

Edmund de Waal

letters home

Potsdamer Straße 77-87, 10785 Berlin

14 June – 10 August 2024

Opening: Friday, 14 June, 6 – 8 pm

Galerie Max Hetzler is pleased to present *letters home*, a solo exhibition of works by **Edmund de Waal** at Potsdamer Straße 77-87, in Berlin.

In his visual art, Edmund de Waal uses objects as vehicles for human narrative, emotion and history. His installations of handmade porcelain vessels, often contained in minimalist structures, investigate themes of diaspora, memory and materiality. His works offer a kind of visual lyrical narration, created through elements such as rhythm and repetition or light and shadow.

In addition to black, white and oak vitrines made this year, the current exhibition includes both the largest free-standing clay vessels the artist has ever created, and a large-scale pavilion titled *there are still songs to sing beyond mankind*, 2024. Despite their differences in size and material, all the works are ultimately vessels whose interiors only seem to become more intimate as their dimensions increase.

Individual words or phrases from poems by Denise Riley (b. 1948), Paul Celan (1920–1970) and Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) are interwoven in the titles or surfaces of these works by de Waal. Here, the focus is not on analysing the texts, but rather on their emotional heft. A further reference to language can be found in the forms of the vitrines, which seem reminiscent of pages from a book. The pavilion, also referred to as a kind of 'teahouse' by de Waal, draws on the artist's memories of stays in Japan and his studies of *sadō*, the Japanese tea ceremony.

In dialogue not only with one another, but with history, literature and their surrounding space, de Waal's works provide a place for pause, in his words, 'letters home – my attempt to feel both the breath of separation and the pulse of connection'.

Edmund de Waal (b. 1964, Nottingham) lives and works in London. The artist's work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions at major public institutions, including CLAY, Museum of Ceramic Art Denmark, Middelfart (duo show, 2023–2024); The Feuerle Collection, Berlin; Waddesdon Manor, Aylesbury (both 2022); Musée Nissim de Camondo, Paris (2021); The British Museum, London (2020); Japanisches Palais, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden; The Frick Collection, New York; Ateneo Veneto and Jewish Museum, Venice (all 2019); Museu d'Art Contemporani d'Eivissa, Ibiza; Schindler House, Los Angeles (both 2018); Artipelag, Stockholm (2017); Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Gardiner Museum, Toronto (both



Edmund de Waal, *elegie, V* (detail), 2023
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2016); Royal Academy, London (2015); Kunsthistorisches Museum, Theseus Temple, Vienna; Turner Contemporary, Margate (both 2014); Waddesdon Manor, Aylesbury; Alison Richard Building, Cambridge (both 2012); and Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2009), among others.

Edmund de Waal's works are in the collections of Ashmolean Museum of Art and Architecture, Oxford; British Council, London; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; The Jewish Museum, Berlin; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Arts and Design, New York; Museum of Decorative Arts, Montreal; Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool; and York Museum and Art Gallery, York, among others.

Further exhibitions and events

Berlin:

7 June – 3 August 2024

Jeremy Demester

Teratology of Love

Bleibtreustraße 45, 10623

8 June – 3 August 2024

André Butzer / Hans Josephsohn

Bleibtreustraße 15/16, 10623

7 June – 3 August 2024

Eddie Martinez

You think that you know but you know that you don't

Goethestraße 2-3, 10623

Paris:

7 June – 25 July 2024

Matthew Barney

SECONDARY: object impact

46 & 57, rue du Temple, 75004

London:

30 May – 3 August 2024

Giulia Andreani

L'improduttiva

41 Dover Street, W1S 4NS

Marfa:

9 May – 8 December 2024

Katharina Grosse

The Super Eight

1976 Antelope Hills Road

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letters home

This exhibition is full of voices. There are words written into broken shards of black porcelain and inscribed into black lidded vessels. There are echoes of poems of celebration and lament. There are singular voices and some that overlap, echo and repeat. Here on the long wall of the main gallery are thirteen black oak vitrines holding shards, blackened silver and small thin pots: it is named *a part song*, echoing the poet Denise Riley's moving exhortation to a lost child. When I think of pots and the structures and the hands that hold them, I am thinking of them as letters home – my attempt to feel both the breath of separation and the pulse of connection. To bring us closer to touch, to home.

These dark lidded vessels are letters home too. I have dreamed of them for a decade but started making them in Denmark last year, working with the extraordinary team at the Tommerup Ceramics Workshop. They are by far the largest vessels that I have ever made. I needed to make pots to touch, to sound, to be large enough to lean against. They are made with a rough red clay that fires in a vast kiln to a black of such density that it seems close to silver in some lights. While they were still damp I started writing into them, but the writing became scribing, marking, erasing, scribbling. I began with parts of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* but soon these words disappeared into the clay, over-written and smudged back into the surface. I have called these vessels elegies.

And I have made a structure. It is a teahouse, pavilion and lodging. It is a vessel of sorts, in praise of shadows, a poem. When apprenticed as a potter over forty years ago I studied *sadō* or tea ceremony in Japan and the memory of the scale of tea ceremony houses has stayed with me. It was partly the ways of seeing the surrounding garden from the teahouse itself: the idea of framing aspects of the landscape. It was the idea of a place that slowed you down, helped you gather yourself. But it was also the tactility of the buildings, their seeming permeability: they seem contingent.

This pavilion is made from blackened poplar on the outside and burnt oak in the inside. There are flashes of silver pushed between cracks and into interstices. Light comes from a single piece of breath-catchingly thin porcelain, the colour of the moon. Light comes through a rill in the ceiling threaded with burnt oak sticks and filtered through an attic space where there are twenty-nine black porcelain pots.

It is a shadow catcher. The space is just big enough for four or five people, small enough to be solitary, to sit on a bench by yourself.

Ten years ago for my first exhibition in Berlin I made an installation called *Fadensonnen* after the poem of Paul Celan. The poem is a touchstone for me. It is a kind of shard, words broken down, brought back together, held by a page. It aches with pain and hope. *Fadensonnen* – *threadsuns* in the translation of Pierre Joris – has now become part of this exhibition, part of the naming of this structure, part of an attempt to write letters home:

Threadsuns
above the grayblack wastes.
A tree-
high thought
grasps the light-tone: there are
still songs to sing beyond
mankind.

Fadensonnen
über der grauschwarzen Ödnis.
Ein baum-
hoher Gedanke
greift sich den Lichtton: es sind
noch Lieder zu singen jenseits
der Menschen.

Here I am trying to understand the space inside a vessel, inside the hands that hold the bowl, the space between breaths – and now the space that is held by this small house.

Edmund de Waal