Amber Eyes



Jewish families of nineteenth-century Europe. descent from his great-grand-uncle Charles to merchant Charles Joachim Ephrussi (1793–1864) came bankers, with branches and homes in the great European capitals. In Vienna, their home was a palace, amid the splendor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In Paris, Charles Joachim's art and memorabilia are presented through grandson, Charles Ephrussi (1849–1905), became a prominent art historian, an influential art critic, and a major patron of the arts.

In the mid-twentieth century, the history of

The Ephrussis were among the most illustrious carvings in ivory and wood—inherited by From the Black Sea port of Odessa, the grain his great-uncle Ignace to him. This charmed collection has traveled the globe, from Japan founded a family fortune and his children beto Paris, from Paris to Vienna, to Tokyo and then to London.

> In this exhibition, inspired by de Waal's memoir, an immersive design by the architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro. The visitor is accompanied by an audio recording of the author reading from The Hare with Amber Eyes. Works of art and family documents are displayed in

Edmund de Waal Curatorial Consultant

DILLER SCOFIDIO + RENFRO
Elizabeth Diller
Ricardo Scofidio
David Allin
Alex Knezo
Marcos Mouronte
Diego Soto
Paola Foster

JEWISH MUSEUM

Stephen Brown, Curator
Shira Backer, Leon Levy Associate Curator
Olivia Casa, Madeline Weisburg, Curatorial Assistants
Ava Hathaway Hacker, Max Heimowitz, Robert Liles,
Michelle Medawar, Blanksteen Curatorial Interns
Emily Cao, Scout Hutchinson, Marie-Eve Lafontaine, Rebecca Major,
Cecilia March, Catie Matteson, Curatorial Interns
Rene Yaroshevsky, CUNY Cultural Corps Intern
Yeliz Secerli, Naomi Shultz, and Christie Zhong, graphic design

Clint Ross Coller, lighting design
Marie Sutter, videographer
tonwelt, sound design
Stephanie Kissel
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DONORS TO THE EXHIBITION

