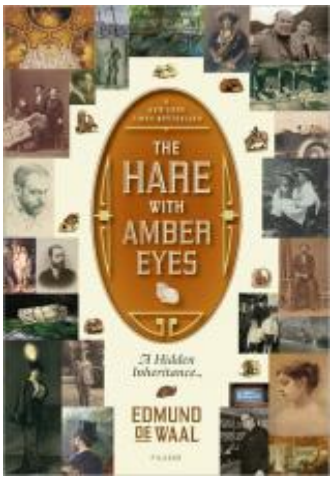
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The Hare With Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance

by Edmund de Waal



About the Book

Edmund de Waal is a world-famous ceramicist. Having spent thirty years making beautiful pots --- which are then sold, collected, and handed on --- he has a particular sense of the secret lives of objects. When he inherited a collection of 264 tiny Japanese wood and ivory carvings, called netsuke, he wanted to know who had touched and held them, and how the collection had managed to survive.

And so begins this extraordinarily moving memoir and detective story as de Waal discovers both the story of the netsuke and of his family, the Ephrussis, over five generations. A nineteenth-century banking dynasty in Paris and Vienna, the Ephrussis were as rich and respected as the Rothchilds. Yet by the end of the World War II, when the netsuke were hidden from the Nazis in Vienna, this collection of very small carvings was all that remained of their vast empire.

Discussion Guide

1. Charles, like the rest of Paris, became swept up in the fad of "japonisme", which led to the original purchase of the netsuke. What did these objects represent to their collectors in the Belle Epoque?

2. In addition to his passion for Durer and the Old Masters and Japanese art, Charles radically embraced the Impressionists. What did he love about that new style? Which of these art spheres seems most quintessentially "Charles"?

3. Did you develop any new impressions of the major French art figures--Degas, Renoir, Proust--in light of their interaction with Charles?

4. How did the relationship between collector, patron, and artist evolve from Charles's Paris to Viktor's Vienna to Iggie's Tokyo? Where does Edmund fall in these roles?

5. The word "insatiability" was used by anti-Semites as a way to propagandize against Jewish families' material success. Why does this word become such a slur? How might the term apply more positively to collectors of things -- and stories?

6. Why did Charles give away his beloved netsuke to Viktor and Emmy?

7. Edmund remarks on the coldness and lack of texture in the Palais at Vienna. What do the differences between Charles's salon in Paris and Viktor's grand Palais say about the two men?

8. You've likely read many accounts of Nazi raid and Jewish persecution at the start of the occupation, but did anything surprise you or stand out in this account of the takeover of the Palais?

9. Viktor and Emmy received vague warnings about the coming threats and were encouraged to flee their home. Would you have been able to walk away from such history and treasures without knowing what was ahead?

10. Viktor essentially sacrificed the Ephrussi dynasty for the sake of his new home country, Austria. Do you think anti-Semetic pressure drove him to become a perfectly loyal citizen, or did Viktor's allegiance represent his true feeling?

11. Edmund originally thought that all the Ephrussi "vagabonding" stemmed from a desire to develop culturally and grow from the provincialism of Odessa. But he realized that Odessa itself was a very culturally rich city. Why do you think it was so important for the Ephrussis to send tendrils of their families to different cities?

12. Why do you think Iggie renounced his American citizenship, a purely symbolic act?

13. Do you agree with Edmund's assessment that the netsuke need not go back to Japan; that their travels and stories have given them an identity of their own?

14. Are stories more important than objects in a family legacy? How are they related?

15. The Ephrussi patriarch Charles Joachim had a vision for his family, but it was dependent upon the future generations' aptitude and willingness. How do the Ephrussi childrens' responses to their "calling" vary? How does Edmund's book fit into the Ephrussi legacy?

Author Bio

Edmund de Waal was born in 1964. He studied English at Cambridge University and ceramics in both England and Japan. He is best known for his large scale installations, which have been exhibited in many museums around the world. Much of Edmund's recent work has been concerned with ideas of collecting and collections; how objects are kept together, lost, stolen or dispersed. His work comes out of a dialogue between minimalism, architecture and music, and is informed by his passion for literature. In May 2014, Phaidon published a substantial monograph of de Waal's work and practice.

Edmund has had major interventions in many museums and public collections, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, Fitzwilliam Museum, Waddesdon Manor, Tate Britain and the National Museum of Wales. In Autumn 2013, de Waal opened his first major solo show in New York with the Gagosian Gallery and installed a work for the new

Asian Pavilion at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. A commission of suspended vitrines, titled *Atmosphere,* opened in May 2014 for Turner Contemporary in Margate, which will hang in the Sunley Gallery until Februrary 2015. Another public work, *Lichtzwang,* is on display over the course of Summer 2014 in a neo-classical temple in Vienna's Volksgarten. This marks the beginnings of an on-going relationship with the Kuntshistoriches Museum as de Waal prepares an exhibition for the museum itself to open in 2016. Other future projects include working at the Schindler House in LA in 2015 and with David Chipperfield Architects for a series of new works for London Victoria.

Edmund is also known as an author and has written widely on art and ceramics. His family memoir, THE HARE WITH AMBER EYES (2010), has been translated into nearly 30 languages and has won many literary prizes.

In 2011 he was awarded an OBE for his services to art.

Critical Praise

"An extraordinary history...A wondrous book, as lustrous and exquisitely crafted as the netsuke at its heart."

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