

JOEL OTTERSON: ON VIEW ON WISCONSIN AVENUE



*“Voluptuous Desire” by Joel Otterson installed within the Ellen & Joe Checota Gallery at the Bradley Symphony Center
212 W Wisconsin Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53203.*

Milwaukee, WI, September 19, 2025 – June 1, 2026 — Sculpture Milwaukee is pleased to present *Voluptuous Desire*, a cast-iron sculpture produced in Wisconsin in 2018 by the celebrated American sculptor Joel Otterson (b. 1959). The latest addition to Actual Fractals, our current exhibition series, the work will be installed on Sept. 19 in the Ellen & Joe Checota Atrium at the [Bradley Symphony Center](#) in downtown Milwaukee, where it will remain on view until June 1, 2026.

A large-scale work in the shape of an ancient Greek amphora, *Voluptuous Desire* depicts the ormolu—the intricate golden filigree that decorates the ceramic vessels—without the bulk of clay behind it. The piece is gorgeous, ethereal—like skywriting, but done in heavy metal—and a prime reflection of Otterson’s mission, now more than three decades underway, to remake, as he has put it, “every single thing in the house.”

Drawing inspiration from domestic handicraft and functional objects, Otterson works in a wide range of materials, including wood, copper pipe, crochet, pottery, and glass. *Voluptuous Desire* is a part of a body of work the artist created in 2018 as a participant in the [Arts/Industry](#) residency program, a unique residency program administered by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center and hosted and funded by Kohler Company, in Kohler, Wisconsin. Otterson had been working for a month in wax and clay, attempting to build lacy models he could cast in the factory foundry during his residency. But then, as he has said, “a light bulb went off in my head” when he realized he could skip all the time-consuming modeling and carve his delicate designs for *Voluptuous Desire* and other related pieces directly into the factory’s resin-bonded sand molds.

Otterson is fascinated by forms and objects and how their familiar genetics morph but also endure across millennia, giving each generation of viewers an “emotional trigger,” as he has said, to feel something new in their presence. “My work questions what it means to be alive and to consider our relationships with everyday things, especially the objects that mediate people and bring them together,” the artist noted in 2019.

“I’m thrilled to present Otterson’s *Voluptuous Desire*, a piece that plays with our expectations of domestic and decorative objects,” said Sculpture Milwaukee executive director John Riepenhoff. “When you stand in front of this monumental sculpture, it’s wonderful to follow the form and observe the close attention of the artist and how it manifests in the classical yet accessible form of a vase that’s been stripped of utility to become pure decoration, exquisitely beautiful.”

“Joel Otterson is an important Pictures Generation artist who has been active since the 1980s, and he has had a longstanding relationship with the Kohler Company through the Arts/Industry residency program,” Riepenhoff added. “I’m hugely excited to exhibit this piece that was not only produced in Wisconsin, but one we’re able to share with visitors in Milwaukee thanks to the major, long-term cultural investments of the Kohler family and our partnering cultural organizations.”

“*Voluptuous Desire* is an iconic and esteemed work from the Kohler Company’s Arts/Industry Art Collection,” states artist Michelle Grabner, the Kohler Company Curator and a former Sculpture Milwaukee guest curator. “Sharing this exceptional artwork with the public both honors Joel’s imagination and his technical prowess and it celebrates John Michael Kohler Art Center’s historic Arts/Industry residency program.”

Riepenhoff said, “We’re grateful to be working with the Kohler Company for the first time in borrowing this piece from their collection and excited to bring it new visibility on Wisconsin Avenue, and we’re grateful to John Michael Kohler Arts Center and the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra for supporting what will be the fourth installation we’ve presented in the Chequamegon Atrium. We have a tremendous cultural infrastructure here in Wisconsin, and we’re proud to help celebrate it.”

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Otterson was born in Los Angeles in 1959. He received his BFA from Parsons School of Design in 1982. He was an artist-in-residence with the Arts/Industry program in 1991, 2017, and 2018. His work has been exhibited at many international galleries and museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, CA. Otterson’s work is included in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Hammer Museum, the Cincinnati Art Museum, and many other public and private collections. He currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

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