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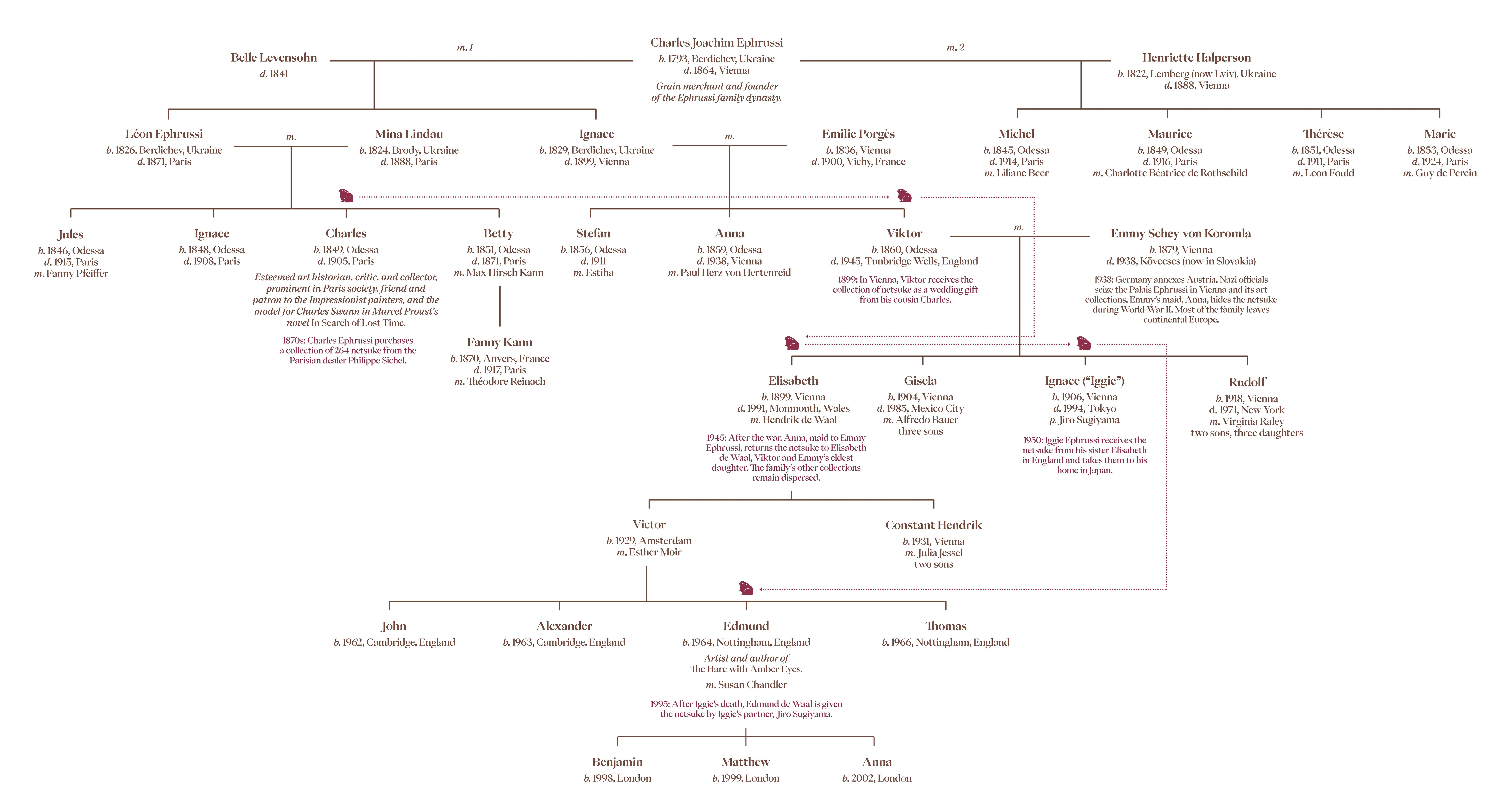
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Donor Wall - 48/58

Unless otherwise noted, all works are from the collections of the de Waal family or the Jewish Museum, Vienna.

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The Ephrussi Family



NETSUKE The Ephrussi Collection

"It is not just things that carry stories with them. Stories are a kind of thing, too. Stories and objects share something, a patina."

-Edmund de Waal, The Hare with Amber Eyes

Edmund de Waal first encountered his family's collection of netsuke when he was seventeen, visiting his great-uncle Iggie Ephrussi in Tokyo. When he inherited this collection twenty years later he determined to discover what this inheritance meant. It led him to write *The Hare with Amber Eyes*.

In his telling, the story has a double thread: the destiny of the Ephrussi family—its rise and then dispersal—intertwines with the tale of the collection of netsuke, passed from hand to hand across generations and continents. Together, these journeys evoke themes of diaspora and continuity. This group of netsuke is one of four placed throughout the exhibition—stations in their transmission from one owner to the next, traced in the family tree. The little amber-eyed hare of the title is found in the last gallery.

Among the many splendid artworks associated with the Ephrussi family, these miniatures stand out for their modest charm and their delightful inventiveness. Netsuke are small wood or ivory toggles used in Japan during the Edo period (the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries) to fasten a pouch to the sash of a kimono. By tradition they were carved into tiny figures, often from folklore and mythology: monkeys, fruit, pairs of lovers, children, mendicant monks, good-luck rats. Diminutive and functional, they were portable artworks, fashion accessories, and curious conversation pieces. When they were first seen in Europe in the midnineteenth century, collectors prized them as tactile objects of wonder and desire.

