

Artlyst

Rembrandt Vs. Trump – The Leiden Collection, Revolution At The Louvre

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Artlyst has travelled to Paris to the Musée du Louvre, which is currently presenting a selection of masterpieces by 17th-century Dutch painters from the collection of Thomas Kaplan and his wife, Daphne Recanati Kaplan. The show focuses on what was – until recently – a relatively unknown and unnamed collection, assembled since 2003 by the American philanthropist and Francophile.

As the name of the collection indicates, it ‘highlights the “fine painters” of Leiden’ – and not (as Kaplan pointed out) – the collector of the work; wishing to take a back seat to the likes of Gerrit Dou, Jan Steen, Jan Lievensz, Frans van Mieris – and of course Rembrandt: this is also currently the largest private holding of the artist’s work, among which is Rembrandt’s Minerva, a particularly large piece, and part of a series of ‘strong women and mythological goddesses’. A fitting reminder of the kind of contemporary freedoms we must now protect.

As Kaplan states himself; “This is indeed a manifesto, one that is – in this age of post-truth darkness – an attempt to promote humanism and tolerance”

In fact Kaplan has been rather generous with this burgeoning collection, having loaned works on more than 170 occasions. The collector has never lived with his collection, but instead made the scrupulous decision to take paintings from the private domain and return them to the public. It would seem the philanthropist chose advocacy over covetousness, and saw his enterprise as culturally – and socially – useful.

As Kaplan states himself; this is indeed a manifesto, one that is – in this age of post-truth darkness – an attempt to promote humanism and tolerance; it would seem this is ‘Rembrandt Vs. Trump’, a collection made public to highlight the need to respond to the ‘burning of books’ and the building of walls – and perhaps breathtaking idealism is exactly what we need right now? As Andre Malraux stated that Rembrandt was ‘the first to touch the soul’ with his

painting; perhaps the artist's brush is a fitting weapon? Perhaps the literal and figurative illumination of Rembrandt's painting might be transcendental, resulting in a spiritual illumination? It's a lovely thought that the artist might in fact hold such power on a global scale; and it is a power we sorely need with four uncertain years ahead of us.

The ambitious philanthropist's vision of Rembrandt is as a riposte to the barbarians of Palmyra – what he describes as 'soft-power' – an attempt to form connections and bring disparate cultures together. It would seem that Kaplan has gone from anonymous collector to Beuysian shaman.

With this shamanistic bent in mind, the collection will later travel to The Long Museum in Shanghai and the National Museum in Beijing in 2017 and 2018 – then on to the Louvre Abu Dhabi, seen as a first ambitious step – at least towards – the aspirations of Dostoyevsky when he wrote: 'beauty will save the world'; it's a lofty goal indeed, but what other painter has the power of Rembrandt?

Finally when the viewer walks among the works on display, it does serve as refreshing to view this collection at the Louvre in such a revolutionary light; it invigorates us to be reminded of the 'contemporary' power of Rembrandt's work. That yes, in fact that power can serve to remind us of the beauty in the world, a beauty that broke with convention and was indeed revolutionary. And Kaplan's 'campaign' lends a youthful excitement to the proceedings.

In fact Rembrandt is rendered youthful – idealistic, and ambitious, and art is elevated to that grand Beuysian philosophy that all art is inclusive, and capable of taking a tangible role in great socio-cultural healing – that the revolution is possible, that beauty can combat our post-truth darkness. I for one want to believe Kaplan, and Rembrandt makes that possible. *Liberté, égalité, fraternité.*

Words: Paul Black @Artjourno

Photos: P A Black © 2017

Masterpieces from the Leiden Collection: The Age of Rembrandt

Musée du Louvre, Paris

22 February to 22 May 2017