

# Le Journal des Arts

L'ACTUALITÉ DE L'ART ET DE SON MARCHÉ À TRAVERS LE MONDE

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Le directeur général de la Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image d'Angoulême Pierre Lungheretti présente ses projets

Entretien page 4



Le parcours atypique du « frenchy » Ghislain d'Humières, à la tête du Speed Art Museum à Louisville aux États-Unis

Rencontre page 11

Le milliardaire américain Thomas Kaplan expose au Louvre une partie de sa collection de tableaux du Siècle d'or hollandais

Portrait page 35



## L'intrigante Vénus de Giambologna présentée à Paris



Le Centre culturel italien vient d'exposer un bronze dont la composition reprend un marbre de Jean Bologne (1529-1608). Les circonstances de la découverte de la sculpture et son périple dans le monde sont pour le moins surprenants. Derrière l'indiscutable intérêt scientifique se cache une opération qui pourrait être commerciale. Le débat sur sa date de réalisation revêt un enjeu considérable quant à sa valeur sur le marché de l'art. Enquête.

Page 6

## La mission Mattéoli, 20 ans plus tard



■ La mission Mattéoli en 1997 a relancé la politique publique à l'égard des biens spoliés aux juifs pendant la guerre, dont les œuvres d'art estampillées MNR. Le bilan est contrasté. Pages 8 à 10

## Une cathédrale russe objet d'une vive tension

Le transfert de la cathédrale Saint-Isaac de Saint-Petersbourg au Patriarcat orthodoxe soulève de fortes protestations en Russie. Le monument est une attraction touristique importante de la ville. Le milieu culturel, appuyé par le directeur du Musée de l'Ermitage, y voit une manifestation de plus du retour à l'ordre moral. Une manœuvre politicienne en serait la raison.

Page 3

## Résultats 2016 nuancés pour le CMN

Les 100 lieux administrés par le Centre des monuments nationaux ont perdu 700 000 visiteurs en 2016. Les sites proches des attentats de Paris et Nice sont les plus affectés. De sorte que les recettes de la billetterie ont baissé de 10 %, ce qui n'est pas sans conséquences sur les travaux de l'établissement public. Une légère reprise a marqué la fin d'année.

Page 7

## Expositions, Marseille sort des sentiers battus

Deux expositions originales sont actuellement à l'affiche de la cité phocéenne. À la Friche de la Belle de Mai, l'art brut se marie avec l'art singulier et la création « underground ». Au MuCEM, la philosophe Barbara Cassin explore le complexe thème de la traduction entre les langues. Un sujet riche et ambitieux mais qui se prête difficilement à la monstration.

Pages 17 et 34

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**“Thomas Kaplan: Businessman and Collector”**

*The American billionaire, who put together an extremely rare collection from the Dutch Golden Age, is coming out publicly with an exhibition at the Louvre for the very first time.*

The most important private collection of Dutch paintings comes to light. Through various exhibitions, connoisseurs could see tableaux by Jan Lievens or Frans Van Mieris on display from an “anonymous collection.” Then a name appeared, “The Leiden Collection,” in reference to the city where Rembrandt took his first steps. At one point, it made an appearance at a private gallery in Manhattan for savvy amateurs. In 2014, fourteen of its Gerrit Dous were found at the heart of a monograph in Leiden. The following year, twelve of its paintings by Pieter de Hooch, Jan Steen or Gabriel Metsu were shown at Cornell University in New York. In total, out of a collection comprising over 250 works, 170 were already entrusted to some forty museums around the world.

Finally, a figure emerges – that of a 54-year-old atypical billionaire, the son of a Jewish family from New York, a historian of French education and aesthetics: Thomas Kaplan. Under the supervision of Arthur Wheelock, the collection's catalogue was recently released online. On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, at the Louvre, the Leiden Collection will embark on an international tour going as far as Shanghai and Beijing. Thomas Kaplan would also be delighted to lend his Rembrandts to the Louvre Abu Dhabi one day – even if, one year away from the long-awaited grand opening of institution, the program has yet to be established. Given his ties to the Gulf, he has entrusted his enthusiasm for this ambitious cultural dialogue to the Crown Prince, H.R.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed. “In that region, where culture is subject to so much destruction, it is important to see the creation of bridges between works of art and people,” he explained to us with a communicative zest, walking through his apartment overlooking the Invalides.

