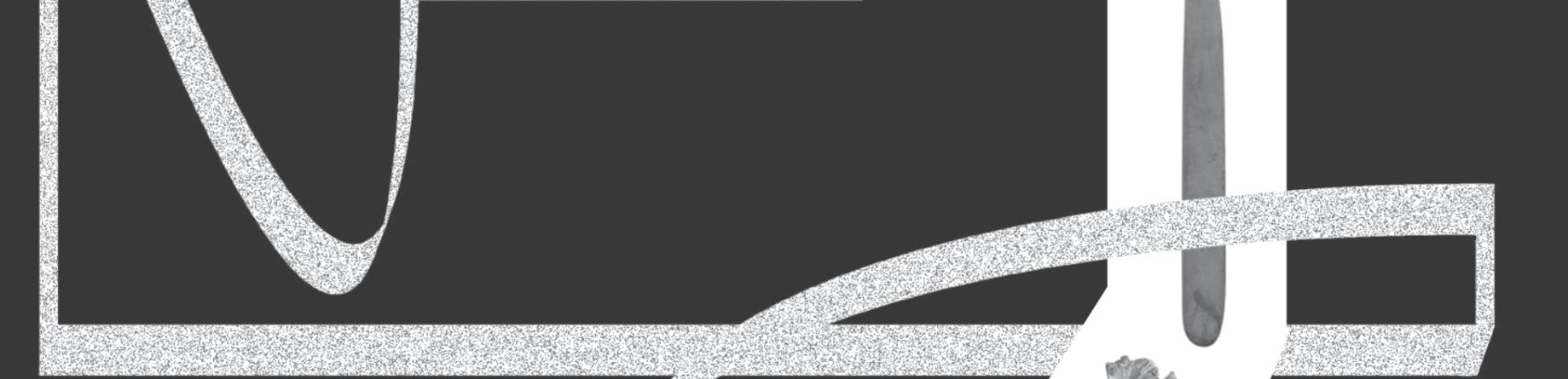


lacrimae rerum





DEAR FRIEND,

In a situation where suddenly so much of the ordinary froze and disappeared, I actually enjoyed the randomness it brought and the fact that there was time. I took pleasure in the possibility of spending time at home that I believe many, including me, often lack. Even the movement of light throughout the day is experiential. Naturally and soon enough, it was evident that the fun factor present in many activities—even the ordinary pre- and post-talks at meetings—was missing.

I have never before had to so often answer questions about the origins of objects or practice one of the favorite parts of my work—making home visits. The immediate surroundings, details of the everyday environment were discovered, possessions reorganised and re-evaluated. New collections were initiated and older collections changed owners. A significant number of new collectors emerged. The prices of certain objects have risen to unprecedented heights. Statistics from the local central auction portal reveal the unseen numbers both in queries and deals. Considering how the past is coded in our future, this kind of relating seems to help people come to terms with their past. Collecting is done with a certain unsentimental nostalgia.

My activities have long been accompanied by a continuous relation to the old, history, brushing things out from the past. I have been engaged in looking for and finding objects, memories, materials—and it suits me well. I have developed a sharpened sense and fine-tuned instinct for making observations, but also a certain kind of positive numbness that allows me occasionally to ignore. I have always been pleased that my work allows me to be relatively free from the urge to build a personal collection.

For a while now I've been eager to write you about something that started approximately a year ago and has continued for some time.

One day last spring I was standing in an old house soon to be sold that was filled with fragments from several generations. The only rational aspect in the house was that most of the older material was buried and the newer layers covered the previous. So, I was in the middle of these micro-worlds that were awaiting their destiny—to be packed or given up—depending on my expert verdict.

On one hand, these were some of the most exciting things I have seen, but on the other it was a distressing amount of everyday materials: all the letters and postcards from decades ago that no one ever rereads, opera programs from visiting Vienna, Berlin and other European cities in the 1920s with tickets between the pages, receipts of things and services consumed, turned fragments of chairs, old clothing kept for the value of the material, lace collars, tablecloths featuring Richelieu embroidery, a measuring stick with the old metric system, plugs from lost or broken cafes, glass, metal, bone and wooden walking sticks, vases and stationery, neo-renaissance, functionalist, rattan and tubular steel furniture, a desk ventilator, a fully packed bag for fishing, faience and porcelain tableware, glass and crystal goblets, cutlery, ceramic doll heads, brass bras, decorative lock-plates and handles, marble elephants, a packet of anemone seeds from 1931,

jewelry, candy and cigarette boxes, paper and bamboo Japanese parasols, artificial flowers, unfinished and beaded embroidery, silk shawls, handkerchiefs with lace details and monogrammed boxes, lamp shades, powdered sulfur in a carefully folded paper cover, spices, essences, books about engineering, medicine and religious studies, fragments of memoirs, medicine in apothecary packaging, copper vessels, cast iron pans, a travel clock in a leather case, hundreds of keys, a butterfly collection, empty Champagne and wine bottles kept in the pantry under the staircase, rusty cake and biscuit forms, board games, lighting chains with sharp-ended bulbs. All juicy snippets of past lives, new and old objects and collections holding meaning. It was the most organic way of these things being together.

I was anxious about everything that might fall apart, and I had never stumbled upon such an amount and variety of things. Every layer took me by surprise. Typologies of objects, habits and possibilities of people, mentalities, determination, respect of the past and concern for the future unfolded. Never before have I felt so perplexed and helpless among things. It outweighs the heaviness of the systematically collected material and provides so much to contemplate, like the people who had lived there but also how to handle the encapsulated hints of lifestyle, habits and customs that accumulated in such a natural manner.

So we packed almost a houseful of pieces and took them to a safe place to have some time to contemplate them, browse the fragments of memoirs, draw connections.

During the whole process I was thinking about the first book from Edmund de Waal, which I basically swallowed ten years ago. It was an enchanting historical story about tracking the origin of the netsuke collection his family possessed. A reconstruction of family history, heritage, expropriation of the property during the Second World War and wider relations to cultural history. It was a narrative running through materiality and objects, creating beautiful connections with people and their ties to the everyday world describing (among other issues) the *lacrimae rerum*, tears of things.

When I had more or less finished this letter, I received a new book by de Waal, "Letters to Camondo", in which he sort of continues reconstructing the family history. He focuses on a distant relative's neighbor, Moïse de Camondo, whose spectacular house on rue de Monceau in Paris was filled with 18th century French paintings and was to be inherited by his son Nissim who sadly was killed in the First World War and so the house was bequeathed to the French state in his honor. Currently there's a museum that has stayed untouched since 1936. The book consists of imaginary letters to the count, and this time the preface reads "*lacrimae rerum*" and chapters begin with the phrase "Dear friend!" and continuing at the very beginning: "As you may have guessed by now, I am not in your house by accident."

So, these are the things that keep me going these days.



KAI LOBJAKAS