

ENCORE!

Ivory Chess Treasures from the Jon Crumiller Collection

May 14 - October 18, 2015





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Used for thousands of years to create decorative and utilitarian objects, ivory's monetary value is reflected in its nickname "white gold." Skilled artisans have transformed the tusks of mammoths, elephants, and walrus (among other animals) into highly decorative and prized possessions. The material's creamy white color and hard texture lent itself well to the creation of musical instrument components, religious icons, combs, jewelry, and gaming pieces—especially chess sets and embellished boxes and boards. Artists and craftspeople created both solid, simple playing sets and elaborate and delicately carved ornamental sets from the treasured material.

This exhibition showcases ivory pieces and related objects from one of the greatest collections of chess sets in the United States. They date from the 16th through 20th centuries. By examining the over 80 chess sets, and numerous boards and tables included in *Encore! Ivory Chess Treasures from the Jon Crumiller Collection*, visitors to the World Chess Hall of Fame (WCHOF) will be able to study the evolution of the game of chess during this time, appreciate the fantastic craftsmanship of each object, and learn about different artistic techniques from cultures around the globe. This exhibition is also intended to create a discussion about the beauty and cultural value of the antique sets as well as the importance of laws that safeguard the remaining animal populations.

In 1800, the global elephant population is estimated to have numbered 26 million. However, during the same century, demand for ivory in Europe rose dramatically. In 1890, London, England, alone imported 700 tons of ivory, derived from the tusks of approximately 14,700 elephants. Mass production of utilitarian objects from ivory further fueled the killing of elephants through the twentieth century. In the 1970s and 1980s, a conservation crisis inspired new restrictions on the ivory trade, designed to combat the rapid decline in elephant populations, which had declined to 1.3 million by 1979. In 1975, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) banned international trade in Asian elephant ivory, and in 1989 expanded this prohibition to African elephant ivory. Over the subsequent decade, elephant populations in some areas rebounded.

Driven both by expanding demand for ivory due to increased prosperity and lax enforcement of laws regarding the sale of ivory in China, poaching of African elephants has again risen dramatically since 2005. In the United States, the terrible possibility that African elephants could become extinct in the matter of a decade, has led to tighter restrictions and new regulations banning trade in antique African elephant ivory. A 2013 Executive Order by President Barack Obama initiated these efforts. The first limitations eliminated the commercial and non-commercial import, export, transfer, and sale of objects at least 100 years old.



John Company Set, 1830. India. Ivory.
Indian Ivory and Ebony Chessboard, 19th century. India.
Ivory and ebony.

Dieppe Green White Ivory Set, 1850. France. Ivory.
French Ivory and Ebony Board-Box, c 1850-1900. France.
Ivory and ebony.



Over the last several months, restrictions have been loosened on the non-commercial movement of the prized medium, allowing musicians to travel with instruments containing ivory. However, New York and New Jersey laws have become more restrictive, also banning the sale or trade of mammoth and mastodon ivory. Not only have these changes affected collectors of objects, such as chess sets, but they have also significantly impacted museums and musicians. Collectors, including those of chess sets, saw their entire cache of ivory become valueless. Some professional musicians expressed concern for their livelihoods as well as about the possibility that musicians would no longer be able to use the best instruments in the United States after the commercial transfer of prized antique instruments incorporating ivory became impossible.

may harm elephants by further pushing the trade underground, increasing the danger and raising the black market value of ivory. Some state that the laws are unfair to collectors of antique ivory, prevent the preservation of important art and historical artifacts, and do not do enough to stop poachers from killing elephants. The coming years will prove crucial to people on both sides of the debate, as global populations of endangered species are monitored and as collectors and museums evaluate the effects of the laws upon the preservation, exhibition, and transfer of ivory artworks and artifacts.

—Shannon Bailey, Chief Curator,
and Emily Allred, Assistant Curator

The debate is complex. Those who promote the ivory ban argue it is necessary to save not only thousands of African elephant lives, but also the lives of the park rangers who protect them. Only by completely closing avenues for ivory to be sold can they safeguard these animals. Others argue that the illegal ivory trade sometimes supports terrorist networks. Those who argue against the ban claim that the ivory restrictions

Cantonese King George Ivory Set, 1860. China. Ivory.
Chinese Ivory Filigree Disc Set, 1860. China. Ivory.
Indian Muslim Polychrome Set, 1780. India. Ivory.

