



## An epistolary exploration through history, Jewish country houses, the Temple of Solomon, and a monumental Wedding Cake

### 2025 at Waddesdon Manor

#### *Tales from the Archives: Baron Edmond's autograph letters*

**Spring 2025**

In 2024, a routine cataloguing project in the Waddesdon Archive uncovered something quite extraordinary. An ordinary archive box was revealed to contain a collection of 150 letters and papers written or signed by some of the greatest and most influential figures of the last 500 years.

Now, a new exhibition at Waddesdon Manor will display them, most of which have never been seen by the public before.

There are letters from the pen or direction of historical giants such as Elizabeth I (1533-1603), Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) and Lord Byron (1788-1824), on a variety of subject matter, and even a musical manuscript by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791). Some were written in the knowledge they would be made public, while others were clearly intended to be private. They offer a fascinating insight into some of the greatest minds of their time and the lives of people that continue to intrigue us hundreds of years later.



This hitherto unexplored collection was compiled by Baron Edmond de Rothschild (1845-1934) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, an indefatigable collector whose interests ranged from ancient world coins to French inlaid furniture and rare pheasants. He was also passionate about manuscripts and works on paper, which is probably why the collection includes contemporaneous letters, including one by the author Victor Hugo (1802-1885). The letters were eventually handed down to his son James and demonstrate wide-ranging interests, especially in music, arts and literature.

The letters also illuminate the nature of letter collecting, and the exhibition will explore this popular pursuit that has endured for centuries. It will also highlight how Waddesdon's archive cares for its collections, and how archival material provides the foundations for an understanding of history and the history of collecting.

### **Discovering Jewish Country Houses: Photographs by H  l  ne Binet**

**26 March – 22 June 2025**

H  l  ne Binet (b.1959) is one of the world's leading photographers. This exhibition showcases a new body of work, capturing an extraordinary group of houses, owned, built or renovated by Jews.

The display of more than 20 works takes as its inspiration the new book *The Jewish Country Houses* (edited by Juliet Carey and Abigail Green, Profile Books, 2024), which sheds new light on a previously overlooked category of country houses owned, renovated, and at times built by Jews and individuals of Jewish descent.

Binet was commissioned to create photographic essays about nine houses, two mausoleums and a synagogue explored, to capture their extraordinary and varied exteriors, gardens and interiors.



The properties featured encompass a remarkable stylistic range, from the playful historicism of Waddesdon Manor and the gothic castle of Strawberry Hill House in Twickenham to a reinvention of an ancient Greek villa with Villa K  rylos on the C  te d'Azur and the modernist masterpiece that is the Villa Tugendhat in the Czech city of Brno. Some of the houses are celebrated tourist destinations, others are little known.

Binet's photographs offer an alternative to familiar, celebratory conventions of country-house photography, and help to establish these places as sites of Jewish memory.

## **Pablo Bronstein: The Temple of Solomon and its Contents**

**From 16 July 2025**

Pablo Bronstein (b. 1977) is one of the leading artists working in Britain today. He engages with past and present in brilliant thought-provoking ways. For this exhibition, he has made a new body of work in response to Waddesdon Manor as a Jewish country house, with a grand assembly of paintings on paper depicting the Temple of Solomon and its contents, both crazy and provocative.

The Temple of Solomon is one of the most famous buildings in history, significant as a place and an idea that has been sought, contested and imitated. Described in detail in the Bible, no one knows what it looked like and for centuries it has been reimagined by artists and designers, archaeologists, theorists and ideologues.

Unintimidated by the weight of history and holiness, Bronstein creates an assembly of framed paintings on paper. Neoclassicism and Romanticism vie for attention, alongside recollections of Bernini and Blondel, John Soane and John Martin. With virtuosic fluency in different languages of architecture, the works offer the viewer alternative ways of reconstructing the lost Temple, from 'architecture terrible' to Art Deco, exploring notions of the primitive, the modern and the holy.

Joyful and serious, erudite and subversive, the exhibition will, in the artist's own words, explore "*our vain efforts to infuse the fragmentary, vanished and imaginary with solidity and reality*".

During exhibition, drawings from Waddesdon's own collection, selected by Pablo Bronstein, will also be on display.

## **Joana Vasconcelos: Wedding Cake**

Visitors will continue to enjoy and be surprised by the monumental work *Wedding Cake* by celebrated Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos (b 1971)– a 12-metre-high sculptural pavilion in the form of a three-tiered wedding cake, clad entirely in ceramic tiles.

Almost five years in the making, *Wedding Cake* has been thrilling visitors since its commission by the Rothschild Foundation for Waddesdon, prompted by the relationship between visionary collector the late Lord Rothschild and Vasconcelos.



Part sculpture, part architectural garden folly, *Wedding Cake* is an extraordinary, enormous fully immersive sculpture which combines patisserie and architecture. Gleaming and icing-like outside and in, it offers an intricate and richly sensory experience – glazed in pale pinks, greens and blues, beset with sculptural ornament and complete with the sounds of trickling water and a site-specific lighting scheme. *Wedding Cake*, Vasconcelos' most ambitious commission to date, was described by the artist as “*a temple to love*” that celebrates festivity and marriage.

Inspired by the exuberant Baroque buildings and highly decorative ceramic traditions of Lisbon – where Vasconcelos lives and works – the work is also a contemporary response to the great Rothschild traditions of hospitality with echoes of 18th-century garden pavilions.

### **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

**Waddesdon Manor** was built at the end of the 19th century by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild in the style of a French early 16th-century château. Baron Ferdinand was an inspired collector, and the house was designed to showcase his exceptional collection of English and Dutch paintings, French 18th-century furniture, Sèvres porcelain, and other decorative arts. When Ferdinand died in 1898, he left Waddesdon to his sister, Alice, who also was a great collector. Upon her death the house passed to her great-nephew, James de Rothschild, who inherited a substantial part of his father Baron Edmond's great collection. In 1957, to ensure its future in perpetuity, Waddesdon was bequeathed to the National Trust. The Rothschild family continues to run Waddesdon through a family charitable trust, the Rothschild Foundation. Until February 2024, it was under the chairmanship of Jacob, 4th Lord Rothschild. His eldest daughter, Hannah Rothschild, is now the Chair. More at <https://waddesdon.org.uk/about-us/press/notes-for-editors/>

For more information on Waddesdon Manor and its exhibitions, visit [www.waddesdon.org.uk](http://www.waddesdon.org.uk), like @WaddesdonManor on Facebook, follow @WaddesdonManor on Twitter and @waddesdonmanor\_nt on Instagram.

### **HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGES CAN BE DOWNLOADED BY CLICKING ON THIS LINK**

- *Queen Elizabeth I*, Nicholas Hilliard, 1576–1578. Image - Waddesdon (Rothschild Family) © Hamilton Kerr Institute
- Photo of Waddesdon Manor, Hélène Binet © the artist
- *Pablo Bronstein* @sophieedavidson
- *Wedding Cake*, 2023, Joana Vasconcelos, Photo © Waddesdon Image Library

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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