A man of principle

He also admits to admiring the intellectual agility of Scientific Director Jean-François Charnier (see JdA from February 27, 2015), calling him “one of the most brilliant curators” that he has ever met. Elegantly omitting any mention of the onerous requirements of French bureaucracy, he also expressed his gratitude to Vincent Pomarède and Blaise Ducos for having masterminded the introduction of his paintings to the Louvre. “I know very well that hanging up a tableau from a private collection touches upon a taboo, and they have taken it upon themselves to overcome this prejudice. They even accepted one on loan – something that never happens, if I understand well.”

The story has made certain conservative curators cringe, those who are fussy about principles. This composition by Ferdinand Bol, showing Rebecca offering water to Eliezer, sent to find Isaac's betrothed, was purchased at a Versailles auction in 2009 for 1.3 million euros – a record for this pupil of Rembrandt. Having learned that the Louvre had planned a preemption, Thomas Kaplan established contact with the curators: “I told them: if only I had known! I never bet against a museum; it is a matter of principle. This painting's place is at the Louvre. I offered it to them as a loan, which they accepted, knowing that they were breaking the rules. Today, I am delighted to donate it. Similarly, if it were possible, I would love it if my Rembrandts would one day be found at the Abu Dhabi Louvre, surrounded by the totems of the universe, for which they would constitute a reference.” Perhaps there is another biblical scene that he is particularly pulled to, painted by one of Rembrandt's most promising pupils, Carel Fabritius: an angel, sent by God, offering water to Hagar, on the edge of death in the desert, where she had been chased with her son Ishmael. “An angel that saves the ancestor of the Arabs, is that not a good story?”

### A passion for Rembrandt

Even if, paradoxically, his collection features several “fine painters”, of which Gerrit Dou is the figurehead, Thomas Kaplan holds a special admiration for Rembrandt. In the Leiden master he sees “a concentrate of the universal message, which our poor planet certainly could use.” His collection was built around him, focusing on the master and his followers, including genre scenes, *trompe-l'œil*, and even Flemish artists.

Professor Ernst Van de Wetering played a crucial role in helping Kaplan better understand his own collection, starting with Rembrandt’s “Self-Portrait” rediscovered under repaints which he bought from Las Vegas casino entrepreneur Steve Wynn in 2008. He also owns “Minerva”, part of the suite of Olympic goddesses in large format for which Rembrandt was attacked following his arrival in Amsterdam. From the artist’s youth, Kaplan also acquired “Allegory of Smell” – found by the Talabardon & Gautier gallery in New Jersey (the first to bear the signature "Rembrandt" without the "d"), which he added to his “Allegory of Touch” and “Allegory of Hearing”. In addition to portraits, the collector also counts two Rembrandt drawings as part of his treasure, including one of a lioness. A lesser-known fact about Thomas Kaplan remains his ownership of Leonardo da Vinci's “Study of a Bear's Head.” During a retrospective in London, curator Luke Tyson had presented the drawing and explained to a rather surprised Kaplan that it was a reference to “Lady with an Ermine”, depicting the Duke of Milan’s mistress. Incidentally, Thomas Kaplan named his eldest son Leonardo...

Another jewel from the collection of this great sentimentalist is “Young Girl Seated at a Virginal” by Vermeer – the artist’s sole remaining work still in private hands. Kaplan purchased this piece from Steve Wynn, who had acquired it four years earlier for the price of thirty million dollars. When we tell him that the painting might have suffered from abrasions and repainting, he responds on the spot: “Of course. It’s not “The Milkmaid”. But, the more I contemplate it, the more I appreciate it. I lose myself in this detailed art. It carries all of Vermeer's capacity to express silence. Or more specifically in this case, one single note. It really strikes a chord, this little note, which this adolescent has just played.”

