

Thomas Kaplan: the world's largest private collector of Rembrandts refuses to have any at home

- January 6, 2017

Gold is the only thing that piques his interest. Firstly, he tasted **professional success** by investing in the precious metal (1).

Subsequently, **gold** allowed him to immerse himself in what is commonly known as the **Golden Age**.

The New York businessman **Thomas Kaplan** (born 1962), along with his wife **Daphne Recanati Kaplan**, is now the **world's largest private collector** of that genre which culminates with the ascendancy of **Dutch painting at the beginning of the 17th century**, and among whose leading figures is **Rembrandt**.

For many years **Thomas Kaplan** was close-lipped about his acquisitions and his numerous museum loans (he named his collection **Leiden**, after Rembrandt's place of birth). But not any longer.

From 22 February, the **Louvre** will be openly exhibiting thirty of his paintings and drawings among **250 works**, including **ten Rembrandts (11 paintings, 2 drawings and 9 paintings by his studio)** plus a **Vermeer...**

He likes to recall how one fine day in the 2003, during the holidays, the former head of the Royal Academy in London, **Sir Norman Rosenthal**, told him that the art which fascinated him most, the **school of Rembrandt**, was undervalued. From then on, the apprentice collector would have a **voracious appetite**.

‘Between 2003 and 2008 I was buying sometimes one work a week. I have 11 paintings by **Rembrandt**. Altogether there are around **35 in private hands**.

My closest competitor belonged to the French branch of the **Rothschild family**. But in 2016 he sold **two portraits jointly to the Louvre and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam**. I was offered them but the asking price was too high (2). It was my genuine wish that the two portraits be sold for the highest price.'

He adds, 'Imagine, I acquired one of the most precious Rembrandts in my collection, 'Minerva', from the New York dealer **Otto Naumann** for less than 'Green Car Wash', a painting by **Andy Warhol** sold the same week.



At the time no one was buying the way we were. We were flooded with offers. We decided quickly and paid straight away.'

Equally among his trophies is **Vermeer's** 'Young Woman Seated at a Virginal' which he acquired from the well-known **Las Vegas casino** entrepreneur **Steve Wynn** and which will be shown in February at the Louvre in the Vermeer exhibition.

Last year, the standout work at the Tefaf fair in Maastricht was on the stand of Paris antiques dealers **Talabardon & Gautier** : a never-seen-before work by **Rembrandt** from his youth that had been purchased for **\$870,000** at a little-known auction in **New Jersey**.

Kaplan already owned two works from the same series. 'The French dealers took possession of the work on Thursday. We were the rightful owners by Friday.'

The price paid is said to be around **\$2 million**.

‘Nowadays our acquisition rate is closer to one per year. The sources have dried up.’

In the Louvre exhibition you will find a painting which Tom Kaplan and his wife donated to the French museum. ‘**Eliezer and Rebecca at the Well**’ by **Ferdinand Bol** (1616-1680), a pupil of **Rembrandt**, was bought in 2009 by the **Kaplan** couple at auction in **Versailles** for **1.3 million euros**.



At the time the **Louvre** did not have the finances to acquire the work. The wrong has now been put right.

As surprising as it might seem, the world’s largest school of Rembrandt collector does **not have** one single work from the genre **at his home**.

‘At home I have framed photographic reproductions of the works. **I prioritize loans**. I get the greatest pleasure from knowing that the public can see them,’ he explains.

One can’t help wondering **what will happen in the future to the Leiden collection**. ‘I would like the collection to stay together,’ confesses the singular collector.

One suspects **a number of museums around the world would be happy to take ownership of the Leiden collection**, especially after the endorsement of these old masters by an institution such as the Louvre.

From 22 February until 20 May. www.louvre.fr

(1) Thomas Kaplan is the Chairman of The Electrum Group LLC, which invests in natural resources.

(2) The two portraits were sold for a total of 160 million euros to Holland and France.

(3) “Green Car Crash” from 1963 sold for \$52.9 million on 16 May 2007.

(All photo copyrights: Leiden collection)