



CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES

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PRESS RELEASE

THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES HAS CHOSEN LOUIS BENECH IN PARTNERSHIP WITH JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL TO LANDSCAPE THE WATER THEATRE GROVE IN THE GARDENS OF THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES

PRESS CONTACTS

PALACE OF VERSAILLES
Hélène Dalifard
+33 (0)1 30 83 77 01
Aurélie Gevrey
+33 (0)130 83 77 03
Violaine Solari
+33 (0)130 83 77 14
presse@chateauversailles.fr
www.chateauversailles.fr

LOUIS BENECH
Chantal de Franqueville
+33 (0)1 42 01 04 00
cf@louisbenech.com
www.louisbenech.com

STUDIO OTHONIEL
Géraldine Dufournet
+33 (0)1 43 67 47 22
geraldine@othoniel.fr
GALERIE PERROTIN
Héloïse Le Carvenec
+33 (0)1 42 16 91 80
heloise@perrotin.com
www.othoniel.fr

FOLLOWING THE INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION AMONG GARDEN DESIGNERS FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE WATER THEATRE GROVE, THE LANDSCAPE DESIGNER LOUIS BENECH AND THE ARTIST JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL HAVE BEEN CHOSEN FOR THEIR CONTEMPORARY DESIGN PROJECT. THE WORK WILL BEGIN IN 2013 AND WILL BE A NEW HOMAGE PAID BY THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES TO ANDRÉ LE NÔTRE TO MARK THE 400TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS BIRTH.

THE WATER THEATRE GROVE, now the Round Green Grove, is located in the centre of the northern fringe of the garden of Versailles between the Star Grove and the Three Fountains Grove. It was constructed between 1671 and 1674 by Le Nôtre, backed up by the hydraulics experts Francine and Denis. The fountains are the work of Le Brun. Originally designed to be explored in stages, the Water Theatre revealed its attractions progressively. Modified in 1704 and badly damaged subsequently, the Water Theatre was demolished in 1775 to make way for a layout of walks and lawns, which led to its new name, the Round Green Grove.

SQUARE-SHAPED LIKE MOST OF THE GROVES OF VERSAILLES, it consists of a central area covering 1.5 ha which is now empty and is used as a logistics site. But, following the storms of 1990 and 1999, a strategy for the requalification of the park of Versailles has been implemented to restore to the groves their configuration during the Ancien Régime, with the exception of the Water Theatre which will feature a contemporary landscape design in the central part.

LOUIS BENECH IN PARTNERSHIP WITH JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL will landscape the inner 'room' of the Water Theatre forming a square of 120 m on each side within another square measuring 180 m on each side.

THE PROJECT WILL FOLLOW THE SPIRIT OF THE GARDENS DESIGNED BY LE NÔTRE to take into account the ecology of the setting, the constraints of sustainable development and accessibility, and the costs of maintenance, security and water use.

THE PROJECT OF LOUIS BENECH AND JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL

“You need to have heard Louis Benech evoking the triple-time rhythm that will punctuate the composition of the Water Theatre Grove and Jean-Michel Othoniel describing the steps of the ‘graceful dance’ that will inspire the fountains to measure how the spirit of King Louis XIV is omnipresent in this contemporary design.”

Catherine Pégard, President of the Public Establishment of the Palace, Museum and National Estate of Versailles.

THE APPROACH ADOPTED BY LOUIS BENECH IS TO CREATE A WELCOMING GROVE that is permanently open, whereas the other historical and more fragile groves are often closed, to allow visitors to enjoy alone or with their family the intimacy of these surprising “open-air rooms” desired by the king, but in a more relaxed, more spontaneous and easier way. The visitor will be drawn into a rhythmic stroll punctuated by halts in the shade of green oaks before reaching the large clearing of light and water. This clearing will recover the concept of the original vocation of the grove of 1671 based on a new axis. It will be divided into a large ‘room’ and a stage above it interpreted in two basins.

TO BE ABLE TO SHOW HOW THE GROVE WAS, without the mythology, copies or off-beat variations, a series of allusions to the work of Le Nôtre – perspective curiosities, recurrences of rhythms – and the positioning of vegetation landmarks will provide some pointers and dimensions of the soul of the long-gone grove.

