 31.