

## The Vanished Collection

**Pauline Baer de Perignon**

**Natasha Lehrer, Translator**

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Pauline Baer de Perignon's memoir concerns a years-long pursuit of the truth about her grandfather's disappeared art and antiques collections—and about her own hushed heritage.

De Perignon grew up knowing very little about her great-grandfather, Jules Strauss, beyond the fact that he was a venerated Parisian collector. A chance encounter with a distant cousin raised a striking possibility: that Jules, who died midway through the war, had been one of many Jewish collectors whose possessions were stolen by the Nazis.

De Perignon had been seeking a source of inspiration, and she found it in Jules's tale—but she also realized how little she knew about her family's history. Indeed, it had not occurred to her that her great-grandfather was even Jewish, let alone that he had endured so much. With the assistance of other researchers, museum curators, and even a Nobel Prize-winning author, she began piecing together the facts of her family's collection—and its ignominious dissolution.

The book's research accounts are fascinating—a true treasure hunt through history, involving stumbling, learning on the ground, and sudden fortuitous reveals. But the bonds that De Perignon forms along the way are as heartening, including with family members whom she previously had little contact with, or with whom she had avoided the subject of the war, let alone spoliation. "Ancestral love," she says, "has the strange and marvelous power of uniting people who have little else in common." Her eventual requests that two tracked items be returned (one was located in the Louvre, to which Jules had donated a bevy of antique frames; another was found in a German museum) make for riveting reading.

As it sifts through "a jumble of beautiful things, of guilt and dust," *The Vanished Collection* arrives at a sense of delayed justice—but also at invaluable family reconnections.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January / February 2022)

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