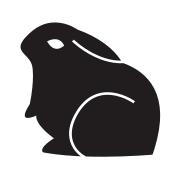
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325 words

PARIS

The Ephrussi family were Jewish. They originated in a shtetl in Russia and rose to wealth in the early nineteenth century as grain merchants in Odessa and then as bankers in Vienna. In the 1860s they expanded their interests to France. They opened offices in Paris and built a splendid mansion near the newly fashionable Parc Monceau, close to other upper-class Jewish families—de Camondo, Reinach, and de Rothschild—with whom they shared social and business ties. One son, Charles, was unattracted to a career in banking. He had a passion for art and a taste for society. A young man of style, he soon became a presence in the city's fashionable salons and literary circles—so much so that his friend Marcel Proust took him as the model for Charles Swann, a central charac-

ter in his monumental novel *In Search of Lost Time*. Charles Ephrussi (1849–1905) made his name as an art historian, a critic, a publisher, and as an indefatigable collector. He was the friend and supporter of the avant-garde painters Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Claude Monet, reviewing their shows and buying their paintings, some of which can be seen here as both originals and sepia images that capture the variety of his tastes. On one occasion he asked Manet to paint a bunch of asparagus and then overpaid him, so the artist sent him a little canvas with one further asparagus spear.

Charles wrote about art with love and wit: an outpouring of reviews, essays, and historical research for *The Gazette des Beaux-Art*s, the pioneering journal of art and art history whose influence was unparalleled for more than a century. Later he became its editor and part-owner. Of the painter Berthe Morisot, he wrote, "She loves painting that is joyous and lively, grinds flower petals onto her palette in order to scatter them on her canvas with light and witty touches."



Charles collected art passionately and on a grand scale: Impressionist and Renaissance paintings, tapestries, Meissen porcelain, Rococo furniture. During the 1870s, at the height of the vogue for Japonisme in France, he bought 264 netsuke—tiny carvings in ivory and wood, each one a marvel of invention and the miniaturist's skill. He wrote with delight of the Japanese artists, admiring their "inexhaustible patience, the love of the challenge overcome, the capricious fecundity of motifs, the astonishing diversity of forms."

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325 words

VIENNA

When the Ephrussis expanded their banking and trading businesses from Odessa into western Europe in the mid-1800s, Vienna became their headquarters. In 1869 Ignace Ephrussi commissioned an ornate palace on the Ringstrasse in the city center. Two years later, Ignace was ennobled by Emperor Franz Joseph I for his services to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Five stories tall, the Palais Ephrussi had a monumental staircase, a ballroom, public reception rooms, and a large private apartment. Nearby were the grand homes of other Jewish members of Vienna's upper class. The palace was designed by Theophil von Hansen, the architect of the Parliament, the Musikverein, and other significant buildings. It had ceiling paintings by Christian Griepenkerl, tapestries and fine furnishings, and canvases by Austrian, German, and Netherlandish masters. This was the setting in which Ignace and his wife, Emilie, raised their three children. Later, their son Viktor and his wife, the glamorous Emmy, brought up four children there—Elisabeth, Gisela, Iggie, and Rudolf. In 1911 Viktor was the first of his Russian family to take Austrian citizenship.

What remains of the fashionable social lives of this generation? Some paintings and personal possessions—opera fans, gloves, a monogrammed seal, photographs, letters, and the memories they evoke of an assimilated Jewish family. There are family albums of photographs showing parties with young women dressed up as Old Master tableaux; others show cousins in Secessionist style. One notebook from 1916 records Elisabeth's visits to concerts, theater, and opera. The magnificent Torah curtain, cut from the silk wedding train of Emilie's mother, had been donated in the 1830s to the Stadttempel, the synagogue where illustrious Jewish Viennese families were married. Throughout the final decades of the nineteenth century the Ephrussi family flourished.



When Viktor Ephrussi married Emmy Schey von Koromla in 1899, his cousin Charles sent an unusual wedding gift to Vienna from Paris: his collection of 264 netsuke. Emmy kept them in her dressing room in the palace, where the Ephrussi children were allowed to take them from their glass vitrine to play with them.