Victorian Ornamental Ivory Set, 1850. England. Ivory.



Russian Kholmogory Mammoth Ivory Set, 1780. Russia. Ivory.
South European Ivory Inlaid Hardwood Chess Board-Box,
 16th-17th century. Hardwood and ivory.

Inuit Walrus Ivory Set, 1940. United States/Alaska.
 Walrus ivory. *Board not in exhibition.*

Indian Figural Ivory Set with Seated Kings, 1900-1930. India. Ivory.
Indian Ivory and Ebony Chessboard, 19th century. India.
 Ivory and ebony.

Berhampore Kashmir Style Ivory Chess Set, early 19th century.
 India. Ivory. *Board not in exhibition.*

FROM THE COLLECTOR

It's a privilege to be able to exhibit these antique works of art at the World Chess Hall of Fame. The chess sets in this exhibition need little introduction because they speak for themselves: they are timeless masterpieces from centuries past, making their reappearance on the public stage for the first time in many years.

It is important to note that the ivory items in this exhibition have been legally confirmed as antique, meaning over 100 years old, by CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service, the federal agency whose mission is to preserve and protect endangered species.

An exhibition of ivory items might be considered controversial. Indeed, any modern-day reference to elephant ivory must be taken within a larger and more important context: the world's elephants are under attack, and their very survival is threatened. As the chosen stewards of our planet, it is our duty to protect these majestic, intelligent, and sophisticated creatures from the snares of increasingly brazen and violent poachers. That mandate is incontrovertible. Taking it a step further, some people feel that all ivory artifacts—whether two years old or two hundred years old—should be immediately and permanently removed from our society.

With that in mind, one might be inclined to wonder why my collection includes (and even highlights) antique ivory chess sets. The reason is simple and straightforward. Many collectors of antique items, such as museums, private collectors, and institutions of higher learning, seek to acquire the best-possible expressions of art—those rare, crowning achievements of artistic talent, skill, and craftsmanship. For chess sets and

other ornamental items of prior centuries, ivory was the definitive choice of the master artisans; it was exotic, readily carved, durable, and perfectly weighted, with a glossy appearance, smooth and solid to the touch. So the acquisition of a top-tier antique chess set is, in almost all cases, the acquisition of a top-tier antique ivory chess set.

Yet today, elephants are being hunted and struck down so that their tusks can be exported and converted into mass-produced trinkets, offered for sale in tourist shops and flea markets in Asia and around the world. How to reconcile the difference between these two diametrically opposed scenarios?

An important distinction needs to be made between the present and the distant past. To state an obvious but overlooked fact—we can diligently strive to save the elephants of today and tomorrow, but we can't save the elephants of yesteryear. Another consideration, also obvious and also overlooked, although I imagine that we would all agree with it, is this: a defining characteristic of who we are, the human race, is that we take great measures to protect our cultural history, as captured by the artistic expressions of master artisans throughout the ages. The chess sets in this exhibition are part of those masterful artistic expressions, and are part of our cultural history. So while it is mandatory that we take all possible steps to preserve the world's elephant population, I would submit that it is also important to preserve our artistic heritage, even when the chosen artistic medium of the time is one that cannot be obtained, legally or morally, today. True, the first goal is more acclaimed and more urgent than the second, but there is no reason to sacrifice an essential part of our heritage, as evidenced by these works of art, due solely to the unscientific perception that



German Ivory Bust Set, 1860. Germany. Ivory.
Central Provinces Ivory Set, mid-19th century. India. Ivory.
Ivory Bust Chess Set on Metal Pedestals, 1890-1900. Italy. Ivory and metal.



French Figural Regence Set, 1900. France. Ivory
French Ivory and Ebony Board-Box, c 1850-1900. France.
Ivory and ebony.



German Double-Knight Ivory Set, 1800. Germany. Ivory.



Indian Ivory Set with Prancing Knights, 1825. India. Ivory.
Indian Ivory Playing Chess Set, 1880. India. Ivory.
Anglo-Indian Chessboard, 1875. India. Wood and ivory.



Samuel Pepys Black and White Ivory Set, 1870. India. Ivory.
Indian Sedeli-work Chessboard, 1850. India.
Wood, ivory, and metal.

