

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY



### Edmund de Waal to explore the colour white in “quiet journey” through The Royal Academy Library

Richard Moss



*A Mind of Winter (2015) 14 porcelain vessels in a wood and plexiglass vitrine © Collection of Edmund De Waal, Photographer: Mike Bruce*

If Grayson Perry really is the people’s potter, then Edmund de Waal is surely the thinking person’s ceramicist.

He may not have the profile or disarming down home charm of Perry but de Waal’s donnish take on the history and mystery of porcelain has seen his celadon glazed installations beguile audiences in countless exhibitions from Turner Contemporary and the V&A to Kettle’s Yard and the Chinese Gallery of the Fitzwilliam in his old university town, Cambridge.

His books on pottery and his family memoirs (de Waal is the son of a Dean of Canterbury Cathedral) have similarly secured his reputation as, if not England’s most famous potter, then seemingly the country’s most learned.

Now de Waal’s cerebral explorations of the qualities of porcelain continue with an autumnal sojourn exploring the colour white in the serene surrounds of the Library and Print Room of the Royal Academy.

Edmund de Waal is, of course, a self-confessed porcelain obsessive and, according to the RA, the colour white has fascinated him “since he made his first white pot as a child”.

He will, however, be widening his palette for the unusual timed entry exhibition to include sculpture, paintings, photographs and books selected from the RA and private collections – including his own.

Describing the exhibition as “an exploration of white as both object and experience” the RA says star objects will include J.M.W. Turner’s porcelain palette, a white-washed sculpture by Cy Twombly, John Cage’s 4’33’’ manuscript, Kazimir Malevich’s Suprematist Teapot, the death mask of Francis Chantrey RA, the life mask of Thomas Banks RA and the ivory netsuke of a hare with amber eyes.

The latter comes from de Waal’s personal collection and fans will immediately recognise it as the touchstone of his bestselling family memoir *The Hare with the Amber Eyes*, which won the RSL Ondaatje prize and the Costa Biography Award.

Another de Waal treasure, one of the first pieces of white porcelain made in the West, a delicate Meissen cup of 1715, will also be displayed alongside his now trademark porcelain installations.

The show coincides with the publication de Waal’s latest book, *The White Road: a pilgrimage of sorts*, which will be published by Chatto & Windus on September 24 2015.

Described as an “intimate journey”, the book takes the reader across continents in search of porcelain, beginning in its birthplace, Jingdezhen, China, continuing to Venice, Versailles, Dublin, Dresden, the Appalachian Mountains of South Carolina and the English south-west.

No journey to the dark heart of Essex, then, for the boy from the Cathedral cloisters. A fittingly “quiet journey of discovery through the spaces” is promised of the coinciding RA show.