

Ehrlich Steinberg
5540 Santa Monica Blvd
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Tuesday - Saturday 12-6pm

November 9 - December 21 2024
Opening: Saturday November 9 6-9pm

Joel Otterson
How To Be Beautiful

Ehrlich Steinberg is pleased to present *How To Be Beautiful*, a solo exhibition by Los Angeles-based American artist Joel Otterson. The exhibition features a major, new sculpture entitled *The Last Judgment*, which hangs from the gallery's skylight, accompanied by smaller wall-based moss agate and sterling silver works.

Mimicking a cascading waterfall, *The Last Judgment* is made from threaded beads, pieces of glass, and other found objects. Suspended from the skylight, the sculpture transitions between delicate and shimmering stones and beads at its top into rusted tools and chains — recovered from Otterson's late father and brother's garage — at its base. The sculpture has been completed over a decade-long period from 2014 - 2024. Referencing one of the most canonical representations in art history, the Second Coming of Christ and God's final judgment, Otterson's sculpture reworks this image by seamlessly combining the supposedly incongruous symbols of the decorative (stones and beads) and the industrial (tools and chains). Although these objects differ in their immediate symbolic significance, Otterson has long combined discordant materials, continuously reevaluating and transforming given cultural hierarchies.

The artist's silver-framed moss agate works hang on the surrounding gallery walls. Fascinated by the pieces of naturally occurring stone, Otterson points to their uncanny resemblance to nineteenth century Romantic landscape paintings by artists such as George Inness and J.M.W Turner. Important art historical references for Otterson, here his work's diminutive scale playfully challenges the grandeur and profundity of the Romantic painting tradition. While the landscape paintings' reverence is found in their painstaking human depiction of transcendental beauty, Otterson's moss agates, formed over millions of years, are presented just as they are: immediate and exquisite slices of nature. The agates are set in ornate silver frames, handmade by the artist, drawing from Renaissance, Baroque, Neo-Classical, early Modern, and Folk Art design and tradition.

This new body of work continues Otterson's extensive research into the art historic, cultural and present-day implications of aesthetics, defined as the concept of beauty and artistic taste. The artist fondly displays beauty's seductive and magnetic qualities while simultaneously re-positioning or undermining its supposed inherent value. Through overlapping and varied techniques, *How To Be Beautiful* masterfully presents the artist's exploration into the tensions between the sublime and decaying, eternal and ephemeral.

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Joel Otterson (b. 1959, Inglewood, CA) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. Otterson received his BFA from Parsons School of Design, New York in 1982. Previous exhibitions include The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (PROJECT series, 1987); the Venice Biennale (1993); the Hammer Museum (Made in L.A., 2012) and the Whitney Museum of American Art (2014 Whitney Biennial). Otterson's work is included in numerous permanent collections such as Cincinnati Art Museum, The Broad Foundation, the Hammer Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.