



AMBASSADE DE FRANCE EN INDE  
FRENCH EMBASSY IN INDIA

## France-Firozabad-France

An exhibition of the glass installation by French creator, Jean-Michel Othoniel

# JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL

## *The Precious Stonewall*

Installation  
2010

28 August - 24 September  
11 am - 7 pm  
Lalit Kala Akademi  
Rabindra Bhawan, New Delhi

Opening on 27<sup>th</sup> August, 2010 at 7 pm  
On-site press preview on 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2010 from 4-6 pm

Jean-Michel Othoniel will be present on the occasion along with a small team from Firozabad that participated in the realisation of the sculpture.

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The Precious Stonewall is

**4200 glass bricks blown to perfection**  
**150 glass bead necklaces**  
**7 ½ square metres of ground area**  
**4.2 metres high**  
**A 5-ton structure**

Jean-Michel Othoniel describes his labour of love thus:

*The Precious Stonewall was born from my experimentation with glass in India. I discovered the primal force of this material of deep hues while working in Firozabad in the heat of furnaces and the dust of pigments.*

*The thousands of bricks that this work is composed of were blown and polished to a gleam, akin to burnished ingots that illuminate the mists of time. This work is a tribute to the piles of bricks, like so many constantly evolving forces, that line Indian roads adorned with hundreds of necklaces, each of whose stones, deceptively naïve, has been hand-cut like a jewel.*

Post Delhi, the installation will travel to Paris to be showcased at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 2011 as part of a major exhibition involving India and titled, “Paris-Delhi-Bombay”.

Produced in India (New Delhi, Firozabad) at the invitation by the French Embassy in India in collaboration with Culturesfrance (Paris), the Alliance Française de Delhi and with the support of the Centre Georges Pompidou.

Special thanks to the glass artisans of Firozabad and Purdil Nagar who have been an inseparable part of Jean-Michel Othoniel’s Indian journey and the collaboration of Swiss artist Mattéo Gonet and Indian facilitator Nitin Singh Chauhan.

## The Journey

Jean-Michel Othoniel arrived in New Delhi in January 2009 with the first gleam of the glass “institution” he was to create. This vision was powered by the simple aquarelle of an amber wall on a piece of paper.

While in Delhi, he interacted with inlay workers, marble manufacturers, visited antique shops, bead markets, dealers and interacted with Indian artists working with glass, many of whom couldn’t imagine their *metier* without the “heat and dust” and the craft of Firozabad artisans. From the high-tech glass blowing facilities in Murano (Italy) where Jean-Michel has been used to working, he landed amidst the blazing furnaces in Firozabad to make his first contact with the art and commerce of glass. Curio ateliers, time-honoured ovens, ingenious production systems, processes of silvering and working with metal moulds, stocks and markets, the glass blower and the agent, the small town enveloping a universe within itself. Range, diversity, technique... everything is possible.

Colour sampling, cut glass stones, silvering, and quality control followed next over months of interaction between Firozabad and Delhi and Paris. Transporting, storing, packing and conceiving the installation of this gigantic sheer glass piece was an undertaking in itself.

More than a year after Jean-Michel Othoniel envisioned the watercolour drawing of his bejewelled glass wall, this installation will be on view starting 26<sup>th</sup> August, first for the media, a work that even Jean-Michel Othoniel himself hasn’t seen in its final avatar.

## Jean-Michel Othoniel

Born in 1964 in Saint-Etienne, Jean-Michel Othoniel lives and works in Paris. He has been in residence at the French Academy at Villa Medici in Rome (1995-96) and participated in great exhibitions of contemporary art such as Documenta IX in 1992, Féminin/Masculin at Centre Georges Pompidou in 1994, Heaven at the Tate Gallery in Liverpool and the Kwangju Biennial in Korea in 2000. He has also done solo exhibitions such as his show at The Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice in 1997 and at PS1 in New York in 1998. One of his most famous masterpieces made in glass is “Le Kiosque des Noctambules”, an installation at the entrance of the metro station Palais Royal-Musée du Louvre in Paris, realised in 2000 for celebrating the centenary of the Paris subway. He also worked for the Fondation Cartier in Paris creating the installation “Crystal Palace”, which mixes architecture, sculpture, glass and light. The result is a magnificent fairy tale where glass plays the key role.

Despite his affinity for glass, which he prefers working with since 1993, Othoniel does not label himself as a glass artist. Instead he has described himself as an “opera

director” helped by talented people to make interpretations from his own drawings. The direct collaboration with Murano glass blowers, especially, is vitally important for him. Othoniel says that working with glass blowers involves a lot of concentration: he usually intervenes actively during their work, stopping them at the right moment or pushing them towards the “ideal” form.

An artist who has a passion for all sorts of metamorphoses, sublimations and transmutations, Jean-Michel Othoniel has a predilection for materials with reversible properties. He has been interested in the physical properties that make up the elements of an object since his early career. He focuses on the moments of transition when an object changes from one state to another. Othoniel is interested in drawing connections between injuries and destructions in life, and the process of transformation, sublimation, and modification, while seeking a possibility for healing. Glass is a crucial element in portraying this theme for Othoniel. According to the artist, glass itself is not solid. It is easily shaped and open to diverse interpretations. Furthermore, its clear and highly reflective characteristic makes it well-suited for communicating and sharing the artist’s approach when works are displayed publicly. Since 1990 Jean-Michel Othoniel’s spectacular glass sculptures have earned him international acclaim. His oversized sculptures have been composed as magnificent installations which have decorated entire house facades or even public places. Today, each one of his masterpieces arouses collective enthusiasm.

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**Jean-Michel Othoniel will be in New Delhi from 23 to 28 August, 2010**

For interaction with the artist and to confirm your presence at the press preview on 26<sup>th</sup> August, please contact

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