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DEBACLE

The annexation of Austria by Germany in March 1938—the Anschluss, or Union—was a disaster for Austrian Jews. Overnight, Jewish families like the Ephrussis were identified by the Nazis, expelled from their homes and businesses, and stripped of their property. Many were arrested, interned, or killed. The Ephrussi bank and their home, the Palais Ephrussi, were immediately seized. On April 18 the Gestapo arrested Viktor Ephrussi, Edmund's great-grandfather, and his youngest son, Rudolf. Under threat of internment in a concentration camp, Viktor was forced to sign away all his assets—businesses, homes, works of art, jewelry, porcelain, and furniture. The palace was occupied by Nazi administrative offices. Its extensive art collections were then distributed to German and Austrian museums and art dealers.

Viktor and Emmy managed to escape to their country house in Kövesces (now in Slovakia), where Emmy died in November 1938. Viktor finally reached England in 1939 as did Elisabeth and her two sons. Gisela reached Mexico in 1938. Iggie was already living in America, and Rudolf joined him in 1939. The family were dispersed.

Documents recording these events still exist in various archives and have been helpful in the family's ongoing efforts to recover their possessions. Several are reproduced here. They trace the process by which the Ephrussis' possessions were seized by the Nazis and how, after the war, some were recovered and returned to the family.

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CHANGES

By the end of World War II, the next generation of the Ephrussi family were gone from Paris and Vienna, scattered to new horizons in Britain, the United States, Mexico, and Japan. The children of Viktor and Emmy—Elisabeth, Gisela, Iggie, and Rudolf—no longer owned an international bank, a grain-export business, or Parisian and Viennese palaces. Their art collections, too, were dispersed, and the long years of effort toward their recovery were just beginning.

Elisabeth, the firstborn child, had been one of the first women admitted to the law school at the University of Vienna in the 1920s. A poet and novelist, she married Hendrik de Waal in 1928 and had two sons. She lived in Paris and Austria before exile to England in 1939. Her eldest son, Victor, is Edmund de Waal's father.

Gisela was an artist. She was married in the Vienna Stadttempel in 1925 to Alfredo Bauer, whose grandfather was the representative in Spain of the house of Rothschild. The couple moved to Madrid and then, in 1938, to Mexico. She had three children.

Iggie (Ignace) moved to the United States in 1934, where he worked as a fashion designer in New York and Los Angeles. During World War II he served in the U.S. military and took part in the Normandy Landings in 1944. He moved to Tokyo in 1948, living there until his death in 1994. He lived for forty years with his partner, Jiro Sugiyama.

Rudolf worked in the family business until the annexation of Austria in 1938, when he was arrested together with his father. They were released after their businesses were expropriated and Rudolf emigrated to the United States, serving in the armed forces during the war.

Myriad details of their lives are preserved in family mementos, photographs, objects, and documents.



The fate of the netsuke during the war years is obscure. Family lore recounts that in 1938, when Viktor and Emmy Ephrussi fled Vienna, a maid remained in the Palais Ephrussi. Ordered to assist the Gestapo in inventorying the family's possessions, she secretly hid the netsuke in her mattress. Thus the netsuke survived the war and eventually returned to Japan, their original home. They remained there, cared for by Iggie, until Edmund de Waal inherited them.

NETSUKE The Collection Continues

"As the vitrine is being fixed to the wall I remember my own child-hood collections. Bones, a mouse skin, shells, a tiger's claw, the sloughed scales of a snake, clay pipes and oyster shells. When I was seven the cathedral library was getting rid of mahogany cases, and so half my room was taken over by a vitrine—my first—in which I would arrange and rearrange my objects, turn the key and open up the case on request. It was my Wunderkammer, my world of things, my secret history of touch."

-Edmund de Waal, The Hare with Amber Eyes

The Ephrussi netsuke were inherited by Edmund de Waal from his great-uncle Iggie in Tokyo. One hundred fifty-seven of them are on long-term loan to the Jewish Museum of Vienna. In 2018, with the consent of the family, seventy-nine were auctioned for the benefit of a charity for refugees.

The netsuke continue their journey.