



## Jean-Michel Othoniel

Born in 1964

Live and works in Paris

With a marked taste for metamorphosis, sublimation, and transmutation, Jean-Michel Othoniel shows a fondness for materials with reversible properties.

He started out, at the beginning of the 1990s, with works made out of sulfur, showing them at the Kassel documenta in 1992. A turning point in his output came following these years when he began to work with obsidian stone and glass. Working with the finest glassmakers in Basel ever since, he explores the properties of a material that subsequently became a hallmark of his work. Jean-Michel Othoniel is represented by Perrotin, Karsten Greve and Kukje Galleries. In 2011, an important exhibition held at the Centre Pompidou Paris presenting the entire gamut of his artistic practice retraced his career.

In May 2015, the artist revealed *The Beautiful Dances*, three fountain sculptures installed on the ponds of the new Water Theatre grove of Versailles. It is the first permanent commission in the gardens of the Palace since three hundred years.



## Goetheanum

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Access from Basel to Goetheanum,

**Public transport: 20min**

***Tramway line 10*** from Basel SBB  
to Dornach-Arlesheim station.

**By car: 15min**

Highway from Basel to Delémont,  
exit Reinach-Sud,  
follow Dornach, then Goetheanum.



## INVISIBILITY FACES

Jean-Michel Othoniel

June 14 - July 5, 2015

Daily 8am - 10pm

Goetheanum



*Invisibility Face*, Othoniel 2015  
Carved obsidian stone, 85 x 60 x 45 cm



Obsidian block faceted after Othoniel's drawing  
*Glassworks Studio*, Basel



Chestnut carved wood base,  
*Baukunst*, Dornach

At the beginning of May, after four years of preparation, a new permanent work by Jean-Michel Othoniel, consisting of an impressive three-part fountain *Les belles Danses*, was inaugurated at the château de Versailles.

And now, Othoniel at the Goetheum. One can hardly imagine a more unforeseen leap than from the pre-enlightened Versailles to the radical understanding of the human condition expressed in Rudolf Steiner's Goetheum, built in 1924-1928. What could possibly be Othoniel's interest in this building and its language of forms? The initial spark was a small lamp by Goetheum sculptor Oswald Dubach from the 1930s which he found in an antique shop in Paris.

The form of this unspectacular, but yet expressive lamp carved in wood caught his interest and led him to the carpenters' workshop, *Baukunst*, on the Goetheum campus, the same place where once Dubach worked and probably manufactured the very lamp. In collaboration with *Baukunst*, and *Glassworks* (Münchenstein), the new body of work *Invisibility Faces* has been realised.

There is another link, maybe more hidden and yet to be discovered, that has to do with Othoniel's fascination with the materials and their inherent transformative possibilities.

Twenty-six years ago, at the beginning of his career, Othoniel made a trip to the Aeolian Islands north of Sicily to look for

natural sulphur. It was here, that he first learned about obsidian, volcanic glass. Obsidian does not appear as we expect glass to behave. Even coloured glass has a certain transparency. On the contrary, obsidian looks totally opaque, and yet there is a kind of reversed transparency as if light is coming from within.

How is this possible? Maybe it is this paradoxical sensation of darkness and light that provide obsidian with its mysterious presence. Now we can understand why Othoniel chose the unconventional structured title. It is not about invisible faces but about a countenance of the invisible.

*Johannes Nilo*