LOUIS BENECH HAS CHOSEN TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE ARTIST JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL For the production of the sculptures. So it will be on the water mirrors of the grove that Jean-Michel Othoniel will place at surface level four gilt sculptures-fountains. These abstract works composed of interlacing arabesques of glass will evoke the body in movement, inspired directly by the ballets performed and organised by Louis XIV and *The Art of describing dance* by Raoul-Auger Feuillet in 1701. The grace of their powerful water spouts will give life to minuets or rigadoons resembling lace forming in the air. Dynamic calligraphic patterns that will recall the ‘embroidery’ of the flower-beds and parterres present in the garden of Versailles. The garden, the body and sculpture will thus be intimately linked.

THE PROJECT OF LOUIS BENECH WILL PUT THE EMPHASIS ON DISCRETION so that it fits in harmoniously in this exceptional site, completely invisible from the Palace and the park. The trees chosen will not be higher than the 17 metres decided by Le Nôtre and will be in perfect balance with the crowns of the yews of the neighbouring grove of Apollo’s Bath, just as the diagonals will be visually closed as in the other groves.

THE CONCERN FOR ABSOLUTE REVERSIBILITY IS ALSO A KEY FEATURE OF THE PROJECT. It was essential to preserve the vestiges of the stonework and hydraulic system still present on the site, so the network of new pipes will take these into account as will the rest of the features visible above ground. The entire steel basin can be dismantled and even recycled, as its supports rule out the need for any foundation.

LOUIS BENECH

LOUIS BENECH CAME TO GARDEN DESIGN THROUGH HIS LOVE OF PLANTS. After studying law, he worked in England as a horticultural worker in the celebrated Hillier nurseries. Enthused by what he had learnt, he returned to France and became a gardener in a private estate in Normandy. In 1985, he began his career as a landscape designer. Five years later, he was commissioned with Pascal Cribier and François Roubaud for the redevelopment of the old part of the Tuileries gardens. He was launched.

SINCE THEN HE HAS DESIGNED AND CARRIED THROUGH OVER 300 PROJECTS, both public and private, in Korea, Panama, Canada, the United States, Greece and Morocco. Working essentially for individual owners, he has also taken on contracts with major institutional companies such as Axa, Hermès and Suez. He has also worked on numerous established gardens such as the gardens of the Elysée palace and the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, the Palais d'Achilleion in Corfu and the estate of the Château de Chaumont-sur-Loire. A recent commission was the landscaping of the quadrilateral of the Archives Nationales in Paris.

FOR EACH OF HIS COMMISSIONS, LOUIS BENECH STRIVES TO CREATE A VERITABLE HARMONY between the landscaping project and the architectural or natural environment of the site. Ideally, he would like visitors not to guess what changes he has made... Special attention is paid to finding the most economical way to guarantee the continuity of his gardens, with their maintenance as a key concern.

WWW.LOUISEBENECH.COM

JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL

WITH AN ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENT FAVOURING METAMORPHOSES, and materials whose properties are reversible, Jean- Michel Othoniel (born in 1964 in Saint-Etienne) made his name in 1992 at the Documenta in Cassel with his sulphur sculptures. The following year he introduced glass into his work and it became his favourite material. His creative work is multi-faceted, composed of uncluttered artworks imbued with poetry and eroticism.

IN 2000, THE ARTIST TRANSFORMED THE PARIS METRO STATION OF PALAIS-ROYAL - Musée du Louvre into a *Kiosque des Noctambules* (Kiosk of Night Owls).

FOR THE "CRYSTAL PALACE" EXHIBITION in the Fondation Cartier in Paris in 2003 and the MOCA in Miami, he executed large sculptures in blown glass intended to restore enchantment to the world. Othoniel, an inventor of a world of ultimate freedom, had his first retrospective at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2011. *"My Way"* will be on tour until the end of 2012: Plateau/Leeum Samsung Museum of Art in Seoul, Hara Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo, Macau Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum in New York

JEAN-MICHEL OTHONIEL IS REPRESENTED BY THE GALERIE PERROTIN IN PARIS.

WWW.OTHONIEL.FR