During this exchange covering a host of different Dutch artists – from the prodigious Fabritius who disappeared so quickly, to the portraitist Hais, Thomas Kaplan expresses a profound sensibility whose charm adds to his scholarship. He, who wanted to associate his wife, Daphne Recanati Kaplan, with this collection, emphasizes how much the search for these great artists has to do with the effects of light. The couple has other passions, such as decorative art – from Prouvé to Mollino, as well as Noll and Perriand – or 19<sup>th</sup> century animal paintings, which relates to their love of big cats. The NGO Panthera, which he created, is at the forefront of wild cats conservation. Some of its partners include, among others, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed and the house of Hermès. For Kaplan, this organization also constitutes a way of paying respect to his mother, who, when he was a young boy, took him to the Metropolitan Museum of New York, but also to the Amazon on the trail of jaguars. He has done the same for snakes on the brink of extinction, in response to a promise made to his daughter Orianne after visiting a reptile park in Florida. Through art as a way of patronage, he fills a canvas with memories from his life and his family.

### A second home in France

France holds first place in his heart. Having learned French while studying in Switzerland, Thomas Kaplan has kept his love for the French language, countryside, culture and way of life. Jean-David Levitte, Ambassador to the United Nations (UN) before representing France in Washington, recalls with emotion the solidarity that Kaplan had shown to his friends in a hostile environment following Villepin’s famous speech against the Iraq war. In addition to supporting young artists in schools and a cultural center, he recently funded a library in New York and has never ceased to denounce American prejudice towards the French: “This country has proven to be the bravest of our allies. Without the French

Revolution, the United States wouldn't exist. They were absolutely right to not participate in the Iraqi intervention, whose brilliant consequences can be observed in Daesh or with the situation in Iran.”

#### A fortune valued at over 1 billion dollars

Mark Wallace, who served as an American ambassador to the UN and is currently a business associate of Kaplan's, claims that he has “never met as brilliant or as engaged an entrepreneur.” Kaplan offered a restored Spitfire plane to the English museum Duxford, where the first squadron of these chasers took off, meanwhile funding a scholarship to promote the teaching of history to intelligence officers. In fact, he believes that everything starts in history and then returns to history. His thesis at Oxford centered on the strategic role of commodities in the repression of the Malayan insurgency in the aftermath of World War II. “When I started in business, I reasoned like a historian,” he says. According to Forbes Magazine, which placed him on the list of the 400 richest Americans in 2013, his net worth today exceeds one billion dollars. Kaplan made his fortune investing in raw materials and precious metals, making significant bets on gold especially – in his view the most stable of currencies against the “folly of men”.

Is it quite amazing that this man, who seems to cultivate a few superstitions, has extolled since his childhood a period in art history called the Golden Age. It was Norman Rosenthal, director of the Royal Academy in London, who convinced him to start his own collection. Given his considerable financial resources, he was able to assemble significant pieces quickly. Kaplan himself estimates that, together with his wife, they bought, on average and for some time, close to one work of art per week. His first dealer, Otto Naumann, was surprised to meet this stranger who had read his Van Mieris *catalogue raisonné* twice. Thomas Kaplan has favorites and maintains an interest in lesser-known artists such as Isaac de Jouderville and Arent de Gelder, for whom he holds a special affection. These two were, respectively, among the first and last batch of Rembrandt's pupils.

The art dealers we interviewed all agreed with the portrait of this very considerate man – direct, capable of completing a purchase in minutes, posing practically no limits at auctions, paying cash on the nail, and demanding absolute loyalty. At the beginning, he sure experienced his fair share of mishaps, which led him to hire renowned gallerist Johnny Van Haeften as advisor. Although Thomas Kaplan claims to have no such plan at the moment, he may well decide one day to establish his own museum – not unlike Calouste Gulbenkian.

Find the complete biography of Thomas Kaplan on: [www.LeJournaldesArts.fr](http://www.LeJournaldesArts.fr)

#### Thomas Kaplan in Dates

- 1962 Born in New York.
- 1993 Establishes his first company, Apex Silver Mine.
- 2003 Resells his shares in African Platinum for 580 million dollars. Begins his Rembrandt collection.
- 2007 Sells his gas extraction company, Leor, for 2.5 billion dollars.
- 2016 First exhibition of his Leiden Collection, at the Louvre.