

# The Small Hare and His Famous Destiny

BY IDA SALAMON

In the current exhibition, **"THE EPHRUSSIS. TRAVEL IN TIME,"** the Jewish Museum Vienna relays the saga of the Family Ephrussi based on the bestseller, "The Hare with Amber Eyes," authored by Edmund de Waal, a descendent.



# The Small Hare and His Famous Destiny

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Recumbent hare with raised forepaw, signed Masatoshi / ivory, eyes inlaid in amber coloured buffalo horn / Osaka, Japan, ca. 1880, de Waal family collection

**The Hare with Amber Eyes** (2010) is a family memoir by British ceramicist Edmund de Waal. De Waal tells the story of his family, the Ephrussi, once a very wealthy European Jewish banking dynasty, centered in Odessa, Vienna and Paris, and peers of the Rothschild family.

The Ephrussis lost almost everything in 1938 when the Nazis Aryanized their property. Even after the war, the family failed to recover most of its extensive property, including priceless artwork.

However, an easily hidden collection of 264 Japanese netsuke miniature sculptures was saved, tucked away inside a mattress by Anna, a loyal maid at Palais Ephrussi in Vienna during the war years.

The collection has been passed down through five generations of the Ephrussi family, providing a common thread for the story of its fortunes from 1871 to 2009.

Stretching Eji, unsigned / ivory / Japan, 1800, de Waal family collection



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At the opening of the exhibition: Doris Schmidauer, Wife of the President Edmund de Waal, Artist and Author, Alexander Van der Bellen, President of Austria © JMW/wulz.cc

The eponymous little hare has already become familiar to over 1.5 million readers. Now through mid-April, visitors to the Jewish Museum Vienna can personally admire the delicate, ivory rabbit featured in a showcase at the core of the display. The exhibit traces the rise of one of the most important European Jewish families, from their origin as grain traders and then bankers seated in the southern part of the Russian Empire, in Odessa, as it relocates to Vienna and becomes rooted in its bourgeois society. The book vividly depicts the social and economic challenges and accomplishments of the family and their life in the magnificent Palais Ephrussi until 1938.







Exhibition View at  
the Jewish Museum  
Vienna  
"THE EPHRUSSIS.  
TRAVEL IN TIME"  
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With the opening of this important exhibition, the little hare along with 156 other Japanese miniature carvings return to Vienna. The remaining netsuke (the original collection totaled 264) were auctioned off with the proceeds going to a refugee relief organization. This was also the first time since World War II that members of the Ephrussi/De Waal family returned to Vienna for the opening of the exhibition. "At least 41 members of my dear family came from all over the world to tell that we still belong in Vienna", remarked Edmund de Waal in his opening speech.

Edmund and Victor de Waal  
Alexander Van der Bellen,  
President of Austria  
Danielle Spera, Director of the Jewish  
Museum Vienna © JMW/wulz.cc



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## NETSUKES AS LEITMOTIF

The centerpiece of this exhibit is the family archive of the Ephrussi, on loan to the Jewish Museum by the De Waal family, along with 157 chestnut, elm, and ivory netsukes (pronounced net-ske). De Waal, a British artist, and best-selling author, as well as heir to the figurines, tells movingly how he, 40 years ago, in jeans and long hair, entered the apartment of his great uncle Ignaz Ephrussi in Tokyo: *"I met this elegant Austrian Hungarian baron in a beautiful suit and a bow tie. He gave me a kiss on one cheek and then another and my first whiskey sour at the age of 17"*. In the library, Edmund first saw the little Japanese figurines and learned from his uncle the fascinating story behind them. Throughout his book, the figures serve as a leitmotif, which we see displayed in the museum in this *"beautiful and extraordinary exhibition,"* as per the author born in Nottingham in 1964.



Chinese savants,  
signed Masahiro  
/ ivory / Japan,  
ca. 1880, de Waal  
family collection





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Upon entering the exhibit, in the first gallery, one is introduced to Edmund de Waal's "Vigil," an artwork consisting of 18 porcelain vessels. This is where you embark on your journey in Time, from its very beginning on a wide boulevard in Odessa.