Italian Figural Ivory Set, 1900. Italy. Ivory.
Holly and Teak Chessboard, 21st century. United States. Wood.

such a sacrifice would somehow promote the preservation of today's elephant population. It doesn't. The two objectives are entirely separate, and both can be met simultaneously.

I hope you enjoy the exhibition. If you have any questions, whether about the chess sets or the controversial substance from which they are made, I invite you to attend and participate in an upcoming lecture on August 29 at the World Chess Hall of Fame, during which I'll discuss chess artifacts and answer your questions. Meanwhile, I think you will agree that these works of art still evoke feelings of excitement and awe, as they did in their original days of glory, one or more centuries ago.

—Jon Crumiller, 2015

JONATHAN CRUMILLER

A longtime chess fan and competitor, Jon Crumiller purchased his first antique chess set online in 2002. This acquisition quickly sparked a passion, and Jon's collection of antique sets now numbers over 600. It includes sets originating from over 40 countries, dating as early as the 11th century (and gaming pieces dating to 3000 BCE), unique sets owned by 18th- and 19th-century royalty, and made from materials such as jade, silver and gold, bone, wood, and precious stones among others. The scope of his collecting has also grown to include chessboards, timers, and chess miscellanea, mainly from the 19th and 20th centuries. Now recognized as one of the greatest chess set collections in the world, the artifacts he has gathered serve as a visual history of the diverse ways that cultures across time and around the world have interpreted the game of kings. A portion of the Crumiller collection was first shown in the World Chess Hall of Fame's 2013 exhibition *Prized and Played*, which included notable ornamental and playing sets.

Not only interested in acquiring artifacts but also learning about their origins and histories, Jon conducts research on the evolution of chess set styles, usage, and manufacturing. He shares this information with the global community of collectors, including his fellow enthusiasts in Chess Collectors International. Through his website www.chessantique.com, Jon provides curious chess devotees from around the world with beautiful photos of his stunning collection as well as some of the fruits of his meticulous research.

Jon's tournament experience stretches back to the Bobby Fischer-boom years in the early 1970s, and includes a Delaware State Championship title and numerous other victories. Along the way, he has earned the United States Chess Federation National Master title in both over-the-board and correspondence chess. Still active via online chess, Jon credits much of his middle-age chess improvement to the outstanding teaching skills of his chess teacher and friend, U.S. Chess Hall of Fame inductee Grandmaster (GM) Lev Alburt. Jon relishes the occasional opportunity to play with, and against, some of the top players in the world. He teamed up with World Chess Hall of Fame inductee and former World Chess Champion Garry Kasparov in London for a charity game versus Team GM Nigel Short, and managed to eke out a draw against World Chess Champion Magnus Carlsen in a simultaneous exhibition. A one-on-one game versus former World Chess Champion Vladimir Kramnik did not finish with such a successful result! Ever the competitor, Jon remarks that one of his favorite ways to end a game is by winning.

Jon and his wife Jenny live in Princeton, New Jersey, and have three children and two grandchildren. Jon is Co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of Princeton Consultants Inc., a mid-size consulting firm that specializes in business optimization and operational efficiency. Jenny is an elected official on Princeton Council, the governing body of Princeton, New Jersey.



Left to Right, from Top:
Calvert set with board, 1825. England. Ivory.
"Burmese" Style Ivory Set, 1810. China. Ivory.
Indian Islamic Ivory Set, 19th century. India. Ivory.

Indian Brass Inlaid Hardwood Chess Table, 1880. India. Hardwood and brass.
French Figural Battle of Waterloo Ivory Chess Set, 1840. France. Ivory.
French Chess Table, 1800. France. Wood, ivory, and tortoiseshell.

Left to Right, from Top:
Chinese Green and White Ivory Chess Set in Lacquered Cabinet, 1850. China. Ivory.
Kashmiri Ivory Chess Set, 1810. India. Ivory.

Rajasthan Ivory Set, 1880. India. Ivory.
James Leuchars Ivory Set, 1810. England. Ivory.
Board not in exhibition.



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Front: **Edel Style Ivory Set**, mid-19th century. Germany. Ivory.

Back: **Samuel Pepys Style Ivory Set**, 1820. India. Ivory.

*Photos: Tim Nighswander/
IMAGING4ART*