*"Stories have weight and shape," says Edmund de Waal, "they have agency in the world. What you do with the story, how you hold it, how you handle it, how seriously you take it, and how you - in the end - pass it on, it is a huge responsibility".*

This story took him and his brother Thomas to Odessa, to Paris, to Vienna and back to Tokyo in an effort to trace family letters, photographs, and places. De Waal tells this incredible story in his book while the Jewish Museum exhibit illustrates this moving tale.

"The Ephrussi. Travel in Time", curated by Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz and Tom Juncker, can be seen through April 13, 2020, at the Jewish Museum Vienna.

Artisan splitting a gourd, signed Shugetsu / wood, with inlaid ivory wedge and himotoshi rings / Tokyo, Japan, ca. 1880, de Waal family collection. © JMW/wulz.cc



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Top Right: Male tiger looking over its shoulder, signed Toyokazu / inlaid buffalo horn eyes with bored pupils / Tamba, Japan, ca. 1820, de Waal family collection. © JMW/wulz.cc

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## THE STORY OF A FAMILY

The exhibition retraces the path of the Ephrussi family and their voluntary and involuntary travels between Russia, Austria, France, Great Britain, Spain, the USA, Mexico, Japan, and other countries. On the basis of selected objects, documents, and pictures, the economic and social development of a European-Jewish family, whose descendants now live scattered throughout the world as a result of flight and expulsion, is depicted. At the heart of the exhibition is the Ephrussi Family Archives, donated to the Jewish Museum Vienna by the De Waal family, as well as 157 netsukes provided by the family as a long-term loan to the museum.

### A EUROPEAN FAMILY

The Ephrussis left their mark all over Europe and later around the world: In Odessa, from where the family's economic and social advancement began. In Vienna, where the family further expanded their social position and their network, married into Viennese society, and inscribed themselves in the city's history with the building of Palais Ephrussi. In Paris, where Charles Ephrussi, art patron and art collector, inspired Marcel Proust to write his novel *In Search of Lost Time*, and the Dreyfus affair split French society. Despite their social

standing, the Ephrussis were not immune to rising anti-Semitism and the ills of two world wars. The story after 1938 ultimately tells of the robbery of the Ephrussi assets by the National Socialist regime, of the family's expulsion from Vienna, of life in exile, and of the family's efforts to bring about restitution, the proceedings of which continue to this day.

### A VIENNESE FAMILY

Chaim Joachim Ephrussi and his sons, Ignaz and Leon, were excellent networkers who soon extended their business empire beyond the borders of Russia. In 1857, Joachim Ephrussi founded a trading house in Vienna with the permission of the Russian authorities. His younger son, Ignaz, moved his main residence to the capital of the Habsburg Empire, while the elder son, Leon, ran the company in Odessa. Through Ignaz Ephrussi's marriage to Emilia Porges, the Ephrussis sealed their affiliation with the old-established Jewish families of Vienna. In 1871, Emperor Franz Joseph granted the Russian citizen Ignaz Ephrussi a hereditary title of nobility for his services to the city of Vienna. However, Ignaz's son, Viktor Ritter von Ephrussi, first gave up his Russian citizenship in 1911 and acquired the right to live in Vienna.



Portrait of Therese Ephrussi,  
Pierre-Auguste Renoir  
© Private property



Portrait of Ignaz Ephrussi  
Drawing  
© The Jewish Museum Vienna

In 1869, Ignaz Ephrussi commissioned Theophil Hansen, the favorite architect of the Viennese bourgeoisie, to erect a mansion at Franzensring 24, today Universitätsring 14. The architect paid special attention to the design of the Belle Étage with a separate stairwell for the house owner and his family. The representation rooms were designed as a complete work of art and planned down to the smallest detail. The paintings in the ballroom are dedicated to the biblical story of Esther, perhaps as Ignaz Ephrussi's acknowledgment of his Jewish family history.

### A FAMILY IN EXILE

In March 1939, Viktor Ephrussi succeeded in fleeing to his daughter, Elisabeth de Waal, who lived in Great Britain. The family settled in Tunbridge Wells, where Viktor Ephrussi died on March 12, 1945. In his will he revoked the renunciation of his possessions in Vienna, which he had been coerced to sign by the Gestapo. Following the death of her father, Elisabeth de Waal established a new life with her family in the U.K. They converted to the Church of England, and their eldest son, Victor de Waal, later embarked on a career as an Anglican priest. He was Dean of Canterbury from 1976 to 1986 and is active in refugee aid today. Ignaz "Iggie" Ephrussi left his hometown of Vienna before the "Anschluss" in 1938. After spending time in Paris and Frankfurt, he went to the United States in 1934, where he worked as a fashion designer. In 1941, he accepted U.S. citizenship. His younger brother, Rudolph, managed to escape from Vienna to the United States in 1939.



Both brothers joined the U.S. Army following the country's entry into World War II, and returned to Europe as soldiers. Rudolph Ephrussi received the Bronze Star Medal for outstanding achievement in combat; his brother Iggie took part in the landing of the Allies in Normandy in 1944. He moved to Japan after the war and became an Austrian citizen again in 1965. Rudolph Ephrussi spent the rest of his life in the USA with his wife and six children.

## THE STORY OF A FAMILY

Emmy Ephrussi © The Jewish Museum Vienna



Things and the stories that tell about the people who once collected them, held them in their hands, passed them on and found them again are the focus of the exhibition at the Jewish Museum Vienna. It examines the fate of the Ephrussi family, who originated from Russia, and their voluntary and involuntary travels between Russia, Austria, France, Great Britain, Spain, the USA, Mexico, Japan and other countries. On the basis of selected objects, documents and pictures, the economic and social development of a European-Jewish family, whose descendants now live scattered throughout the world as a result of flight and expulsion during the Nazi era, is traced. Works once belonging to the family

can be found today in international museums and art collections. These recall the former owners and their relationships with the artistic and intellectual circles of that time in Odessa, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, London, Madrid and other places.

At the heart of the exhibition is the Ephrussi Family Archives, donated to the Jewish Museum by the De Waal family, as well as 157 netsukes the family will loan to the museum.

Curators: Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz, Tom Juncker  
Exhibition design: Schuberth und Schuberth

## THE EPHRUSSIS. TRAVEL IN TIME

06 Nov 2019 to 13 Apr 2020, Museum Dorotheergasse

WEBSITE: [WWW.JMW.AT/EN](http://WWW.JMW.AT/EN)

Edmund de Waal  
Vigil  
18 porcelain vessels with gold in a wood,  
aluminium and plexiglass vitrine  
De Waal family collection  
© Ida Salamon



IDA SALAMON, PhD

“I was born in Belgrade, I am living in Vienna and I am traveling often between the both cities and many other destinations.

Due to the wide range of study programs available in the Humanities at the School of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade, I decided to pursue a degree in Ethnology and Anthropology, where I completed my doctorate on the Serbian diaspora in Vienna.

Before working as the Cultural and Educational Director of the Jewish Community of Belgrade, I was employed at the University as a research assistant.

I authored an exhibition at the Ethnographical Museum in Belgrade entitled “Between Tradition and Fashion – Garments of Belgrade Jews at the End of XIX and the First Half of XX Century.” This exhibition was awarded the “Event of the Year in Serbian Photography” by the National Center for Photography. In my essay, “Solidarity and Identity”, published in the “Annual of Social History”, I described how members of the Jewish Community of Belgrade spent three months in Budapest during the 1999 NATO bombings of Serbia.

For my humanitarian work with refugees, the Federation of Jewish Communities awarded me with the Megila. As the Serbian coordinator for “The Central European Center for Research and Documentation – Centropa” of Vienna, I recorded testimonies and conducted interviews with Holocaust survivors.

Currently, I work in the marketing, sponsoring, and the event management branch of the Jewish Museum Vienna, as well as a freelance journalist for various media outlets.”

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